

Panther Women: An Army for the Liberation
India Nicole Burton

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Written & Conceived by: India Nicole Burton

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*In order to produce this, play the director must be a Black woman. The technical team should be all women of color.

Panther Women was originally created and devised at Cleveland Public Theatre.

2018, Workshop at Cleveland Public Theatre (Cleveland, Ohio)

2019 Workshop at Cleveland Public Theatre (Cleveland, Ohio)

2020 Workshop at Prop Thtr, Rhinoceros Festival (Chicago, Illinois)

2020 Workshop Cleveland Public Theatre (Zoom performance)

NOTE: The cast of women 1-3 fall in out of the main characters Angela, Assata and Elaine. It should be very clear when they are portraying the main “Panther Women” and when they are portraying ensemble roles.

Cast

Woman 1: Angela Davis & Ensemble. African American Woman, 20-35

Woman 2: Assata Shakur & Ensemble. A Brown completed Black woman, 20-35

Woman 3: Elaine Brown & Ensemble. A Brown completed Black woman. Should be able to dance or move. Black Woman, 20-35

Woman 4: Elaine’s Grandmother, Cousin 1, Bull Conner, & Ensemble. Should know how to sing. Black woman, 25-45

Woman 5: Big Mamma, Huey, Cousin 3 & Ensemble. Black woman, 25-45

Woman 6: Granddaddy, Cousin 2, Young Elaine, Young Assata & Young Angela. Black woman & Ensemble. Black Woman, 18-25

The Ancestor: Elaine’s Mother & Ensemble. Should be played by an actress that is a strong mover or dancer. She should have a strong presence. 30 – 50

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*Lines that read *Women*, should only be said by Women 4-6. Although women 4-6 are given specific characters, the director should feel free to distribute lines between them as it makes sense to the world she creates.

Movement: This play is strongly rooted in abstract movement, dance and song. In the original workshops of the piece the director and choreographer worked with and devised movement with all 7 of the women. They created their own phrase of movement that appeared throughout the play. This movement should be very unique to each woman. When the line *Phrase of Movement* appears, this is where the movement you create with the women are recommended. The movement can be repetitious, shared between the ensemble or different every time. Whatever the Black woman wants. I also encourage the director to feel free to offer different and unique ways to find the foundation of where the movement derives from. Also, the term *Dance* and *Phrase of movement* are used differently. The Term *Dance* is choreographed by the Choreographer, *Phrase of movement* should derive uniquely from each actress.

“Where there is a Black Woman there is Magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman
who is magic”

- Ntozake Shange

Dedicated to Brittany L. Spivey

Watch over us. You are now one of the ancestors. Bless this work!

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Setting: The time is present, but also past tense. The world lingers in between the self-conscience, reality and what one perceives reality to be. There are moments that may be clearer on where the women are. But, they are wherever you want them to be. Black woman, this is your world, create it as you will. At your will! If there is an intermission needed, the director should choose where it should appear.

Ritual.

(A meeting of kindred souls.)

The Ancestor stands onstage alone. She is looking out into the abyss. Something is out there. It is speaking to her. It's as if this entity is passing a life line to her. The entity possesses her. She is now all She moves. The ensemble enters they sing "Images" By Nina Simone. They move. In this ritual the phrases of movement created by the ensemble should appear. They move, they sing, they see each other, but they do not know each other. They see themselves. They are searching to connect with each other.

Uncaged.

(A conjuring of the Ancestors.)

The Ancestor: To the northernmost edges of the industrial north to the extension down into the broad vastness of the agricultural, cotton pickin, south

Woman 6: The spirits of my soul sista's

Ensemble: The Ancestors

Woman 5: Tug at the nerve endings of my shoulders

Women 4: My knees buckle

Woman 6: Gravity forces me south

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Woman 3: And I give praise

Woman 2: To those who have come before me

Woman 4: A mystical breeze washes over me

Woman 5: I am baptized (*She does an action from her phrase of movement*)

Woman 6: Possessed (*She does an action from her phrase of movement*)

Women: Emancipated (*They do an action from their phrase of movement*)

Ensemble: UNCAGED (*Action in unison from their phrase of movement.*)

The Ancestor: They

Ensemble: The Panther Women

The Ancestor: Are now in me

Women 1-3: All of them

Woman 2: A Panther Woman is anyone of those melanated sista's

Woman 3: Who have bartered their hearts in exchange for stained shattered mirrors

Woman 1: Where their reflections were no longer visible

Woman 6: And smeared across the glass

The Ancestor: blood

Woman 3: A Panther Woman is me

Woman 1: (*Chooses a black woman in the space, or just out to the audience*) A Panther Woman is you

The Ancestor: We assemble here asking for allowance to unveil the caged cat

Women 5: For she is doing away with her cherubic purr

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Women: And ready for the feline in her to roar

Ensemble: The Panther is ready to pounce

Woman 6: So, then we name the names of those

Woman 2: Who we intend to conjure up

Woman 4: Those who have raised havoc

The Ancestor: Those who have taken firecrackers

Ensemble: Lit them

Woman 5: And tossed them into the irreconcilable stew called the melting pot

Woman 1-3: And watched the fury of the flame

Ensemble: Burrrrrrrrn. (*Beat*)

The Ancestor: The Panther is ready to strike.

Woman 4: So, we name the names of those

Woman 5: Who we intend to conjure up

Woman 3: Sista Kathleen took the brass brutal iron fist of Minister Cleavers

Woman 5: Slow motioned through the Mediterranean coast line of Algeria

Woman 4: Kathleen was not in Minister Cleavers exile from the Americas

Ensemble: Yet in her own

Woman 5: I am like Kathleen in that I have slept sleepless nights

Woman 6: Cradling the body of a Man-made bureaucracy governing only that which benefits its patrons

The Ancestor: While the entire universe nestles sweetly at my back

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Women 5: I am my sista's keeper

Ensemble: The Panther is ready feast

Women: (*Celebrating her*) This is for Sista Kathleen

Ensemble: A Panther Woman (*A movement in unison*)

The Ancestor: There are other Panther Women too

Woman 5: I hear the words of sista Ericka Huggins

Women 4: And the whiskers at my face rise

The Ancestor: I praise her courage her strength and her fearless leadership

Ensemble: We sing for you

Women: We gather in this moment for you

The Ancestor: The Panther is ready for guerilla warfare

Women: (*Celebrating*) For Sista Ericka

Ensemble: A feline woman (*A movement in unison*)

Woman 4: Through the bullets of fear

Woman 5: And the harshness of the Chicago winter

The Ancestor: There's a trinity of restless souls

Woman 1: One murdered

Woman 2: Chairman Fred Hampton

Woman 3: Another mourns him,.

Woman 6: His lover

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Woman 4: And an unborn child is left behind

Woman 2: The one who mourns

Ensemble: She is of our blood of blood

The Ancestor: Say her name

Woman 1: (*Celebrating*) Akua Njeri

The Ancestor: There are others too.

Woman 2: Women who have sat in windows barred

Woman 1: And dirtied with scratched marks from claws seething and seeking refuge

Women 3: For which encourages the Black Woman

The Ancestor: And gives her the sweet nectar from a lovely rose that grows up and sprouts from concrete

Beat.

. Ensemble: We have forfeited our breast milk

Woman 5: Literally and figuratively.

Ensemble: You have suckled for too long

Women: My bosoms have run dry

Ensemble: My creek baron

The Ancestor: We utter the name of those in which we walk in the imprint of their footsteps..

Woman 2: To Sista Fredrika Newton

Woman 3: Rosa Parks

Woman 5: Harriet Tubman

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Woman 6: Sonia Sanchez

Woman 3: Comrade Toni Morrison

Woman 5: Artie Seale

Woman 1: Sista Afeni Shakur

Woman 6: Mamie Till

Woman 4: Comrade Maya Angelou

Woman 3: Fannie Lou Hamer

Woman 2: Shirley Chisolm

Woman 6: Comrade Nikki Giovanni

Ensemble (*except The Ancestor*): Ntozake Shange

The Ancestor walks forward. She looks at woman 1-3

The Ancestor: (*To women 1-3*) To you.

Woman 1-3: To me?

The Ancestor: (*Confirming to women 1-3*) To you! (*Looks into the audience*) And to you.

Beat.

When each of the women's names are called below she (women 1-3) should choose an action from their phrase of movement to transition into "The main Panther Women." This movement doesn't have to be big, it could be as settle as the blinking of one's eyes.

Woman 4: (*To Assata*) To Sista Assata Shakur

Woman 5: (*To Elaine*) To Sista Elaine Brown

Woman 6: (*To Angela*) To Comrade Angela Davis

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Assata, Elaine, Angela: To all the sista's!

The Ancestor: We give you encouragement to storm the fucking Bastille

Assata: And let them mutha fuckers eat cake

Woman 6: Sista's you have the right to mad

Woman 5: And a lot to be mad about

Elaine: If you aren't mad then something must be wrong with you

Assata: I intend to be a mad Black woman

Angela: Until we all are liberated

Woman 4: Be ferocious

Ensemble: And don't apologize for shit

The Ancestor: Lead the Charge

Angela: Demand your freedom

Assata: Nat Turner these bastards

Elaine: Take what's your

Women: What belongs to you

The Ancestor: Be the vanguards of a revolution

Ensemble: and RAGE!

The Ancestor Snaps her fingers cuing the music to play

Light Shift

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Rage.

(Releasing it all.)

“See Line Woman” by Nina Simone plays or something with the same vibe and feel. This dance should be choreographed. Everyone starts to dance. The dance should be explosive, an exploration of self, a celebration of Black women (Anything the Black Woman wants!) There are endless possibilities. This Dance should be violent and sharp, yet very beautiful and vulnerable. The Women are a pressure cooker ready to explode!

The song Ends.

And then...

Lights shift.

Sistas.

(Becoming one and different.)

Elaine is isolated in lights. She stands there frazzled and shaken. vulnerable. She steps forward.

Elaine: Its 1974 and I am standing tall, head up, erect to the sky, chest beating so loud I’m sure the entire crowd can hear it. They see a strong stoic, Black, woman, a warrior! But inside she is breaking and so has her heart

Ensemble: Her Heart is broken in two.

Elaine: The voices are so loud, but it is not the pounding of my comrade’s chatter. It is not their disbelief and hysteria that a Sista is standing before them and not Brotha, Huey. They must believe in me, right? If I am here and Huey has given me power on his own volition. Then they must, right? I hear the chatter about the party being weak. A woman has taken over one of the most notorious, militant organizations in America, that woman is me, Elaine. And then verbosely the Panther men mocks me and jokes

Woman 6: “Now that she’s chairmen we can’t even call them bitches anymore!”

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Elaine: And the harsh suggestions that as Huey was away in exile he had let them all down by

Woman 4: "letting some broad run his shit"

Elaine: I step out of myself and in the distant screams of a woman unraveled, I hear the cryptic laughter of a young Elaine. I see her standing in the crowd, smiling back at me. Perhaps she knows the journey better than I. (*Trembling as if she has just awakened from a nightmare*)

Elaine's mother appears

Elaine: Mama? Mama is that you? I got that feeling again.

The Ancestor: She's got that feeling again...

Ensemble: That feeling of nothingness.

Woman 6: (*Teasing, as if she is a school yard bully*) You're too dark to be white and too white looking to be black!

Woman 4: (*As a Panther man*) "You're a woman and women should stay in a woman's place."

The Ancestor: She's got that feeling again.

Elaine: That feeling of nothingness

Huey Appears.

Elaine: Huey? Is that you?

Huey: Will you save my party, Elaine!

Elaine Suffers

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Huey: Will you?

Elaine: (*Hesitantly*) Yes, Huey. I'd do anything for you?

Ensemble: I'd do anything for love.

They all fade away like dust.

Assata steps in violently. Perhaps Startling

Assata: Zayd...

Ensemble: Zayd....

The Ancestor: Zayd is dead!

Assata: It is May 2, 1973 and the spring New Jersey air is breathing at my back! I am hot and then I am cold!

Ensemble: And Zayd is dead!

Assata: He is cold too, now

The Ancestor: Because he dead!

Assata: I am watching it all unfold. I am there. I am in the car. (*There is a gunshot*) I am shot!

Ensemble: And Zayd is dead!

The Ancestor: And so is an officer!

Assata: Fuck that Pig!

Ensemble: Sundiata

The Ancestor: Sundiata!

Assata: Sundiata is there too. They put handcuffs on him. Let him go, you fucking pigs!

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Woman 4 & 6 step forward as police officers. They Strike Assata.

Assata: *(Surprised, yet defiant)* My mouth tastes like blood and dirt!

Police officer strikes her again

Assata: I can't feel my arm!

Woman 4: *(As a Police Officer)* She ain't dead yet? We ought to finish her off.

The Ancestor goes to Woman 5. She moves around her. She does an action from her phrase of movement. She manipulates Woman 5 into Big mamma

Woman 6: *(As a Police Officer)* Naw, let her lay in the street like the dog she is!

Assata Drops her head as if she is defeated.

Big Mamma: Stand up straight and look them in the eyes when you're talking to white folks, Joanne!

Assata: Big mama, my mouth taste like blood and dirt!

Big Mamma & Women 4, & 6: You sassing me girl?

Light shift.

Everything stops Abruptly

Angela is still. Everything is quiet. She glares out

And then...

Angela: Autumn is her again. Again and again and again it appears. Every year the same. The birth of something new, and the leaves are falling, falling, falling, they are dying, parting ways from the branches seeking refuge. I feel like a refugee.

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The Ancestor: A fugitive,

Angela: A runaway Slave

The Ancestor: October 13th

Ensemble: 1970.

Angela: The weight of the earth is at my chest and the October brightness takes siege. .

Woman 2 & 3: A fugitive,

Woman 2: A refugee,

Woman 3: A runaway slave!

Angela: Has it already been two months since I've been running?

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement. Women. 4, 5 & 6 are now "The Cousins."
They Freeze in a Tableaux.

Angela: And then my cousins appear. Finally, something familiar.

Cousin 4: Cows aint for petting

Cousin 5: And stop running 'round the field with no shoes on.

Cousin 6: Alright you ain't gone listen? Them red ants gone tear yo feet up! *(The cousins laugh and then disappear)*

Angela: Running. Running. Running! I am tired of running *(She begins to run. She stops abruptly)*

A flashlight shines on her

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The Ancestor: Are you Angela Davis!?!

Angela: *(blinded by the light).... Silence*

Ensemble: ARE YOU ANGELA DAVIS?

The ensemble closes in on her. She is feeling suffocated. They all repeat over and over and over. "Are you Angela Davis?"

Angela: Their mouths are moving, but I hear nothing. I look out the window, through the rustling of the fall leaves an image of him silhouetted, the fall leaves illuminate him, the sun reflects off his brown, golden skin...

Ensemble: Angela Davis!

Woman 5: This is the FBI

As Angela is being arrested she is still looking out the window

Angela: George... George... George... *(To the Officers)* Can you see him?

Woman 5: You have the right to remain silent.

Ensemble: Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.

Angela: Don't you see him?

Woman 4: You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney,

Angela: He's with me

Woman 6: One will be provided for you.

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Ensemble: Do you understand the rights I have just read to you?

Woman 4: With these rights in mind, do you wish to speak to me?"

Angela breaks loose from the officers, Woman 2, And Woman 3 Join her.

The Ancestor Does an Action
Lights shift.

Angela transforms back into woman 1

Woman 1: (To the audience): Are you really here

Woman 2: Am I even here

Woman 3: Standing before you

Ensemble: Naked

Woman 4: Ready to disclose it all

Woman 5: Strip off all my clothes

Woman 4: To dance for you

Woman 6: Peeling My skin back

Woman 3: And underneath relics of scars

Woman 6 Scabbed over

Woman 2: From overgrown blisters

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Woman 6: As the pus boils over

Ensemble: There is pain

Woman 1: Stinging from resilience.

Beat.

Woman 4: Am I allowed to experience pain?

Ensemble: Is my pain as valid as yours?

Woman 2: Will I ever be able to validate my own suffering

Woman 1: Without the scrutiny of others?

Women: Am I even real?

Woman 6: Am I translucent?

Women 1-3: Sometimes I feel so invisible.

Women: Am I asleep?

Ensemble: How did we get here?

Woman 5: I have given too much of myself

Woman 4: I have given it all.

Ensemble: And now I have nothing left for myself.

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Woman 3: Am I authorized to feel?

Woman 5: To give love?

Woman 4: And to accept it?

Woman 6: To spread it?

Woman 1: And we all know the most dangerous weapon

Woman 3: and the most benevolent gift you can give to someone is

Woman 3 breaks away from the group. She is reimagining her childhood. She is now in another world.

Elaine: love.

Ensemble: How did we get here?

Lights shift.

Elaine: Mama? *(Elaine drops to the floor.)* Mama, I got that feeling again

Ensemble: That feeling of nothingness.

Elaine, Angela & Assata sees an image of themselves as little girl in the distance. The Ancestor lingers around them. She does the full phrase of her movement. But very softly. It's as if she is painting a picture of each of their child hoods.

Elaine: There she is. The little girl. The little me. Perhaps she knows more about the journey than I.

Angela: I see her in the distant dark, foggy night.

Elaine: Juxtaposed and lined up and down the city streets.

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Assata: Standing on a beach dancing to the music.

Angela: Waving at me from afar on an old ancient farm, barefoot.

Angela, Elaine, Assata: (*To each other*) How did we get here?

Elaine: Mama... Mama.

Ensemble: I got that feeling again.

Elaine: That feeling of nothingness...

Beat.

Ensemble: And here I go again

Angela: And again and again and again

Angela, Elaine, Assata: Welcoming a brutal beat down

Women: Sparing with the world

The Ancestor: So that someone else can free.

Lights Shift

Birthed.

(A Coming of age.)

Elaine is center. The Ancestor commands the actors to create York Street. She does actions derived from her phrase of movement. They create York street as Elaine remembers it as a child.

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Elaine: Danger steals through the streets of North Philly, York Street, my home, blue, grayish tent rusted of blood from a stabbing that took place just the night before. 2051, my home,

Ensemble: York street

Woman 1: Grayish

Woman 2: The recognition of nothingness.

Elaine: My Aunt Mary in one room, and grandmother in another. My grandfather slept on the downstairs couch. His body the resemblance of a corpse. (*She begins to shake in fear*). In passing my young eyes refused to look at what death looked like; for he was breathing

Ensemble: But, he was dead!

Elaine: And so was York Street! We heard the rats rustle and rant across the floors and through the walls, through the grotesque sounds of the rats chatter, I hear my grandmother's voice. (*Elaine's grandmother appears she sings "Yes Jesus loves me"*) She sings of God in the mirror as she peels back her pale light skin. Her light skin, was the result of a white man's rape. She prayed Jesus would deliver her. So that maybe one day she'd feel something other than

Ensemble: Nothingness.

Elaine: My mother thought herself nothing too. How could she not, if her mother thought the same of herself. She was determined to make sure I was something.

Elaine's mother appears

Elaine's Mother: "Elaine, You're my beautiful, little Fairchild."

Elaine: She'd whisper as she held me tight.

Elaine's mother: "Not ugly and black like the other girls"

Ensemble: On York Street.

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Elaine: They looked too much of African descent and they wore it monstrously.

Woman 5: Ashy legs

Woman 6: Big Lips

Elaine: And popped eyes like something out of a minstrel show.

Elaine's Mother: "They're all just jealous of the beauty God has given you!"

The ensemble becomes the little girls on York Street. They tease and taunt Elaine.

Ensemble: "If you white, you right
If you yellow, you mellow
If you're brown, stick around
If you black, git back
Wayyyyyyyyy back!"

Woman 1: "Look at her she thinks she cute, she ain't cute!"...

Woman 5 1: "You ain't all that!"

Woman 2: "And you sholl aint white!"

Elaine: I thought I white. I wanted to be white! Attending a predominantly white all girls school and coming home to the ghetto was terribly hard. Nonetheless, when I was home we were the same. We were all poor, breathing the same poisonous North Philly air. And we all wanted nothing more than anything, to be something. For they felt just as my mother and grandmother did.

Ensemble: Nothingness

Young Elaine appears

Elaine: I'd lay awake thinking

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Young Elaine: If God made me, and really loves me, like my grandmother said, then who made God?

Elaine: And if somebody made God, then who made that somebody who made him?

Young Elaine: And if there is a God how does he make decisions on who lives where?

Elaine: How does he make decisions on who deserves what? Who deserves to have a daddy?

Young Elaine: Who deserves to starve and who deserves food?

Elaine: Who gets to be free?

Beat.

Elaine: And why doesn't he just come and deliver us all:

Ensemble: From York street?

Elaine: Because I don't want to live here anymore! Not in this opaque wasteland where everyone and everything feels so much like...Nothingness.

Elaine gets down on her knees.

Elaine: God, I want to appeal this life, to nullify your works. I want the one who made you or the one who made him, to make me over! I am done with this body, I am tired of this...

Ensemble: Nothingness.

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement. She manipulates the actors into creating the shores of North Carolina.

Light Shifts

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It is Assata's turn to speak. The focus should be in her.

Assata: I tiptoed on brown sand and listened to the ocean through the seashells, my cousins and I retrieved on the shores of

Women: My home.

Assata: That nestled sweetly on the edge of Wilmington, North Carolina.

Ensemble: 7th street...

Assata: The paved road, that lead to our humble abode, ended just before the white people's section. Big Mamma used to say.

Big mamma appears.

Big Mamma: "Don't you show no respect to nobody who doesn't show you no respect, Joanne,

Assata: Joanne. (*cringing*) My slave name!

Big mamma: And that includes these crackers!"

Assata: The crackle and strike of the sun's beam scorched my melanated skin and granddaddy would roar across the shore

Granddaddy: "Put that hat on, gal! Big mamma aint make that hat for you to be foolish with!"

Assata: I'd sit, feet digging into the sand and read about the Bobbsey Twins. Lost in my imagination, my imagination would take wings and fly.

Woman 3: Across the Jim Crow South

Assata: I'd sail with the pirates

Woman 1: In the deepest, darkest parts of

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Women: “Whites only” water fountains.

Assata: I’d take a sip and quench my thirst... and then when the book was no more. I’d have to be faced with my reality. The reality that I was still here. In the pits of the mean, ugly south. Music was a dear friend of mine and the piccolo, the jukebox. (*Woman 4,5 &6 Form into a du wop group. Woman 4 is the lead singer. They are the music that echoes through the jukebox. Perhaps they are the Jukebox.*) Was a magical inanimate object that made me more alive than anything. Dinah Washington, was one of my favorites. She’d sing to me...

Woman 4 sings. “What a difference a day makes” softly in the background. Woman 5 & 6 can join in at leisure. Maybe they sing back up, maybe they are instruments. (Whatever the Black woman wants!)

Assata: And looking out into the abyss of the blue Carolina beach listening to Mrs. Washington My imagination would take wings and fly. To this day there is no place on earth I love more than the beach. (*She begins to dance or perhaps she does her phrase of movement?*) I’d dance and get lost in the string section.

Big mamma: Stop all that dancing chile!(*Assata snaps out of her trance, the illusion of the jukebox falls apart*) Get back to work! (*under her breath*) That gal is dancing fool!

Assata: There was a zoo that lived halfway down the road of

Ensemble: 7th street.

Assata: My young voice would beg my grandmother to let me see the wild, exotic, animals.

Ensemble: She would often say

Young Assata appears

Big mamma: Joanne, don’t you ask me that again gal! Now I done told you no already!’

Young Assata: She’s the meanest woman in the world

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Assata: I thought. But, I'd never dare say that out loud to Big Mamma at fear she might tear my black ass up!

Young Assata: Please Big Mamma?

Big Mamma: I told you no already!

Young Assata: Pretty please with cherries on top?

Assata: Until she finally leaned over to me,

Ensemble: Softly and Sweetly.

Assata: Her lips hesitated to speak

Big Mamma: We can't go in there Joanne... because we're colored.

Assata is heartbroken. She does not understand. But she does not dare question Big Mamma either.

Assata: There, in that moment, I started to question the social constructs of America! Even as a child it bewildered me. I began to think such things as

Young Assata: Are the animals allergic to black people? Will my skin poison them?

Assata: Every day we'd passed the little Zoo

Ensemble: On 7th street

Assata: As we crept towards our home, on the edge of Wilmington, North Carolina my eyes filled with tears. I was a young, black girl who yearned for so many things that America did not want me to have.

Young Assata: Do young, white girls yearn for things too?

Assata: Do their imaginations wonder what the "coloreds only" water fountains taste like as I do the "whites only" fountains. *(Broken, almost in tears)*

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Young Assata: When they stare at us do they wonder. Just as much as I do?

Young Assata fades away...

Light Shift.

She is still Traumatized

Elaine appears

Elaine: God, I want to appeal this life

Assata: I want to Nullify your works

Elaine: I want the one who made you

Assata: Or the one who made him

Elaine, Assata: To make me over!

Lights shift. Angela is the focus.

The Ancestor manipulates the women to create Angela's home. Angela is still

And then...

Angela: In May the rose bush outside my parents large, wooden house, blossomed and welcomed the freshness of the Birmingham spring.

Ensemble: My home

Women: Center Street

Angela: Was an upgrade from the ran down government housing projects that embodied little red bricks that completed the structure of the complex. My parents always understood that no one could

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Woman 4: breathe, *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Woman 5: move *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Woman 6: or prosper *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Angela: within the vicinity of any subsidized housing. especially in

Ensemble: Birmingham, Alabama

Young Angela appears

Young Angela: My home.

Angela: We kids thought the new house was haunted because of its nature. The way it seemed to stare at you with open eyes, the way it seemed to be breathing.

Young Angela stares at the house intrigued.

Angela: As a child staring up at steeples attach to the place in which you and your family slept, seemed unlikely and odd. Steeples were for Churches, steeples were Cathedrals, steeples were associated with death and not homes... or where they?

Young Angela: Behind the house you could find

Woman 3: woods *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Woman 4: fig trees *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Young Angela: And my most favorite

Ensemble: The blackberry patches *(They do an action from their phrase of movement)*

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Angela: If you stood in the road you'd find your feet melting in a strip of orange, red, Alabama clay. we knew when it was April because the Alabama Azalea's would bloom and the spicy lemon scent would permeate our nostrils, and that meant it was time to visit my family's farm in

Ensemble: Marengo County

Angela: It belonged to my paternal grandmother and my uncle Henry. Visiting them was like an antique tunnel that connected one to a journey, a time capsule, a history lesson. I loved the freeness of the land.

The Cousins appear. They freeze in a Tableaux

Angela: My cousins resented my leisurely attitude, for being there meant work for them,(*Excited*) for me it was amusement.

Cousin 1: Stop chasing that chicken round, Angela! We gotta get eggs from it, shoot!

Cousin 2: Cows are for milkin, not for petting and going on about how cute it is!

Cousin 3: You can't run through the tobacco fields like that! You gone mess round and have us picking switches for grandma to whoop us wit!

Cousin 1: I aint tryna get no whooping. Just got one the other day!

Young Angela: Aww aint nobody gonna get no whooping, we just having fun!

Cousins: You having fun, we working, shoot!

The Cousins disappear

Angela: The farm was an escape from the terror that was occurring back home

Ensemble: On Center street.

Angela: White folks set flames to our homes, little children died in the cross fires,

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Young Angela: And there weren't no kind of freedom!

Beat.

Angela: Some of my very earliest memories are the sounds of dynamite exploding, houses going up in flames and the sinister echo of Bull Connor's voice broadcasting through the singed streets of Birmingham.

Bull Conner appears

Bull Conner: Some Niggers moved into a white neighborhood today. Better get ready for bloodshed!

Bull Conner fades away

Ensemble: And there would be Blood Shed!

Bombs explode all around her. Although you could use projections or sound cues this is also a moment for The Ancestor. She moves, she dances. She is a bomb!

Angela: *(Calm and Stoic she does not flinch as the bombs are exploding behind her.)* I was 4 years old when I recall the first bombing. I was washing my shoelaces getting ready for Sunday school. And out of nowhere an explosion rippled through the house. Knocking down medicine bottles. The floor seemed to have lifted up off the foundation and jolted my little body across the room.

Beat.

The Ancestor Abruptly Stops.

The Ancestor: You never forget your first bombing.

Beat.

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Angela: Your first thrust into the realities of the nature of being Black in America.

Woman 5: My home.

Angela: Center street was known as “Dynamite Hill” and the entire city

Ensemble: Bombingham, Alabama

Angela: Where every black person is just a breath, a look, a goddamn existence away from

Woman 2: Being killed *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Woma 3: And reminded that we ain’t wanted, *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Woman 5: Respected, *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

Woman 4: Or cared about, *(She does an action from her phrase of movement)*

The Ancestor: Except as kindling for the white man’s fire or bones for their dog’s bowls

Angela: My Home.

Ensemble: Center Street

Angela: Is more than Dynamite Hill

The Ancestor: Human beings’ dwell within the walls of the homes, that snuggle beneath the foundation of Center Street.

Angela: My Home

The Ancestor: And the elders who sing songs that migrate and wail from the depths of the Ivory Coast while hurling their black bodies over into the deep Atlantic Ocean

Ensemble: To escape bondage *(They do an action in unison from their phrase over movement)*

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The Ancestor: Now those voices are replaced with new voices, whose cries are heard through the flames of bombs and the bars of cages!

Beat.

Angela: I've seen little kids, mostly boys set fire to paper and leaves laughing at how it quickly disappears.

Woman 2 & Woman 3: Set fire to it,

The Ancestor: And boom!

Woman 2: It's like it was never there. .

Woman 5: "That's what boys do"

Ensemble: They say.

Angela: They trade in leaves and paper for houses and churches

Woman 2: Extra points if there are humans inside.

Angela: White folks teach it to their sons and it's a rite of passage.

Ensemble: You ain't realllly in the KKK

Angela: If you've never set fire to the black bodies, freedom, work, blood, sweat, and tears of negroes.

Beat.

The Ancestor: And *BOOM!*

Ensemble: It's like WE aren't even there.

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Angela: And suddenly it's 1963 and four little girls limbs are flying through fire, fighting with wood and broken pieces of foundation like BBQ ribs on a hot, Alabama, summer day. Daddy's on the grill and all the folks on our street are listening to the gospel and... BOOM

The Ancestor: It's like THEY were never there.

Angela: I am often haunted by images and sounds of Annie Mae, Denise, Carole, and Cynthia. Who were murdered by those white cowards at the church. (*Softly*) And I what to set fire to every white man I see.

The Ancestor does and action.

Lights shift.

Elaine: God,

Angela: I'm not getting on my knees and praying to some white god any more

Elaine: God, why haven't you answered any of my prayers?

Assata: Why have you forsaken me?

Women: God, where are you?

Elaine & Angela: (*intensely*) I want the one who made you

Assata: And the Mutherfucka's who bomb us!

Angela: Or the one who made him

Assata: And the Mutherfucka's who made the muthafucka's who bomb us to understand

Ensemble: We have already been made over!

The Ancestor Snaps her fingers cueing the music.

Lights shift.

Music.

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The Phoenix.

(The arrival into reality)

Dedicated to the press plays by Betty Davis or something with the same feel. This should be a choreographed dance. They are becoming women. This dance should be sexy and fun. They embrace their womanhood. They are becoming PANTHER WOMEN!

Woman 6: In 1965 America was burning

Woman 5: And Nigga's were on fire!

Women: Burning up

Woman 4: And on fire

Ensemble: And furious

Woman 3: From this fury rose all kinds of Black pride and Black liberation organizations

The Ancestor: And in 1966 the Black Panther Party rose up like The Phoenix. Rising from the ashes of burnt crosses,

Woman 5: Dogs that maimed us

Woman 6: And ripped are skin apart

The Ancestor: The bombs that eroded and penetrated southern soil

Woman 2: And all at once

Ensemble: We all felt like we had been born again.

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Woman 5: We had arrived

Woman 4: And now was time to let the Phoenix swore

Woman 3: And begin her reign of terror.

The Ancestor: The Black Panther Party spoke directly to the ordinary Black person

Woman 5: The Black Panthers wanted the street niggas

Woman 1: People who weren't scared to die for the liberation of our people

Woman 4: Not afraid to be the

Ensemble: Vanguard of The Revolution

Woman 3: Mother fuckers were tired of the white, supremacist, fascist, pig's

Woman 1 : capitalistic,

Woman 2: imperialistic

Woman: Oppression.

Woman 6: Martin Luther King was talking about peaceful protest

Woman 2: Fuck peaceful protesting!

The Ancestor: Because no revolution has ever been won by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them.

Ensemble: We needed a mother fucking revolution!

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The Ancestor: And If you are a revolutionary, Black, woman then you must assume that everyone has a reactionary view point about your liberation.

Ensemble: Even the Panther Man!

Woman 4 : We needed a Liberation

Woman 6: A liberation of Mind,

Woman 5: Body

Woman 2: And soul

Ensemble: By any means necessary.

Woman 2: And when I speak on a liberation of mind

Woman 1: I mean the right to sit in my womanhood

Ensemble: And my Blackness

Woman 3: And understand that being a Black woman doesn't mean we are monoliths

Woman 6: We are all different and yet one

Woman 2: And in reality, we have survived shit that half you mother fuckers could ever endure.

Woman 1: That doesn't make us monolithic

Ensemble: That makes us geniuses.

Woman 6: When I speak on a liberation of my body

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Woman 3: I mean the right to own my pussy

Women: And do what I please with it

Women 1-3: I own my pussy

Woman 4: My ass

Woman 5: And my titties

Ensemble: And they need liberated too (*They Laugh*)

Women 6: When I speak on the liberation of my soul

Woman 3: I mean allowing me to experience a spectrum of damn emotions.

Woman 4: Cause if I am angry, that means I got a damn reason to be.

Woman 3: So, fuck turning the other cheek.

Woman 3: Shit, I aint never really been the

Ensemble: "Turn the cheek type bitch!"

Woman 1 : I've always been the

Woman 3 : "Nigga, You fuck with me. I'll whoop your ass"

Ensemble: Type Bitch! (*Give the audience a polite smile*)

Lights shift.

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Battalion.

(The formation of an Army)

Woman 5: By 1968 women made up over half of the Black Panther Party.

Woman 5: And many of those women held high ranking positions

Woman 3: And some were ordinary women.

Women 5: from all walks of life

Woman 1: Colleges educated

Woman 4: To the woman from the ghetto's who were sick and tired of the unjust overt racism of America.

Woman 2: Didn't matter where you were from

Woman 3: You still had to contribute

Woman 4: And stand in protest against the degradation of our fellow brothas and sistas

Woman 5: The free breakfast programs

Woman 3: Free health Clinics

Woman 1: Youth institutes

Woman 6: Panther Women were in charge of all that shit!

Woman 2: You see women where the heart and the soul of the party

Woman 5: And we knew we had to be as hard and just as impenetrable as the men

Woman 4: If we wanted to be the vanguards of the revolution

Woman 5: We knew we had an important job to do

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Woman 6: one of the most important jobs was to inspire the movement so that we could all bring true liberation to the people

Woman 5: All those people who were oppressed

Woman 6: Poor people

Woman 4: Gay people

Woman 6: And any other marginalized group in America

Woman 4: And the only way to sustain after a revolution is won is to teach it to the children

Woman 5: Progeny was a necessary weapon that could be more powerful than a gun

Woman 6: Creating a generation of soldiers that were not only armed with physical weapons, but also (*Points to her head*) This weapon

Woman 4: The weapon of knowledge

Woman 5: And to create a legacy you need something to past down to your successors

Woman 4: One of those somethings was the ten-point program

Woman 6: The Ten Point program was the foundation in which all of humanity should be granted

Woman 3: We, The Panthers, had to learn and memorizes the Ten points.

Woman 2: Along with a long list of other intraparty disciplinary rules.

Woman 6: These were a part of our teachings

Woman 1: Our manifesto

Woman 6: Which explained inept what we wanted and demanded from the white pigs of America!

Lights Shift.

The Ancestor does a movement.

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This is a moment where I encourage the use of the women's phrases of movement.

Ensemble: What do we want?

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement.

Woman 3: Number 1

Woman 2: We want Freedom. We want the power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: Number 2

Woman 4: We want full employment for our people.

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: Number 3

Woman 6: We want an end to the robbery by the white men of our Black Community

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: Number 4

Woman 1: We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: Number 5

Woman 4: We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society!

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement.

Ensemble: Number 6

Woman 2: We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.

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The Ancestor does and action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: Number 7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black People... especially of those who are unarmed!

The Ancestor does and action from her phrase of movement

Women 1-3: Number 8

Woman 5: We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails

The Ancestor does and action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: Number 9

Woman 1: We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group...

Woman 3: Or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the united states!

The Ancestor does and action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: Number 10

Woman 4-6: We want land, bread, housing and free education!

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement

Ensemble: We hold these truths to be self-evident, and that all men are created equal.

Ancestor: Dear, white people that's what the fuck we want!

The Ancestor does the same action she did before the light shift.

The Women shift quickly back into the conversation that was had before the ten-point program.

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Woman 4: Sistas! We have to see to it that all of these demands are met. And in order to make sure that we create a world in which our children can walk freely through their neighborhoods without threat of police brutality, In order to guarantee that for generations to come our descendants have the same rights and justice that their white counter parts have, there must be significant sacrifice. As the late great Che Guevara once said: “Wherever death may surprise us

Ensemble: It will be welcomed!”

Woman 6: My fellow comrades, let us not forget about the Vietnamese guerrilla women, who carried guns just like the men did, but also used their bodies against The American military. We have to demonstrate courage in order to defeat the enemy! (*quizzing the women*) What did Sunzi say about thine enemies in The Art of War?

Woman 5: “If you know the enemy and you know yourself

Woman 4: You need not fear the result of a hundred battles.

Woman 2: If you know yourself but not the enemy

Woman 1: For every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat.

Woman 3: If you know neither the enemy nor yourself

Ensemble: You will succumb in every battle”

Woman 6: (*Proud*) Right on sista’s. Power to the all the people! (*She hesitates*) Comrades, as women we might have to have a sexual encounter with “the enemy” at night and slit his throat in the mutherfucking morning! That’s how vicious we have to be! One must know thine enemies!

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Beat.

Woman 4: Sleep with enemy and slit his throat in the morning?

Woman 5: Sleep with the Enemy and Slit his throat in the Mutherfucking morning.

Woman 3: Sleep with the Enemy and Slit that niggas throat in the morning!

Woman 6: Right on Sista's!

("Sleep with the enemy..." should be rhythmic. A Rap? A Song? (Whatever the Black woman wants!)

Ensemble: "Sleep with the enemy and slit that niggas throat in the morning!

I said sleep the enemy and slit that nigga throat in the morning.

Sleep with the Enemy and slit that nigga throat. In the morning... "

The Ancestors does an action. The chant slowly turns into a chant to free Huey P. Newton.

Elaine is drawn away from the group. The chant has triggered her.

Ensemble: Set our warrior free

Free Huey

Black is Beautiful

Free Huey

Set Our warrior free (Let him go)

Free Huey

Black is Beautiful (Oh let him go)

Free Huey

Set our warrior free (Let him go)

Lights Shift.

Elaine is isolated.

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Elaine.

(The Unsung Shero)

Elaine finds herself alone. The ensemble chants "Free Huey" softly behind Elaine words.

Elaine: In 1968 when the free Huey campaign erupted I had to ask myself some hard questions. I could either be a part of the problem or a solution to the problem.

The chanting stops.

Elaine: Choosing a woman to be the interim leader of one of the most revered organizations in the world was revolutionary in itself. Huey was a true revolutionist. Brave, brilliant and often times belligerent (*She laughs*). Huey wasn't afraid to reveal his ugly and his beauty at the same time. Lord knows I'd seen a lot of ugliness growing up in North Philadelphia. I'd seen enough ugliness in folks to last me a lifetime. My father was the first to show me the ugliness of men. I was his bastard child. His child born outside of his marriage. His child he wanted little to nothing to do with. Maybe that is why I took on various lovers. Maybe that is why I held on so tight to Huey, knowing that he was no good for me. Perhaps I was looking for him to fill that void. Perhaps, the little girl with in me sought after the love a father is supposed to give you in all the wrong places.

The Ancestor does an action from her Phrase of movement.

Lights shift.

We hear a cacophony of "right on Sista" and various other affirmations.

Elaine looks out as if there is a crowd of people in front of her. She hesitates. We see her vulnerability, her fear and her regrets. The Ancestor touches her or does an action that suddenly transforms her. She stands up straight. She is stoic and fearless.

Elaine: In August of 1974, I assembled all of leaders from each chapter from all around the nation. We organized in an auditorium, In Oakland. Oakland was to be the center headquarters of the party. The

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central committee and leaders from Chicago, Washington. D.C, New Orleans and several other chapters stood before me. Larry, Huey's most trusted body guard and now my body guard, stood beside me. He had a 45 automatic pistol under his jacket, I knew with his support I could stand a little taller. He stood there as if to say "I wish a nigga would step out of line." (*She laughs*)

Beat.

Elaine realizes she has lost her composure. She comes to. She looks into the crowd.

Elaine: I knew my biggest challenge as a woman would be to convince everyone around me that a woman was fit to lead this Army in pursuit of dismantling the American way of life. Would I be able to do what was necessary by any means? (*Beat.*) There were gazes and stares that seemed malformed. And others beaming back at me in support. I stepped up to the microphone and took a deep, deep, breathe. The words poured out of my mouth and I uttered: "I have all the guns and all the money. I can withstand challenge from without and from within. Am I right, comrades?" I meant every word I said! I did have the guns and I did have the money and every one in that room had to go through me and Larry to get to it! They all began to scream out.

We hear a company of "Right o Sista, "power to the people"

Elaine: "I haven't called you here to make threats, Comrades I've called this meeting simply to let you know the realities of our situation. The fact is, Comrade Huey is in exile. The other fact is, I'm taking his place until we make it possible for him to return. I am, as your chairman, the leader of this party as of this moment. My leadership cannot be challenged."

Beat.

Elaine sees her younger self off into the crowd. Is she really there?

Elaine; And through the validation and unrest of my comrades. There she was again, a young Elaine, in the distance. She waves and laughs with gratification. The North Philly wind behind her. Her. A fatherless, poor child who was determined to be something! (*Waving back at the young Elaine*)

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Assata: Perhaps she knows the Journey better than I.

Beat.

Huey appears in crowd.

Elaine: Huey appears behind her. He nods his head and grins.

The Ancestor: A sharp particular grin.

Elaine: The same grin he gifted me just several years before when I first met him. This grin had seduced me many, many, many times before. (*Beat.*) My lips and the metal of the black encased microphone meet. I take a deep breathe. I hesitate. Huey smirks harder and nods again.

Angela: And again and again and again.

Elaine: I remember the nights when I was in his arms. Those crestfallen, unsustainable, beautifully lit nights where we'd wallow in his brilliance

The Ancestor: (*A reminding*) And his madness.

Beat.

Elaine: Had I been mistaken? Had I been fooled? Just weeks before Huey asked me to save his party he had struck me!

Ensemble: The slap heard all around the world.

Elaine: I was ready to go. Ready to leave the party. Should I have called it a beating? Should it have been justified as a disciplinary action? Huey was always "disciplining" someone

Woman 5: With his Fist (*An action from her phrase of movement*)

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Woman 6: Or his boot (*An action from her phrase of movement*)

Woman 4: with his pistol. (*An action from her phrase of movement*)

Elaine: With his love. Was this the same man that so poetically told me once after making love

Huey appears.

Huey: “I am not a man, I’m not a woman, I’m a plain born child”

Beat.

Huey disappears.

Ensemble: I have died a thousand times for

Elaine: A Panther Man.

Woman 5: And yet here I am

Woman 2: Standing before you

Ensemble: Naked

Woman 1: Ready to disclose it all

Woman 4: Strip off all my clothes

Elaine: To dance for you.

Lights abruptly shift “The Meeting” by Elaine Brown plays. The Ancestor takes Elaine and dances with her. The dance should represent Elaine’s and Huey’s Tumultuous, complicated, yet beautiful relationship.

Music fades. The Ancestor and Elaine stand face to face looking into each other’s eyes in silence.

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lights shift.

1969.

(The bloody year)

Everything is suddenly in chaos. We see glimpse of Black people being water hosed, dog attacking them, Black Panthers holding guns, resistant, Black power symbols. Tableaux's, or projections?

V/O J. Edgar Hoover: "The Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country."

Beat. Everyone freezes except The Ancestor. She watches the women and turns towards the Audience.

The Ancestor: J Edgar Hoover declared in 1969 that that year would be the last year that the Black Panther Party would exist. And so it continued: A war between America, the liberation of Blacks, and the FBI! 1969 would be the bloodiest and most turbulent year of the struggle!

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement. All of the women come alive.

Ensemble: April 2nd

Women: 1969

Woman 1: 21 Black Panthers

Woman 2: All members of the New York Black Panther Chapter

Woman 3: Were indicted on charges of conspiracy to bomb three locations in which inhabited a large number of police officers.

Women: They were all given \$100,000 bails

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Woman 6: After serving almost 3 years in prison.

Woman 5: In 1971 all who were arraigned were acquitted of 156 charges.

Beat.

Ensemble: December 4th

Women: 1969

Woman 3: Chairman Fred Hampton

Woman 5: Leader of the Chicago chapter

Woman 6: And one of the most notable, and respected Panther men

Ensemble: Was assassinated

Women: At the age of 21

Woman 1: When an FBI informant leaked information to the Chicago Police of the whereabouts of Chairman Fred Hampton.

Beat.

Ensemble: December 8th

Women: 1969

Woman 2: The Los Angeles Black Panther Party Headquarters was ambushed by the LAPD

Woman 4: And raided by over 200 Police officers

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Woman 5: Including the L.A Swat team.

Woman 4 : This lead to a shootout in which lasted for a miserable 5 hours.

Beat.

Ensemble: 1969

Woman 6: Brotha Bunchy Carter, one of the founding members of the Southern California Black Panther Party

Woman 4: And John Huggins, leader of the Los Angeles chapter

Woman 5: and husband of Ericka Huggins

Ensemble: were both Murder at UCLA

Woman 2: In a struggle with an opposing Black power organization

Woman 1: Which was initiated by the FBI

Woman 3: And J. Edgar Hoover's Counter-Intelligence Program

Ensemble: COINTELPRO

The Ancestor focuses her attention on Angela.

Woman 4: Established to intentionally disenfranchised and destroy the Black Panther Party

Ensemble (except Angela): 1969

The Ancestor: The bloodiest year of the struggle!

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She does an action from her phrase of movement. This movement is intended for Woman 1 to transition into Angela.

Ensemble: 1969

Angela separates herself from the others. It is clear that she is now in a different space and time.

Woman 2: Governor Ronald Reagan fires Angela Davis from UCLA

Woman 3: Because of her open affiliation with the Black chapter of the Communist Party

Ensemble: The Che-Lumumba Club

Woman 2: After a Journalist releases her identity as a member of this club

Woman 3: She received hundreds of death threats a day.

Woman 4: And Purchases handguns for her safety.

Ensemble: 1970!

Lights quickly shift on Angela. She is isolated.

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Angela.

(A Communists Manifesto)

Angela: The Guns! No,no,no,no, no, no! to reconcile with the purchasing of these weapons, we must first consider the “why” and not the “how.” Not that the how doesn’t matter because the “how” in most circumstances matter. But sometimes there are illusions that things just happen out of nowhere.

Pause.

Angela: You see, people seem to always want to put the cart before horse. And because America has been influenced by white, capitalistic, patriarchy, we sometimes forget that there is always a sequence in which things occur. Even if they seem to happen out of nowhere. For instance, the need for a revolution and the demanding of the liberation of my people did not just manifest itself because we were bored, Black, people looking for some entertainment, looking for a way to dismantle and interrupt the “American Dream”. The arrangement and organizing of A militant, Black army in America was a long time coming. And the journey to this moment, this generation of descendants of the millions of Africans kidnapped from the shores of the Ivory coast, was inevitable. So, there you have the why of this revolution. And certainly, the how of it is important, to not acknowledge that, would be the dismissal of the African Slaves humanity. However, the how of this situation is the past. The why is more present tense when planning a revolution, because it begs the question of “What are YOU going to do about the IT?”

Pause

Angela: I purchased several hand guns in 1970. Why, you ask? Well, Because I was literally receiving hundreds of death threats a day. I was a known member of the Communist Party. That same year three brothas who were inmates at Soledad State Prison, were standing trial for the death of a prison guard during a riot that took place there, George Jackson was among those three; AKA The Soledad brothas . I was an advocate for the Soledad brothas and demanded the release of all political prisoner!

Beat.

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Angela: *(She smiles, blushes)* And during my time of advocacy for these comrades, I began to exchange letters with George.

The Ensemble Appear.

Lights Shift

Angela is recalling some of the notes from the letters. Envelopes and letters fall from the ceiling. She is surrounded by them. She walks around the space picking them up. As she picks them up the ensemble reads them.

The Ancestor: "Dearest Angela (first among the equals),

Woman 2: This is the fourth attempt to reach you.

Woman 5: The others were on paper like this. They all said, "I love you, African Woman," little else."

Angela: I became very enamored by the beauty of his writing, and his gentle nature. He wrote like a poet.

The Ancestor: "Angela,

Woman 3: I will continue to try to reach you in this existence that follows. They can't control this."

Angela: His words filled me up and took me to places that I never imagined I could go.

The Ancestor: "Dear Angela:

Woman 6: I'm thinking about you. I've done nothing else all day. This photograph that I have of you is not adequate.

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Woman 4: Do you sense how drunk this photograph has made me?

Woman 6: You've got it all, African woman. I'm very pleased,

Woman 5: If you don't ask me for my left arm,

Woman 4: my right eye,

Ensemble: both eyes,

The Ancestor: I'll be very disappointed. You're the most powerful stimulus I could have."

Beat.

Lights Shift.

Angela: I grew to love George very much. I often thought about him in relationship to the bombs I'd hear penetrating through my home as a young girl.

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement. It should be violent. The Ensemble reacts.

Angela: I imagined him in his most vulnerable state of being.

Ensemble: In a cage (*They all do an action from Their phrase of movement*)

Woman 4: trapped (*She does an action from her phrase of movement*)

Woman 6: Bare and unclothed (*She does an action from her phrase of movement*)

Woman 3: Laying in fetal position (*She does an action from her phrase of movement*)

Angela: On a cold floor while the world was so violently falling apart all around him. There were days when I felt the same

Ensemble: Caged!

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Angela: Days when the walls were caving in on me. Days when the sound of the dynamite releasing the flames from its sockets would pierce directly through to the bullseye of my soul. That led the way straight to my stuff

Ensemble: The core of it

The Ancestor: And where should the things of a Black woman be kept?

Ensemble: If she cannot protect the stuff of her soul?

Angela: The why of it? Why did I run?

The Ancestor: The guns!

Angela: George's younger brother, Johnathon, who was a brilliant, young, revolutionist and one of my guards at the time, used the guns that I purchased in an attempt to help George escape from prison. My guns. The guns that were registered to me.

Beat.

Angela: I glare at the television screen. And there is my face. A gap in between my teeth and an afro as wide as the Grand Canyon.

Ensemble: The News Woman says:

Woman 5: *(As news woman)* Police are now looking for Angela Davis in connection to the Marin County Court Shooting.

Woman 6: *(As news woman)* It is believed that the guns used by Jonathon Jackson and accomplices in the shooting were registered in Angela Davis' Name.

(Angela Suffers.)

Angela: I was not going to turn myself in. I had seen what had happened to the young Black Panther man, little Bobby Hutton several years back when the Oakland Police murdered him as he was surrendering. And how just the year before, Fred Hampton had been sleeping in his own home and was murdered by the Chicago Police and the FBI. The only logical thing to do was to run!

Angela begins to run. And then a sharp light shine on her. So bright that it is hard for her to see.)

Woman 5: *(As News Woman)* On this day of October 13th, 1970, the FBI finally caught up with the fugitive, Angela Davis. Who has been on the FBI's top ten most wanted list for months now.

Woman 6: *(As News Woman)* She was found at a Howard Johnsons in New York City.

Women: *(As the FBI)* Angela Davis?

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Ensemble: *(As the FBI)* Are you Angela Davis

Women: *(As the FBI)* This is the FBI

Angela: Through the Sharpness of the lights a tiny silhouetted figure is running through the tobacco fields, shoeless and full of joy. The little girl. She is always with me. Behind her is George. *(To the Audience)* Can you see them? Can you feel her freeness? Can you see the way the leaves gather him?

Ensemble: *(As the FBI)* Are You Angela Davis?

Angela: *(Suffering)* Has it already been two months since I first started running? I am tired of running, I am exhausted, I can't... I can't run any longer...

Ensemble: *(As the FBI)* Are you Angela Davis?

Angela: *(Exhausted/ Giving in)* Yes... Yes, I'm Angela Davis.

Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement.

Lights shift abruptly.

(The Ensemble quickly transition from the FBI agents to Black woman consoling Angela.)

Woman 4: I am tired of running too

Woman 5: I am exhausted with this life

Ensemble: I want to be made over

(If there is a white woman in the audience the actresses should direct these lines to her)

Elaine: I want the one who made you

Assata: Or the one who made you

Ensemble: To make me over

Light slowly shift

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Nightmare.

(What dreams May come.)

The Spotlight moves to Assata.

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement.

The other women start doing actions from their phrases of movement.

At some point these actions morph into the women physically acting out Assata's dream that she describes later on in "Assata". This dramatization does not have to be literal.

Assata stands there in silence while the women move behind her or around her. This is her dream. At some moment The Ancestor focuses her attention on Assata. Assata is still. The only movement that should happen from her is her facial expressions. The Ancestor does a gesture and motivates all of the women to stop their movement. The gesture stops the other women's actions, but it moves Assata to speak. Assata is awakened from her worse nightmare.

Assata

(The Escape?)

Assata stand there. Shaken. She has just awakened from a nightmare. She finds composure and speaks.

Assata: Who is JoAnne Chesimard vs. Assata Shakur? Well for one JoAnne is my Slave Name! JoAnne is that little girl who stood at the edge of her grandfather's black own business at the beach back in North Carolina, and watch as all the white folks past and looked at us like we were dirt. Assata Shakur is the soul of the Black Liberation Army. JoAnne Chesimard WAS and Assata Shakur IS. The Shakur is who I choose to be; Chesimard was the name of an old white slave owner who thought people could be property. Jail is another slave plantation. I was in jail for 6 ½ years; 2 of those in solitary confinement. In prison, it is was not at all uncommon to find a prisoner hanged or burned to death in his or her cell. No matter the circumstances of their death they are always assumed to be suicides. These "suicides" were all usually Black people, threats to the social order and structure of the prison, political prisoners.

The Ancestor does an action from her phrase of movement.

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Assata: Sundiata drove that night. Zyad sat in the back seat. I was on the passenger side. Zyad, had sworn to protect me. He was one of my greatest friends. We were pulled over by two state patrol officers in what seemed to have been a minor traffic violation. They asked Sundiata to get out of the car and then they ask all of us to. They then asked us to present our ID's; we all complied. But of course, since we were caught while driving Black and I was wanted for arm robbery and a known member of the Black Liberation Army, they would and could not let us go.

Beat.

Assata: In blink of an eye there were bullets flying everywhere and even though I lifted my hands to surrender I was shot in the arm and then in the back.

Beat.

Assata: My mouth tasted like blood and dirt! There was a ringing in my ear. My head felt like it was on fire.

We hear the ringing of white noise. Assata suffers.

Woman 5 & 6 appear

Woman 5 & 6: *(As the police officers)* She aint dead yet?

Woman 6: *(As the police officer)* We ought to just let her die out here in the road like the dog she is!

The Ancestors does an action. The ringing instantly stops
Lights shift.

Assata: When I had awakened I was in the hospital. Handcuffed to the bed. My arm nearly blown off. The officers tortured me. Pocking me with things in my wound, threatening to kill me. I was every kind of nigga in the book.

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Woman1: Stupid Bitch Nigger!

Woman 3: Slut Nigger!

Woman 4: Black bitch nigger!

Ensemble: Nigga, Nigga...Nigga... Nigga...Nigga!

We hear a cacophony of the word Nigga from the ensemble. And then:

The Ancestor does an action. The ensemble immediately stops.

Assata: It was a cold November morning when I escaped from Clinton Correctional Facility for Women. A few days before Big Mamma came to visit me. She told me about a dream she had. She said

Big Mamma appears.

Big Mamma: I had a dream about you, girl! I had a dream that I was dressing you.

Assata: Was I little or big? The only time an adult is dressed by another adult is when they're dead.

Big Mamma: Naw, Naw chile! Would you just shut up and listen to me! You ain't gone die, God's got plans for you here on earth. You leaving that prison soon.

Big Mamma Disappears

Assata: I didn't understand what any of it had to do with me leaving prison. Big Mamma was always having dreams and everyone knew when she had a dream they came to fruition. (*Beat*) That same night I had a dream of my own.

Lights Shift.

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Assata sees her younger self.

Assata: I dreamt that my younger self was standing on top of the police car, that dreadful night on the Jersey turnpike. Her little eyes watching as the bullets fly back and forth. The air was thick. The bullets migrated through the wind in slow motion tearing through time. Tears fell from her face. "I am shot." She kept screaming. "And I can't feel my arm!" (*Softly*)

Ensemble: Zyad!

Assata: And Zyad is dead

Ensemble: Sundiata!

Assata: Sundiata is there too, but he runs. He gets a way. The air was thick. He fought through the tension of the night. As he ran he turned back. It was as if he was saying his last goodbye to me. And there on the ground was Zyad's lifeless body. The little girl! She falls to her knees. Her head disappears in her hands.

Women: As the night stars glistened above

Assata: It was as if the stars assembled around her illuminating every fear she's ever had. She is tired of being tired.

Women: She is tired of being scared.

Assata: When she looks up at me; her eyes are different, her skin is light brown, her hands trembling...it isn't my face its...

Ensemble: Kakuya's

Assata: ... Kakuya? My daughter? My child? The stars strengthen about her while she watched. She stood still. It was as if she understood that if she moved she might be shot too. How pitiful it is that little black children are born knowing.

Ensemble: Born terrified of the world

Assata: Born understanding

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Ensemble: That Amerikkka doesn't give a shit if there dead or alive!

The Ancestor does an action.

Assata: Abruptly I awake! but the nightmare is not over.

Ensemble: It has just begun

Assata: My child, Kakuya. Will she ever see me free? Will she ever see me alive? The child that I conceived and gave birth to in prison. Did escaping prison mean leaving her behind?

Assata touches her womb in recognition to her daughter.

Assata: Often times, while I was carrying her, I wondered what kind of a person would bring a child into this world. Would escaping from prison mean leaving her? I'd do anything to be free for her,

Ensemble: I'd do anything for her love.

Assata: I feared for my life and because I feared for my life in prison I had to escape. For her. For my child. I needed to survive for her! *(Beat)* And so Here I am

Ensemble: Standing before you

Assata: Baring it all

Ensemble: Naked

Assata: Hoping in some way

Ensemble: That I might free myself

Lights shift

Women 4-6 Exits.

The Ancestor lingers in the back ground.

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Three.

(A reconciliation.)

Angela: Of all the things I wanted to be as a little girl, a revolutionary wasn't one of them.

Elaine: And now it's one of the only things I ever want to be,

Assata: And it is the true investigation of myself that continues to sustain me

Elaine: I cannot help but to continue to ask myself the hard questions

Assata: So that I can arrive at some hard truths

Angela: So that I may begin to listen a little harder

Elaine: To what I need.

Angela: Who am I?

Assata: And where in the hell do I belong?

Elaine: Can I belong to myself?

Angela: Or will I always be in the continuous action of public service?

Assata: I've felt that if I gave all of myself

Elaine: Then maybe the individual that was the receiver would make me whole

Assata: I have never felt whole

Angela: Is it even possible for one to ever truly be finished?

Elaine: The fear of never being total

Assata: Is always here *(Touching her chest, where the heart beats)*

Assata, Elaine & Angela: And so is the little girl

Elaine: Who manifests herself deep down into the core of that fear

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Angela: For she was here first

Assata: And she continues to haunt me

Assata, Elaine & Angela : But she is mine

Assata: And I am hers

Elaine: Perhaps she does know the journey better than I

Angle: Maybe one day her and I will reconcile

Elaine: My intentional dichotomy away from her

Assata, Elaine, Angela: So that we can become one

The women 4-6 enters.

Ensemble: *(A realization)* Maybe that's what's missing!

The Ancestor: The acceptance of her!

Assata, Elaine & Angela: And what she means in correlation to the woman I have become.

The Ancestor does an action.

Lights Shift

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One.

(And yet different)

The ensemble enters joining Assata, Angela and Elaine they begin to sing Images by Nina Simone. They begin to perform the same ritual they performed at the beginning. However, there is something different this time. They connect more. They see each other more. The Ritual becomes more of a celebration rather than a beginning of self-investigation or investigation of each other. They have travelled this journey together. They are truly One. and yet different.

Return.

(To the forgotten ones)

The Ancestor: From the bleeding shores of the Americas all the way across the seas, the valleys and the deserts where the diaspora of my Sistās dwell.

Woman 4: Those ancient and those that are new.

Woman 5: Those who have been lustrated in the blood of our foremothers

Woman 6: The originators,

Woman 1: The liberators,

Woman 2: The innovators,

Woman 3: The giants,

Woman 4: The women in which we stand so gently on their backs

Woman 5: The Women who have exposed their hearts raw and stripped

Beat.

The Ancestor: And when the mothers of the church wale and sing from the pits of their guts:
(Women 4 sings the chorus of "Take me to the water" softly underneath the next few lines. The Ensemble should join in at the leisure of the director.) regurgitating the images of my grandmothers emaciated

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hands. Hands that have worked sun up til sun down in the share croppers' fields so that I could be free. Hands that were burnt in chicken grease so that I could be fed. Hands that cradled me to sleep so that I would be rested. *(Beat)* To the woman who's hands I see in mine. To my mother, to my grandmother, to her mother and their mothers before their mothers *(Actress can says the name of one of her ancestors. (A woman))*

Woman 1: To my... *(The Actress says the name of one of her ancestors. A Woman.)*

Woman 2: To my... *(The Actress says the name of one of her ancestors. A Woman.)*

Woman 5: To my... *(The Actress says the name of one of her ancestors. A Woman.)*

Woman 6: To my... *(The Actress says the name of one of her ancestors. A Woman.)*

(Take me to the water ends)

Woman 4: To my... *(The Actress says the name of one of her ancestors. A Woman.)*

The Ancestor: To those Panther Women, those in which feel like they have been forgotten,

Woman 5: Those who wake up every day in the ghetto wondering where the milk in which their children need to suckle will appear from,

Woman 6: Those in which have stood in welfare lines,

Woman 3: Put clothes pins to clothes line

Woman 4: Rode 3 buses a day just to get to work and 3 buses from work

The Ancestor: Those of you soul Sista's that are holding on and holding on and holding on

Ensemble: We stroll along beside you

Pause.

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The Ancestor: Because Sista's we once were the earth
and when we are the earth again
No one will tell us to be anything less than that
This is the secret Black women know
This is why we wear our old age
like a rich white woman might wear diamonds
Or a string of pearls around her neck
Cause we are not aging
We are returning
To our deeper glory
When we are the earth again
Flowers and good harvest will grow from our wombs
When we are the earth again
Mountains will quake at our suggestion
Trees will sprout as our laughter
They will see our power then
Our power
black as death
black as earth
And deep...

Ensemble: Our, Black, Woman, Power!

Blackout.