Acting Edition

THOUGHTS OF A COLORED MAN

BY KEENAN SCOTT II

REVISED EDITION

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DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE

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For Joe Burgess, Timothy "Timmy" Smith,
Michael "Mikey" Taylor, Frankie Warren,
Brandon "BC" Carroll, and Joshua "Cash" Cashwell.

THOUGHTS OF A COLORED MAN was first presented on September 4, 2019, at Syracuse Stage (Robert Hupp, Artistic Director; Jill A. Anderson, Managing Director) in Syracuse, New York. It was directed by Steve H. Broadnax III, the set design was by Robert Brill, the costume design was by Toni-Leslie James and Devario Simmons, the lighting design was by Ryan J. O'Gara, the sound design was by Mikaal Sulaiman, the projection design was by Sven Ortel, the original music was by Te'La and KAMAUU, and the production stage manager was B.J. Forman. The cast was as follows:

WISDOM ..... Jerome Preston Bates
PASSION ..... Brandon Dion Gregory
DEPRESSION ..... Forrest McClendon
WOMAN #1 ..... Ashley Pierre-Louis
LUST ..... Reynaldo Piniella
HAPPINESS ..... Jody Reynard
LOVE ..... Ryan Jamaal Swain
ANGER ..... Garrett Turner
WOMAN #2 ..... Hollie E. Wright

The production was then transferred to Baltimore Center Stage (Stephanie Ybarra, Artistic Director; Michael Ross, Executive Director) on October 10, 2019.

The original Broadway production of THOUGHTS OF A COLORED MAN opened at the John Golden Theatre on October 13, 2021, produced by Brian Anthony Moreland, Ron Simons, Diana DiMenna, Kandi Burruss, Sheryl Lee Ralph, and Samira Wiley.

It was directed by Steve H. Broadnax III, the set design was by Robert Brill, the costume design was by Toni-Leslie James and Devario Simmons, the lighting design was by Ryan J. O'Gara, the sound design was by Mikaal Sulaiman, the projection design was by Sven Ortel, the original music was by Te'La and KAMAUU, and the production stage manager was B.J. Forman. The cast was as follows:

LOVE ..... Dyllón Burnside
HAPPINESS ..... Bryan Terrell Clark
LUST ..... Da'Vinchi
PASSION ..... Luke James
DEPRESSION ..... Forrest McClendon
WISDOM ..... Esau Pritchett
ANGER ..... Tristan Mack Wilds
UNDERSTUDIES ..... Bjorn DuPaty (LUST, WISDOM, PASSION, HAPPINESS)
Garrett Turner (ANGER, DEPRESSION, LOVE, HAPPINESS)

Special thanks to all cast members past and present. None of this would've been possible without you.

WRITER'S NOTES

Genre:
Slam Narrative
/slam ˈnerədiv/

Intertwines the stylistic elements of slam poetry and prose into a cohesive narrative structure. It employs traditional scene work, breaking the fourth wall, direct address, and internal thought (soliloquies) to convey its story, which may follow a linear or circular trajectory. Movement and music are infused in its storytelling. The language is often poetic, lyrical, and surreal, drawing influence from African folklore and the role of the Griot teaching a lesson(s). It's deeply rooted in Afrocentric spirituality and culture.

About the play:
The poetry shouldn't be forced. The language is jazz, meaning there shouldn't be a distinctive cadence. The rhythm and internal rhyme should be found but not overdone. The energy of SLAM poetry should be present. The language of this piece should be grounded and should not sound presentational. The pace is key; it has an urgency and energy that drives the spirit throughout. The natural rhythm is lost when done slower. This piece has many light and funny moments; find them because the heavier moments will naturally land. The scenes should blend into each other, utilizing the environment for seamless transitions. There should be no dead space; music and movement will help with this.

Set:
The world of this play is grounded in Brooklyn, New York. The set should reflect the present day, the moments of now. This world should be established with mixed media. It should contain as much or as little as needed to support the present world of the play to allow a design team to be as imaginative as they can be. These scenes should be woven together with a musical soundscape and movement (not necessarily dance).

Dialogue:
Slashes (//) indicate when the next speaker should start speaking. This helps create a more natural sounding dialogue. This will also naturally happen with what actors bring to their characters.

Ellipses (…) indicate a breath or pause, slightly faster than a beat, but longer than a breath caused by a comma.

Dashes (—) indicate when the next character should interrupt that line.

Towards the end of the scene Black Boy, Black Boy, "au" and "aw" sounds should be used and emphasized in words like "tour," "jaw," and "saw" to creates rhymes even though not all the words phonetically rhyme. The "or" sound like in "more," "moor," and "hoarse" should also have the "au" and "aw" sound.

Music:
The music in this show should enhance and/or punctuate a scene, adding the connective tissue throughout the show. Music is the ever-present character throughout the created world.

Ensemble:
All characters on stage together form the ensemble. All actors in this world are black in race, heritage, culture, and experience. The cast should be diverse in height, size, complexion, and hairstyle to fill as much of the spectrum as possible.

Singer:
The songs can be done in multiple ways. They can be sung by one cast member (suggested: Passion), any number of the ensemble, or a recording. Productions are welcome to set the lyrics to their own music or contact Dramatists Play Service for more information on the availability of the music from the original Broadway run.

CHARACTERS

LOVE, 18, college student. Poet by trade. Young in every sense of the word. He's a sneaker head and dresses like the youth of now, he cares about his clothes. Shy in certain situations. Needs to be well versed with the language of poetry.

LUST, 20, retail worker. Heavy New York accent. Charming and naturally flirtatious. Purehearted. As carefree as he is reckless. His words are unrefined, and he has no filter. He is highly sexual and addicted to women and has enough confidence to go around.

ANGER, late 20s–early 30s, youth coach/part-time barber. A former collegiate basketball player that is an academic in disguise. He carries a chip on his shoulder. Has a rawness to him. Must have the energy of SLAM poetry during poetic scenes.

DEPRESSION, late 30s, grocery store clerk. An astute survivor. A true neighborhood guy at heart. Highly intelligent and steady; equally comfortable in multiple different environments, can adapt to his surroundings, but at times he exposes himself to be socially awkward.

PASSION, 35, teacher. A scholar from the inner city. A seasoned guy who has seen a lot in his life and is very in tune with the world around him. He has an articulate but edgy presence. He possesses the spirit of ancestral orators. Must be rhythmically inclined and fluent with poetic verse.

HAPPINESS, early 40s, financial director. An upper-middleclass man originally from the South. A man who happens to be gay, but his sexuality does not rule his life, nor does he wear it on his sleeve. He has a dressed-down, casual look. He desperately wants to fit in. He's externally unapologetic but deeply caring internally.

WISDOM, 60–65, shop owner/entrepreneur. A man of dark complexion, African born. An immigrant to the United States. His accent has weakened over time. Heavy thinking man. Regal and confident, but equally humble. He has a calm presence and possesses a strength only age can bring.

TIME

The present. It is a beautiful breezy fall Friday.

LOCATION

Gentrifying neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York.

THOUGHTS OF A COLORED MAN

SUNRISE TO SUNSET

House goes to half as sounds of a busy city are heard. Depression enters. It's around 6:03 A.M.

Prologue: The Sun Kissed Me

DEPRESSION. Who is the Colored Man? Is he a king? Ruler of empires and gold, conqueror, and holder of God's knowledge… Or is he a slave? Forced laborer of land he didn't know and couldn't own. Given a new history, void of his own tongue. Either way our ancestors endured centuries of being property, merely holding on to a dream of us having more than they could fathom. They wanted us to live amongst the stars they charted for us. So why have we settled for the dim light of the moon and not bask in the sun?

Beat.

But if you pay attention…if you listen real close…at the beginning of every sunrise, you can still hear the spirits of our ancestors…sing.

Singer's voice pierces through the dimly lit stage. Lights onstage start to slowly fade up, symbolizing a sunrise.

SINGER.

The sun kisses my skin,
And I ask the Lord to take away my sins.
And one day, if I keep prayin',
The Lord will let me into heaven.

Sirens are heard as projections and lighting reflect them. Depression exits. Happiness enters in a tracksuit. He is

jogging around the neighborhood for his morning workout. He answers a call from his Apple Watch/Fitbit. Anger enters on the opposite side of the stage. He sees someone he knows offstage. It's 7:00 A.M.

Scene 1: This Is Home

ANGER. Yo! C'mon my man. We got people leaving for work and kids tryna get to school. You can't sleep in the doorway…I know. It's all love, but c'mon. You know better.

HAPPINESS. Hey babe. You need anything while I'm out?… Okay, you sure?… Oh, you need me?…you better stop… See you soon. Bye.

Happiness starts to stretch.

ANGER. I woke up and the sun was nowhere to be found. I knew it was time to get up because I heard the crashing sounds of Mrs. Renee's kids moving around. Car horns bleed from hoods like deep cuts. I used'ta say a prayer every time an ambulance went by but that was too much. Every time I step into the hallway, I see the same tiles they use in prisons, and the graffiti written on them lets you know whose territory you in. We don't dare use the elevator, 'cause if you get stuck ain't no one coming. The sight of mold greets you on the way out the front industrial door and what little grass we actually have is unkept…

HAPPINESS. *(Redirects his focus.)* I woke up with the sun this morning, with love by my side and I decided to run with the wind. I'm far from Southern streets with no sidewalks and open roads and where lightning bugs do the Charleston in the night. Where my grandma lives houses are at least an acre away from each other, but close enough to smell what everyone's cooking on Sundays. And pollution doesn't exist down there so you can see the stars sketched into the abyss. Air is polite…and calm. Trees are not timid, the image is breathtaking.

ANGER. There's always an old lady sitting at her window staring at the block like it's one of her soap operas. But compared to the roots woven in the concrete she's young. She even plays the ingénue with

her cigarette lover. Wet cement where I once created murals with tree branches are newly paved. Sidewalks are stages where girls play hopscotch as boys watch because they know they cute. Pit bulls are on short leashes, while hustlers got money in one hand and dice in the other, rolling for a come-up. Buckets that once held paint now discarded, now find themselves under the drumsticks of musicians who will create the greatest sounds you'll ever hear…

HAPPINESS. But here, the clouds sit on buildings. My condo is eye level with heaven, I speak to God daily. Two bedrooms, two baths, and a den. No sand, but there's an island in my kitchen. Paintings from starving artists hang on my walls with hope, that's how I give back. With a patio overlooking the city that never sleeps. I'm alive here. And I feel like I can finally be…me.

Happiness takes a moment.

ANGER. Kids capture Egyptian souls in aerosol cans and write tribal languages to claim corners with righteousness. And they look up to me, so I gotta keep going, I gotta last. "Work hard and it'll pay off" will be engraved in my epitaph. 'Cause the wrath of this hood is relentless.

HAPPINESS. I woke up with the sun this morning and I decided to run with the wind.

ANGER. I woke up and the sun was nowhere to be found.

HAPPINESS. This is now home.

He jogs off.

(To Anger.) Good morning!

Happiness exits.

ANGER. This is my home, and I wouldn't change it for the world…

Lights go down on Anger. Depression enters pushing a shopping cart filled with boxes. He works at a Whole Foods. The stacked boxes in the cart fall in front of him before the lights cut back on. He is working a double from the night before. It's 9:00 A.M.

Scene 2: Grocery Store Blues

DEPRESSION. It feels like I've lived two lifetimes in this neighborhood. I was finally going to move out, but my mom couldn't take care of my brothers alone. Graduated at the top of my class, but I ended up working here. Stocking shelves, cleaning, bagging groceries, and working under someone that's been here…forever. They're not happy with their own life, so they blame the workers for it. My manager tries to make me feel inferior because I don't match up the barcodes on the canned food. *(To himself.)* I know I can program and rebuild every machine in this store with my eyes closed. I just worked a double last night, but they want me to go out and push carts…fuck that…my back hurts, they can find somebody else to do it. *(Says into the distance.)* "Hey Timmy, Mr. Montgomery wants you to go get the carts… Nah he didn't ask me, he told me to tell you."

The reality is, I get paid minimum wage to bite my tongue and yet I still get cursed out. And when that happens, I really wanna say, "I'm sorry ma'am if the products we sell aren't good enough for your stuck-up ass. And I truly apologize if I don't know the price of the random item that you're holding up above your head from two hundred feet away. Maybe I don't know it, because you're screaming from across the store…lady I'm not your husband. Actually, I feel bad for anyone who's with you. Maybe…just maybe if you came a little closer and tried to articulate your question without screaming at the top of your lungs, I might actually have a great answer. If I don't, I would love to find out for you. Fucking bitch."

> *Lights dim around him as a pool of light appears. He steps into it. This happens throughout the play with multiple characters. This symbolizes their internal thoughts. When this happens all action freezes onstage.*

Sometimes I feel like these aisles are the fields and these condiments and cereal boxes are the cotton and they sure do gots me picking.

> *Lights abruptly brighten back up. Depression straightens up as an elderly woman walks by, though the audience does not see her. She asks him where an item is in the store. He answers her in a very polite manner then watches her walk away.*

"Hello…no, I can't complain…apple cider vinegar is two aisles over, in the middle shelf on the left…ummm Epsom salt would be aisle 5 and the cat food is in the front of the store…thank you ma'am you're sweet…I am single, I would love to meet your granddaughter…okay have a good day."

He crosses to another section of the stage.

Earlier today an old friend of mine came through my line and said, "What you doing here, you're too good to be doing this." I laughed it off, but it ate away at me like an infection. I know I'm not dumb. But working in places like this people make you feel that way. *(Directed to the entire audience.)* So the next time the cashier is ringing up your food. Pay attention. You never know who that person could be, you could be talking to a genius…you could be talking to me.

Depression exits as music and lighting transitions the scene. Lust and Love enter. Lust is trying to show him women on his phone, but Love is listening to music in his headphones. Lust continues to swipe through his timeline on Instagram and Love is writing in a journal. It's now 10:00 A.M.

Scene 3: Aye You / Galaxy Ride / Church Folk

LUST. Damn, she's fine as fuck.

He scrolls through her post, then stopping at one.

This one deserves like seven fire emojis.

LOVE. Why seven?

LUST. The number for completion my nigga.

Love starts looking up the street.

LOVE. This bus is taking forever.

LUST. Where you going?

LOVE. Somewhere to clear my head for a second.

Lust stares at Love.

LUST. Giovanni really got you fucked up. You gotta get outta this mood man.

LOVE. It's still fresh.

LUST. *(Looks down street.)* This bus need'ta to hurry up. I got something to get to…or should I say get into. Feel me.

LOVE. You wild.

Lust sees two beautiful women in the distance.

LUST. Aye, look.

LOVE. What?

LUST. You don't see'em? Here's your chance.

LOVE. *(Spots them.)* Which one?

LUST. The one on the left.

LOVE. I think the one on the right is…gorgeous.

LUST. Well…go talk to her.

LOVE. Nah, nah, I'm good.

LUST. You not. *(Looks as the women keep walking by.)* Aye, you!… See, they gone now…witcho scary ass.

LOVE. I'm not, you know I—

LUST. *(Mocks him.)* I…I what? All the damn poetry you be writing. Why don't you use some of that shit? *(To himself.)* I know what I'd say.

LOVE. What would you say?

LUST. I don't know.

LOVE. Well maybe, I could've started off by saying her body accents the earth.

LUST. This nigga… I just wanna touch her body.

LOVE. And baby, while you stand on Venus and I'm on Mars, we'll hold hands and look into each other's eyes like an oncoming comet.

LUST. And I got the house to myself. If I get her in my room it would be a wrap.

LOVE. And when we're tired we can revolve around the sun for a vacation.

LUST. And when she gets in my room I'll play Drake…or maybe the Isley Brothers or some shit like that. // Yeah…

LOVE. We'll listen to Neo Soul on Neptune and Jazz on Jupiter.

LUST. Light a couple of those little dollar-store candles.

LOVE. Then we'll lay on our Moon and draw constellations as the Milky Way surrounds us.

LUST. I just wanna smash.

LOVE. Seduce.

LUST. Hit.

LOVE. Rub.

LUST. Beat.

LOVE. Massage.

LUST. Bang.

LOVE. Touch.

LUST. Fuck.

LOVE. Caress.

LUST. *(To himself.)* Why didn't we talk to them?

LOVE. The galaxy is the bedroom and…

LUST. Aight, that's all good, but will you get the… *(Makes a sexual gesture.)* You know?

LOVE. Does it always have to be about that?

LUST. Uh, yeah.

LOVE. Can I just enjoy her company?

LUST. I guess, but damn why—

LOVE. I like to take it slow.

LUST. How slow you gonna take it man?

Lights dim onstage as a pool of light appears. Love steps into it. Lust freezes.

LOVE. *(To audience.)* He crazy. You either love him or hate him. There's no in between. See, we grew up in "The Church." Second pew from the back is where we sat, all the way to the right. Five days a week, three services on Sunday. This was our second home. The congregation would file in carrying their sins from the previous week. Elders and deacons fell in and out of sleep while tapping their feet to a spirit-filled drummer. Ladies would shake and tremble while tambourines bounced off their hips. Through praise dancing you could see Africa. The music director would make sure the

choir was harmonizing their hymns, we were kin no matter where we were from.

Some reached their hands as high as they could to grab heaven itself. The pastor would preach and catch his rhythm to the metronome of "You better preach" and "Say that again pastor." People placed ten percent of their hopes and dreams in collection plates as organs moaned, while praying their way out of poverty-stricken projects. And prepackaged juice and crackers that represented blood and body was consumed for communion.

I never knew where my parents went…I never asked. I just figured they didn't love me enough to stick around. *(Gestures to Lust.)* But his mom and my grandparents made sure we both had the fear of God… and we both had each other. And that's always been enough for us.

Pool of light fades as lights come back to full. Love continues the conversation from where they left off.

I like to work on their time.

LUST. Okay playa. I'm gonna try that. Take it slow. *(Sees another woman in the distance.)* Aye! Can I jog with you baby? Yeah? *(To Love.)* Yo, I'ma catch up with her. But don't worry. I'ma take it slow.

LOVE. Oh, wait, wait.

He goes through his book bag to grab a card then hands it to Lust.

…Happy birthday bro.

The moment lands on Lust as he takes the card. Then he directs his attention back to the woman he sees.

LUST. Hey, what's your name baby? Karen? *(Looks back at Love.)* Forreal?

Lust exits. Beat.

LOVE. *(To himself.)* Next time I see her…I'll just say…hi.

Love puts his headphones back on and waits for the bus as the lights fade down on him. He dances off. Lights transition as Passion enters. It's 11:00 A.M.

Scene 4: Concrete Proverbs

PASSION. Aye BC!… BC!… Don't "huh" me. Why you not in school?… Why I'm not…don't get smart, I'm off today. Don't have me call your mother, you know she don't play. You think I'm playing?

He pulls his cell phone out his pocket and acts like he about to call the student's mother.

No, no, 'cause you think I'm playing, let me call her… Yeah, that's what I thought… Then get your butt back to school. Aight, see you next week and stay outta trouble this weekend. Tell'ya brother I said what's up.

(Back to audience.) I have a hundred and twenty-six kids…students, and I love 'em like they're my own. But I'm glad I don't have'ta take none of their asses home. I'm not just they teacher. I'm their mentor, social worker…psychiatrist. For the ones that don't come from great homes I'm like a parent to 'em. It's like they not listening to no one and no one's listening to 'em. That's what we're missing. What happened to the OGs? The street scholars. The ones who sat on the block with their pop bellies, talking about, "Let me talk to you for a second young blood." The ones who had the knowledge of everyone who walked here. Growing up I can remember old heads telling me rules like proverbs that you could tell were passed down from ancient sands and Hennessy-stained sidewalks, like…

Always look a man dead in his eyes and shake his hand with power.

Never fear a real man. Fear the coward. He'll be the one to shoot you.

Always remain calm even in the face of danger.

Hang out with people that are gonna fight with you when things go south.

Keep your word even if that means death.

Don't ever let a door slam in anyone's face 'cause you'll never know when you'll need that door open for you.

Respect your heroes but know they're not perfect.

Find confidence in your humility. If you're not the smartest person in the room, be next to the person who is.

Master your situation. Quiet the ego and be humble.

And talk to God…*talk to God*. He's your best friend.

And when in doubt, know the barbershop is our sanctuary…Amen.

As lights transition, Wisdom, Anger, Depression, Love, and Happiness set the scene and Passion helps them with this moment. They place everything strategically onstage. We are now in a barbershop. Lights dim onstage as a pool of light appears. Wisdom steps into it. Everyone freezes.

Scene 5: Who Laced You With the Ill Cut?

WISDOM. The barbershop became a safe haven when streets caved in because we had to be careful amongst men who sinned. Even though our mothers didn't "raise no fools" and said it "wouldn't be you," we had to make it through, because we were survivor turned revolutionary, but we walked hip and talked jive, we were the beatniks who made the world sound cool.

I've seen us go from afros with pork chop sideburns to high top fades with parts. To caesars that made us roam like Caesar, but rule like Imhotep. Because one look in the mirror can give you stronger steps…and intention. So, when an elder speaks make sure you listen. Welcome to *Joe's*!

The pool of light fades as the lights come back to full. Happiness and Depression are already in the middle of a conversation. Sounds of a barbershop are heard. Sports Center plays in the background. It's now 12:00 p.m.

HAPPINESS. Why? I think it's nice.

DEPRESSION. They never had places like that before. *(In mirror.)* The only person closer to you than your barber is God and your mother.

HAPPINESS. Well…

DEPRESSION. There used to be this chicken spot…

ANGER. *(To Love.)* My twelve o'clock, you up.

Lust enters and talks over everyone.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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