

A Family Manual for Kwanzaa

By
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FAMILY CHARACTERS

(ranked in order of privilege)

1. Larry - father, 40s-50s
2. Francis - mother, 40s-50s
3. Bennett - son, 20s
4. Liza - daughter, teenager
5. Mema - grandmother, 80s

TV CHARACTERS

1. Wiggedy Whack - white rap duo: WW
2. Althea- talk show empress/TV chef/pet therapist
3. Rap Video Hoes /Showgirls - seductive mistresses of champagne and car rims.
4. Jenna - talk show audience member.
5. Announcer - voice that can be embodied on stage or pre-recorded.

All the roles should be played by an ensemble of 8-10 actors. The family is comprised of 5 African American actors. Mema and Althea should be played by the same African American actress. The roles of Wiggedy Whack and Announcer are played by the same 2 actors: White males who can be in the age range of 20-40s. The roles of Video Hoes, Showgirls, and Jenna should be played by 2 women: one is white and one who is non-Black. Both of the actresses are in the age range of 20-40s.

If you are looking for a cast of 8, then Wiggedy Whack and Video Hoes can be played by two white actors (one male and one female) who will share all four roles.

The characters ages and who can play them are flexible. Ideally the son and daughter should be in their early to late 20s. The mother and father should feel like they're in their 40s to late 50s. The grandparents should feel like they're in the 60s-80s, however they should probably be played by actors who are in the 30s-50s, because there is a lot of role-doubling.

STORY

This is a comedy that takes place around Kwanzaa. But it could just as easily be Passover, Christmas, Ramadan, or All Saints Day. The holiday is just the setting for the wishes, hopes, and dreams of a family to play out.

The tone of this story is 'unusual happiness.' In this setting, smiles and laughter come out of a sense of embarrassment and discomfort.

SETTING

The story is set in one of those prefab containers known as suburban house. It's a box that's stapled and glued together, and then dropped into the middle of the swamps of South Florida. The play centers around a Kwanzaa table replete with the various pieces necessary for a holiday: a Mkeka (straw mat), Muhindi (ears of corn), Zawadi (small gifts), Kikombe Cha Umoja (unity cup), Tambiko (water and soil sample). At the center of the table is the Kinara (candle holder) with the Mishuma Saba (seven candles). In the back hangs a Bendera Ya Taifa (Flag of the Black Nation).

DAY 1: Umoja

The Telle family set up the room for Kwanzaa. Larry, Francis, Liza, and Bennett place props around the space.

FRANCIS

Come on, let's hurry. Your grandparents are going to be here any minute. Be careful with the Mshumaa.

BENNETT

The what?

FRANCIS

The first candle.

BENNETT

Why didn't you just say don't break the candle?

FRANCIS

I want you guys to get comfortable with the terminology. Use the word bank I emailed everyone.

LIZA

The word bank is ridiculous.

LARRY

Let's not gang up on your mother. She's trying.

FRANCIS

Umoja.

BEAT

FRANCIS

That's the greeting for the day.

LARRY

Right, right.

FRANCIS

And you're supposed to say back to me...

LARRY

Umoja.

FRANCIS

No. 'Habari Gani.'

BENNETT

So each day we have to say a different word of some sort and then say something else in response to it?

FRANCIS

Each day we celebrate a concept.

LIZA

You mean a concept like communism?

FRANCIS

No, like an ideal. Happiness, love, unity.

BENNETT

Ugh. This is like a Black cult. I can't wait to move out of here.

FRANCIS

Anyway, in response to the idea for the day we always say 'habari gani,' which is like saying 'ditto' or 'I heard that.'

BENNETT

Why don't we just say 'I heard that' and simplify this?

FRANCIS

I'm going to ignore that because 'Umoja' means unity. This is the first day. This holiday is supposed to unite and bring us together to-

BENNETT grabs the remote control from Liza and turns on the TV. TV is located out toward the audience. The sound of cable news can be heard.

LIZA

Hey!

LARRY

Bennett.

BENNETT

Umoja.

LARRY

Bennett, turn the TV off.

BENNETT

You're supposed to say Haberry Ganja.

FRANCIS

It's Habari Gani.

BENNETT

Exactly.

FRANCIS

Habari Gani and turn that thing off. Your grandparents are coming soon and we want to show them unity. Hey, first one to show some Umoja wins Kwanzaa for the day.

LIZA

If we win Kwanzaa, does that mean we no longer have to do it? Like an immunity clause on a reality TV show.

FRANCIS

No.

BENNETT

But I like that idea.

FRANCIS

You win Kwanzaa and you get to...tell us about what that day means to you.

BENNETT

(turns off TV)

What this day means to me is unity around the TV.

FRANCIS

Bennett.

BENNETT

Wait, wait. Hear me out. We set up all the Kwanzaa stuff in front of the TV. Kwanzaa candles, Kwanzaa quilts, Kwanzaa cake, cookies, crayons. Now we bring the past of all these fake Nativity props and the mud/dirt thing-

FRANCIS

-that's the Tambiko and it's the water and soil sample-

BENNETT

-that's just lovely. So we take Tambiko and all this stuff from the past and we set it in front of our TV. Black culture, Black life, Blackness. And we have like a multimedia display of Kwanzaa in the past (pointing to props), the present in us and the future (point out toward TV). And then our Kwanzaa becomes like this... fully-enmeshed, living, organic, holistic thingy.

LARRY

...that was actually a pretty convincing argument.

FRANCIS

Larry!

LARRY

Sorry, uh, Umoja.

FRANCIS

Habari Gani and really? 'Holistic thingy' is winning you over?

LIZA

I mean, if we're going to watch TV anyway. Why not just use the holiday to watch...black TV?

BENNETT

Bingo. See, we're uniting on this. Black TV: music videos...

LIZA

...Bad infomercials on hair straighteners and skin lighteners...

LARRY

A couple of Blaxploitation films. And we could watch some of those talk shows with women sitting around with giant coffee mugs and yelling at each other.

FRANCIS

I'm feeling a bit betrayed.

LARRY

Oh come on, honey. Everything is gonna be just fine. You know Papa gonna work it out for you.

LIZA

Gross Dad. Just gross.

FRANCIS

I'm gonna check on dinner. And while I'm gone I want you guys to really think about our ancestors and all they did. Really think about the suffering they endured so that we could have this freedom. You sit with that and then you decide if you want to squander it on watching TV or being together for a few precious days. Think about our ancestors. All I'm asking for is seven days of cooperation, seven days of acting like a family. Would it kill you jackasses to be together for one week? Think about the goddamn ancestors!!!

Francis exits. There's a long solemn moment. Then Liza grabs the remote and turns on the TV.

LARRY

Liza.

LIZA

What?

LARRY

We're supposed to be feeling guilty.

LIZA

I had a moment. I thought about the ancestors. It's terrible.

BENNETT

And I think they would want us to watch TV.

LIZA

I do too. Umoja.

BENNETT

Hagani Berry. Once again, we are united. (fake African accent) Father. Giver of Life. Tree Bearing Fruit. Join the tribal circle.

Larry sits down as Liza flips through the channels. They land on a music video.

BENNETT

STOP!

Thumping bass music starts. VIDEO HOES bop around with dead soulless eyes. One holds champagne while the other has some car rims in her hand. RAP DUO, WIGGEDY WHACK are jamming.

BENNETT

Awww, Wiggedy Whack in the house. This is the jam right here.

WIGGEDY

Girl, you know I think I want to make you my wife

WHACK

-Yay-

WIGGEDY

We can be together, you and me for life

WHACK

-Fo' sho-

WIGGEDY

But if you want to chill, run games and ride

WHACK

-Nut what-

WIGGEDY

Then you best believe you're gonna open wide.

WHACK

After the show, it's a little bit of Cris

WIGGEDY

-Sip, Sip-

WHACK

While we get pissy drunk and you reminisce

WIGGEDY

-zip, zip-

WHACK

Don't act surprise, you know your way around

WIGGEDY

-beeyatch-

WHACK

Now it's time for you take that trip downtown/ So...

WIGGEDY WHACK

Put my dick in your mouth

Put my dick in your mouth

Make a nigga happy, put my dick in your mouth

WIGGEDY

Can't say nuttin'

With my dick in your mouth.

WHACK
 Swallow all my babies
 When my dick in yo' mouth
 I'll buy a house
 If ya open your blouse
 Give a protein boost
 When you chug-

BENNETT
 Swallow all my babies
 When my dick in yo' mouth
 I'll buy ya a house
 If ya open your blouse
 Give a protein boost
 When you chug my juice...

Larry changes the
 channel.

BENNETT
 HEY!

LARRY
 What is wrong with your generation?

BENNETT
 Dad, that was a classic.

LARRY
 Pop music putrescence, that's all that is.

LIZA
 It's cultural appropriation and degrading to women.

BENNETT
 It's not degrading to women. It's degrading to
 everybody. Therefore it actually could be considered
 feminist music. It levels the playing field.

LIZA
 Oh, please. You know, for someone who claims to like
 women so much, you sure do love talking about hitting
 'em, smacking 'em, flipping 'em.

LARRY
 Maybe that's why you don't have a girlfriend.

BENNETT
 Can we stop talking about this? I mean I thought we had
 a very lovely song playing to get us in the Kwanzaa
 spirit, but apparently I was wrong.

LARRY
 Yes, you were. Umoja.

LIZA
 Habari Gani.

BENNETT

And let the record show that I've seen *you* dancing to my music.

LIZA

...only in irony.

BENNETT

You can't shake your ass in irony. Umoja!

Francis enters with more
candles.

LARRY

New rule: they'll be no more foul music in the house during Kwanzaa.

FRANCIS

That's the spirit, honey. And I printed out the Kwanzaa word bank for everyone.

Francis hands out a sheet of
paper to everyone.

LARRY

Poppa's just laying down the law.

LIZA

Gross Dad.

FRANCIS

Then can Poppa explain to me why the TV is still on?

LARRY

I was just showing them the filth they are consuming. The stuff we have to turn away from as African Americans.

FRANCIS

Oh. Well I suppose that's okay. Now, we gotta problem: I just got off the phone with Mema.

LARRY

And? What's taking them so long?

FRANCIS

Opa is lost.

LARRY

Again?

FRANCIS

Honey, he's in the opening stages of dementia. So we're dealing with an ornery, angry, and lost man. And you know what they need to guide them home. My lil' Poppa Smurf Navigator.

LARRY

Can I just talk them in?

FRANCIS

Larry.

LARRY

They're at the same spot?

FRANCIS

At Denny's sipping coffee, and waiting for you to arrive.

LARRY

Fine. I'll go fetch the folks.

FRANCIS

Umoja, Larry.

LARRY

Yeah whatever.

Larry exits. Awkward silence.

FRANCIS

I'm guessing you guys have had a chance to think about the errors of your ways and reflect on our forefathers.

BENNETT

Sure, yeah yeah.

LIZA

Absolutely. Umoja!

Francis picks up the remote control.

FRANCIS

Look, I don't hate TV. It's just that for this one, slender moment in our life I want to focus on us and

FRANCIS (cont'd)

just being more of a family. Would you guys just stop!

As Francis is saying this, she hits the 'pause' button the remote. Suddenly Liza and Bennett freeze in mid-speech and gesture. They are in suspended animation.

FRANCIS

(turning around)

Now if we can just stop, and breathe, then I think we have...(looks at them) All right, quit playing around. Liza? Bennett?

Francis walks around them and pokes at their bodies. Then she looks at the remote control. She hits a button. And they unfreeze and continue moaning.

LIZA

We get it, Mom.

BENNETT

The ancestors, yeah yeah.

FRANCIS

I think I'm losing my mind.

BENNETT

We know: you're crazy for Kwanzaa.

FRANCIS

No, it's just...never mind. Why don't you watch some TV? Maybe that will make everything all right.

BENNETT

You're gonna to allow us TV time?

FRANCIS

Sure. As a family bonding activity until Opa and Mema arrive. How about I just change the channel to something more... therapeutic.

Francis points the remote control at them and presses a button. Then she keeps pressing it but nothing happens.

LIZA

Uh...Mom? We are not the TV.

BENNETT

The TV is that way.

FRANCIS

Right. I was just...checking the remote. (presses) Here we go.

Talk show music plays. Liza and BENNETT groan.

BENNETT

Ugh. Not the Althea show.

FRANCIS

She's one of the few uplifting things on the air. And your mom watches her all the time.

LIZA

She makes me very uncomfortable.

FRANCIS

What's the matter with you guys? "Essence" named her one of the most eligible black female billionaires over the age of 40.

ANNOUNCER

It's the Althea Alice show. Now please give a hot, spicy, deep-fried, sista gurl hand for Althea.

Studio applause. Althea, a busty and sassy black woman enters with a microphone. She's like a Wendy Williams-style talk show host. She pumps the crowd up with high fives and dancing with audience members.

ALTHEA

And we are back at the Althea Show and you know what we say: 'hey, sista-gurl!' We're here wrapping up, 'Ebony and Ivory Spiritual Awareness Week' on the Althea Show. We are going to take some questions from the audience. So if any of y'all have any questions for Althea just raise your precious hands.

JENNA, a preppy woman, bounces up from her seat and toward Althea.

JENNA

Ohmygod, I can't believe I'm here. 'Hey sista' gurl.'

ALTHEA

Hey sista gurl!

JENNA

Sista' gurl Althea, you are a true inspiration in my life. (APPLAUSE) I remember my mom telling me about her childhood in the south. And how she had this sassy black maid named Brenda, or Beulah or something. Well Beulah was always there for her. She was even breastfed by this wise, spiritual maid. And I realized that I never had a Beulah growing up. And it just made me so sad.

ALTHEA

That's terrible, honeychild.

JENNA

Sista' I got so depressed as a child that I would go into the kitchen and take out the Aunt Jemima syrup bottles and re-enact the maid quarters on one of those plantations. And I would be the matriarch and I would sit around with all my little Jemimas gossiping and giggling, you know, just like on a real plantation. We would laugh and talk about boys I liked. They would do my hair and scrub the floors while singing Motown songs. Every once in a while Uncle Ben would pop in and copulate with one of the Jemimas in front of us. We would all just sit around, watching and giggling as Ben moaned and wheezed, because of his emphysema. We would giggle and point as Ben worked himself into a frenzy. Before -you know- his climax, Ben would try to pull out in time so there wouldn't be any more Jemimas and Bens, because he was sick of bringing babies into the world and watching them get sold off by the master. It was so cute.

ALTHEA

Sounds like you have a fruitful imagination.

JENNA

My therapist says it's schizophrenia. But back to the plantation: one day Uncle Ben got drunk off sake and flew into an alcoholic rage. He raped all the Aunt Jemimas and broke their necks, before he off'ed himself with a shotgun. It was the saddest day of my life. And as I sat there crying in a brown pool of their severed heads, blood and love spunk, I saw your show come on the

JENNA (cont'd)

TV. My whole life changed. Althea, I just want to say that you are like those maids to me. The way you laugh and shuffle gives me goose bumps. It's so exactly like I imagined it. You sitting there like a rotund voodoo goddess, comforting all the plantation wives who-

ALTHEA

-Plantation?

JENNA

Sorry, I mean housewives. I don't know if I speak for everyone when I say this, but: I suck at the teet of your mysterious, but down-home sista' gurl wisdom.

Jenna weeps. Althea goes over to comfort her, strokes her hair and Jenna clings to her. She sits down and puts Jenna in her lap. Althea thinks for a moment and then knows what she has to do. As if she's used to it by now, Althea yanks down her blouse and slides one cup off her breast. She puts Jenna's head to her nipple, letting her partake of her nourishment. As Althea nurses Jenna, she hums a negro spiritual, first softly and then with growing passion.

ALTHEA

Mmmhmmm...mm-mm-mmm,
Hmmm-mm-mm-mmmmm!
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine
mmm...hmmm...(upbeat tempo)
mmm-hmm...hmm...hmmm
(skatting)skittle-be-bop-a-dip-do-whop-pam-bo-zip-pety-
zam-bam-bo! (cringes)Oh! (She adjusts herself) Careful
with dem teef, gurl.'

LIZA

Turn it!

FRANCIS

I can't.

BENNETT

TURN IT!

FRANCIS

The button is stuck!

ALTHEA

Who else wants to be nourished?

APPLAUSE. Althea begins undoing her other cup. FRANCIS manages to turn the TV off. They stand there, panting for a few moments. They all sit. Francis places the remote control down. She attempt to speak a few times and then gives up. Larry re-enters.

LARRY

Well they are here. All in one piece. I tried to show the old man, once again, what exit to take. But he wouldn't hear of it, so he just followed me. Mema is in the bathroom. Oh, we just have one little problem: Opa has locked himself in the car and refuses to come out. But he's gotta poop some time so we should be fine.

Larry looks at his family who appears to be in shock.

LARRY

Is everything all right?

FRANCIS

Honey, the TV is broken.

LARRY

But it was working fine a few minutes ago. What's wrong with it?

FRANCIS

The remote.

LARRY

Oh, it probably just needs a new battery. I can fix it.

BENNETT

Maybe it's better if you didn't.

LIZA

We can just let it be.

LARRY

Do my ears deceive me or are you guys ready to turn off the tube and come together for some family bonding?

FRANCIS

(shaken up)

Ben and Liza, why don't go wash up and set the table for dinner? Your father and I will go lure Opa out of the car and get anything they need from trunk. And then let's reconvene here in five minutes to light the, uh, thingy.

BENNETT

The Mshumaa.

FRANCIS

What? Oh, right. That. Yes, we will light the Mshumaa and the first day of Kwanzaa will commence. (under breath) God help us.

LARRY

What?

FRANCIS

I said God bless us. Each and every one. Now go.

Bennett and Liza exit.

LARRY

So who's going to be the hostage negotiator this time?

FRANCIS

Well you wrangled them here. It's only fair that I talk Opa out of the car before he makes a mess of the upholstery.

LARRY

Then I'll go see about Mema.

Francis and Larry exits.
Mema, a snow-haired Black woman, shuffles in on a walker. She looks around, sees no one and keeps shuffling. She grabs the remote and turns on the TV. The lights flicker and Mema gets scared that she did

something wrong. She exits.
Francis re=enters looking for
Mema. An announcer's voice
booms from heavens.

ANNOUNCER

Cracked wide open. Can you feel it? Ancestral
electricity. Coursing molecules, floating in the air
like little pixels. A swirling vortex of dots churned
out by a pulsing red device. Pumping out millions of
specks joining together, forming a sea of images.
Cresting waves and whirlpools. Sealed inside a portal.
And when that looking glass cracks. SMASH! HA! Wide
open! Wide open.

DAY 1: Umoja (Do Over)

Sitcom theme music plays. One by one, the family wanders on stage, strikes a funny 'opening credits' pose, and then continues moving toward each other. They have on colorful sweaters, corduroy, and sensible shoes. Everyone has a pleasant and upbeat smile. They each look around for differences.

FRANCIS

Is everyone all right?

LARRY

Yes, I think so.

MEMA

Feeling actually pretty good. I feel sassy.

BENNETT

Feel the same.

LIZA

Yep. But you're still ugly.

Canned studio laughter appears.

LIZA

I mean you've still got the face of roadkill iguana.

Studio laughter.

BENNETT

What was that?

LARRY

It sounds like someone's in the house.

FRANCIS

What is happening?

MEMA

Remember those happy Black sitcoms in the 1980s and 1990s. They were my best friends. And I always thought it would be nice if we could be like those families and insult each other. But like in sitcom jokes.

LARRY

I'm gonna to have to say 'no' to that.

LIZA

Pass.

FRANCIS

Mema, I think what we're saying is that-

BENNETT

Wait...how about we sweeten this arrangement?

MEMA

What do you have in mind?

BENNETT

The one who has the best insults wins. And we judge by the audience reaction.

LARRY

I don't know.

LIZA

I'm not playing.

FRANCIS

Guys, a family that plays together, stays together. So if this helps us stay together...then fine.

MEMA

Sounds good to me, you jive sucker.

Studio audience laughter.

LARRY

Really? That's what gets a laugh? Well Mema, you are an... (trying to think of something funny) dirty, old, coot.

FRANCIS

Larry?!?

LARRY

(listening for laughter)
Sorry. I thought we were trying to get laughs by being mean. I thought dirty old coot was a lot better than jive sucker.

MEMA

The bigger the truth the bigger the laugh, because it only works if it's coming from the heart.

Studio audience 'ahhhs.'

MEMA

You punk bitch.

Studio laughter and hoots.

LIZA

Yeah, Dad. So I would only get a laugh if I said something I really believed like... 'Bennett is a couch-squatting freeloader who has more dents in his ass than an Avis rental car.

Studio laughter.

BENNETT

I thought you weren't playing, Liza?

LIZA

I'm not. I was just using you as an example of speaking from the heart.

BENNETT

Oh so I would be speaking from the heart if I said that your liver is more pickled than a jar of pigs feet.

Studio laughter. Bennett bows.

LIZA

Well if I got a pickled liver you gotta tiny crotch. Yeah. It looks like you're smuggling a thimble and a sowing needle in your pants. Habari Gana.

Studio laughter. Liza is starting to like the laughter.

LARRY

Now, kids. You are supposed to be passive aggressive middle-class people. We didn't raise you to act ratchet.

Studio laughter.

BENNETT

You didn't raise us to act ratchet? Dad, don't take this personally... but you couldn't raise a window. Much less us.

LIZA

Mom did all the real work. Dad, you couldn't raise the toilet seat, much less kids.

Studio laughter.

FRANCIS

That was pretty good.

LARRY

Francis!

FRANCIS

Sorry. Umoja.

BENNETT and LIZA

Habari Gani.

LARRY

I guess the library is open cause these kids want to read. Well okay then: Bennett and Liza you're not exactly winning at life. You've been dumped more times than a port-o-potty at a county fair.

Studio laughter.

FRANCIS

Tell 'em. They've been dropped more times than a Sprint phone call.

LARRY

Nationwide isn't even on their side.

FRANCIS

And like a good neighbor, State Farm don't care.

Studio laughter.

FRANCIS

I'm sorry. That was wrong of us. But it felt so good.

LARRY

Course it feels good. These kids today are just so ungrateful. They both got into every public school and yet they attend private schools and spend all of our money. Money I was secretly hoping to use to buy a Winnebago like our next door neighbor.

Studio laughter.

FRANCIS

And now after they spent all that money, all our money, Liza is a teenage drunk and Bennett is a deadbeat who moved back into our home. Using our electricity, sucking up our water, eating us out of house and home. Umoja.

BENNETT

Hey, habari gani. I didn't ask to be here. You made a kid. You did the crime and now you gotta do the time.

MEMA

I can tell you about doing carnal crimes back in my day. In my time we didn't have no phone apps or 'fancy internets' to help us find our way to the bedroom. Back then we knew how to ball. Good golly Miss Molly! I'm talking about the licky-icky, sheet soaking sticky.

LIZA

Too much information.

MEMA

Shove it. In any hole that is available. Oh, and Umoja.

Studio audience laughs.

LIZA

Habari Gani and no disrespect Mema. When you and your kind were younger and didn't smell like Metamucil, you actually made the world a better place. But mom and dad and the baby boomers are useless. You guys are the worst thing to happen to the world since...since...

BENNETT

Since Barbershop Quartets. Since Crocs started making shoes. Since white folks started making potato salad.

Studio laughter.

FRANCIS

Habari Gani. But you're not really angry about us, Ben. You're angry about yourself.

LARRY

Could this have anything to do with the open secret of you being gay?

BENNETT

Hmmm...yes.

Studio laughter.

MEMA

But I think it's not just that grandson is a big ol' closet queen. I think at a certain point we stopped talking to each other and just isolated. Like a bunch of scared punk bitches. Umoja.

LIZA

That's why I stay in my room all day when I get home, pretending to study when I'm really drinking myself into a frat boy stupor.

Studio audience laughs.

LARRY

Well we are part-Irish.

FRANCIS

Yes, the bad part.

MEMA

Is there a good one?

Studio audience laughs.

BENNETT

You know, Mema, if you weren't so pitifully old and backward in your views some might actually take offense to that.

MEMA

Yes. Fortunately being old allows me the opportunity to say what I want and all the nasty and mean things I've always felt. I'm seen as being sassy and wise when really I'm just not being held accountable for my actions.

BENNETT

Yeah, and speaking of being accountable when is your generation gonna die off so we don't have to keep draining all our money into your retirement?

Studio hoots and laughs.

MEMA

Baby, we ain't going anywhere. We are gonna drain every last drop out of this lemon. And then set it on fire.

LARRY

And what our generation wants to say to you guys is we don't really care about your dreams. We just want you to get the fuck out and shackle yourself to whatever minimum wage horror you can find so you can stand up on your own two feet.

BENNETT

I understand perfectly.

LARRY

So will you leave?

BENNETT

...No.

FRANCIS

I'm glad we had heart-to-heart talk as a family. Now why don't we stop this game, and get something to eat.

Studio boo's and hisses.

MEMA

I think...they don't want us to turn it off. (Audience applauds) Should we keep going?

Audience applauds, hoots, and stomps feet.

FRANCIS

Then how do we get out of here?

MEMA

Well this whole thing started when I changed the channel. So I guess we can try that.

Larry lights a candle.

LARRY

Okay and I guess we can try to keep the spirit of Kwanzaa going. But just remember this kids. Through thick and thin, we'll do it together and to the end. Cause we're family. Like umoja.

Audience 'aaah.'

BENNETT

(to audience)
Oh shut up!!

Studio laughter and applause.
Mema clicks the remote and
changes the channel.

DAY 2: Kujichagulia

The door bell rings. Mema exits to answer it.

MEMA (O/S)

I'll get it. Maybe that's Opa.

LARRY

Or someone to save us.

ALTHEA (O/S)

Yes, my precious bundle. I am here, have no fear.

FRANCIS

No. It can't be?

LARRY

Hey, do I smell food?

ALTHEA

That's right, because Auntie Althea is here. Hey, sista gurl!

Audience applause. Althea's theme music plays. She rolls in a cart covered with a sheet.

ALTHEA

Sista gurl, I was just getting ready for the party. It's a Kwanzaa-bration my...my (thinking)...succulent n' sassy sister sarsaparilla. But before we go I figured I'd swing by with some tasty vittels. (uncovering dishes) Nothing special just some Hamhocks, chicken knees, cow tongue, Cajun cornbread, collard greens boiled with fatback, cheese broccoli n' bacon bits soufflé, seven-layer chocolate chunk n' funk cheesecake, a wild Turkey basted in spice, pepper, cinnamon and roasted to a golden crisp, then glazed with plum sauce and to wash all that food down: chocolate buttermilk and a sweet potato pie deep fried in Crisco, caramel, and corn syrup with a fat-free waifer on top.

Larry, Liza, Bennett attack the food, dropping the waifer off the plate. Drooling and grunting, they carry all the dishes off to the kitchen.

Studio applause. ALTHEA gets teary-eyed and grabs Francis's hand.

ALTHEA

Isn't it beautiful? Ain't nothing better on God's green earth, than people who 'ppreciate food. And you can find all these recipes in my new cookbook "Hog-tied and Deep Fried in the Blood of Jesus: Soul Food for the Spirit." Now Francis what is the one thing you've never had for the holidays?

FRANCIS

A Kwanzaa party?

ALTHEA

Yes, a Kwanzaa gala. That's right my...my...my...SHIT, Lucy! Why do I have to fucking talk like this all the time?!?

Althea is electrocuted. Studio audience laughs.

ALTHEA

My afro ho-ho and honey-nut cheerio.

Studio applause.

FRANCIS

Excuse me...what just happened right there?

ALTHEA

Oh, nothing. Just a tiny re-adjustment the system makes every once and a while.

FRANCIS

The system? You mean, like the cable box?

ALTHEA

It's more like a high-speed, WiFi, modulating flux generator.

FRANCIS

Where is it?

ALTHEA

Why honey...you're in it.

FRANCIS

What?

ALTHEA

Everything is acid-electric euphoria and pixilated perfection that has been sinuated through time, reformatted, separated, ionized, and re-transmitted. But there are pieces and pixels of the living that exist in the system. And you have your own pieces to add to the system.

FRANCIS

You mean like...my soul?

ALTHEA

And the system creates this! Voila!!

FRANCIS

So you're saying everything is fake?

Francis is electrocuted.
Audience laughs.

ALTHEA

Shouldn't do that.

FRANCIS

Shouldn't do what? All I said was that everything is fake-

Francis is electrocuted again.
Studio audience laughs more.

ALTHEA

The system doesn't like it when you do that.

FRANCIS

That's it! Althea, this Kwanzaa is over.

ALTHEA

Wait, Francis. Remember the Kwanzaa gala I planned.

FRANCIS

Un-uh. Getting electrocuted is a deal-breaker for me, baby. I don't care what you're offering.

ALTHEA

Just don't use that four-letter word: F-A-K-E.

FRANCIS

How come you weren't electrocuted?

ALTHEA

Because I spelled it. Letters are like pixels: it's how you put them together that makes the world. And we, here, like a world without ugliness. A world of rhythm, poetry and symmetry. So how about we go grab some stuff for the next day of Kwanzaa.

FRANCIS

Forget Kwanzaa! My body was just turned into a George Foreman Grill by this system. And what is that smell?

ALTHEA

Fried chicken. Now please just come along to the kitchen and I'll cook you up some triple-fried chicken fries and a diet root beer.

FRANCIS

Why don't you get started on the triple frying and I'll be right in.

Althea exits. Francis thinks about what to do and calls to her family.

FRANCIS

Guys? Guys...come out here.

The family comes back out with crème, sauce, and grease smeared across their face. They are happy and sleepy from all the food.

BENNETT

Kujichagulia.

EVERYONE (except Francis)

Habari Gani.

FRANCIS

No, listen-

BENNETT

I said Kujichagulia.

EVERYONE (except Francis)

Habari Gani.

FRANCIS

Shhhh... Listen, we can't stay. We have to figure a way out of this right now.

LARRY

But honey, all we needed was a bit of food and we're back to feeling fine.

MEMA

You should have some food too, Fran.

LARRY

Yeah, honey. Try some of the food.

FRANCIS

Oh my god, are there drugs in the food?

LARRY

What?

FRANCIS

I'm right, aren't I? You guys were drugged. By the system.

Studio laughter. Family laughs.

MEMA

What system?

FRANCIS

Guys, there is a system that is controlling us.

MEMA

Now that's some silly talk. Francis, are you getting a little bit of the menopause crazies? You know, I had those when I was your age.

Audience 'aahhhs'
sentimentally. Heartfelt music
starts to play.

MEMA

And the thing about growing older is that, you grow wiser. And realize each day is just a lil' mo precious, a lil' mo' peaceful, a lil' mo of the warm blood of Jesus washing away the sins of the past.

FRANCIS

Mema, stop talking and go get your things.

MEMA

Shit! You ain't never let me have any fun.

Mema exits and music stops.

BENNETT

I still don't understand why we're leaving. So there's a system that's in charge of things. That makes living easier.

FRANCIS

I don't think this was created for easy living. It...electrocuted me.

LIZA

Dad? Is Mom okay?

LARRY

Liza, it doesn't matter. Just humor the woman.

FRANCIS

Larry?

LARRY

Sorry, I meant: of course we believe you. Yeah. (using sarcastic air quotes) There's a 'system' and it's 'controlling' us. So that we can't 'escape-'

Larry is electrocuted.

LIZA

Dad, what's wrong?

FRANCIS

(using sarcastic air quotes)
It's 'the system.' It 'electrocuted' him.

LIZA

But all he did was say 'we can't escape-

Liza is electrocuted.

FRANCIS

That must be another one of the words we can't say. Now, do you believe me?

BENNETT

Okay, maybe what you're saying has a little tiny, itty bitty, truth to it. But so what? I still don't see the problem here. So we can't say a few words. Big deal. I

BENNETT (cont'd)

mean when you really think about it, there are too many words out there. Too many opinions. What if we just skimmed away a few of those words and opinions and -in exchange- we get to have the stuff we want, it seems like a fair trade. Am I right, family?

Studio applause.

LIZA

Mom, what can we do to help?

BENNETT

Oh come on, really? A little static electric shock and you're ready to esca-...I mean... you're ready to...depart without getting your turn to change the channel?

LARRY

Bennett...just do what your mother says.

FRANCIS

Thank you.

BENNETT

So what do you suggest, o' wise one?

FRANCIS

The first thing I suggest is that you cool it with the sarcasm. The second thing is...I don't know. Maybe we can use our...collective will power to... overwhelm this thing. If we all just stick together and fight it with who you really are!

LIZA

And who is that?

FRANCIS

Okay, I'll help you: Liza, you are the neglected, emotionally-scarred alcoholic teenage daughter. Bennett, you are the smart-aleck closet case growing into manhood. And you two would have this sort of sibling banter. Larry, you are the slob husband. Mema, is the sassy Black grandmother who gets away with saying outrageous stuff because she's old and going to die soon. And Opa is a stubborn old goat who has locked himself in the car. This is the Cliff Notes version. Now let's use our will power and turn this thing off.

Althea re-enters.

ALTHEA

Francis, you can't turn it off, but you can change the channel. Now if you had the remote control you might have a chance to-

FRANCIS

The remote control! That's it. Mema had it last. Where is she?

LIZA

I don't know. But she had it on her when we were eating.

FRANCIS

We find Mema, find the remote, change the channels. And then we're home free. Now everyone spread out.

Liza exits. Bennett's body language shows that he can't believe they're going to try to leave. Larry points at Bennett to leave, and he does so reluctantly. Then Larry exit.

ALTHEA

Francis, everything is going to be all right if you just trust me.

FRANCIS

No. We can say that in the machine right? No. Well I don't care. Because I don't like this place. Something is really E-V-I-L.

ALTHEA

What? The disembodied laughter?

FRANCIS

No.

ALTHEA

The offensive stereotype I'm playing?

FRANCIS

No.

ALTHEA

The electrode pads growing like cancers on our inner thighs and mouth that are there to electrocute us?

FRANCIS

Maybe. But I want o-u-t.

ALTHEA

Francis, will stop being such a baby! Now you got at least five more days of Kwanzaa before you can't return to...(realizing she said too much)...aaahhh hahaha shit.

FRANCIS

What did you say?

ALTHEA

I said you ever wonder why red velvet cake taste so good? Well in my cook book 'Hog Tied and Deep Fried' I tells ya that-

FRANCIS

No, you said after five days we can't return? Return to what? Home?

ALTHEA

Never mind that, Fran. Just a slip of the tongue, sista' gurl. Let's relax and get our grooves on, honey!

FRANCIS

Althea, if we stay here until the end of Kwanzaa does that mean we can't go back home?

ALTHEA

Just play along with me for a while. I'm your best friend 'till the end, remember sista gurl? You're my ABC: my ace-boon-coon from another womb.

FRANCIS

Althea you are my spiritual beacon. But fuck that sista' gurl, honeypie, sugar peach dumpling' talk. I am o-u-t. Besides, what can it do? (looks heavenward) Strike me down? Torture me? Tear me into a billion pixels?

Althea starts to get
electrocuted.

FRANCIS

O' my God. Why are they doing this to you?

ALTHEA

B-because...I...da...hostess...t-this.....my...duty

FRANCIS

(up at heaven)
STOP IT! It's my decision. It's not her fault.

ALTHEA

I...da...hostess...n-n-not...doing...good...job...

FRANCIS

Why won't they stop? Althea, why are they doing this? I just want to go home.

Althea is sweating. She drops down on her knees and clasps her hands in prayer. She mumbles something. Francis can't take it any longer.

FRANCIS

OKAY! ALL RIGHT! I'll go along with it!

Althea is released from the grips of the machine. Francis runs to her and picks her up. Althea dusts herself off and smiles with plastic doll intensity.

ALTHEA

All right, my mulberry muffin munchkin. Let's light the candle.

Althea lights the candle.

ALTHEA

Kujichagulia.

FRANCIS

Kujichagulia.

DAY 3: Ujima

Kwanzaa Infomercial. Althea sings for the Telle family, who also participate in the dramatization of the song. But while they're acting out the pageantry they're also looking around for the remote control. Althea's tune is atonal and arrhythmic. She can use a small accompanying instrument like a harmonica, xylophone, kazzo, ukulele, or hand bell to harmonize, but it should not make her any better.

ALTHEA

From our blood deep in Africa
Rises royal crowns of who we are
Habari gani - now what's the word?
There's a ju-bi-la-tion!
Seven Principles, seven days...of
celebra-a-ations.
We light fire and rap praise
Dance rites and ancient ways
Hailed for genera-a-ations.

She can use the instrument here to re-harmonize. But it doesn't get any better.

ALTHEA

Kwanzaa - we're celebrating Kwanzaa
Kwanzaa - a gay ol' revelry
First Day, Umoja means unity
Family immunity with no importunity
Second Day: Kujichagulia
Self determination
No degradation.

Third Day: Ujima. Responsibility
collectivity with some adorability
Fourth Day, Ujamaa, prosperity
Through...uh, through adaptability.

Kwanzaa - we're having revelation.
Kwanzaa - a juicy jubilation.

ALTHEA

Next is Nia, so purposeful
We feel the power within us all.
Kuumba means creativity
And having flexibility.

Last, Imani means faith and fact
In our future, yes we act.
Seven Principles, here intact.
Give us motivation we lack.
Kwanzaa - we're celebrating Kwanzaa
Kwanzaa - celebrating Kwanzaa

Umoja, Kujichaguli, Ujima, Ujamaa,
Nia, Kuumba, Imani. Kwanzaa, Kwanzaa, Kwanzaa!

She ends with an instrumental
flourish and exits. Infomercial
audience applauds. The family
look for the remote control.

LIZA

Well we are in Ujima. Collective work and
responsibility. Got sticky issues? Tough-stuck on social
inequality and systemic oppression? Wham! Just add Ujima
and look at that. It's gone.

Audience applauds. Liza
produces a flask, 'toasts' the
day, and drinks.

BENNETT

Ujima. A family sharing in the collective opening of
presents. Add Ujima and Wham! We got cool stuff.

Bennett tries to open a present
when Francis slaps it out of
his hand.

FRANCIS

Ujima: a family bonding together by looking for the
remote control or (shows fist) Wham! Ujima! Now come on,
we have to collectively work together. We have to E-S-C-
A-P-E.

BENNETT

O-K-I-W-I-L-L.

LIZA

Ujima also means we should take responsibility for ourselves. And I guess I should take some responsibility for thinking this holiday would offer me one final chance at liking you guys before I go away to college. I was hoping to walk away from this experience being able to look back fondly on where I grew up and not just in anger at being ignored my entire childhood.

FRANCIS

I'm sorry, Liza. Did you say something after 'Ujima?

Liza drains her flask.

LIZA

I was just saying I find Ujima and this whole ordeal a tired dress-up game that's outdated. Wham.

LARRY

Don't forget pathetically and exaggeratedly Afro-chic.

Toilet flushes and Mema re-enters from the bathroom.

MEMA

And borderline Marxist..."collective work and responsibility?" By the way your toilet is clogged.

FRANCIS

Ujima. I wanted normal. I wanted the American family. And I got you guys.

Studio audience 'aahhhs.'

LARRY

Sort of a mob squad.

LIZA

Oh boo-fucking-hoo. Stop you're complaining. We aren't in jail. Nobody got any illegitimates crawling around. We aren't strung out on crack rock and we don't huff paint. That's a passing grade as a parent.

Audience applauds.

FRANCIS

So you think I'm a good mother?

LIZA

I wouldn't go that far? But hey: you're a solid...C-minus.

BENNETT

D-plus.

LIZA

Whateva.'

FRANCIS

Will you talk nice about me when I'm gone?

LIZA

No. But we'll talk about you.

FRANCIS

Well at least I'll be remembered.

BENNETT

When we get through exposing you for who you are you as a person, you'll be more than remembered. Of course I'll wait until after your dead so you can't defend yourself.

LIZA

(lighting candle)

But hey, at least you'll be remembered. Ujima.

EVERYONE

Habari Gani.

Bennett finds something under the gifts.

BENNETT

(uncontrollable)

Yaas, Jesus I... I mean. Ujima.

LIZA

What is it? Did you break a nail?

BENNETT

No. I... just remembered something. Mema, didn't you have the remote control while you were eating Althea's corn poon?

MEMA

I think so.

BENNETT

I think I picked up something when I grabbed your plate.

FRANCIS

The remote?

BENNETT

Mom, I think you're right. It's probably in one of the garbage bags in the kitchen.

FRANCIS

Good thinking Bennett. That's my studly son!

MEMA

That's my slutty grandson.

BENNETT

Mema, she said studly.

MEMA

I know.

Studio audience laughter.

LIZA

To the kitchen! Ujima!

Liza, Larry, and Francis exit.
Mema shuffles off after them

MEMA

Bennett, you're coming to look?

BENNETT

Of course. (Mema exits. Bennett is alone and sinister)
Of course.

Bennett removes the remote control from behind the gifts. He's about to turn the channel when Larry re-enters. Bennett hides his hands.

LARRY

Bennett?

BENNETT

Father?

LARRY

Why aren't you in their rummaging through the trash like the rest of us?

BENNETT

Gee, I was just about to go in there. Just thinking about Ujima, you know. Collective work. And responsibility. And how we're all collectively together in this thing.

LARRY

And you would never do something like find the remote control and use it for yourself, would you?

BENNETT

I think it would betray everything Mom said and what this family stands for: trust. I could never do that.

LARRY

Me either.

BENNETT

Just the thought of it sickens me.

LARRY

Here here. What's wrong with your arm?

BENNETT

My arm? Oh, it's all...gay and stuff.

Studio audience laughs. Bennett puts remote control in back pocket.

LARRY

Your arm is gay and stuff? I thought that was all of you.

BENNETT

Right, right. That's true. You got me there. Well, Dad I'm just going to go the bathroom-

LARRY

-You know in African mythology, the gay son is considered to be the manipulator, the gender-shifter, the conniver.

Larry blocks Bennett's path. This is a stand-off. They are sizing each other up.

BENNETT

That sounds a bit homophobic. Why can't the gay son be considered the warrior, the strong nobleman, or the king?

LARRY

I guess people tell stories about what they know from their own families.

BENNETT

Well to assuage your fears you'll be happy to know that I don't identify as gay.

LARRY

Oh, you don't? Then what are you?

BENNETT

I am a...homothug.

LARRY

A homo what?

BENNETT

A homothug.

LARRY

Is that like 'on the down low?'

BENNETT

It's more like a new movement: men-loving-men. Sex is an act. Gayness is a whole set of beliefs and behaviors, cultures and lifestyles that I don't identify with. Gayness is cultural...like Blackness. It doesn't really exist.

LARRY

What do you mean? You like to have sex with men.

BENNETT

Yes, but that's an act, Dad. That doesn't mean I like showtunes or fashion or interior decorating. That doesn't even mean I like giving fellatio.

LARRY

Okay, son. That's more than enough information.

BENNETT

So we are redefining our sex status as 'men loving men' and my culture as 'homothug.' And homothugs aren't connivers.

LARRY

Then what are they?

BENNETT

Killers. You know what I'm saying?

Studio audience 'ooohhs' with suspense. They look at each other a moment. Larry switches tactics.

LARRY

Killers. That's pretty good.

BENNETT

Thank you. But I'm speaking metaphorically, of course. Even if I had some magic ability to change myself, I wouldn't ask for that.

LARRY

You know what I would do if I ever got my hands on the remote control?

BENNETT

Turn it back in to Mom?

LARRY

What? Oh, of course. But if I had a moment...I might change the channel on myself. You know? Try to be a better husband or father to you and Liza. If only I had it in my hands.

BENNETT

And if ifs and buts were candy and nuts wouldn't we all have a Merry Christmas?

LARRY

What's that supposed to mean? Is that some sort of gay saying?

BENNETT

No, it was said by a football star. And it means you don't have it. So save the hypothetical 'ifs.'

LARRY

What's behind your back?

BENNETT

I would ask you the same thing. What's behind *your* back?

LARRY

I don't have anything behind my back.

BENNETT

Well there you go.

LARRY

Why are moving away from me?

BENNETT

To grow fonder of you.

Studio audience laughs.

LARRY

That doesn't make any sense.

BENNETT

Neither does love. And looks can be very deceiving.

LARRY

Yes. And so can sons. Bennett! I know you have the remote control.

BENNETT

Well good for you, Dad. Bravo. You know something. But that's half the battle. First you know something. But then you have to know what to do with it.

LARRY

Bennett, what has come over you?

BENNETT

I've been watching "Scarface" on a loop. So don't fuck with me. (Larry moves toward him) Okay, I'm just playing. So... what do you want?

LARRY

I just want us all to be a good family and work together so that we can use the remote to-

BENNETT

-Spare me! Working together? Good family? If that were true you would have yelled for mom already. What do you really want?

LARRY

Okay, let's think this through. We can split this remote control time?

BENNETT

How?

LARRY

You go and then I go. Sort of like a click-click-pass.

BENNETT

Dad, I like the way you think. Okay, but I get to go first. Go away and distract the others for a few minutes. I want some 'private time' with this thing.

LARRY

And then I get to go?

BENNETT

Yeah, sure. Click-click-pass.

LARRY

I'm trusting you, Bennett.

BENNETT

That's what family is for, Dad. Ujima.

LARRY

Habari Gani.

Larry exits and Bennett is alone with the remote.

BENNETT

Let's take this thing for a spin.

Bennett focuses and changes the channel. Gangsta rap music starts playing. Bennett is backstage at a Wiggedy Whack concert. Whack enters with cups of liquor.

BENNETT

You're MC Whack, from Wiggedy Whack.

WHACK

The one and only.

BENNETT

Oh my God, I'm your biggest fan.

WHACK

What's your name, biggest fan?

BENNETT

Bennett Telle.

WHACK

Yo Ben, what's clacking-lacking? Nice to meet you. You want an autograph?

BENNETT

That would be amazing.

WHACK

(hands him cup of liquor)
Yo, you swole. Are you on the football team? Oh, cause you look like...well never mind. Man, I am soo drunk.

BENNETT

Congrats.

They clink plastic cups.

WHACK

Are you drunk?

BENNETT

I'm getting there.

WHACK

Come on, you gotta get fucked up.

BENNETT

I'll try.

WHACK

I'm just trying to hide out for a little bit. Away from my girlfriend.

BENNETT

You mean MC Wiggedy? She's pretty.

WHACK

Yeah, but some times she can be a real bitch.

BENNETT

I know how that goes. You need to relieve some...stress. Just want to relax and get a massage or relief. And just let it go and say the first thing that comes to your mind.

WHACK

First thing? My girlfriend has never done it with a Black guy.

BENNETT
Really?

WHACK
Yeah. Never.

BENNETT
How do you know?

WHACK
Cause she told me.

BENNETT
She could be lying.

WHACK
Yeah. Fucking bitch.

BENNETT
It's not her fault. We're very sneaky.

WHACK
Yeah...Some times when me and my girl are doing a little foreplay. I pretend that I'm a black guy. She thinks it's pretty cute.

BENNETT
Oh you got impersonations huh? This I gotta see.

WHACK
Nah.

BENNETT
Now, come on. Do the Black man.

WHACK
We're cool, bro?

BENNETT
Sure.

WHACK
I mean, we're like cool and everything? You're not going to call the NAACP or Jesse Jackson on me?

BENNETT
Do your thang, Black man.

WHACK

Okay. Don't get mad, all right?

Whack starts swaggering around.

WHACK

Yo yo yo, where my bitches at? Where my motherfucking weed at? What's up my nigga? Where my dawgs at, my nigga? Pour a little liquor out for my niggas that locked up and dead. Man, fuck you nigga! Die nigga die! Fuck all y'all motherfuckers. Eat a dick and kiss my Black ass! While you're at it toss my Black salad with some strawberry jelly. I'm out this piece, beeyatch!!

Bennett points the remote at him and tries to make an adjustment again.

WHACK

What are you doing?

BENNETT

Trying the 'mute button.'

WHACK

So what did you think of my impersonation?

BENNETT

That was...some funny shit right there.

WHACK

Yo, I can also do a White guy I call him Cracker Bill.

BENNETT

Oh yeah?

WHACK

Wanna see it?

BENNETT

Naw, you're doing it right now. I don't need to see more.

WHACK

Oh snap, dawg! You ranking on me. You official. You real official, yo.

BENNETT

Fo' real yo.

WHACK

Yeah...man, Wiggedy always talks about doing in with a Black guy.

BENNETT

No kidding.

WHACK

Yeah.

BENNETT

You want me to fuck her?

WHACK

You funny bro. Would you?

BENNETT

If you ask nicely.

WHACK

Naww, she'd be stretched as wide as equator after you. She come back to me and it'd be like I'm throwing a hot dog down a dark hallway.

BENNETT

Why's that?

WHACK

You know.

BENNETT

No.

WHACK

You know what they say...(motioning with hand)

BENNETT

Oh. That.

WHACK

Yeah. Is it true?

BENNETT

Is *what* true? What *they* say?

WHACK

Yeah, bro. Stop being all cryptic and shit. Is it true?

BENNETT

Absolutely.

WHACK

Naw, for real?

BENNETT

100% true.

WHACK

Word?

BENNETT

Word.

WHACK

Yeah, you know...if I was a girl-

BENNETT

(to himself)
Finally, the pay-off!

WHACK

What?

BENNETT

Nothing. Oh, man I am so wasted. Go on with what you were saying.

WHACK

You know, if I were a girl...I'd let you fuck me.

BENNETT

If you were a girl?

WHACK

Yeah, bro. Totally. (laughs) Oh man. I am so shitfaced. Are you wasted too?

BENNETT

(not drunk at all)
Totally, bro.

WHACK

(clink plastic cups)
Fucking awesome, bro.

BENNETT

Man, it would be cool to lie down a moment and just drift on this buzz, right?

WHACK

Yeah it would be. I got a bedroom in the tour bus.

BENNETT

Any visitors?

WHACK

Naw, man. I keep it right private. Yep.

BEAT

WHACK

Man, I just had a thought: you should totally come to my bus. I got some of the good 'ish. Straight from Hawaii. It's got crystals on it.

BENNETT

You wanna invite your girl?

WHACK

Man, fuck that bitch.

BENNETT

Okay. Then let's get on the bus.

WHACK

Yeah, play some dope music, smoke a little of the sticky. Chill. Let me just make sure nobody is inside and then you can sneak in a minute later, okay?

Whack staggers off. Bennett kisses the remote and starts to exit, when Liza comes in.

LIZA

Bennett, what the hell were you talking about? Mema didn't leave the remote in the kitchen. We've been looking everywhere and-

Liza sees him holding the remote control.

BENNETT

Now, I know this looks bad and I can explain things. I just need about 15-20 minutes for some...thug pleasure.

LIZA

No, Bennett! And by the way: ew.

BENNETT

Ok, I will settle for 10 minutes. Or even 7.

LIZA

I'm going to tell mom.

BENNETT

Well now let's think this through. We're family, right?
Ujima, sister!

LIZA

You crazy. I'm...I'm telling everybody. Mom! Dad!

BENNETT

Liza, now let's not be too hasty.

LIZA

Bennett, you had me digging through garbage for your
stupid ass!

Larry re-enters unnoticed.

BENNETT

I will give you time. With the remote.

LIZA

...how much time?

BENNETT

As much time as you want, I'm all about family, sis.

LIZA

So I could be...whatever? So I could be a...first-class
runway supermodel supreme diva bitch?

BENNETT

You've thought this through?

LIZA

A little. Okay, then hand it over.

BENNETT

I just got some...business to take care of. But if you
could wait about... 5 minutes, I swear you're the next one
who will get a turn.

LARRY

Well, well, well.

BENNETT

Dad!

LARRY

You're just trading favors and conditions for the remote with everyone. Just like a conniving backstabber.

BENNETT

Dad, I can explain.

LIZA

I changed my mind, Ben.

BENNETT

See, compromise. This is what Ujima is all about..

LIZA

I want to go now.

BENNETT

What?

LARRY

Not before me.

LIZA

It's my turn.

BENNETT

I still haven't finished my turn yet.

LIZA

So what? You don't deserve it because you lied.

Francis and Althea re-enter.

ALTHEA

What's going on here, my precious dumplings?

LIZA

Ben, lied. And he's using the remote control to enact some freaky fantasy while we suffer.

FRANCIS

Bennett, how could you?

BENNETT

What do you mean, 'how could I?' You got Althea, Mema got her sitcom. All I'm asking for is three minutes and I'm the bad guy?

LARRY

He's got a point there.

FRANCIS

Larry?!?

LIZA

Dad's just saying that because he wants the remote.

LARRY

And you don't?

LIZA

That's only because Ben offered it. But I wasn't negotiating like you two probably were.

FRANCIS

Hand it over, Bennett!

ALTHEA

Now, everyone just calm down.

BENNETT

Over my dead body.

LIZA

Fine, have it your way.

Liza wrestles Bennett to the ground. Studio audience laughs.

ALTHEA

Now you two be nice. The remote is a sensitive thing that can be broken if put under too much pressure.

FRANCIS

Larry, aren't you going to do anything?

Larry gets on the ground and is wrestling Liza and Bennett. They're screaming and trying to grab the remote (in the struggle actors can ad-lib lines like 'who's biting me...someone's keys are pressing against my thigh...you play too damn much.) Francis gets on the ground with them and they tumble over each other.

LARRY

Be a family. No biting!

FRANCIS

Remember the ancestors, you jerks!

BENNETT/LIZA/LARRY/FRANCIS

GIVE ME THE REMOTE!!

A BLADE OF LIGHT strikes the
family and they become statues.
Althea is electrocuted and
transforms into a sorcerer.

ANNOUNCER

EVERYTHING.
EVERYTHING.
EVERYTHING.

ALTHEA

Yes. It must be. It will be.

ANNOUNCER

THAT IS MY CURSE TO YOU!
MAY ALL YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE!
THAT IS THE WORST THING I CAN SAY
May you all get your way.

Althea grabs the remote from
the frozen hands of Bennett.

ALTHEA

Pig feet, chicken legs,
Hambones n' cornbread.
Slow shuffle soft shoe
what the sysem gonna do fer you?
Black and blue, blue as black
How you gonna get ahold of your facts?
May this control
Wipe whole your soul
And suck your blood
And in place, flood
You top to tail,
Hammer to nail,
Drive it in
Deep pass the skin
And to the bone
Your history has flown
into the night
Birthing new plight!

Althea changes the channel and
the sky falls in. Blackout.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

DAY 4: Ujamaa

Francis wakes up on the floor. It's night and the room is lit with the electric snow and static from the TV. She looks around. Everything appears normal. The Kwanzaa table has four candles lit on it. Opa enters with a walker. He trudges forward and sits next to Francis. His entire body is mummified in shawls and veils.

FRANCIS

Opa! You finally got out of the car! I didn't think I'd ever see you again. Remember, those bed time stories you used to read me. "Zip Coon" and "Tintin" and "Black Sambo" and "Thursday," the African boy Mickey Mouse finds in a crate of bananas. Why did you do that? You used to laugh and laugh. I hated them. I really, really hated them. They made me ashamed to be... me.

BEAT

FRANCIS

One night Zip Coon came to me. And he told me I could have everything in America. Except one thing. I could have fame, big fancy cars, mansions, family. But I would still be the daughter of Zip Coon. I would never be free. So I asked for the car and the house and the family. And I just forgot about that one thing. And I was swept off into this machine and there were all these people sitting around looking at us. And for a moment I thought I could see them. These people. These dreams. These, these... souls.

BEAT

FRANCIS

Souls, Dad. I could see inside people... is that crazy?

Opa stands and starts to exit.

FRANCIS

Wait. Wait, Dad. I'm sorry I can't take better care of you at this point in your life. Can you forgive me? I'm asking you this because...I can't forgive you for what you did to me as a child. Fathers can forgive their children, but it doesn't really work the other way. When

FRANCIS (cont'd)

children forgive their father it's really just...pity. And I know you don't want that. So I'm asking you to forgive me knowing that I could never do the same for you. Dad, can you forgive me?

Opa unravels himself to reveal Althea Alice.

FRANCIS

Of course. Another joke. Althea, why are you doing this?

ALTHEA

Well I tried to warn you and yours but you weren't careful. You had to have it your way. So I guess it's on with the show.

FRANCIS

What show?

ALTHEA

You've fixed yourself up, nicely. Okay, we're ready in 30 seconds.

FRANCIS

Althea, I just want-

ALTHEA

(putting lapel mic on Francis)
Don't worry, Francis. Auntie Althea put on her kid gloves and will be as soft as peach cr me.

LIGHTS UP. Studio applause and hooting. Althea Alice dances through the crowd dispensing high-fives, selfies, and booty bump dances with the audience.

ALTHEA

Hey, sista, gurl! We're back and this is a special Althea Show: "Kwanzaa: Making Black American Dreams Happen." Which dreams matter, which dreams don't! Well we'll find out today. How many of y'all have dreams out there? Well we've been here with Francis and her family. They've been telling us about their dreams. Since then, worlds have fallen and risen, people have died and been reborn, lives and love have been crushed and birthed. Now -fifteen minutes later- we want to check back in with the family and seeing how they're doing. And remember everybody: they're

ALTHEA (cont'd)

competing to see who matters. The one who has lived their dreams to the fullest wins Kwanzaa and will be able to decide the fate of the Telle family. Our first guest is Francis. Fourth time's the charm, right?

FRANCIS

What?

ALTHEA

It's the fourth day of Kwanzaa. The time is slipping away from you. And that means Ujamaa. Francis: Ujamaa.

FRANCIS

We don't have to celebrate this day or any other.

ALTHEA

Why not?

FRANCIS

Because these are just empty words and phrases. There's no real feeling behind it.

ALTHEA

So are you saying there's no real feeling behind Kwanzaa? Shame on you Francis!

Studio audience boos.

FRANCIS

No, that's not what I mean. There's no real feeling behind any holiday if a family can't celebrate it with love. So it's better not to celebrate Kwanzaa, Christmas, or anything if it's going to become a cheap excuse to cover scars with a gluttony, overbuying, greed, and drunk anger.

ALTHEA

But what about bringing the family together?

FRANCIS

Maybe there is too much pain for us to be together. So we retreat into our fantasies, phones, and nightmares.

ALTHEA

Nonsense. Ujamaa means cooperative economics. Pooling our resources, pooling our pain, our disappointment and debasement.

FRANCIS

(taking off microphone)
Then all you're doing is mixing poison together? Look, thank you very much Althea, studio audience. Thank you very much and goodbye.

Studio audience boos her as she tries to find an exit.

FRANCIS

Althea, where are the exits?

ALTHEA

Honeychile,' there are no exits. Only more channels.

FRANCIS

All right, Althea. You've made your point. The system, the audience, everyone has made their point.

ALTHEA

But what about the kids, Francis?

FRANCIS

What about them?

ALTHEA

Why my deliciously *dense* dollop of dulce, the kids have something to say too. How would you like to see your two kids, Francis?

Studio audience applauds.
Althea gets the live audience to clap louder.

FRANCIS

No, that's all right.

ALTHEA

Bring them on out, Lucy.

ENTRANCE MUSIC. Bennett swaggers in. He has on ten platinum chains or some ridiculous amount and pants that are so low they're under his butt. He gives Althea a high five. He turns around and pretends to backslap Francis. Bennett, the gangsta rapper, takes a seat next to Francis.

Liza, the stripper, comes out in a bikini, fur coat and sunglasses. She's sucking on a lollipop and does a little nasty dance to the audience and then she hugs Francis and sits in her lap.

ALTHEA

I want to thank both of you for comin'. How ya feelin'?

LIZA

Charmed like a muthafucker.

BENNETT

Can I plug my album?

ALTHEA

Not so fast. Why don't both of you tell your mother and all of us what you've been up to. Why don't we start with you Liza?

LIZA

Mom, my stage name is Brown Suga Mocacchino. And I work at the Midnight Chocolate Brandy Bar...and Grille.

Audience 'ahhhs' and applauds.

ALTHEA

That's wonderful. Commodifying your name into a product to be consumed. Reducing you from an I-thou human to an I-it thing.

LIZA

Say what, bitch?

ALTHEA

(source citing)
Martin Buber, Jewish philosopher.

LIZA

Well as long as the nigga paying, I'm staying, you know what I'm saying?!? (source citing) Lil Kim, freak bitch. Hello!

BENNETT

Gotta song about strippers on my next album called "Skidmarks on a G-string"-

LIZA

Stop inna'rupting me, fathead!

BENNETT

Girl, you betta watch yo'self. Else someone gonna get hurt round here.

LIZA

Nigga, you can't do jack!

BENNETT

Listen you-

ALTHEA

- aw'right, MC. Let your sister finish.

LIZA

Thank you, Althea. (sucks teeth) Well ANY-way, afta' I left home and stuff, I was, you know, like, floating round da world. Den I met Lex Bling.

FRANCIS

Who's Lex Bling?

LIZA

My manager and spiritual advisor. He helped reveal my secret talent.

FRANCIS

Liza!

ALTHEA

And what's that?

LIZA

My beautiful soul. (audience awws) And that I'm double jointed (audience hoots). Now I work four days a week at the Chocolate Bar and my brown figure-eight helps me pull down six digits so that my five kids got a college fund. And I just wanted to say thank you, Mom.

FRANCIS

Thank me! What did I do?

LIZA

Without your emotional unavailability I would've never had the anger and bitterness to run away from all my family and friends. I also probably never would've met Lex Bling. And when I'm on stage running my legs down

LIZA (cont'd)

that glistening golden pole, I feel absolutely nothing. Just like you. The men are shouting and hollering for Brown Suga Mocacchino and I can just smile and think about mutual funds. And I feel like I'm dancing in an empty room. I think that's the way all successful strippers feel. Like they're dancing alone. Just like you. And behind every stripper, hooker and woman with low self-esteem is someone like you. So thank you, Mom.

ALTHEA

Isn't it beautiful? A daughter coming home.

LIZA

Althea, I deserve that damn prize!

ALTHEA

I'm sure you think you do, my Cinnabon hon. But first lets hear 'bout your brother.

BENNETT

I go by the name of MC Freaky-Teek. Yo, but you can just call me Freak or Teek of Freaky T. I also go by FT or MC Snatchenstein and my new album, "Diary of a Mad Freak" is dropping on the 4th of July. I want all my thugs and Thugettes to light a tree, pop a molly, tear up iTunes, and cop this shit. I can't think of a betta way for you and your baby's mama to celebrate Independence Day than wit' some banging gangsta rap.

LIZA

Althea do I gotta sit on stage wit' him?

BENNETT

You should be glad to be on a stage where you don't have to ride a pole.

LIZA

It's called a stripper stand!

BENNETT

Whateva. At least my thighs don't smell like burnt brass wax.

ALTHEA

Am I gonna haveta separate you two? (pause) Now go on.

BENNETT

Althea, I grew up...well you could say my life was gritty and grimy.

FRANCIS

What?

BENNETT

I was raised in the streets.

FRANCIS

You grew up in a middle-class home.

BENNETT

I was raised in the streets!

FRANCIS

What streets?

BENNETT

The streets of...the ghetto

FRANCIS

What ghetto?

BENNETT

All of 'em.

ALTHEA

All of the ghettos in America, Freaky Teek?

BENNETT

Yeah. The streets raised an animal. Like one of those fighting pit bulls. Trained to hate the air it breathes. And once that dog hates life, there ain't nothing left to hold back. The teeth grow sharp and the madness come out. You done raised a monster, America. I'm Tupac Shakur. I'm Biggie Smalls. I'm a black panther. I'm Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan rolled into a stick of dynamite! I'm a Mau Mau, bling bling, modern marvel of market research, racism and the apocalypse! I am an angry black man with a microphone.

'Booty' bass music starts thumping. WHACK enters with microphones and raps along.

FRANCIS

How can you be angry? What gives you the right to be angry?

BENNETT

Wiggedy Whack in the house

WHACK

Making your women lift up der' blouse

BENNETT/WHACK

When God comes for me
 He betta bring a Mac
 Cuz Imma nigga with an attitude
 And the devil at my back
 Beaten and battered
 All scarred up and bruised
 Cuz I'mma mad monster
 And I got nothing to lose.

BENNETT

I was put here
 To pop haters in their grille
Pop chickens with my drill
Pop rims like Shaquille
Pop rhymes yo mama feels
 Aim at me, I'll stop bullets that could kill

WHACK

Whut duh deal!

BENNETT

I knock glocks cuz I'm so damn real.
 I peel your cap back
 You rap over laugh tracks
 Rhymes wacker than stoners playing hackysack

WHACK

-Matter fact-

BENNETT

You couldn't touch me
 with a ten foot pole
 You sell only half of me
 and your company's goal
 You flow on the mic
 like white boys sing soul.
 Last word of advice
 before I put ya in a hole.
 Play your position
 and know your role.

WHACK

Beeyatch!

In his excitement, Bennett
 blows out the candles on the

Kwanzaa table. The lights go out and everything stops.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen we're going to hold here for a second. Just experiencing some technical difficulties.

FRANCIS

What just happened?

ALTHEA

Nothing. We are just experiencing some small glitches with Kwanzaa.

ANNOUNCER

(sounding like an executive producer)
Why don't we move forward to the next day!

FRANCIS

No! That's not fair. You're speeding things up so that we can't get out.

ANNOUNCER

Good work, people. Strong, colorful. Remember, keep the system going. Keep it up. We are rebooting...now!

DAY 5: Nia

Studio lights and applause. The show has rebooted.

ALTHEA

Hey, sista gurl? And we are back on The Althea Show. Sorry for the technical difficulty but we are now on Day 5 of Kwanzaa, which is Nia. Nia means the purpose of tradition. And we have a very special guest for this segment.

LIZA

And who is that? Bennett's closeted boyfriend?

BENNETT

Liquor Liza, are you trying to read me?

LIZA

I will read you for filth, boy!

BENNETT

Oh, you're talking about the filth between your legs?

FRANCIS

Stop it. Just stop it, you two!

LIZA

Or what? Whatchu gonna do? We done grown up now. Can't beat us now, huh?

FRANCIS

Where the hell is Larry?

BENNETT

Whut dat nigga gonna do fo' you?

FRANCIS

You know they both had a father, Althea. It's not all my fault.

ALTHEA

No one said it was, Francis.

Althea turns away and shoots the audience a look that says "it's FRANCIS's fault."

FRANCIS

Our whole family has fallen apart.

BENNETT

I wonder whose fault dat iz, MOM!

LIZA

Yeah, hmm let me think...hmmm, who could it be? Hmm...oh...

Liza and Bennett point at her. They laugh and high-five each other. Hating their mother is a bonding moment for them.

ALTHEA

Aw, precious chil'ren. Comin' together to bury their mother.

FRANCIS

I'm still alive.

ALTHEA

For now. But maybe not for long! How 'bout we bring out Lex Bling? How does that sound sista gurls of America?

Studio audience applause.

LIZA

Yeah!

FRANCIS

Who is Lex Bling?

ALTHEA

Don't you know anything, Francis? Lex Bling is the man behind your kids' success.

LIZA

He's my business manager.

BENNETT

He gave me my first three gunshot wounds and launched my rap career.

FRANCIS

Ah yes. The man I intend to murder. Yes, bring him out.

ALTHEA

Are you all ready to see Lex Bling? (cheers) Now introducing the man with the plan. The nigga on the trigga! He has his own clothing line, record label, liquor label, salad dressing, and adult diaper line. The producer/manager/agent/pimp and ordained minister of the

ALTHEA (cont'd)

African Methodist Episcopalian Church: the honorable
Doctor Reverend Lex Bling.

Video Hoes/Showgirls stand in the entrance holding giant feathered fans. They pull back the fans to reveal, LARRY. He's Rev. Lex Bling. He's decked out in gaudy fake furs, diamonds and pleather. He holds a golden staff in his right hand and a jewel-encrusted mirror in his left. He's clothed in a kingly robe of unknown origin. Around his neck is a minister's collar and several diamond-crusted crucifixes. He moves toward his throne in one smooth motion, as if levitating off the ground. Then he floats into his cushioned seat. He has the infectious energy of Don King...and maybe his hair too.

FRANCIS

LARRY?!?

LARRY

Call me Rev. Bling. And God bless America!

FRANCIS

What? But...this makes no sense...I-

ALTHEA

Rev. Bling...

LARRY

God is good, Althea. Every morning I just wake up and have to thank the good lord for being born in America-

ALTHEA

Yes, now Reverend-

LARRY

-because, Althea: I am the living breathing definition of America. I am the American dream. And it's a beautiful thing! It's just the most beautiful-est thing in the whole wide world to know that dreams can come true.

LIZA runs over and sits in his lap. She hands him a present.

LIZA

Happy birthday daddy!

LARRY

Oh baby, thank you. Isn't she just beautiful everybody? Simply gorgeously radiant and magnificently marvelous.

LIZA

I have to be daddy. That's how I get you your money.

FRANCIS

Liza

LARRY

Mocacchino, Francis. Her name is Brown Suga' Mocacchino.

FRANCIS

And how could you do this, Larry?

LARRY

Do, what? Live the American dream?

ALTHEA

Rev. Bling, I think she might be referring to shooting your son and pimping out your daughter.

FRANCIS

Larry, you disgust me!

BENNETT

Mom, better be careful: he's strapped.

FRANCIS

This is the inside of your heart?

LARRY

This was my channel, my dream.

FRANCIS

It's disgusting, Larry. What's inside you is rotten.

LARRY

Francis, I am red-blooded, apple-pie eating flag-waving, SUV-driving, gas-guzzling, spending, consuming, God-blessed American! How dare you question me! How dare you insult these people! How dare you call their dream disgusting!

LIZA

Yeah, moms. What he said and throw in a 'fuck you.'

LARRY

Insulting the American dream. That'll get you canceled, Althea. I'll pray for you but you better watch her.

ALTHEA

Woman, what is your problem?

FRANCIS

I don't have a problem. I just want my family back.

LARRY

We are back. Back from the dead, Hallelujah and pass the Hennessey.

LIZA

(like in church)
Yes-sah!

FRANCIS

No, not like this. I want the old you's back.

LARRY

Can't never go back, Francis. Can I get an amen and a Versace?

BENNETT

Amen and a silk Versace suit.

LARRY

I ain't talking bout no leftover Stouffers. What I'm talking about is more than just reruns, redos, and reparations. I'm talking about resurrection. Can I get an amen and a set of 20-inch rims?

ALTHEA

Amen and a set of spinning gold rims!

LARRY

I said a resurrection of the spirit! The beaten, worn spirit of the Americas. The spirit that's as deep as slaves' graves and as high as the blue sky.

SHOWGIRLS take out church tambourines and begin shaking them. An organ strikes up. All dialogue -except for FRANCIS's- become sing-songy, growling

church call and response. (The 'ALL responses' exclude Francis and should have an overlapping ad-lib feel.)

FRANCIS

But Larry, you weren't that bad?

LARRY

Not that good either. I was trapped. Like most of you out there, I was stuck-

LIZA

(sing-songy)
-mmmhmm-mmm-mmm

LARRY

Down-

BENNETT

Well.

LARRY

Low.

ALTHEA

What's that?

LARRY

I said...low. Can you say it with me?

ALL

Low.

LARRY

Where?

ALL

Low...

LARRY

Down...

ALL

Low...

FRANCIS

You didn't seem so unhappy.

LARRY

Huh. (to congregation) But guess what?

ALL

What?

LARRY

But guess what?

ALL

What?

LARRY

I wanted to be...(falsetto like Al Green) high.

Applause, tambourines and
shouts of 'well, all right
thens,' 'amens' and 'preach,
preacher!'

LARRY

I wanted to be high. Y'all don't hear me. I say I wanted
to be...(sweeter) high! (applause) Do you feel me? Gonna
make me say it one more 'gin: I said I wanna be
(singing) hiiiigggh!

ALL

Hiiiiighh!

LARRY

Where?

ALL

Hiiigggh!

LARRY

Till you touched the...

ALL

Sky!

LARRY

(quickly)
Saw-a-man-on-the-corner-with-a-pipe-and-he-was-trying-
to-get

ALL

High.

LARRY

Slapped the pipe outta his hands. I said slapped the pipe outta his hands. Dragged him up to his feet and said: if you wanna get high, you gotta di-ver-si-fy. If you wanna get high/you gotsta diversify, your what?

LIZA

Stocks

LARRY

That's right. Diversify your portfolio, or you'll wind up just another silly ho. I'm telling you to...

ALL

Invest!

LARRY

In your dreams.

ALL

Invest.

LARRY

Save your stress and just...

ALL

Invest.

LARRY

Awww, I feel a lil' consumer healing coming on! I feel a little Dow Jones Industrial Average! I feel a little S&P 500. I feel a little Goldman Sachs. Nasdaq!

ALL

Nasdaq!

LARRY

Nasdaq! Aww make way. Make way for the healing of tradition and spirit.

LARRY

Nia.

ALL

Habari Gani!

LARRY

Nia!

ALL

Habari Gani.

LARRY

Althea, I think I'm gonna have to go.

ALTHEA

No, Reverend.

LARRY

You didn't let me finish. I think I'm gonna have to go...to church. The black chu'ch! Better yet, TV black chu'ch. The 1-800 number. The 976-FIND Jesus digits. TV Black chu'ch.

ALL

Hallelu! Hallelu! Praise him.

LARRY

The final destination point. The place we've always been heading to as a people and as a country. The pixellated, instagrammed, insta-praise, iGospel 6.0. The commodified crucifix. The Black chu'ch.

ALL

Yes pastor! Come on with it! Come on with it now!

LARRY

Y'all wanna go to chu'ch?

ALL

Yea!

LARRY

Y'all wanna go to chu'ch?

ALL

YAAAAYYY!! I wanna go!

BEAT

LARRY

Well I can't take you.

ALL

Awww, man! Noooo! What?

LARRY

You didn't let me finish. I was going to say I can't take you unless I got the keys. Who got the magic keys?

LARRY (cont'd)

Who got the keys? Althea, you got the keys?

Althea produces the remote control. She hands it to Larry.

ALTHEA

I think I do, good and Honorable Reverend.

LARRY

Aww, it's time! Make way for the holy hands of Hitachi, Sony, and RCA! It's time to let go of the Nia. Let go of the tradition. Open the portal and get ready. For a brand new chu'ch. A brand new gospel! A brand new day.

Larry lifts the remote to the sky and presses the button. The talk show studio becomes a Televangelist Church.

DAY 6: KUUMBA

Black Televangelist Church.
Larry does a lap around the
congregation with a tambourine.
He comes back and people are
catching the Holy Ghost. The
excitement eventually dies down
and Larry aka Reverend Lex,
makes his way to the pulpit.

LARRY

I want to welcome the congregation, choir, pastors,
pimps, hustlers, hedge fund managers, deacons,
deaconesses, choirmaster, chicken heads, mistresses, and
side pieces. And I want to welcome all of you sitting
out there right now watching this on your little screens
and gadgets, your devices of distraction and decadence.
Welcome to my church. The Televised, Spectacular. The
Glitzy Gospel that makes Las Vegas seem tame. The Palace
of Mirrors that puts Versailles to shame. Welcome to
the House of the Black Holy Ghost of the Americas. My
house, your house, it's a very very very fine house. Can
I get an amen?

ALL

Amen!

LARRY

Amen and a bottle of gin.

FRANCIS

Stop this service right now! Stop the church!

LARRY

Who is that?

Francis steps up to the pulpit.

FRANCIS

This man is a fraud. I know because he's my husband. Or,
he was my husband. I'm not quite sure any more.

Congregation gasps.

LARRY

Now, now, no need for the drama. Yes, this is and will
always be my wife, everybody. Francis Telle. She's a
saint. I like to call her Saint Francis of A-Sit-Your-
Ass-Down. Just kidding...(aside to her)but seriously, sit
down.

FRANCIS

I will not sit down. I want to testify. Before the congregation that this is wrong. This is not what America is about, this is not what Blackness is about, this is not religion or spirituality.

LARRY

Francis, I have one word for you: Kuumba.

FRANCIS

What?

LARRY

The sixth day of Kwanzaa. Kuumba. Do you know what that is?

FRANCIS

What difference does it make when you are polluting these people's minds? How can you talk about Kwanzaa when-

LARRY

Creativity, Francis. Kuumba means creativity. Do you know what creativity means? Do you know what Kuumba means?

FRANCIS

Don't patronize me, Larry. I know the definition of creativity.

LARRY

But Kuumba creativity isn't just finger painting for red ribbons or twerking for a Tweet. Kuumba - lovely wife and congregation- is a reinvention. It is continuous improvement. Reanimation, re-aspiration, re-newification for the next...what?

BEAT

LARRY

The next generation. It's the reanimation and re-aspiration for the next what?

ALL

Generation.

LARRY

But in order to build -my people- (dramatically quiet) in order to build... sometimes you have to tear down. You have to knock down a few tenements. Bulldoze a few

LARRY (cont'd)

shacks. In order to rise, you first have to crush. You say you don't recognize me. Well I don't recognize me either. And Thank God for that. And for that, I say KUUMBA!

ALL

Habari Gani.

LARRY

Francis, I killed the old me. I was tired of it. Walking around, day after day with him. And I was dead. I'm talking about a soul dead. I was feeling lower than the slaves' graves at the bottom of the Atlantic. And then one day..

ALL

Yeah!

LARRY

I got up!

LIZA

High?

LARRY

No, low. I got up and crawled outta bed. I was driving myself crazy. Crazy with thoughts of mediocrity, crazy with thoughts of missed opportunities. Crazy with failure. I was driving myself into the grave. So I hopped in my car and started driving. Driving. Driving. Thought I was going to drive myself all the way across this whole state and country. Thought I was going to drive myself across the sea. Drive myself to Jerusalem. Drive myself to Mecca. But instead...I drove myself to KFC. I saw the sign. Glowing along the highway and byways. Eleven herbs and spices. ELEVEN! Sounded like a lucky number. And I thought: what this goofy, bow-tie wearing cracker got that I don't? Huh? What he got?

LARRY runs into the circle and snatches up tambourine as he repeats the question to everyone in a sing-songy cadence.

LARRY

What he got?

LIZA

A secret recipe?

BENNETT

A neon sign?

FRANCIS

A dream?

LARRY

No, no and hell no. We all got dreams. What he got that I don't got?

ALTHEA

A franchise.

Congregation hollers 'amen.'

LARRY

That's right. The fertilizer of favor's fortune. The Holy See of franchisement, you see? And I went up to the drive-thru when divine inspiration struck. I heard the voice of God. She sounded like a 15-year-old girl with braces. She was greeting me and inviting me home. And after I placed my order, God told me about my history. The history of the chicken meal and that cracker Colonel a hundred years ago. And it all became clear. I saw the Colonel coming home from the Civil War beaten and battered. Money gone, plantation burnt, slaves fled to the hills. And that young colonel couldn't fix for hisself or clean worth a damn. And outta the eleven slaves his daddy gave to him only one was left. And that dark soul became his drinking buddy. They slept in the same bed, ate at the same table, even shared the same whores. And the colonel musta thought, 'this be the living end. If only my daddy could see me sleeping in a bed with his nigger.' But that nigger knew how to make bathtub gin, use a buck knife and could cook. One day he done fixed himself some fried chicken.

ALTHEA

(angelic)
Fried chicken.

LARRY

That's what the colonel said when he tasted it. And the freedman said, 'oh that's just my dead nigger mammy's recipe for fixing chicken.' And on that day, in that burnt plantation with no more paintings, silverware or even curtains, a legend was born. In that dirty faded

LARRY (cont'd)

dining room, a franchise was born. And now a century later in the middle of the night, this smiling dead cracker is lit up in the sky like a neon angel. And he's selling me back my goddamn recipe. That's when I knew there was never gonna be no justice. No retribution. No compensation for living the good life. If you want to get high, you need a franchise. So when this system made my dreams come true I set it off. At first I started off simple. Pimping. Got two sluts in a country shack. A new mane and a new name: Lex Bling. I ordained myself, schooled myself and got schooled. Moved up from being a hustler to a loan shark, to a dealer. I made myself an owner: of women. And then a producer: of hope. And finally a preacher of prosperity. A prophet for profit. Now I pimp from the pulpit in the name of..myself. And the sweetest thang about it all is: I'm insured. I gotta a license. An LLC in my name, stock with my picture on it, and a board of motherfucking trustees who watch my back. Clothes, liquor, guns, hoes and baby diapers. Francis, I'm immortal. I got a franchise.

Explosion of amens 'free at last' and 'hallelujahs.' They sing "Movin' On Up"

ALL

Cuz we movin on up,
To the east side.
To a deluxe apartment...in the sky.
Movin on up
To the east side.
We finally got a piece of the pie.

Fish don't fry in the kitchen;
Beans don't burn on the grill.
Took a whole lotta tryin'
Just to get up that hill.
Now we're up in the big leagues
Gettin' our turn at bat.
As long as we live, it's you and me baby
There ain't nothin wrong with that.

Well we're movin on up,
To the east side.
We finally got a piece of the...
PIIIIIIIIEEEEEEEEE!!!

The stage explodes with waves of tambourines rattling, foot stomping, 'hallelujahs' and 'amens.' BENNETT, LARRY and the SHOW GIRL take out their guns. In celebration, they fire into the air.

LARRY

Get ready for the rapture. Get ready for Jesus. I said JESUS!

ALL

Ni-kes!

LARRY

Je-sus!

ALL

Pep-si!

LARRY

Je-sus!

ALL

So-ny

LARRY

Jesus!

ALL

i-Tunes!

LARRY

OOOOOHHHHH, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! Hallelujah! Thank you for the franchise. I need a witness up in here. This is the Gospel! I need some witnesses for the New American Gospel!

LIZA

I wanna testify.

LARRY

Go 'head, sista! Let your voice be heard!

LIZA

(moving into circle)
Glory, to Rev. Lex. Glory to the chu'ch. Glory to the system!

Testify!

LARRY

I was lost.

LIZA

Well...

ALL

But now I'm found.

LIZA

Well...

ALL

I was weak!

LIZA

Well...

ALL

Now I'm Mocha Brown.

LIZA

Go shorty!

ALL

ALTHEA

Come on, Francis. Get into the franchise. Get into the spirit of Kuumba.

FRANCIS

But my family...

ALTHEA

What family? They're all a part of the system now. Join us, sista' gurl! One more Kwanzaa principle and it'll be too late.

FRANCIS

Too late for what?

ALTHEA

Too late to turn back.

FRANCIS

If I can just get to the remote control...

LIZA

I just want to testify that before y'all came into my life, my desires took a back burner to my reality. My heart came after my head. But now, I've got freedom. Yes-sah. The power of the hoeing is beautiful. Because what is more natural and beautiful than what God gave me? Not my clothes, not my Brazilian yakki weave, not my fake press-on nails. What could be more beautiful than giving joy to men? And women.

ALTHEA

Well all right then.

BENNETT

I wanna testify.

LARRY

Go head, MC Freaky Teek!

BENNETT

Free at last. Free at last, thank God almighty, I'm free at last. A pimp once told me that. He told me he got the phrase from his friend, the Honorable Dr. Martin Luther King. Can I get an amen?

Everyone is taken aback and gets a little quiet. FRANCIS starts to listen more intently. The system experiences a glitch, the lights flicker.

LARRY

What?

BENNETT

That's right. Free at last. And now his friends and honorable preachers, pastors, and even King's own family uses it to make a dollar holla.' Every time they sell one of his speeches. Every time Black chu'ches pimp his name and pain to make it rain. Free at last! Can I get a hallelujah?

FRANCIS

...Hallelujah.

LARRY

Um...MC Freak, that's very nice but we should be moving-

BENNETT

-Cuz what is more freeing in a consumer society, than

BENNETT (cont'd)

the freedom to sell your soul, right? The freedom to sell your ancestors. The freedom to sell the words of your father.

FRANCIS

That's right, Bennett. Tell them: they're selling out.

BENNETT

Free at last. Just like a certain movement. He had dreams and they had schemes. If only Dr. King could see what they done to his dreams. Free at last.

FRANCIS

He had high hopes and they got a lifetime supply of Coke.

BENNETT

Yeah. That's funny.

ALTHEA

(running him off the pulpit)
Thank ya, brotha Bennett.

BENNETT

But I'm not finished testifying.

ALTHEA

Yes, you iz Precious Peach.

Larry points the remote and Bennett and clicks. The lights flicker but nothing else happens.

LARRY

(quietly to Althea)
Althea, what the fuck is wrong with this thing?

ALTHEA

The battery must be running low.

BENNETT

What's wrong?

ALTHEA

Nothing baby.

BENNETT

Did I say something wrong?

ALTHEA

Certain things are off-limits. Even in the system. (to Larry) Look, once we get everyone in here situated and sedated the system will be recharged and good as new. (back to everyone else) Hey sista' gurls: I think it's clear that Reverend Lex Bling is the winner. He wins Kwanzaa. He wins his own channel. And gets to be one of the hosts with the most. I'm sure iz glad to have some mo friends and dis here collective. Mighty glad you iz sticking around. Cuz how's a system gonna run without some new channels and new hosts every once and a while.

LARRY

Like a heart not getting new blood.

FRANCIS

Althea, what does Larry winning mean?

ALTHEA

It means it is too late for E-S-C-A-P-E.

LARRY

What's did you say?

ALTHEA

Oh, nothing. Go 'head with the proceedings.

FRANCIS

She said it's too late for us to leave.

ALTHEA

But, Francis: why would anyone want to leave 9 million channels of opportunity?

BENNETT

That's exactly what I was talking about-

LARRY

-now MC Freak-

BENNETT

-with the civil rights movement, our leaders, our country. It's true, I just have to testify.

The lights come up. Bennett addresses the audience.

BENNETT

We should all sell our dreams like they have. All the black leaders of the past, present and future. If we

BENNETT (cont'd)

were all like the Kings, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, the NAACP...

LARRY

SHUT UP BENNETT!

Larry continues pressing the remote control before giving up and placing it down. Francis grabs it before anyone notices it's gone.

BENNETT

But I congratulate them. They were ahead of the curve, right? That's why there's no heroes, no leaders left. Now it's every man for himself. We've done to ourselves what the KKK, FBI and IRS couldn't do in a century of work. But at least we're getting paid, right? Why be a leader when you can have a franchise?

LARRY

YOU CAN'T TALK LIKE THAT! YOU JUST CAN'T GO 'ROUND SAYING THINGS LIKE THAT-

BENNETT

I'm just testifying. Lets all sell our history. I wrote a rap song about it. Called "I Killed A Dream" dropping on my album on Independence Day. Check-check-check it out!

LARRY

I'm warning you, Bennett!

BENNETT

(rapping)
 I lynched Emmitt Till
 with my platinum-plated wheel
 I snitched on Anne Frank
 Then I copped that Swiss bank
 I'm dat nigga who got Diallo
 so I could rap about it at The Apollo
 Kill, loot n' rape!
 Den slap it on a mixtape.
 Fuck, bite n' fight!
 'What's on TV tonight?'
 Ain't got no strings on me
 Cuz I'm out for CREAM
 I'm a merchant of history!
 I KILLED A DREAM!

Larry shoots Bennett. Everyone screams in terror. Liza, Larry, and the Chorus Girls scramble to get off stage.

LARRY

Where is the remote control? WHERE IS IT?!?

ALTHEA

I don't know, Rev. Bling. You had it.

FRANCIS

Bennett! Are you all right, son?

BENNETT

I don't know. Help me out.

Francis and inspects his wounds. Her hand is covered in blood.

LARRY

(pointing gun in the air)
Where is it?!? Someone has to have it! One of you motherfuckers messing with me in my own house?!? In the House of the Holy Ghost!

ALTHEA

Please, Reverend. Don't hurt us!

LARRY

No one is getting hurt.

ALTHEA

Thank you.

LARRY

(pointing gun at Althea)
YOU DIDN'T LET ME FINISH!! I was saying no one is getting hurt as long as what's dutifully mine is returned to me in an orderly fashion. After all, I am a man of the cloth. Althea you guys eyes in the back of that Aunt Jemima head of your's.

ALTHEA

I didn't see anything.

LARRY

Come on, now. Who are you protecting? Who?

Glitches in the system
continues.

LARRY

We don't have much time, Althea. And I'm starting to
lose my patience with you.

ALTHEA

But...I...

FRANCIS

One of your showgirls took it.

LARRY

I'll fix them. Just point in the direction.

With bloody hands, Francis
points off in a direction.
Larry storms off with gun as
Liza re-enters.

ALTHEA

Thank you, Francis.

LIZA

Bennett got shot. Again?

BENNETT

MC Freaky Teek to you, thank you very much (looks at
wound), This doesn't look that bad. Maybe I'll go double
platinum now.

FRANCIS

What?

BENNETT

My album. Number one with a bullet. What a mess. I'm
sorry, Mom.

FRANCIS

Sorry? For what?

BENNETT

That we were never the family you wanted.

FRANCIS

No, that's-

BENNETT

Mom, we tried, but...we were never that clean and

respectful family you wanted.

FRANCIS

It's nobody's fault.

BENNETT

It isn't? I guess you're right, huh? I guess it all didn't quite come together. Mesh. It didn't quite mesh into the future. You bought me books, encyclopedias, all the things to nourish me and at the end, I'm just as poisoned as everyone else. You don't know how many dreams I have of being a gangsta rapper. Every day I think of murdering cops, lynching soldiers, assassinating presidents. Every day I dream of robbery, larceny, extortion, rape, torture, murder. In my head.

LIZA

That's where it counts.

BENNETT

And I'm sorry for what I have to do right now.

Bennett snatches the remote control from Francis. He puts it to his head like a gun.

LIZA

Bennett what are you doing?

Larry re-enters.

BENNETT

I'd like to blame them. Crack, AIDS, failed dreams. "It's all right, America. It's not your fault. The CIA did it. The FBI conspired it into happening." It's comforting, isn't it? Helps us forget all this pain.

Larry re-enters with gun.

LARRY

That's a beautiful soliloquy Freaky Teek. Now if you don't mind: hand me the remote.

BENNETT

What? You want it pops?

LARRY

Althea, fetch the remote from my handsome, talented, platinum-plated portfolio: my son.

BENNETT

Son?!? SON?!? You shot me!

LARRY

Strictly business. I'm still very fond of you. Oh, and I still have this gun so you better hand it over.

BENNETT

And what if I were to just change the channel.

ALTHEA

There's a fraction of a second delay. He could still shoot you.

BENNETT

And so? It wouldn't matter because I would be on to another fantasy. My own.

ALTHEA

Actually, you carry everything with you. Every scar, every emotion, every residual effect carries over.

FRANCIS

Don't give it back to him, Bennett.

LARRY

Francis, stop being ridiculous. I'm keeping Althea and all these people happy and busy in the system. We've had song, dance, raps, strippers, tons of product placement, advertising, foreplay and some gun play. I'm excitement. I'm exactly what the people need.

Larry is reaching out for the remote control, and just as he's about to take it, Bennett raises the remote in the air. And with all his might, Bennett hurls it to the ground. It smashes into a thousand pieces.

ALTHEA

NOOOO!!!

The system glitches start up again with a rattling of the ground and lights flickering. Slowly, the family's personas start fading away. Liza looks at her outfit and is horrified.

LIZA

Oh my God! What the hell am I wearing?

BENNETT

What's going to happen now, Althea?

ALTHEA

Why, my precious...I don't know. But let's not worry about that. On with the show right! We just need to get to the end of this day and...

A shaft of light pierces the ground. They look up.

ALTHEA

Hey, don't pay that no nevermind. Just keep going with the festivities. Hey, look at me. Don't look up, look down. Look at my happy feet. Look at these nigga toes twinkle and tap. Learned dis step from Mr. Bojangles. (dances) Whoop-pitty-do-slap-pa-bam-zippety-be-bop-crap-pitty-crap-dap-pa-doo-whop-pa-doo-whop-pa-rum-pa-pum-pum-jammity-flip-bam-BOO!

Another beam of light descends, along with dust and rubble. Francis examines the dust.

FRANCIS

It's from outside the system.

ALTHEA

Nevermind all that mess. Look at the channels. All the...the...fun...Bennett gonna sell a million in his first week. Gonna have lil' kids everywhere grabbing their crotches and grabbing their guns. Hahaha, you're dem crackers worse nightmare. You're a modern marvel, remember? You're a stick of dynamite. And Liza you're gonna be freaking a leek all over the country. You're gonna be bigger than Linda Lovelace and Nicki Minaj. You're gonna have lil' girls everywhere wanna to ride the stripper pole. Think about what you're gonna do for black women.

LIZA

I'm thinking.

ALTHEA

And Larry! I mean, Reverend Bling. Look at all you've done. Look at what your Kuumba has done for the community.

LARRY

Althea: I shot my son, pimped my daughter, and betrayed my wife.

ALTHEA

I mean besides that, negro! You...you have a franchise. Think about out there versus here. Out there is just flat, dull reality. As plain as spit. But here. Right here in dis world we got magic. (laughs to herself) Pixels and electricity. Heroes and villains, music and dance, dey whole she-bang I can make it happen.

LIZA

I can't go on like this.

ALTHEA

HEY! YOU MOTHERFUCKING MOTHERFUCKERS BETTER NOT START THINKING TOO SLICK.

LIZA

But, Althea...

ALTHEA

AND YOU CAN'T LEAVE! SISTA GURL! YOU'RE FUCKING STUCK WITH ME AND MINE. FOREVER AND EVER AND EVER. YOU MADE YOUR GODDAMN CHOICE! YOU MADE YOUR CHOICE. AND YOU CHOOSE THIS...over each other. You choose this.

FRANCIS

It's not up to you, Althea.

ALTHEA

What do you mean, it's not up to me?

FRANCIS

Rev. Bling won Kwanzaa. He gets to decide the fate of the Telle family, remember? He's the host with the most.

ALTHEA

Oh that's no problem. (to Larry) My main man from the frying pan got a clue. Whatchu gonna do, huh? Brother man, you gonna roll with a sista? Come on, Reverend Bling, don't leave a sista gurl hanging? I...need...you guys. Some times it gets so...I mean, around here...

Larry walks up to her and shakes her hand.

LARRY

In some strange way, I'm gonna miss you.

ALTHEA

Wait...you're not seriously gonna. Ah... you're playing a prank on me, aren't you?

LARRY

I wish there was something we could do for you.

ALTHEA

'Do for me?' You're trying to do for me? Negro-

FRANCIS

-Althea: come with us.

ALTHEA

What?

FRANCIS

Get out of this thing and come with us.

ALTHEA

You...you want me come with you? With all of you?

LARRY

Yeah.

LIZA

We got an extra room.

ALTHEA

(slow build of laughter)

Oh, well...you hear that? They got an extra room. Who could turn down that offer? I can have 9 million channels of dreams and possibilities or...a room. Oh man, you are just too much, sista. You are too much.

FRANCIS

Don't you want to get out of this and go back home?

ALTHEA

I was just a dull housewife in Flint, Michigan. Abused. Forgotten. Invisible. But this thing has made me... famous. It has immortalized me.

BENNETT

But are you happy?

ALTHEA

Okay, I'm not talking to Forrest Chump over there. Life ain't about puppies, lollipops, rainbows, and...and, happiness. You'll learn that when you grow up and your

ALTHEA (cont'd)

balls drop. But right now this is a conversation for the winners. The hosts. Lex it's you and me. Lex, remember what you got here. You got a franchise. You got immortality, stocks and bonds, you're the American dream. You are a corporation!

BEAT

LARRY

Well. I guess this is goodbye.

ALTHEA

But Rev. Bling-

LARRY

We are going back home.

ALTHEA

You are making a huge mistake. Do ya know whut's waiting for you and yourz back there?

FRANCIS

I think we have some idea.

Althea looks around. She's lost the crowd.

ALTHEA

Fine. You want your life back? You want what you had before back? Don't say I didn't warn you. Niggers, niggers, niggers. So fucking ungrateful. They ask you for something, then they don't want it. Ain't never thankful. Always complaining. Always griping about something. But once I close this portal, that's it. You'll just be a spectator in the system. Un-plugged. Once I close this portal, you are stuck with what you got. You are what you were and what you will be. Do you really want that?

LARRY

I think everything that comes into this system gets poisoned.

ALTHEA

There are millions who are just dying to get in. Millions of souls.

FRANCIS

And you're one of the souls.

ALTHEA

(struggling against herself)
 Just...just look at me. Look at my clothes. Look at my
 makeup and hair. Look at my jewelry, just look. Come
 on, look and see why I did it. See why I traded it all
 in. You know how much this suit costs? And these shoes?
 Guess, go ahead. Guess how much these fabulously fierce...

BEAT

ALTHEA

No one wants to even guess? Fine. Well you guys blew it.
 Maybe if you're lucky I'll see you in another 400 years.
 Stand back: I'm gonna do my conjuring.

Althea goes into a trance and
 starts her spell of history. A
 storm of electricity grows. The
 family looks around and they
 each wander off stage. Images
 of blacks on TV and film flash.

ALTHEA

Pig feet, chicken legs
 Hambones n' cornbread
 Slow shuffle soft shoe
 what the system gonna do fer you?
 Black and blue, blue as black/
 How you gonna get the color off yer back?
 Take you through a history
 Of Black life and you'll soon see
 Now a long time ago
 There was an African king
 Had lazy mean sons but he couldn't do a thing
 No cure from the witch doctors
 No answers from the sky
 So all this king did, was sit around and cry
 A man came to him
 With skin that was pale light
 Said his name was Duke,
 preferred the name Ben White
 Comforted and consoled
 The king through the night
 Said he had a solution to fix his problem right.
 Princes needed training
 and they'd be good as new
 and to top it all off,
 Ben White will pay you.
 So the king and Ben made a sweet deal

ALTHEA (cont'd)

To teach his royal sons
 how to beg, scrap, and kneel
 Ben White got the remote
 To the prince's hearts
 Promised freedom
 when they learned to act their part

You see its an art form
 Takes a lot of training
 How to be black without much complaining
 So the sons were chained
 And brought to the sea
 Ships pointing west
 to the land of opportunity.

The sons were stripped
 down to their birthday suits
 Ben White set sail
 with his princely black loot
 The ship set for America
 Docking here and there
 Spreading the king's seeds and sons everywhere
 Princes sang and cried
 Wanting to go home
 Ben White told 'em
 no need to fuss n' moan
 Because what he was teaching
 Took a lot of training
 Being black takes time, no use complaining

In the fields stinking and sweating
 Planting and picking cotton
 Picked so much to their hands were almost rotten
 So the princes had an idea
 To please master Ben
 And to make lives easy,
 they created the cotton gin
 Ben White wept with joy
 Then came to his senses
 Went back to the king,
 bought a million more princes
 Before the sons knew it,
 They had been tricked.
 With their own machine, they wuz 'gin licked.'

Princes looked 'round
 And bloodshed, from sea to sea
 War iz da way in dey land of opportunity
 Signed up to fight

ALTHEA (cont'd)

Grabbed a gun and a flag
 Figured showing honor,
 would break dis bad luck jag.
 So dey stabbed and shot
 Ben White watched da show
 And at dey end of da day, the princes got Jim Crow.
 From da ships inna docks
 to back of da bus

Princes were steamed a
 nd started making a fuss
 Ol' Ben White told 'em
 no use complaining
 Being black keeps evolving
 and so do the training

Princes had a new idea
 To get dem magic keys,
 No fighting and screaming
 Just peaceful protests
 Dis left Ben White confused
 and in some distress
 But the Duke grabbed his gun
 Loaded a coupla' rounds
 Bang! Bang! went the Duke,
 and da princes fell down.

But Duke was getting old
 And he couldn't see dat well
 So he grabbed a rocket launcher
 And the princes fell
 Rolled up in a tank
 And blasted them to hell.
 400 years of training
 Yes, you better believe.
 400 years and you still can't breathe.

But Ben White had all da keys up his sleeve.
 Because black is an artform
 And yes, we finally gaining
 But the battles not over,
 so no use complaining

Been looking low and high
 For the princes' secret keys
 Ben's got it stored in the cabinet
 marked: his-story
 After all these years
 Few find the path

ALTHEA (cont'd)

Most keep stumbling,
cuz they don't know the math
Darkness all 'round
But a beacon in the night
This glowing on your screen
gonna make history right.
Four hun' red years
This time we've done the most
Whut yus' just saw was the great
Black
Holy
Ghost!

DAY 7: Imani

Francis is in her bathrobe
watching TV.

LIZA

That's my ride. Mom?

FRANCIS

(startled)
Huh? Oh. Okay.

LIZA

Sorry, I couldn't stick around until tonight, but it's
the last day anyway so I figured it wouldn't be such a
big deal. But Happy Kwanzaa.

FRANCIS

Yeah. Happy Kwanzaa.

LIZA

Are you all right?

FRANCIS

I'm fine.

LIZA

Mom, I'll call you when I get there.

FRANCIS

That's nice dear.

LIZA

I think boarding school will be good for me. And for us
too. Might be a way for a while.

FRANCIS

Sounds like a great place.

LIZA

Do you want to go out for lunch...before I...

FRANCIS

No, thank you dear.

Bennett enters. Larry enters
followed by Mema.

LIZA

I'll see you later, guys. Mema, I'm sure they'll find
Opa.

MEMA

Of course. He just wandered off, but he'll...be back. You worry about yourself. Be safe.

There is an awkward exchange of hugs.

LARRY

See you later, Liza.

BENNETT

She'll be fine. Mom, are you all right?

MEMA

She's probably got a bit of the empty nest blues.

BENNETT

Well I will still be here for another few months.

LARRY

We know, Bennett. We know.

LIZA

Hey: Imani.

BENNETT

What?

LIZA

(reading from sheet)

That is the word for the 7th day of Kwanzaa. Imani. Right Mom? Imani

MEMA

Habari Gani.

LARRY

Habari Gani. And what does Imani mean?

Liza takes out her sheet. They put on a "Kwanzaa" performance to impress Mom.

LIZA

Imani: Faith. To believe in all our hearts in our creator, our family, our teachers, and our victory over our struggle.

BENNETT

Victory over our struggle? Fascinating. But what does that even mean?

LARRY

I'm so glad you asked that, Bennett. Because we have an expert with us right here to chime in: Francis Telle!

LIZA

So tell us what does faith mean to you?

MEMA

Honey, you want to chime in on faith? Faith in your family and yourself?

BEAT

LARRY

Maybe not. Well if you don't want to do that how about we open up our Kwanzaa gift.

BENNETT

Finally.

Larry brings out one present.

LIZA

Wait, what happened to the other presents?

LARRY

I got this from the back of Opa's car before he wandered off.

MEMA

Opa wanted to surprise you guys. He wouldn't even let me see what he was wrapping.

LARRY

Oh and here is a card that says... "Happy Kwanzaa. From Opa and...and the ancestors. To the Telle family."

They open the present together.

LARRY

It's an antique book.

FRANCIS

I know what this is.

LIZA

What?

FRANCIS

"Bedtime Stories." My Dad used to read me these old stories. Let's see if I can find his favorite one. Here: the story about Little Black Sambo. (she retells from memory) Sambo was a rambunctious little devil. He ran all the way from India, all the way, from Africa, all the way from Detroit, from New York, from Los Angeles. Sambo was always running cause he was always in a lot of trouble. And in his very last adventure he was running away from some tigers who had just taken all his stuff. They took his red coat, his blue trousers, his purple shoes. They even took his beautiful green umbrella. Little Black Sambo started to run again and he heard some growling in the distance, so hid behind a palm tree. And he saw all the tigers fighting. They were fighting to see who was the grandest. The tigers fought and ripped and tore at each other. And the tigers all caught ahold of each other's tail and wouldn't let go. And so they ran around and around in circles. Holding on to each other's tails, trying to eat the other tiger. Round and round the tigers went. Running faster and faster until they disappeared into a blur. Until all the tigers stopped being tigers. They just melted. Melted into butter. And thought wouldn't that be wonderful, boys and girls? Melt your problems away. Your color, my religion, your life, your pain. Just melt it all away. Think about all that butter you would have? All that pain. But it would be worth something. It would give you some hope for the future. Some faith."

BEAT

FRANCIS

When I was a little I hated that story. I used to believe that meant one thing. I thought it was saying everything is gonna work out if you're good. Now I think it means we all got our own tigers to fight.

Francis lights the last candle of Kwanzaa. They gather around the flame.

FRANCIS

And even if it if it rips us apart we gotta fight them. And every day I am fighting them. We all are.

They gather round the candle
marking the last day of
Kwanzaa. And in one collective
breath, they blow out the
flame. Blackout.

THE END