

*Acting Edition*

# HANG TIME

by Zora Howard

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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*HANG TIME* received its world premiere at The Flea (Niegel Smith, Executive Artistic Director; Martin Meccouri, Director of Producing) in New York City on March 17, 2023. The production was directed by Zora Howard, with scenic design by Neal Wilkinson, costume design by Dominique Fawn Hill, lighting design by Reza Behjat, sound design by Megan Culley, and movement direction by Charlie Oates. The production stage manager was Beatrice Pérez-Arche. The cast was as follows:

- BIRD** ..... Dion Graham
- SLIM** ..... Akron Watson
- BLOOD** ..... Cecil Blutcher

A workshop production of *HANG TIME*, directed by Zora Howard, was presented as a part of the 2021 Ojai Playwrights Conference New Work Festival (Robert Egan, Artistic Director/Producer).

*HANG TIME* was additionally developed at Seattle Rep and The Lark.

## CHARACTERS

**BIRD** – (M), Black, sixties. Has seen some things. Knows to keep his head down.

**SLIM** – (M), Black, forties. The pontificatin' type. Quick to tell you the way of the world.

**BLOOD** – (M), Black, twenties. Just coming into himself.

## SETTING

Underneath an old, wide tree.

## TIME

Anytime. All the time.

## NOTES ON STYLE

A speech usually follows the one immediately before it except when:

- a) one character starts speaking before the other has finished, and the point of interruption is marked “/”.
- b) there are multiple interruptions, which will be marked sequentially by “/”, “//”, “///”, etc.

A **Pivot** marks a kind of resetting. It is four times as long whatever you think a beat is. Or even longer. Listen for it.

In general, the play takes its time. It should run an hour long.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the summer of 2020, two Black men were found hanging in Southern California within weeks of one another. Robert Fuller and Malcolm Harsch. Buried under countless “breaking news” stories, there was scant coverage about their deaths. I could not stop thinking of the two men, the lives they might have lived. Moreover, I could not figure out how to archive these deeply personal and public violences in my own consciousness and body. I needed somewhere to reckon with that question. *HANG TIME* was born out of that need.

*Three men chew the fat under an old wide tree.*

*HANG TIME* is a “sitting and talking” play. But instead of sitting and talking, the three Black men at the play’s center are hanging as if from a tree. Yet there is no tree in the play’s design, nor any other element that delineates time or place. The usual trappings of the theater are intentionally absent. The standalone set piece – a technical apparatus that suspends the actors’ bodies in space – is the only reference the audience will have to contextualize the violence in the play’s central image.

And, even still, with all of its implied brutality, *HANG TIME* invites the viewer to envisage the Black body triumphant over the legacy of violence that it holds. Within these pages, Bird, Slim and Blood are alive. They talk shit, they make plans, they remember. They, like the rest of us, cannot play their end.

For sixty minutes in the dark, they do not hang “3,000 miles away,” or in the “Jim Crow South.” They hang here here here, now now now.

– Zora Howard

*For Robert Leroy Butler the First, Second and Third.*

*Also for Claude, Alexandre and Zachary. My menfolk.*



*(Darkness. Cicadas.)*

**SLIM.** Mmm, mmm, mmm.

Now ain't that a sight for sore eyes.

**BIRD.** What?

**SLIM.** Over there.

**BIRD.** Over where?

**SLIM.** Is you blind, nigga? Look.

Look look look. Quick.

**BLOOD.** Where?

**BIRD.** Oh. I see.

**SLIM.** Ooooweeee, sure *is* somethin' to see, ain't it.

**BLOOD.** Oh yeah, I see now.

**BIRD.** That's alright right there.

**SLIM.** More than alright right there.

Can't even look away if I wanted to.

**BIRD.** Can't even.

*(Lights slowly fill the space. Three **MEN** hanging from an old wide tree. They shoot the shit.)*

**SLIM.** She comin' round the corner.

**BIRD.** Yeah?

**SLIM.** Ooooo, she comin' round the corner when she come!

**BIRD.** When she come.

**SLIM.** I can already tell.

**BLOOD.** Tell what?

**SLIM.** Too much ripple in them hips and too much tittle  
in them tits for there not to be some brass...in that ass.

**BLOOD.** Ha!

**BIRD.** (*Affirming.*) Is a lotta tittle.

**BLOOD.** Didn't know you were a poet, Slim.

**SLIM.** Oh, Imma poet.

Imma poet and a lotta thangs, youngblood.

Poet and a lotta thangs.

**BIRD.** She turning now.

**SLIM.** O, here we go here we go here we go

(*To BLOOD.*) Pay attention.

(*The MEN follow with their eyes.*)

**BLOOD.** Damn.

**SLIM.** (*Vindicated.*) Am I lyin' or am I dyin'?

**BIRD.** Damn.

**SLIM.** I said am I lyin' or am I dyin'?!

**BIRD.** Well, you ain't lyin'.

**SLIM.** GOT damn.

**BLOOD.** Yeah, that's somethin' there.

**BIRD.** Lordy lord lord.

**SLIM.** Ass clap like that make you wanna clap back.

Standin' ovation kind of ass right there.

**BLOOD.** Ha!

**SLIM.** Make you wanna call somebody.

**BIRD.** Be somebody.

**SLIM.** Do right by ya mama.

**BIRD.** Do right by ya God.

**SLIM.** Shid, pay your bills on time.

**BIRD.** Just make the space around it look different.

**SLIM.** Make the sun a little brighter.

**BIRD.** Shade a little cooler.

**SLIM.** Amen and amen!

Yeah, that's a Sunday kinda ass right there.

**BLOOD.** Sunday kinda ass?

**SLIM.** Make every day feel like Sunday kinda ass right there.

*(The **MEN** continue looking after the woman until she passes out of sight.)*

*(Pause.)*

**BIRD.** ...Is it Sunday?

**SLIM.** Think so.

**BLOOD.** Yeah, think so.

**SLIM.** Everything closed so...

**BLOOD.** Must be.

**BIRD.** Yeah, must be.

*(Beat.)*

**SLIM.** Knew me a woman like that once.

**BLOOD.** Yeah?

**SLIM.** Sure did.

*(Remembering.)* Boy, I tell you / -

(**BIRD** *snorts.*)

**SLIM.** (*Off* **BIRD.**) What?

**BIRD.** Blood, you got time?

**BLOOD.** Yeah, I got time.

**BIRD.** Good. Cause Slim 'bout to talk you near to death.

**SLIM.** Shut up, Bird.

**BLOOD.** I got time.

**SLIM.** Nah. I don't feel like talkin' no more.

**BIRD.** Oh, now you don't feel like talkin'?

**SLIM.** Nope.

**BIRD.** Nigga, you always feel like talkin'.

**SLIM.** Not when no one appreciates what I'm sayin'.

**BLOOD.** We appreciate it, Slim.

**BIRD.** Speak for yourself.

**SLIM.** No need wastin' my breath.

**BIRD.** Fine. Don't say shit then.

**SLIM.** I won't say shit then.

**BIRD.** Mmhmm.

(*Pause.*)

**SLIM.** (*Can't help himself.*) ...She really was somethin', though.

(**BIRD** *snorts.*)

Brick house of a woman.

Dark and tender.

Just a juicy / ol' thang –

**BIRD.** We talkin' 'bout broads or we talkin' 'bout chicken?

**SLIM.** Sharp like a blade and quick like a pistol.

Man, she was bad!

**BLOOD.** Sound like it.

**SLIM.** You ever made love to a woman make you forget yourself?

Man, listen. First time she laid it on me, changed my whole life.

Quit my job. Changed my religion. Learned Creole behind that woman.

You think I'm playing? I'm tellin' you. There's no place too far. No valley high or mountain low. You will go to the ends of the Earth for a woman do you like that.

Drive you mad. That loving thing? Drive you out your mind mad.

**BLOOD.** Well, what happened to her?

**SLIM.** Came home one night and found her laid up with some nigga that wasn't me.

**BLOOD.** Damn.

**SLIM.** Yeah, I was cut up about it.

**BLOOD.** Damn.

**SLIM.** Wasn't cut through like that nigga was though. Ha!

**BLOOD.** Cut through?

**SLIM.** Mmhmm. Sliced that nigga straight through. Nose to navel.

(**BLOOD** looks at **SLIM**.)

**BLOOD.** ...You killed him?

(**SLIM** looks at **BLOOD**.)

**SLIM.** Do I look like a killer to you?

(**BIRD** *grunts.*)

**BLOOD.** That's crazy.

**SLIM.** Make you crazy, loving somebody.

Make you do what you won't do.

**BLOOD.** Hmm.

(*Pause.*)

**SLIM.** (*To* **BLOOD.**) You got you somebody?

**BLOOD.** Me?

**BIRD.** He ain't askin' me.

**BLOOD.** Oh.

...

Yeah, something like it.

**SLIM.** Something like it?

**BLOOD.** Yeah...

**SLIM.** I'm talkin' 'bout somebody make your groin ache  
and heart palpitate at the same damn time. I ain't  
talkin' 'bout no "something like it."

**BLOOD.** Well, I don't know then.

**SLIM.** You love her?

**BLOOD.** You sure ask a lot of questions.

**SLIM.** Nah, ain't askin' no questions.

We just shootin' the breeze, Blood.

Chewin' the fat. Ain't no thang.

(*Pause.*)

Come on, you either love the broad or you don't.

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