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BLOOD AT THE ROOT was commissioned by the Pennsylvania State University School of Theatre and premiered on March 28, 2014 at Penn State Center Stage. The performance was directed by Steve H. Broadaxx III, with choreography by Aquila Kikora Franklin, lighting design by Nathan Hawkins, scenic design by Karl Jacobson, costume design by Carly Reeder, and sound design by Liz Sokolak. The stage manager was Gwen Byrnes and the assistant stage manager was Maria Baratta. The cast was as follows:

RAYLYNN ............................................ Stori Ayers
TORIA ................................................ Allison Scarlet Jaye
ASHA .................................................... Kenzie Ross
JUStIN .................................................. Brandon Carter
COLIN ................................................... Tyler Reilly
DE'ANDRE ............................................. Christian Thompson

BLOOD AT THE ROOT was commissioned by the Penn State School of Theatre, and was first produced by Penn State Centre Stage; Dan Carter, Producing Artistic Director.

The New York premiere of BLOOD AT THE ROOT was produced by Penn State Centre Stage and presented by HI-ARTS and the National Black Theatre, Inc.

CHARACTERS

RAYLYNN – Black woman, young adult, eighteen
TORIA – White woman, young adult, eighteen
ASHA – White woman, young adult, eighteen
JUStIN – Black man, young adult, eighteen
COLIN – White man, young adult, eighteen
DE'ANDRE – Black man, young adult, sixteen
PRINCIPAL MILLER – any race, man or woman, can be a voice-over or offstage
DA – White man or woman, can be a voice-over or offstage
STUDENTS – any races, young adults

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play is built on the idea of devised production. What this means is that the work on the page is really only half, and the ensemble is intended, along with the director, to put their own signature on the work in a more defined and pronounced way. The ensemble builds the pictures (i.e., the tree) out of their bodies or creative maneuvering.

The movement that De'Andre does can be dance or other inspired movement. But Hip-Hop-inspired, always.

Most importantly, the ensemble of miscellaneous characters (i.e., Students, Principal, DA, Student Body, etc.) can be assigned as suggested in the parentheses (based on smaller productions), or reassigned as a larger and more ensemble cast. The only thing that is pertinent is that the main scenes and monologues assigned to the core students (Raylynn, De'Andre, Colin, Justin, Asha, and Toria) remain intact for the story to work. All places where their names are written in parenthesis can be reassigned as needed.

Also important: The language of this play should drive. There is a rhythm to it that flows and moves as poetry. As much as possible, there should be few, if any, breaks between lines or within passages of text. Let it flow.

(//) represents a place for interruption, where the next character's line should begin. The first character does not stop their line with the interruption. In Survival Code, (/) represents a break in rhythm, not a pause or interruption. It helps to capture the flow of the rap.
This story is inspired by a series of incidents, media reporting, and social action in Jena, Louisiana in 2007.

I dedicate this work to the resilient young men who make up the Jena 6.

The Student Body

(An arrangement of multi-character voices. Performed as a continuous piece of text, but staged as separate characters. The following lines can be distributed as suggested, or reassigned to various ensemble members of the cast.)

STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
   It’s a hot day in October

STUDENT (TORIA).
   Hot hot

STUDENT (ASHA).
   Real hot

STUDENT (JUSTIN).
   Melt butter on the street – hot

STUDENT (COLIN).
   Walkin’ over coals with bare feet hot

STUDENT (DE’ANDRE).
   Heads noddin’ to a hype beat hot

STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
   It’s just hot

STUDENT.
   Hot hot

STUDENT (JUSTIN).
   “We ain’t got no race problems here” –

ALL STUDENTS.
   NOT

STUDENT (ASHA).
   “This ain’t ‘bout what you thank” –

ALL STUDENTS.
   NOT
STUDENT (TORIA).
"This was all just a prank" –
STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
NOT
STUDENT (JUSTIN).
It’s just hot
STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
Hot hot
STUDENT (TORIA).
Anger rising in your throat hot
STUDENT (ASHA).
Belly feelin’ full of smoke hot
STUDENT (COLIN).
So frustrated you could choke hot
STUDENT (DE’ANDRE).
It’s just hot
ALL STUDENTS.
Hot hot
STUDENT (JUSTIN).
Air so still there ain’t no breeze
STUDENT (ASHA).
Unmowed grass up to your knees
STUDENT (TORIA).
Books and papers and eighty degrees
ALL STUDENTS.
Only Whites sit at this tree
STUDENT (COLIN).
Whole town stuck in 1960
STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
Ain’t the way it ought to be
STUDENT (JUSTIN).
But that’s the way it is
STUDENT (TORIA).
Ain’t the way it ought to be
STUDENT (ASHA).
But that’s the way it is
STUDENT (DE’ANDRE).
Until something’s gotta give
STUDENT (JUSTIN).
"Til then we just stay hot
STUDENT (COLIN).
Too hot
ALL STUDENTS.
Hot hot
STUDENT (DE’ANDRE).
Have not
ALL STUDENTS.
Hot hot
STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
Want not
ALL STUDENTS.
Hot hot
STUDENT (JUSTIN).
Live not
ALL STUDENTS.
Hot hot
STUDENT (ASHA).
It’s just hot
STUDENT (COLIN).
So damn hot
STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
Feelin’ like summer when we in the fall
STUDENT (DE’ANDRE).
Air conditionin’ at the mall
STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
Hot
STUDENT (ASHA).
Hot
ALL STUDENTS.

Hot day in October...

(Lights shift.)

Raylynn's Reflection

(Lights up on RAYLYNN.)

RAYLYNN. You know what day today is? — Today a hot as hell day at school. Today the day my ten-page paper in Miss Lawson's class is due and I over-wrote and have eleven. My brother say I'm the only person he know do MO' homework than I'm given. Today I don't care what's on the lunch menu cuz I probly ain't eatin' it no way. Today different. Today got a weight to it. Today makes three years since my mama passed. Today I woke up to the sound of my daddy cryin', even though he pretended like he wouldn't. Today my brother walked outta the house belo' breakfast was finished talkin' bout he wouldn't hungry. Today I ate extra flapjacks just so I wouldn't waste no food cuz Mama used to hate that. Today gonna mean somethin' different, y'heard. Today can't be like no other day. Today gotta count for somethin'.

(Beat.)

You got to live life on the edge. That's what Mama always say. Used to. Break a rule or ten so you remember ain't nothin' more powerful than your own will. People with no will apathetic. That's what she say. Apathy. Ain't nothin' worse than it. Gotta have passion. Even if it's fo' sellin' drugs. At least it's activity. You can always take that energy and turn it into somethin' productive. But just sittin' back and suckin' up air and not participatin' in the world around you — ain't nothin' mo' selfish than that. I'm gon' participate. Got to.

(Beat.)

Today is hotter than the devil's ass. Today is the first day of Autumn Equinox. Today the trees is all full of color. Today a day fo' change. Today I'm gon break a rule. Or ten. To stamp out apathy.

(Beat.)
Today I'm announcing my decision to run for class president. Rule break number one.

(Shift.)

D Day

(RAYLYNN and ASHA in front of the school on the lawn.)

(A White girl sits under the tree and reads a book.)

RAYLYNN. Hot as hell. Need some shade.
ASHA. You oughta stick to it.
RAYLYNN. Ain't got no support.
ASHA. Forget about support. Gotta gain support. Just go out for it Ray.
RAYLYNN. Ain't never been one befo'.
ASHA. Class president? Been one every year since the school opened!
RAYLYNN. Never one look like me.
ASHA. Whasstmatter – look like you! Be one like you now. Who care 'bout what it ain't never been. Whasstmatter?
RAYLYNN. Maybe don't matter. Maybe do. Be a uphill battle to win this race. (Shift.) Why folk even say that anyway? Uphill. Instead of what – a downhill battle?
ASHA. It's a stupid saying. Whoever made it up was probably dumber than Alice Miller in fifth period Econ.
RAYLYNN. You see how she was lookin' at me when I said I might run?
ASHA. Alice Miller?
RAYLYNN. Looked at me sideways and all sorts a crooked.
ASHA. Alice Miller is dumber than rocks.
RAYLYNN. Like I smelled un-showered or rotten-egg-like or somethin'.
ASHA. Like unwashed drawers or somethin'?
RAYLYNN. Asha, I'm serious.
ASHA. Or like Jesse's breath after eatin' pork rinds.
RAYLYNN. I mean really serious.
ASHA. His breath be smellin' bad after them rinds though – don't it?
RAYLYNN. It do.
ASHA. Like Lawd boy! What kinda hot sauce do you put on them thangs? Smell like shitfire and hell comin’ outta his mouth!
RAYLYNN. He still got the support of the whole football team. That’s how he’s even in the race. And they gonna be hard to win over. Got some kinda code of brotherhood or somethin’ ’tween ‘em. Even for the stupidest thang. They stick by each other like flies to horseshit. And it don’t get horseshitter than Jesse, ya heard me.
ASHA. Well I’m datin’ E-Money now so maybe I can get ’im to sway ’em to your side.
RAYLYNN. You datin’ E? Since when?
ASHA. Since the other day when he told me I got a nice ass for a White girl.
RAYLYNN. He say that to you?
ASHA. In front of half the team.
RAYLYNN. And you ain’t smack him across his face? I woulda smacked him across his face.
ASHA. I did. And then I handed him my cell number.
RAYLYNN. What you do that for?
ASHA. I like a man with honesty.
RAYLYNN. That ain’t honesty. That’s disrespect.
ASHA. I thank disrespect is thankin’ it and not sayin’ nothin’. If you thank I got a nice ass, just say so. Get all the particulars outta the way. That’s what I like.
RAYLYNN. You like it cuz you crazy.
ASHA. I like it cuz it’s true. I got a great ass.
(DE’ANDRE runs on, catching a football being tossed to him.)
DE’ANDRE. (Yelling offstage.) Shut up maine! Thas why yo’ mama smell like cornchips and toc jam!
(He comes sloppily over to RAYLYNN and ASHA and playfully puts his arm around RAYLYNN.)
Whaddup big sis.
RAYLYNN. Boy get offa me. You smell like testosterone and dollar-sto’ cologne.
DE’ANDRE. All the shawties love my cologne.
RAYLYNN. All the shawties in yo’ head.
DE’ANDRE. Gimme some chips.
RAYLYNN. Aint got no chips.
DE’ANDRE. You got somethin’. I know you ain’t eat all them Cheetos you had earlier.
RAYLYNN digs in her bag and pulls out a bag of Cheetos. She throws it at DE’ANDRE.)
(ASHA pulls out a nail file and begins busyin’ herself – preoccupied.)
RAYLYNN. Here fool. Go on get outta my face.
DE’ANDRE. Whaddup woadie?
ASHA. Whaddup D.
RAYLYNN. De’Andre why you botherin’ us? Ain’t you got practice right now?
DE’ANDRE. Naw. Practice cancelled for today.
ASHA. Cancelled for what? E ain’t tell me it was cancelled.
DE’ANDRE. Ain’t go into details. Sign on the locker room door just say it cancelled. But it must be somethin’ kinda serious. We got a game next week and Coach been vexed tryin’ to get us in shape. He don’t neva just be cancellin’.
RAYLYNN. Well where you headin’ now?
DE’ANDRE. Goin’ over Derrick house fo’ a bit. That’s where e’erbody gon’ chill.
RAYLYNN. What about later? Wit’ Daddy. ’Spose to go on down to the site –
DE’ANDRE. Ain’t talkin’ ’bout none of that right now.
RAYLYNN. You ain’t gonna go?
DE’ANDRE. Ain’t talkin’ ’bout none of that right now. That what ya’ll wanna do, ya’ll go ’head on. But I ain’t goin’ to no graveyard.
RAYLYNN. But what about Daddy—
DE'ANDRE. (Ignoring RAYLYNN.) Ay dere' Asha, E said to tell you he gon' be at Derrick's.
ASHA. What he tell you to tell me that for? He can't speak for himself?
DE'ANDRE. I 'ono.
ASHA. Tell him I don't be takin' no second-hand messages. He know how to text me.
DE'ANDRE. Whateva. Just tellin' what I know.
RAYLYNN. What I'm gon' tell Daddy? What you want me to say 'bout why you not comin' wit' us...even though you knowin' what it mean to 'im?
DE'ANDRE. Say whateva you want. You an' him can hold onto them bad memories 'til they make you crazy. I can't do it no mo'.
RAYLYNN. Ain't all bad memories.
DE'ANDRE. Maybe not to you...

(DE'ANDRE turns to walk away.)

Tell Daddy I be home late. Catch you when I catch you.

(DE'ANDRE tosses his ball up into the air, catches it, and disappears.)

(RAYLYNN looks after her brother for a moment.)

(RAYLYNN turns her gaze on the tree. ASHA pulls out a compact and is now preoccupied with refreshing her makeup.)

ASHA. (Mumbling to herself.) Sending me stupid messages. What am I? Some groupie?
RAYLYNN. You know what day today is?
ASHA. What you mean?
(Beat.)
RAYLYNN. Nevermind.

(RAYLYNN keeps her gaze on the tree. And the students sitting underneath.)

ASHA. You know what you oughta do?
RAYLYNN. Sun is killin' me right now.
ASHA. Start a list of slogans. You be real good at it with all them lofty ways you be thankin'.
RAYLYNN. I hate slogans.
ASHA. Every candidate got slogans.
RAYLYNN. 'Cept me. Slogans ain't for me. Sound like bullshit and lies. That's all.
ASHA. Ain't got to be lies. You make it sound like poetry.
RAYLYNN. Poetry can sound pretty and still be a lie. No slogans.
ASHA. You just got to see it. Can't have no campaign without slogans. I'm gon' come up with somethin' and show it to you on a poster.
RAYLYNN. Ain't sho 'bout no poster—
ASHA. -- Just trust me.

(RAYLYNN turns her attention toward the tree again.)

RAYLYNN. You notice how it always been the same kinda people sittin' under that tree? Neva nobody different?
ASHA. I ain't neva really paid attention.
RAYLYNN. Ain't never seen nobody like me sittin' under that tree. Ain't never been nobody like me run for class president. You ever look up one day and realize you been doin' the same thing for so long, you ain't even sure why? Like you just followin' rules and ain't never stop to question -- why it's a rule in the first place?
ASHA. I 'ono. Maybe.
RAYLYNN. Today feel like a different kinda day. Don't it?
ASHA. Different how?
RAYLYNN. New rules-kinda different.
ASHA. What you talkin'?
RAYLYNN. I'm gon' get me some shade.
ASHA. What for? Don't go over there. Ain't nothin' but a bunch of snobs and cliques sit under that tree.
RAVLYNN. And today...me too.

(RAYLYNN walks slowly but decisively over to the
tree. ASHA watches with terror.)

(The shade of the tree washes over RAYLYNN.
All students and onlookers are illuminated in a
moment of stillness. Shock. Disgust.)

Rule break number two.

(Sound of a school bell ringing.)

The Cutting Room

(Lights up on TORIA and JUSTIN in a classroom.
There are press materials all around in prep for the
school paper.)

TORIA. That's a good article. That's a good fuckin' article.
Why everytime I submit somethin' do you have to shit
on it JUSTIN?

JUSTIN. It's too long.

TONIA. Long and good.

JUSTIN. Doesn't matter how good it is. It's too long.
TORIA. Then tell me where to edit it. I can take constructive
criticism.

JUSTIN. No you can't.
TORIA. Don't tell me I can't. I'm tellin' you I can!
JUSTIN. You can't. You suck at criticism.
TORIA. Says who?
JUSTIN. Says Melissa Bordeaux, our most recent story editor
to quit. Says JoAnn Seaver before that. Says Michael
Hendrix and Barry Stevens and Collen Smith —
TORIA. This is a crock a shit.
JUSTIN. And you cuss too much.
TORIA. Like fuck I do!

JUSTIN. Had to use so many symbols to bleep out your
language in that last article, it looked like the whole
thing was written in alien code.
TORIA. It was about freedom of speech. I was cussing to
make a point.

JUSTIN. Well your point almost got our whole edition
shut down and nearly got us all put on probation. I
promised Principal Miller I was going to do a better job
at monitoring proper content for this paper and I'm
sticking to my word.

TORIA. Justin, I'm tryin' to be a journalist. In real life. Do
you get that?
JUSTIN. I don't see what this has to —

TORIA. In real life! Not in some pretend lil’ high school basement where the most interesting thang in print is whether or not we're having fake horsemeat on the lunch menu or who in God's name among the popular and stuck-up is gonna win Prom King and Queen. I am not interested in whether or not the auditorium gets a fresh coat of paint before December or whether or not the football team wins a single game this year. I am not interested in these pathetic little trifles that make up our sad existence as sheltered brats this side of the Mason-Dixon line. I am interested in the true art of journalism. I want to tell the stories everybody else at this school and in this town is too pussy to cover —

JUSTIN. Jesus Toria —

TORIA. Like how many girls at this school have covered up their abortions because their parents are too primitive to allow a sex-ed course that isn't taught by eighty-year-old Mrs. Wellsley who wouldn't know how to model puttin’ on a condom if she had a ten-foot penis statue right in front of her —

JUSTIN. God Toria!!

TORIA. Or how about the number of boys on the football team who'd rather be dating each other than all the girls they swap semen with —

JUSTIN. Toria seriously!

TORIA. — but because we're so anti-homo they take it out on every chick at Cedar High and that's why the number of relationship violence is like — sky high right now —

JUSTIN. You don't have the stats to prove that.

TORIA. I could get them.

JUSTIN. But you don't have 'em —

TORIA. Or like how about the fact that none of the Black students on campus hardly ever hang out with any of the White students on campus or vice versa because we're all a bunch of racist pricks —

JUSTIN. Toria, enough!

TORIA. You know I'm tellin' the truth.

JUSTIN. It's a student paper. A STUDENT PAPER. We're not trying to change the world or disrupt capitalism or bring down the government. We're just giving people something interesting to read while they're waiting on the bus or have a free period or somethin'.

TORIA. What's our readership Justin?

JUSTIN. I'm not doin' this now. I've got to finish getting this layout done.

TORIA. Is it still ten people? Or did we drop to five this month?

JUSTIN. You know I'm working on a new layout to increase our popularity.

TORIA. (Mocking him.) OH! Gee! A new layout! That's what's gonna save our dyin' paper! While every other delusional student at this school is networkin' on Facebook or bloggin' about what colleges they wanna go to, you're workin' on some new colors for the layout. You're changin' the font from Times New Roman to Comic Sans and that's really gonna make everybody lose their shit and run to pick up a fuckin' paper!

JUSTIN. I don't have time for this Toria.

TORIA. Just print my fuckin' article.

JUSTIN. It's about where to get good birth control. Do you seriously think I can print that?

TORIA. It's not just about that — it's about protecting yourself and having a healthy teen sex life. Did you even read it carefully? Or did you get so excited at the word “birth control” that you skeeted on yourself before you could finish?

JUSTIN. You know what Toria? I'm the editor now. I'm the editor and the copier and the publisher and everythang else this dyin' paper needs, and I'm also the one student who hasn't stopped talkin' to you for basically everythang because you're so obviously annoyin'. So write another damn article or else walk cuz I ain't got the time to argue with you no more about it.
(JUSTIN turns away from TORIA and continues working on his layout.)

(A defeated TORIA is silent for a moment.)

TORIA. (Mocking.) It's our senior year.

JUSTIN. I know.

TORIA. I want to cover somethin' amazin'. Just once. Just to leave my handprint here, y'know? You've got to understand what that means. Aren't you sick of just bein' invisible at this place?

JUSTIN. Who say I'm invisible?

TORIA. Oh Justin, please. You're more invisible than me. And I'm damn near a ghost.

(Shift.)

I don't want this year to be like every other one, y'know? Where folks like us get lost forever into this abyss of nobodies because we're the only ones who know we're alive. Still waitin' on this place to give back, y'know? These past three years I ain't done nothin' but give and give to this hellhole, and ain't hardly reaped nothin'. But I decided this year. I can find a purpose for what I am at this school. I'm an investigator. And I can't leave this year without fully definin' what I am. This is the year I can etch myself into stone. Be a journalist. That's what I want Justin. Don't you?

JUSTIN. Maybe.

TORIA. Then let me have a shot to break the rules a lil' bit. Write somethin' excitin'.

JUSTIN. Can't do birth control. Got to answer to too many people. They'll shut it down.

TORIA. Goddamn Justin.

JUSTIN. But if you can find another topic 'fore I go to print in three days, I promise to give it a fair read.

TORIA. So you admit you stopped at "birth control"?

JUSTIN. Three days Toria. Go get your bally story and keep it under two thousand words. And it better fit in the new layout.

TORIA. You ain't sayin' nothin' but a word.

(Lights shift.)
The First Vote

(In the school hallway. COLIN and RAYLYNN are next to each other at their lockers.)

RAYLYNN. You on the football team?
(COLIN looks around himself. Realizing he's talking to him, he responds cautiously.)

COLIN. Yeah.
RAYLYNN. Senior this year?
(Again, and with a little surprise, he responds cautiously.)

COLIN. Yeah. So.
RAYLYNN. Transfer student, right?
COLIN. Yeah. So.
RAYLYNN. Okay. Cool.
(COLIN looks at RAYLYNN stoically. They both go back to their locker business.)

It's like three of ya'll this year. Transfer students.
COLIN. I know.
RAYLYNN. Cool.
(Beat.)

My brother play on the team too. Runnin' back. De'Andre.
COLIN. He a junior.
RAYLYNN. Thas him.
COLIN. He's good.
RAYLYNN. Guess so.
COLIN. Big ego.
RAYLYNN. Thas him. What about you?
COLIN. Quarterback.
RAYLYNN. Thas one of the good ones, right?
COLIN. You don't know the game?

RAYLYNN. Not much. Just enough to scream touchdown when they kick the ball through the H lookin' thang.
COLIN. Naw that ain't a...nevermind.
RAYLYNN. Football ain't my kinda thang. Just show up for D. Sometimes. When he ain't gettin' on my nerves.
COLIN. ...
(Smiles.)

RAYLYNN. Class was kinda crazy today, right?
COLIN. Yeah.
RAYLYNN. Miss Hooper and them pop quizzes.
COLIN. She give 'em a lot?
RAYLYNN. Only when she in a bad mood. Like if she had a bad date the night befo o' somethin'. But you can sometimes tell when she 'bout to go out that night. She come to school wearin' them skinny jeans that she can't hardly fit into. You see her dressin' that way, you know you betta study up on yo' notes lata on. Almost all a her dates be bad. Can't catch a man if she put silk panties on a fishin' line. Don't nobody wanna put up with all her personality. Sound of her voice make me wanna cut my ears off most of the time.
COLIN. It real high-pitched and squeaky.
RAYLYNN. I rather get run over by a truck than listen to her talk all night.
COLIN. Mack truck.
RAYLYNN. Exactly.
(They laugh faintly for a moment.)
(Beat.)

You ain't like... You don't seem like no football player.
COLIN. What you meanin' by that?
RAYLYNN. Ain't meanin' nothin' bad. Just way we talkin' right now. Can't get most of 'em to say two words to me, 'less they askin' bout D. But you just got... case or somethin'.
(Pause.)

COLIN. You the first person that done really...

RAYLYNN. What's that?

COLIN. Nevermind.

(Another pause.)

RAYLYNN. I was wonderin'...

COLIN. Yeah?

RAYLYNN. If you was plannin' on votin' on class president.
Like, if you had made up yo' mind yet?

COLIN. Ain't really thought 'bout it. Got too much other stuff on the brain.

RAYLYNN. Oh.

(Pause.)

Well if you get to thinkin' 'bout it...maybe you vote for me. I'm runnin'.

COLIN. Is you?

RAYLYNN. I am.

COLIN. How come?

RAYLYNN. It's just time.

(Pause.)

COLIN. Yeah – maybe...

(ASHA enters the hallway. Approaches RAYLYNN urgently.)

ASHA. Where you been at? Been lookin' for you for like ten minutes.

RAYLYNN. Been right here.

ASHA. You ain't heard??

RAYLYNN. Heard 'bout what?

ASHA. Lawd, girl... Shit done hit the fan. After you went and sat under that snob tree yesterday, they say two other ones done it too.

RAYLYNN. Other ones like who?

ASHA. You know what I'm sayin'. Ones like us.
Willie Lynch

(A suite.)
(Music.)
(Movement.)
(The staging/embodiment of three nooses being tied to a tree begins to happen as the following dialogue occurs.)

JUSTIN. So it went somethin' like this. School assembly the other day. New transfer student. Didn't know the ropes. Asked some kinda question. 'Bout that tree. That huge oak tree sit in the front of our school yard. Call it "O! Devoted" cuz of how long she been planted there and never hacked or diseased. Got years of carvings and marks on it. Most folk 'round here know to just walk past it and leave it be. Know how things is at this school. These people eat with these people. Those people eat with those. These folk hang out with these folk. Those folk hang out with those. Ain't nobody got no problems with it. Ain't worth questionin'. What's the use? It ain't hurtin' nobody. Folk like who they like. Wanna be near who they gonna be near. And just so happen that folk like to be around other folk they got stuff in common with. That's just what it be. Now everybody know that the tree out front - "O! Devoted" just be a hang-out spot for some of them cliques. But one of them new transfer students come down from North Carolina. Ain't know what it's like down here in Louisiana. Ask this question in front of the whole school. Ask -

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Can only White people sit under that tree out front?

STUDENT (TORIA). He was tryin' to start trouble.

STUDENT (ASHA). They always tryin' to start trouble.

STUDENT (COLIN). Didn't sound like trouble to me.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Was a fair question to ask.

JUSTIN. And then the student got taken out of the assembly. Got reprimanded by half the faculty for bein' disruptive. But later that day, this one senior got somethin' in her head about O! Devoted. Say that senior -

RAYLYNN. They call me Ray.

JUSTIN - announced she's running for class president. Say she just felt fed up yesterday or maybe like some kinda martyr. Who knows? Say she went over to where that tree was and sat down underneath it. Call it gettin' some shade. Then say after while, two other students done went over...maybe followin' her lead. Three Black students sitin' under a tree that everybody else know be a hangout for these cliques.

TORIA. White cliques.

JUSTIN. And now today...whole school is in an uproar. Come out to the yard at lunchtime, and that's when everybody see. Three nooses hangin' on the branches of that great oak tree.

RAYLYNN. Three nooses.

COLIN. Three nooses.

ASHA. That's what everybody see.

JUSTIN. Three nooses hangin' on the branches of that great oak tree.

(The music increases.)
(The symbol of the tree is illuminated.)
(The symbol of the nooses rockin' back and forth.)
(RAYLYNN is illuminated among the crowd. She stares at the tree. At the nooses.)
(The sound of laughter.)

STUDENT VOICES (ASHA & TORIA). It was just a prank.

STUDENT (COLIN). What's the big deal?

RAYLYNN. (In disbelief.) Nooses. Hangin'. Like vines...

JUSTIN. And it went just like that. That's what the story is.
(The image of the nooses on the tree remains, but less dominant. The lights are softened.)

(Lights illuminate TORIA, who now sits before JUSTIN. She has joined his realistic world.)

TORIA. And you’re gonna let me write it?
JUSTIN. With just the facts. Yes.
TORIA. What facts? Are there really just facts to this? Or lots of shades of gray here, Justin?
JUSTIN. Toria, you wanted to do an interesting story that we can print in the paper. I’m giving you an interesting story.
TORIA. So I’ll talk to some folks. Get their side of the scoop. Find out why somebody would do somethin’ so racist —
JUSTIN. Not racist, Toria. You’re puttin’ too much opinion on it. They’re just callin’ it a prank.
TORIA. A prank?
JUSTIN. That’s what Principal Miller is callin’ it —
TORIA. It’s nooses, Justin.
JUSTIN. It’s rope hangin’ from a tree, Toria. Rodeo rope.
TORIA. We ain’t got no rodeo teams here, Justin!
JUSTIN. Toria, look. I’m not gonna argue with you. I’m doin’ what I promised. I’m givin’ you a story to cover.
TORIA. ’Ccept you don’t want me to really cover it.
JUSTIN. I just want you to do what you s’posed to do as any good journalist would. Be objective. Don’t get carried away with your feelins. Just state the facts.
TORIA. Feelins is what makes good writin’, Justin. The rest ain’t nothin’ but empty words on paper.

(Shift.)

Don’t you got no feelin’ ’bout alla this yourself?
JUSTIN. What’s that ’spose ta mean?
TORIA. Seein’ them ropes danglin’ from that tree like...

(Beat.)

If I was you it’d make me feel some kinda way. I know that much.

JUSTIN. You got somethin’ you tryin’ to say to me Toria?
TORIA. I’m just askin’.

JUSTIN. Well don’t ask. In fact, I’m right and tired of alla your questionin’. You question everything I damn say. And ’less you forget, I’m in charge. I’m the one to do the questionin’. So take the story or back off. But don’t ask me another goddamn thing, Toria. I swear.

(Pause. TORIA and JUSTIN glare at each other.)

TORIA. Yessir, boss.
JUSTIN. That’s right. That’s exactly right. And don’t fuckin’ forget it.

(Shift.)
The Pot Callin' The Kettle

(Lights up on ASHA.)

ASHA. People don't know this 'bout me but I used to have a lotta anger. You might not think it by lookin' at me, but I could really throw down. When I was nine, my mama and daddy got a divorce. Was fightin' and fightin' all the time and couldn't never get on the same page. So they split. I went to stay with Mama in Florida for awhile 'fore she moved here to Louisiana. But when I was 'bout ten, I started gettin' in all this trouble at school. Fights and everything. Just madd all the time and didn't know why. So my mama sent me over to live with Daddy in Georgia for a coupla years. He had himself a new wife and everythang. Livin' good in Hotlanta with a new house and all that. Wife was a Black woman. Her name Sharon and she was cool as hell. I liked her out the gate, and that's sayin' a whole lot cuz I ain't like nobody out the gate who be datin' my daddy. But she was somethin' special. Treated me like a daughter. Didn't try to replace my mama or nothin' like that, or even act like she could. I think that's what I liked about her. She was just real easy with me. Ain't had her own kids, but had a bunch of nieces and nephews and she told 'em to call me cousin. So they did. Used to hang with 'em whenever it be a family get together. They say 'whaddup cuz' like that, and I remember feelin' for the first time like I belonged somewhere. Like finally I ain't need to fight no more cuz I was in company that felt like home. And I stopped being so angry all the time. Angry at Mama and Daddy. Angry at myself, even. Angry at the world.

(Beat.)

After while, Mama called fo' me to come move with her here. I was like twelve. But I wun't the same no mo'. Ain't feel as comfortable back here. Not 'til I started hangin' out again with...

(Beat.)

They used to call me "Black by association." Alla my friends and play cousins in Hotlanta. But here they just call me "fake" or "wannabe" or "actin' Black." But you know what I think? If actin' Black mean bein' like Sharon... Mean findin' family and love in places you wun't expectin'. If it mean not bein' angry unless you got good reason... Then maybe we should all be "actin' Black" mo' often. That's all I got to say 'bout that.

(Shift.)

(Music.)

(Movement.)

(Lights illuminate RAYLYNN and ASHA.)

RAYLYNN. It happened the next day. After seein' those three nooses hangin' like...vines. Somethin' had to be done. Somethin' just had to be.

ASHA. So D come around. He say -

(Lights up on DE'ANDRE. The world becomes naturalistic.)

DE'ANDRE. Ya'll see that shit?? How they just hung them shits on them branches like...like what was that? A threat or somethin'?

ASHA. A prank – Principal Miller callin' it.

DE'ANDRE. Thas bullshit. Wouldn't be no prank if shoes was reversed.

RAYLYNN. You mean if roles was reversed. How shoes gon' be reversed?!

DE'ANDRE. Whatever. You know what I'm meanin'.

RAYLYNN. Be walkin' 'round backwards.

DE'ANDRE. What they gonna do 'bout it? Thas what I wanna know.

ASHA. One of them Jesus freaks in my fourth period class. Bet that's who hung 'em. They was lookin' at me funny when Ray sat under that tree.
RAYLYNN. Or if the shoe was on the other foot. Maybe if you said that.
DE'ANDRE. Who cares what I said!
ASHA. Or maybe it was that hash gang that be sittin' up under there gettin' higher than a bluebird most of the time and don't never get in trouble for puffin' on school grounds – talkin' bout it's medicinal. Medicinal my ass.
RAYLYNN. Principal ain't say who it was. Just say they gonna deal with it private and the students be punished.
ASHA. Heard whoever they is gettin' detention.
DE'ANDRE. That's it? Detention? What kinda punishment is that?
RAYLYNN. Give detention for misbehavin' in class. Missin' homework assignments. Not for no noose.
DE'ANDRE. Not for no threats.
ASHA. Detention with Mr. Snodder and all that fartin' he be doin' be more like prison. Gas chamber.
RAYLYNN. Still. It like a slap on the wrist. Ain't really justice. Ain't really fair.
DE'ANDRE. What we gon' do about it, hunh? Talk about it while we straight gettin' disrespected! We gon' just take it, hunh?!
RAYLYNN. Ain't gon' just take it.
ASHA. What you meanin'?
RAYLYNN. I thank it time to revisit that tree.
DE'ANDRE. Thas what I'm talkin' 'bout.
ASHA. Revisit it...for what?
RAYLYNN. For defiance.
ASHA. Defiance?
DE'ANDRE. Start a rally!
RAYLYNN. A demonstration.
ASHA. For who? For what? Why we gotta do anything else? Already sat under it and made yo' point. Now just gotta let them fools get in trouble by theyselves.
ASHA. I can't afford to get in no trouble. Promised my mama I wun't gon' have no issues this semester.
RAYLYNN. Fine then.
ASHA. That don't mean I ain't... I'm still ya girl.
RAYLYNN. Yeah. Sho. Of course.
ASHA. We still good, right?
RAYLYNN. ...
... 
Sho.
...
...
...
Let's go D.

(RAYLYNN and DE'ANDRE head for the tree. Music increases.)

(Shift.)

Flick Of My Pen

(COLIN is isolated.)

COLIN. It was like some shit out of a Civil Rights documentary. Like the kind they be showin' in class. And most of the folks be fallin' half asleep. Seen this one kid in third period start droolin' on the desk when we was watchin' this one — Eyes on the Prize — it called. Real interestin' to me, but guessin' not to most everybody else. I interested cuz it's nice to know what done happened before I showed up somewhere. Nice to know how things used to be and that things as they is now come from somethin'. It all got roots. Way somebody choose not to sit next to somebody in the lunchroom — got roots. Way somebody got problems with the flag somebody else wear on they t-shirt — got roots. Way some people talk the way they talk, or hang out with who they hang out with, or love who they love, or hate who they hate — all got roots. It feel halfway comfortin' knowin' it ain't just start with us. That it been this way. That somebody's been plantin' these awful feelins in the soil somewhere. Long before we came along and started pullin' up crops. We been digestin' this same stuff, grown in this same soil, and ain't even know it. So I like seein' stuff like that...Eyes on the Prize... documentaries on the Civil Rights Movement. When that happened today at school...when those students went and stood under that great oak tree...O! Devoted they call it... Look like some kinda protest. Look like somethin' like from another time. From a Civil Rights Time. And it got me thinkin'...what kinda crop is the folks after us gonna dig up? Is it still gonna be from this same ol' soil? Or is we ever gonna plant somethin' new...

(Shift.)

(A moving tableaux of a protest being formed.
STUDENTS wear black hoodies covering their
bowed heads, or something that might suggest these are all Black students, though it is filled with the entire ensemble. Lighting should assist as well.)

(Beatboxing. Drumming. Sounds of urban teen life fill the space.)

(The ENSEMBLE becomes different players in the following sequence.)

(STUDENTS surrounding the tree.)

(PRINCIPAL MILLER and the DA face the group with bullhorns.)

(Alternative: Their lines can also be pre-recorded or spoken offstage over a mic so they remain an un-seen and powerful presence.)

(A vocalized Hip-Hop/Spoken-word-inspired soundscape should inform how the following lines move.)

STUDENT CHORUS.
Weee WIIILLL not... We WIIILLL NOT be moved!
Weee WIIILLL not... We WIIILLL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.
Students of Cedar High

STUDENT CHORUS.
Weee WIIILLL not... We WIIILLL NOT be moved!

DA.
If you don’t stop these protests –

STUDENT CHORUS.
Weee WIIILLL not... We WIIILLL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.
As your principal I’m warning you –

DA.
If you don’t stop these protests –

STUDENT CHORUS.
Weee WIIILLL not... We WIIILLL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.
I have the local District Attorney here –

DA.
If you don’t stop these protests –

STUDENT CHORUS.
Weee WIIILLL not... We WIIILLL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.
Please disassemble this gathering immediately

DA.
Gang activity

STUDENT CHORUS.
Weee WIIILLL not... We WIIILLL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.
Or the authorities will be forced to take action against you

DA.
You ain’t got the right

STUDENT.
We will NOT be moved

DA.
I can erase you from sight

STUDENT CHORUS.
We will NOT be moved

DA.
You must not know my power

STUDENT CHORUS.
We will NOT be moved

DA.
Been standin’ here for hours

STUDENT CHORUS.
We got our rights

DA.
I can take away your life
STUDENT CHORUS.
We got our rights

DA.
I can take away your life

STUDENT CHORUS.
We will NOT be moved

DA.
With the flick of my pen

STUDENT CHORUS.
We will NOT be moved

DA.
Want me to say it again?

STUDENT CHORUS.
We have a right to stand

DA.
If you don't stop these protests

STUDENT CHORUS.
We have a right to learn

DA.
If you don't stop these protests

STUDENT CHORUS.
We have the right to speak

DA.
If you don't stop these protests

STUDENT CHORUS.
We have the right to live

DA.
I can take away your life with the flick of my pen

PRINCIPAL MILLER.
Students at Cedar High, listen real good

DA.
If you don't stop these protests, I can take away your life with the Flick. Of. My. Pen.
The Aftermath

TORIA. Yesterday at Cedar High, Black students gathered in front of Ol’ Devoted during lunchtime in protest of the three nooses being hung from its branches a day prior. The group was quickly disassembled when Principal Miller, the DA and local authorities arrived to break up the protest. Their concern:

PRINCIPAL MILLER. We don’t want no gang activity here on school grounds.

TORIA. But the students had different things to say about that accusation:

DEANDRE. Ain’t nobody in no gangs.

RAYLYNN. Why would they call us a gang? They call the students that put those nooses up a gang too?

JUSTIN. Personally, I don’t think a protest was necessary. What’s it really change?

ASHIA. Something can be stupid or disrespectful without it bein’ about race.

TORIA. Lately it seems like there’s been growing unrest happening at Cedar High, and things may fall more apart before they come together.

(Shift.)

Sacred Secrets

(COLIN and RAYLYNN in the back of the schoolyard — bleachers. Mid-convo.)

COLIN. So I was standin’ front of that Piggly Wiggly on Jefferson askin’ for change to catch the bus back home cuz by this point, school was almost over. Was cuttin’ class all day but knew I had to get home or I’d have hell to pay. Had spent my last dime at the Big Boy tryin’ to get me some lunch, so I start beggin’ folks for whatever they had. Quarters. Dimes. Even pennies. And that when this fella with this raspy voice say to me, “How much y’need, dere?” And I look up, starin’ straight into the face of Philip Frazier —

RAYLYNN. Of Rebirth Brass Band?

COLIN. The original founder.

RAYLYNN. You’re a damn lie.

COLIN. Swear it.

RAYLYNN. I’da peed myself.

COLIN. Almost did.

RAYLYNN. What you say to ’im?

COLIN. At first I ain’t said nothin’. Soon as I saw it was him, I just went dumb. Couldn’t remember my own name for a second.

RAYLYNN. Then what happened?

COLIN. Then he get impatient wit me, like “I say what you need dere?” So I say — real stupid-like — “Um...can I have a quarter for the bus sir?”

RAYLYNN. (Laughing.) You shut up! You ain’t still ask him for a quarter?

COLIN. Couldn’t think of nothin’ else to say.

RAYLYNN. I’da told him how he the most amazin’ tuba player in the whole south. I’da told him ain’t no band better n’ Rebirth. I’da told him he’s a god.
COLIN. You'da asked him for a quarter to catch the city bus 'fore yo' mama find out you been skippin' school all day!

(They laugh.)

RAYLYNN. So that why you come here? Got kicked outta yo' old school for skippin' too much?

COLIN. Somethin' like that.

RAYLYNN. Why you skip? Ain't you had no good classes? Or you just some kinda rebel?

COLIN. At my ol' school, shit just wunn't really good for me.

RAYLYNN. What's that mean?

COLIN. Just mean what it mean.

(Beat.)

RAYLYNN. Well I guess that's enough studyin' for one afternoon.

COLIN. You a good tutor.

RAYLYNN. Ain't nothin' to it.

COLIN. Real patient and cool. Don't make me feel stupid for 'bein' behind a lil' bit. Hard to change schools in the middle of a semester.

RAYLYNN. I figure it must be. You need help again, just ask. I come meet you this period. It's better than makin' copies for Mrs. BJ all hour long.

COLIN. Thanks.

(Pause.)

RAYLYNN. You believe all that happened yesterday?

COLIN. Bout that tree.

RAYLYNN. Policemen come up and tell us to get outta there like we was criminals or somethin'.

COLIN. I saw it. Was like ten of ya'll. Look like somethin' outta Civil Rights or somethin'.

RAYLYNN. Felt like it too. Only thang missin' was the dogs chasin' us.

COLIN. Seem unnecessary, you ask me. They ain't need to do all that. Just let folk be where they wanna be. Do what they wanna do. Ain't got to be all that police and DA and none o' that.

RAYLYNN. You come to this school at a crazy time. Or maybe you right on time. I ain't sho yet.

(Pause.)

COLIN. You got lots of fight in you. I can tell.

RAYLYNN. Fight in me?

COLIN. Like for belief or something. That seem like a good thing.

RAYLYNN. Guessin' I get that from my mama. Daddy say she used to find injustice in everythang. Write a letter to the supermarket if they ain't have fresh vegetables. Write a letter to the transportation authority if the buses was runnin' late. Write a letter to the mayor if a road had too many potholes in it.

COLIN. Sound like she stay busy.

RAYLYNN. Used to. She gone now.

COLIN. Oh. Sorry.

(Quick pause.)

RAYLYNN. It's alright.

(RAYLYNN and COLIN are silent. Neither is moving.)

COLIN. You...um...

RAYLYNN. Yeah?

COLIN. I like you.

RAYLYNN. (Surprise.) Oh.

...

COLIN. Sorry. I ain't mean to--

RAYLYNN. Naw...it's okay.

(Pause.)

COLIN. I just meant, um...
RAYLYNN. I mean I think you... I just ain’t never... I ain’t been with no boys that look like... I mean my friend Asha, she White and her boyfriends be whatever kinda race she feel like ‘bein’ that day. But me, I just ain’t never... I mean maybe?? But I just ain’t never thought about datin’ nobody like you before –

COLIN. No, um...
RAYLYNN. Oh you ain’t mean –??
COLIN. I, uh –

(Awkward pause.)

RAYLYNN. Oh God I’m so... I mean, Jesus, I oughta... I could just... I should go.
COLIN. Ray, I ain’t mean –
RAYLYNN. Naw, it’s – I just need to...
COLIN. It ain’t you.
RAYLYNN. I feel stupid.
COLIN. You ain’t stupid.
RAYLYNN. I shoulda known you wasn’t meanin’... I mean why would you...
COLIN. It ain’t that. It’s just...
RAYLYNN. just as a friend, right?
COLIN. Well yeah.
RAYLYNN. Great. Got it. Gotta go.
COLIN. Ray, wait.
RAYLYNN. What.
COLIN. I – it ain’t you.
RAYLYNN. You keep sayin’ that.
COLIN. Cuz I mean it.
RAYLYNN. Well whassiit mean?
COLIN. Means I’m –
RAYLYNN. You – what?
COLIN. ....

RAYLYNN. (In slow realization.) You... mean you... don’t like... I mean ain’t attracted to –
COLIN. Don’t wanna talk ‘bout this no mo’.
RAYLYNN. ....

....
Shit.

COLIN. ....

RAYLYNN. I ain’t know you wuz that way.
COLIN. That way? What way is that?
RAYLYNN. You know like... I mean... Not tryin’ to offend you or –
COLIN. Psshhh – I gotta get goin’.
RAYLYNN. Colin –
COLIN. I said I gotta get goin’.
RAYLYNN. Okay.

(Pause. RAYLYNN and COLIN fill in the awkward silence with nothing.)

(Finally COLIN grabs his bookbag and starts to walk off. He stops.)

COLIN. I decided I was gon’ vote for class president. Was plannin’ to cast my vote for you. Just ‘case you was wonderin’.

(RAYLYNN — confused and uncomfortable.)

(Shift.)
Slippin’ Thru

(JUSTIN is isolated.)

JUSTIN. Things at Cedar High can be real divided. Lots of lines get drawn and everybody wanna know what side you standin’ on. Now me? I get by like I always done. Be studious. Be focused. Be attentive. That’s never done me much for popularity. Doesn’t give me the most friends. Keeps me...well... I don’t like Toria callin’ it invisible. I mean what does she...who does she...she doesn’t know me. Nobody knows me, that’s the point. But at this stage in the game, I’m not askin’ for that anymore. Sure, it might’ve bothered me when I was a kid. What kid likes to be the outcast? Sure, it might’ve made me sad or like some story from a after school special. But that’s not the case anymore. I figured out that none of that matters anymore. Folks like me...there’s no space where we really fit, y’know? No side we really make sense on. I’ve always just existed in the cracks. So when they come askin’ me where I stand, what do I say? Whose side am I supposed to take? Black kids protestin’. White kids prankin’. What side am I supposed to be on when don’t none of them ever...when ain’t none of ‘em really...when I just seem to belong to myself. And that’s it. That’s the side I’m on. But here at Cedar High, everybody want you on a side. Wanna know where your loyalties lie. And what I got to say about it? Who’s been loyal to me? Find me one person that can answer that question, and I’ll tell you what side I’m on. ’Til then, it’s all about bein’ objective. That’s the only way I know to survive. In the cracks...

(TORIA enters JUSTIN’s world.)

TORIA. Justin you heard about it?

JUSTIN. Heard ’bout what?

TORIA. Fight broke out in the cafeteria. Some members of the football team got into a altercation!

JUSTIN. What kinda altercation?
Telephone Game

(The ENSEMBLE on stage sporadically. Adding their accounts into the pot as chaos ensues around them.)

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). I was just sittin' in the lunchroom mindin' my business.

STUDENT (COLIN). I was eatin' with my friends and somebody yelled “fight fight” just like that.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). I saw 'em. It was like six Black students. I saw 'em.

STUDENT (ASHA). It was like twenty of 'em.

STUDENT (COLIN). A hundred.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). It was six.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). They was jumpin' on this White boy.

STUDENT (TORIA). That ain't what I saw. I saw a White boy and a Black boy get into a argument. Then the White boy hit the Black one. Thas what I saw.

STUDENT (ASHA). I saw the Black boy hit the White boy first.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). I ain't see nothin'. I was just mindin' my business.

STUDENT (COLIN). They play for the same team. That's what I heard.

STUDENT (TORIA). Two football players got into that argument.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Somebody said somethin' about somebody's mama, I think.

STUDENT (TORIA). Somebody called somebody a fag, I think.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). Somebody used a racial slur.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). I thank they was all just tellin' "yo' mama" jokes. Thas what we do sometimes. White boy musta took it personal. It ain't personal.

STUDENT (ASHA). I thank the Black boy got mad at the White boy cuz he ain't got a mama no mo'. Can't tell a "yo' mama" joke to somebody with no mama.

STUDENT (COLIN). I heard the Black boy was the one startin' the "yo' mama" jokes in the first place. How you gonna tell "yo' mama" jokes if you don't want somebody sayin' one back to you.

STUDENT (TORIA). I heard it ain't had nothin' to do with no jokes. I heard it was somethin' that happened during practice.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). I heard they got into a fight during practice the other day.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). I heard the coach found out one of the boys on that team is a faggot.

STUDENT (TORIA). You ain't supposed to call 'em that. It's racist.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). It ain't racist to say faggot.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Well it's somethin'. You ain't 'sposed to say it.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). I heard Coach shut down practice the other day to deal with the...

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Homosexual.

STUDENT (ASHA). You ain't supposed to say that either.

STUDENT (COLIN). You ain't supposed to say homosexual??

STUDENT (TORIA). It still sound offensive.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Everythang is offensive now?!

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Then the Black boy -

STUDENT (ASHA). You ain't 'sposed to say that neither.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). What you 'sposed to call 'em?


STUDENT (JUSTIN). African American.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Just call me Black.

STUDENT (TORIA). Then the Black boy ended up bumping into the White boy.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Can you still say White?

STUDENT (COLIN). What the hell else you gonna say?

STUDENT (ASHA). Just American??

ALL STUDENTS. We all American!
STUDENT (COLIN). Well why everybody else get to be called somethin' FROM somewhere and all we get is a color!
STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Ain't nobody made ya'll a color. Ya'll made ya'llselves a color. And everybody else one too. Don't be tryin' to change the rules now.
STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). I'm just sayin'. Yo' great-grandparents did.
STUDENT (TORIA). The White boy and the Black boy and the faggot.
STUDENT (JUSTIN). Sound like a bad joke.
STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Don't you dare say faggot again. I'm gon' smack the next person say faggot.
STUDENT (ASHA). And it wun't three people. Just the White boy and the Black boy.
STUDENT (TORIA). Ended up bein' a whole bunch of Black boys.
STUDENT (RAYLYNN). They joined in.
STUDENT (JUSTIN). What they join in for? They was all sartin' trouble.
STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Thas just the code of brotherhood. You see one of yo' peeps throwin' down, you got to join in.
STUDENT (COLIN). Well they joined in I guess. All joined in and ended up jumpin' that White boy.
STUDENT (ASHA). I heard they was all plannin' to jump that boy from the beginnin'.
STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Why would they do that?
STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Thugs.
STUDENT (JUSTIN). What makes 'em thugs?
STUDENT (TORIA). Thuggish behavior.
STUDENT (ASHA). Like jumpin' folks!
STUDENT (TORIA). What if somebody jumped the Black boys too? What if it was just payback?
STUDENT (ASHA). What if it wasn't? What if it was just random hate?

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Naw, I heard one of them Black boys was jumped last week at a party by some White boys.
STUDENT (COLIN). Maybe this was payback.
STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Still don't make it right.
STUDENT (TORIA). Ain't none of it right.
STUDENT (ASHA). Whatever happened to the White boys that jumped that Black boy at that party last week?
STUDENT (TORIA). Nothin'.
STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). They get in trouble?
STUDENT (JUSTIN). Nope, Nothin'.
STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Well it wun't on school grounds. This was on school grounds.
STUDENT (COLIN). Was gon' happen to these boys today?
STUDENT (TORIA). They're in a shitload of trouble.
STUDENT (JUSTIN). Major shitload of trouble.
STUDENT (COLIN). Heard that White boy got sent to the hospital.
STUDENT (JUSTIN). Say he got beat up pretty bad.
STUDENT (TORIA). This got somethin' to do with those nooses hangin' from that tree?
STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). This got somethin' to do with that protest that happened the other day?
STUDENT (COLIN). Or is it all just random?
STUDENT (JUSTIN). Is it all just random??
STUDENT (TORIA). What's gonna happen to those boys now?
STUDENT (RAYLYNN). The White boy in the hospital. And them Black boys...
STUDENT (JUSTIN). The six of 'em.
STUDENT (ASHA). Twenty.
STUDENT (COLIN). A hundred.
STUDENT (RAYLYNN). It was only six.
STUDENT (ASHA). Heard they done got arrested.
STUDENT (TORIA). I know one of them boys.
STUDENT (JUSTIN). I know one of 'em too.
STUDENT (TORIA). Say the White boy... He's new to this school... transfer student. His name’s Colin, I think.

(Flash. COLIN breaks out of the ENSEMBLE and freezes into a pool of light.)

STUDENT (JUSTIN). Other one I know. That's Raylynn's brother, De'Andre.

(Flash. DE'ANDRE breaks out of the ENSEMBLE and freezes into a pool of light.)

STUDENT (ASHA). And both of 'em are in a shitload now. A real shitload.

(Shift.)

Interrogation

(COLIN and DE'ANDRE are isolated in separate pools of light.)

COLIN. I was just mindin’ my business. Like I always do. Like I do everyday. Don’t got time to be worryin’ ’bout nobody else.

DE'ANDRE. I gots a plan. Gonna get drafted and get outta here. Go pro.

COLIN. Buy my mama a new place for herself.

DE'ANDRE. Move my family to a new 'hood.

COLIN. Same dream us all got.

DE'ANDRE. So you probly ain’t thankin’ I’m 'bout nothin’ neither. Same dream.

COLIN. Same plan. Same slim chance.

DE'ANDRE. Probly ain’t thankin’ I got good odds.

COLIN. But you check my stats — tell me I ain’t brung my A game to every play I made this year.

DE'ANDRE. Tell me I ain’t somethin’ ripe to get picked.

COLIN. So why would I wanna go messin’ that up, hunh?

DE'ANDRE. You thank I’m part of some gang or somethin’?

COLIN. You need ta check my stats cuz you ain’t got it right.

DE'ANDRE. You got me wrong if you thank I do anything to kill my chances at havin’ somethin’ better. And I ain’t got no problems with no folks of no kinda.

COLIN. I ain’t got no feelins on race or...

DE'ANDRE & COLIN. This ain’t got nothin’ to do with that.

COLIN. Not for me no way.

DE'ANDRE. I hit somebody – sho.

COLIN & DE'ANDRE. But that was in self defense.

DE'ANDRE. Why would I wanna mess all this up, hunh? You tell me why would I wanna... I got plans.

COLIN. For my mama. Roof of our house 'bout to cave in. You know that? My mama sittin’ there like she watchin' it in slow motion and ain’t got no money or no job to
do nothin' 'bout it. It gonna cave in on her and she can't stop it.

DE'ANDRE. Lost my mama. Years ago. Got shot right on our front porch. Driveby. And now my daddy sit on that porch 'til he rot. You know that? He sit there like the whole porch gonna collapse on 'im and he can't stop it.


DE'ANDRE. Move my family outta this 'hood so we ain't got to think on this no mo'. Won't even have to go to no college. I got on a fast track to somethin' better. So why would I --? Wouldn't mess this up, y'heard? Not for no...

COLIN. Not for nobody, ya heard?

DE'ANDRE. Like I say...

COLIN. They came after me. I ain't started nothin'.

DE'ANDRE. I was provoked. I ain't started nothin'.

COLIN & DE'ANDRE. And that's the truth.

(Shift.)

This Just In...

(TORIA is typing on a laptop, composing a news article. The tone of her piece is very “objective,” as she continues to correct and re-correct her own point of view.)

(Simultaneously, DE'ANDRE dances or enact a movement piece/tableaux symbolizing his arrest.)

TORIA.

Today at Cedar High
Six young male students
Black male students
Were arrested for assaulting
Allegedly assaulting
I gotta be clear
Allegedly assaulting
A young White male student
After an altercation broke out on school grounds
And now the campus is in an uproar
The campus is divided
And six boys' lives
Six students' lives
Six young men's lives
Are left hanging in the balance
Six young men
Some of them on the football team with promising college careers
Have been arrested and are awaiting the charges.
This could be a huge tear in the community of this whole campus.
And the lives of six young Black male students hang desperately in the balance, as we wait –
And wait...
And wait...
And wait...
And wait...
For the results...

(Shakes “enter,” submitting her article to the school newspaper.)

(With pride.) Send.

(DE’ANDRE’s piece ends with him being ushered away in handcuffs.)

(Shift.)

Sayin’ What Need To Be Said

(RAYLYNN is at the lockers. ASHA approaches her.)

ASHA. Ain’t heard from you in a coupla days.
RAYLYNN. Been busy.
ASHA. Heard about D.
RAYLYNN. Everybody ’cross the whole school heard about D.
ASHA. They done arrested him?
RAYLYNN. Got him sittin’ in jail. Like some criminal.
ASHA. Jail? Goddamn.
RAYLYNN. Been suspended indefinitely, Miller say.
ASHA. What about the other guys?
RAYLYNN. All six of ’em. Suspended and in jail.
ASHA. Colin get suspended too?
RAYLYNN. No. But ain’t seen ’im. Ain’t been to school since it happened.
ASHA. I just can’t believe it. None of this.
RAYLYNN. Can’t you?
ASHA. Just can’t believe how thangs done turned around here in the last few days.
RAYLYNN. Turned around? (Hmph.) Prefer thangs like they used to be, hunh?
ASHA. I ain’t said that. I just mean...
RAYLYNN. What you mean?
ASHA. Shit Ray, why you got so much attitude at me?
RAYLYNN. Cuz I’m mad.
ASHA. Mad at me?
RAYLYNN. At everythang. Maybe the whole damn south.
ASHA. Mad cuz I ain’t come stand under that tree with ya’ll?
RAYLYNN. You can do what you wanna do.
ASHA. I ain’t know what to do ’bout that. I ain’t know how to feel.
RAYLYNN. So you do nothin'. Just suckin' up air. Apathetic.
ASHA. I ain’t apathetic. Don’t call me that.
RAYLYNN. What is you?
ASHA. I ’ono. I just ain’t feel like...for some reason...it
ain’t feel like I belonged out there.
RAYLYNN. Belonged out where?
ASHA. With everybody. All the Black students.
RAYLYNN. You always been with us befo’. Lookin’ and
pretendin’ like you us. But just when we go to stick our
neck out on the line, all of a sudden you don’t feel like
you belong?
ASHA. That how you seein’ it?*
RAYLYNN. How else I’m s’posed to see it?
ASHA. I ’ono. Truth is, I ain’t never felt so White ’til all this
start goin’ on.
RAYLYNN. You is White.
ASHA. I know, but I ain’t never felt like it. Most of the time
I’m around ya’ll I just feel like...one of the same. But
soon as it started bein’ a thang...I dunno. Soon as it
started bein’ like a statement or whatever –
RAYLYNN. Must be good for you.
ASHA. What’s that mean?
RAYLYNN. To be able to put it on and take it off whenever
you want. Not me. I don’t get to choose. I got this fo’
life.
ASHA. Why it gotta be such a thang all of a sudden? Why
it got to mean everythang you do be about that?
Everytime somebody get in trouble nah. Everytime
somebody get in a fight nah. Everytime somebody do
somethin’ stupid...now it always got to have somethin’
to do with...bein’ Black?
RAYLYNN. You askin’ me that?
ASHA. I’m askin’ anybody who got the answer.
RAYLYNN. I don’t know the answer. I don’t know why it be
a thang all the time. I just know I ain’t make it that way.
I’m just reactin’. I ain’t put those nooses on that tree.
(RAYLYNN cracks a smile at ASHA. Suddenly ASHA rushes to her bag.)

Oh shit! I almost forgot...your campaign poster.

RAYLYNN. I told you I ain't want no –

(ASHA pulls out a poster, rolled up in her bag. It is beautifully colored and well thought out. On it – RAYLYNN's name and a slogan that reads:)

"Raylyn Harris For Class President...Because It's Just Time."

(RAYLYNN is taken aback. She revels in the poster.)

RAYLYNN. It's...
ASHA. I know you don't like slogans // but I heard you sayin' this befo-
RAYLYNN. Amazin'.
(ASHA stops - finally registering that RAYLYNN enjoys the poster.)
(They stare at it in silence.)

ASHA. I shoul do hope D don't get in no more trouble, Ray. He ain't no kinda bad and I hope they seein' that.

(RAYLYNN quickly remembers something.)
RAYLYNN. Shit – I almost forgot. I gotta go.
ASHA. Where you goin'? I come with you.
RAYLYNN. No I... I got to take care of somethin' for my brother...on my own.
(Shift.)

Press - Ure

(Lights up on the school press room. JUSTIN works on the finishing touches of the layout. TORIA enters.)

TORIA. You got it?
JUSTIN. Got what?
TORIA. The article I sent you? I know I emailed it at the last minute, but there was just so much to cover.
TORIA. I started to do that...keep the issues separate. But then I figured with all what's been goin' on, maybe they ain't so separate. Students in detention for hangin' nooses on a tree. Six Black students in trouble for jumpin' one White student on the football team - with possible homophobic undertones. A Black student runnin' for class president for the first time in the history of this school -
JUSTIN. Well goodie for you for doin' your homework Toria. Now explain to me how all that's supposed to fit into my layout.
TORIA. Justin screw your layout! Did you read my article? This is the type of journalism that could single handedly save our press!
JUSTIN. Single handedly?
TORIA. I'm just sayin' -
JUSTIN. Your article ain't makin' it. I've taken submissions from the two sophomores and one junior who wanted to contribute. They followed the guidelines.
TORIA. You did what?
JUSTIN. I've filled the slot.
TORIA. You - you're bluffin'.
JUSTIN. Am not. There go the test run right there. Soon as I get this border lined up, I'm goin' to final print.
TORIA. A Black guy Justin. Jesus – why are we tiptocin’ around sayin’ it all the damn time? I’m White. You don’t see me havin’ no problems with sayin’ it.

JUSTIN. You’re also obnoxious.

TORIA. Might be, but least I ain’t ’shamed.

(Beat. JUSTIN turns to look at TORIA directly. His eyes pierce her.)

JUSTIN. What – what’d you just say to me?

TORIA. You heard me. And I ain’t apologizin’.

JUSTIN. You think you know what I am? You think you know me?

TORIA. I know enough.

JUSTIN. You don’t know a damn thing about me. Call me ashamed. 'Shamed of what? Bein' Black? That’s all you got?

TORIA. Why else you stay quiet with all this racial stuff goin’ on?

JUSTIN. Maybe I don’t have no strong opinion about it this way or that. You ever think about that?

TORIA. That’s bullshit. My granddaddy say opinions and assholes – everybody’s got both.

JUSTIN. I ain’t your granddaddy.

TORIA. You hide from every possible thang that actually deals with somethin’ real. Everytime I bring up some kinda injustice, you dodge the conversation. Tell me to be objective ’bout every damn thang! How can you go through life bein’ so removed all the time?!

JUSTIN. You said you wanna be a journalist in real life? What you think they do? Their whole operation is about not lettin’ stuff get to ‘em. Not takin’ life so personal. Just seein’ a thing as a thing and not gettin’ yourself tied up into it.

TORIA. A good writer can see themselves in everyone.

JUSTIN. I can see people who look like me doin’ stuff I’d never think to do...actin’ in ways that ain’t natural to me...but cuz we got the same skin I’m supposed to see...
myself in that? Most folk at this school don't know or care whether I'm alive or dead, but I'm supposed to see myself in them?

TORIA. Some shit is just upsettin' no matter who you are.

JUSTIN. Who are you to tell anybody else what to care about?

TORIA. I'm just me. You ain't the first person to be invisible. You thank I don't know what it's like to be on the periphery all the time? You thank any of those girls here invitin' me to they parties or any of those boys 'round here askin' me for a date? But that don't make me thank less of 'em. Makes me sorry for 'em.

JUSTIN. You know what I been called by them? The people I'm supposed to see myself in?

TORIA. How am I supposed to--


TORIA. Justin, I don't need to--

JUSTIN. Lame. Wack. Corny. Weak nigga -- cuz I don't like to fight.

TORIA. Justin, okay. I get it--

JUSTIN. Punk. Soft. Gay nigga -- also cuz I don't like to fight.

TORIA. Alright Justin, you made your point--

JUSTIN. Corny nigga. Any kinda "nigga" you can think of except "my nigga." Never "that's my nigga." Never anything welcomin'. Just the stuff that keeps me separate. Every year. Same shit. Same names. Same insults. Cuz I don't match...cuz I don't fit the thing in your head or their head or somebody's head of what I'm SUPPOSED to be. Well you know what you can do with your SUPPOSED to's? Go fuck yourself with 'em! Cuz I don't care how you wanna see yourself. But don't tell me how to go through life. If I didn't go this way...if I didn't remove myself from all the hate and pain and anger that's thrown at me every damn day -- I might lose my shit and knock everybody's head off! You get it? So 'til you're livin' like me, don't fuckin' tell me how to survive!

(Beat.)

(TORIA is dumbfounded. JUSTIN is startled by his own liberation. He tries to regroup himself. Finds something to keep himself busy.)

(A long moment of silence.)

(Then.)

I gave the story to you. Told you to state the facts. Why you always got to color it with somethin' else?

TORIA. I 'ono. Justin. Seem to me like that's where the truth is...in the color.

(TORIA leaves.)

(Shink, alone and contemplative.)
Cop A Plea

(RAYLYNN and COLIN in the front yard of COLIN's home. They are alone. It is near dusk.)

RAYLYNN. Hope I ain't botherin' you none.
COLIN. Yeah, well...
RAYLYNN. Your mama look like I was interruptin' yo' dinnertime or somethin'.
COLIN. She'll get over it.

(Pause.)

RAYLYNN. I like the way she keep her flowers. Real neat.
COLIN. It's alright.

(Beat.)

RAYLYNN. My brother... What you gonna do about him?
COLIN. You seriously askin' me?
RAYLYNN. I'm askin' you.
COLIN. What you think I oughta do?
RAYLYNN. Talk to the DA. Get 'im to drop the charges.
COLIN. You can't be serious.
RAYLYNN. Why can't I?
COLIN. I get him to drop 'em and then what?
RAYLYNN. Let even be even.
COLIN. It simple as that to you?
RAYLYNN. Ain't said it was simple. Nothin' 'bout this whole thang is simple. Just even. Fair.
COLIN. You know what he done?
RAYLYNN. Ya'll got in a fight.
COLIN. They jumped me.
RAYLYNN. Not D.
COLIN. Yes. D.
RAYLYNN. He say he was provoked. By you.
COLIN. That what he said?
RAYLYNN. You ain't call him nothin'?

(COLIN is quiet.)

Outta his name like that. Somethin' racial that I 'on't even wanna repeat. You don't think that was provokin'?
COLIN. He tell you what he called me?
RAYLYNN. He say he ain't call you that.
COLIN. You know what that feel like?
RAYLYNN. He say he ain't say that.
COLIN. He laughed at it, didn't he?
RAYLYNN. Laughin' ain't the same as callin'.
COLIN. That word...ain't nothin' funny 'bout it. Hate that word.
RAYLYNN. The team just bein' stupid. Makin' dumb jokes.
COLIN. Just like them nooses was a joke?
RAYLYNN. That ain't...

...

... That ain't the same.
COLIN. 'Course it ain't.
RAYLYNN. And what you call him wunn't no better.
COLIN. 'Cept I hear 'em callin' it to themselves all the time.
RAYLYNN. Still ain't yo' right to repeat it.
COLIN. I was mad. Offended.
RAYLYNN. Don't make it better. Everytime somebody hurt all they wanna do is hurt back. It don't make nothin' better.

(Pause.)

COLIN. You know why I left my last school?
RAYLYNN. Cuz they ain't likin' yo' lifestyle?
COLIN. Cuz couldn't nobody make sense of me. See if I was a...a faggot...I ought to be lookin' like some kinda sissy or bein' softlike. They know what to do with that. Make sense to 'em. But bein' on the football team... playin' just as hard as the other fellas...harder even... that don't add up in they math. That make 'em real
nervous. If somebody seem normal like me can be this way, then it only be a real thin line ‘tween them and me. And don’t nobody like that. Not nobody.

RAYLYNN. I ain’t treated you that way.

COLIN. I ain’t know you was — that way...ain’t that what you say?

RAYLYNN. I ain’t mean nothin’ bad by that.

COLIN. Nah? What you mean, somethin’ good?

RAYLYNN. Nah but like...what – you want me to say sorry?

COLIN. I 'on't want you to say nothin’. Don't do me no favors.

RAYLYNN. (A confession.) Well I 'on't agree with it. K? Just tellin' the truth.

COLIN. Agree with what? What’s for you to agree with?

RAYLYNN. That ain’t somethin’ make sense to me. You want me to ‘pologize for how I was brought up? I ain’t never had to be around that befo’.

COLIN. What if I told you I ain’t never had to be around people like you befo’? What if I told you that my mama say all kinda thangs 'bout yo’ brother that I ain’t gonna repeat. What if I don’t agree with who you are neither?

RAYLYNN. That don’t make no sense.

COLIN. No, it don’t.

(Beat.)

RAYLYNN. (A plea.) He’s my brother.

COLIN. I know who he is.

RAYLYNN. We lost our mama. Three years ago. Said they was tellin’ “yo’ mama” jokes all through practice. Thank that ain’t fuel him none? You know how that affect him?

COLIN. What do I care what fuel him? He done what he done. You see this gash right here? (Points to his eye.) This don’t care 'bout no fuel. You know what they done to my ribs? Want me to show you the bruises?

RAYLYNN. No.

COLIN. Tell me 'bout no fuel. We all got somethin’ that fuel our anger. That don’t make it alright.

RAYLYNN. I ain’t said it make it alright! But we ain’t just talkin’ revenge. They gon’ try him as a adult. You know that? You know what that mean? Say that DA callin’ it attempted murder. You know that?

COLIN. What that got to do with me?

RAYLYNN. You hearin’ what I’m sayin’? ! — We ain’t just talkin’ you gettin’ some kinda payback. We ain’t talkin’ hurtin’ yo’ pride or your feelins or even a coupla bruises.

COLIN. Couple?

RAYLYNN. This the dirty south. Fights happen all the time. My brother been jumped 'bout three times in his life. One time he was only thirteen and had suffered a concussion. You thank the older boys what jumped him got’ to jail? They ain’t done nothin’ but go on 'bout they lives and grow up eventually. Ain’t no DA talkin’ to us and makin’ no big case out of it.

COLIN. How’s that my fault?

RAYLYNN. Ain’t sayin’ it’s yo’ fault. Ain’t sayin’ it’s alright what happen to you. I ain’t sayin’ my brother wunn’t wrong for fightin’ you even though you called him outta his name. But what you doin’...this ain’t no temporary punishment. You press these charges and you messin’ with his life, y’heard me? With the life of my whole family. You really thank that’s justice?

COLIN. I don’t thank none of this is justice!!

RAYLYNN. What you been through ain’t nothin’ new. You thank you above a ass whippin’? We all get ass whippins! The rest of us just got to deal. That be life!

COLIN. Get out. I don’t want you here no mo’.

RAYLYNN. Wh—? I...wait – wait a minute –

(COLIN stares at RAYLYNN. His eyes are raging.)

COLIN. Nah. Ain’t no wait a minute. Time for you to go.
RAYLYNN. You ain't even hearin' reason.
COLIN. I done heard enough a yo' reason.
RAYLYNN. Colin –
COLIN. I say leave.
RAYLYNN. Shit, I...
...

(RAY looks at COLIN needfully. Did she go too far?
She slowly begins to leave.)

(Steps.)

(Tears in her throat.) You know...even though you the way you is...even though I don't all the way get it...
I wouldn't wanna see nothin' bad happen to you.
Wouldn't wanna take away yo' freedom or yo' life. Cuz
ain't no comin' back from that.

(Shift.)

Survival Code

(Music.)

(DE'ANDRE is illuminated. He is in jail. He
starts to make a Hip Hop beat with his fist. Other
prisoners hear and join in on the beat, one by one.
The ensemble becomes a chorus of fists beating out
a rhythm on the floor, walls, whatever.)

DE'ANDRE.

Behind the lines – behind bars / ain’t remember the
rules
Mama gave me lessons / early on I been schooled
Behind the lines / behind bars / ain’t remember the
rules
Mama gave me lessons / early on I been schooled
Black face / male body / always a threat
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules
Hands high / out of pockets / keep anger in check
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules
Don't look in the eye
No saggin' at night
Keep hands out of pockets
Hold 'em in plain sight
Nod to the officer, never get smart
Hold back the defiance / keep the rage in ya heart
Don’t matter you right
Don’t matter you true
Black face / male body / ain't gon' listen to you
Don’t matter you hurtin’
Don’t matter ya pain
Black face / male body / you always to blame
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules
Everybody gonna fight but only you do the time
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules
Black face / male body is always the crime
Mama gave me lessons / Early on I been schooled
Shit hell gotdamn I done fo'got the rules
Mama gave me lessons / Early on I been schooled
Why the hell / how the hell did I fo'get the rules
It's the rules /
It's the rules /
Ain't remember ain't remember ain't remember the
rules
It's the rules /
It's the rules /
It's the
It's the
It's the
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

(Movement or dance symbolizes him trying to break
free from his prison cell, as the prison walls close
in on him.)

(In a separate pool of light, TORIA is illuminated.)

TORIA. My granddaddy – he say we come from a long
line of abolitionists. Told me he used to shuttle folks
back and forth in the Civil Rights times when they
was doin’ that bus boycott. Say before that, my great-
great-grandmamma and great-great-granddaddy used
to move slaves to the north. Say we come from people
that believe freedom don’t happen by itself. Ain’t just
for one group. Can’t be free if everybody else around
you is chained. If we don’t know how to connect to a
struggle besides our own, we’re all screwed. That’s
what my family believed. Say everybody always got a
part to play in whatever world they livin’ in at the time.
Every generation. And what you do with your part will
determine whether it added value or destruction.

(Beat.)

It’s s’pose to be our turn now. (Pause.) Wonder what we
gonna add?
(Suddenly, DE'ANDRE breaks out of the handcuffs! They can be physical or imagined. But he is definitely free.)

(He embraces the freedom through movement and space. A celebration!)

(Lights isolate RAYLYNN.)

RAYLYNN. Today is a new day. Like everyday, I guess. Today still hot as hell. Seem like this heat wave ain't never gonna break. Gonna have to adjust to it, maybe. Today De'Andre ate breakfast with us. Out on bail. Back at home. We hope it stay that way. Today my daddy wrote a letter to the Governor of Louisiana on behalf of the Cedar Six. My mama would be proud.

(Beat.)

Today is a debate at school for the student body. I got my bullet points ready. Today is not about waitin' on change. Today about breakin' rules. More rules everyday. 'Til ain't nothin' left to break. 'Til ain't nothin' left to fight for. 'Til the work is done. Today I ain't the same as I was yesterday. Yesterday gone. Today is here. Tomorrow is coming.

...

...

(RAYLYNN looks upward...out into a new horizon.)

(She smiles.)

(Lights illuminate a tree in the distance.)

(Slowly, three nooses are illuminated in silhouette. Hanging from the tree. Joined by three more. Then hundreds.)

(RAYLYNN looks back at the tree, as the ghostly memory of the nooses remains, reminding us of what can never be forgotten.)

(She turns back out to the horizon.)