

[MUSIC] Over the past few years, smart phones have captured brutal images of police violence against black civilians. These go viral on social media, fueling debate and making the violence, but also the resistance to it, more visible than ever.

Under the #BlackLivesMatter, the protest has grown into one of the biggest civil rights movements in the US.

>> The black spring is everywhere.

>> A conversation with the co founder of Black Lives Matter Patrisse Cullors about the need to resist.

This is Backlight.

Welcome to a theater where words become weapons.

[MUSIC] >> Everybody follow behind KT please.

>> I don't really want to be getting upset.

>> Yeah.

>> It's just kinda embarrassing, especially when there's 200 people in the audience.

>> Yeah, so let me just remind folks that our team has your back, right?

And the story is less for them, yes, it's gonna impact people in the audience, and much more for yourself.

It's your opportunity to claim space.

And you could feel as angry, as hurt, as sad, as upset, as pissed as you want to.

It's your story, it's the shit that happened to you.

And you get to feel every single feeling, yeah.

>> You said own the space?

>> Own the space.

It's you all's space.

>> Remember, we start here.

We go here.

>> Patrisse Cullors is an activist and theater maker from Los Angeles.

>> Marisol, put your hat behind so I can see your face.

>> She's working on a play that will give black Seattle residents a voice.

>> In the summer of 2013, Cullors hashtagged the words Black Lives Matter.

The hashtag went viral, changing the conversation around state violence and police brutality.

>> The earliest memories of law enforcement I can remember is when I was 12 years old.

[MUSIC] >> Run, run.

>> Along with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, she founded the Black Lives Matter movement.

Black Lives Matter now has 30 local chapters, not just in the United States, but all over the world.

>> Emotions are running high across parts of the US tonight after the controversial acquittal of George Zimmerman.

He was charged with second degree murder after fatally shooting 17-year-old Trayvon Martin.

It was a case that sparked debate about racial profiling.

>> We, the jury, find George Zimmerman not guilty.

>> No, my god.

>> But for crowds gathered outside, the reaction was one of disbelief.

>> Not guilty!

>> How can you murder an innocent child and sleep at night?

How can you?

[NOISE] >> I was sitting in a hotel in a small prison town, visiting a little brother of mine.

But I wanted to see the verdict of George Zimmerman, to see if he was gonna get any time or get convicted of anything.

And as I sat in that motel room on Facebook, and as the verdict came out, I was completely floored, completely jaw dropped that he got away with murder.

He literally got away with murder.

And was scouring the Internet for some reprieve, honestly, and I came across Alicia's post when she said Black Lives Matter.

And that's the importance of something going viral, right?

That's the magic of virility, is once a thing goes viral, everybody does see it.

And I can go into any place around the world, I can sit in any cab, I can talk to any person in a coffee shop and say, you know Black Lives Matter?

And they'll say, yeah, I know Black Lives Matter.

So your voice sounds really good no matter what you do with it, but it would be good to hear a different fluctuation.

So, at age 15, I was in Maple Lane juvenile prison.

And the staff there were abusing me.

>> Okay.

>> And making me to be this monster that I was not.

Thurston County was trying to remind me, like that.

You know what I mean?

So you want your voice to feel like it has different layers to it.

>> Okay, so I put emphasis- >> On certain things.

>> On monster, yeah.

>> Yeah. >> At age 15 I was in Maple Lane Juvenile Prison and the staff there were abusing me.

They were trying to make me out to be this monster that I was not.

>> Exactly.

[LAUGH] Beautiful.

Technically, I'm developing an art piece with black Seattleites, that's what they call themselves.

And the art piece is really bringing black people's stories of criminalization and state violence to stage.

I think that what I'm really doing is trying to challenge the narrative that black people can't tell their stories, that our stories are shameful, and saying this was unacceptable, this should not have happened to me.

And in fact, this should not be happening to many people.

And you're gonna listen, and you're gonna sit, and you're gonna be a part of this.

And you're gonna be a part of helping me figure out what we do next.

>> The white prosecutor decided to make an example out of my black ass, and try me as an adult at age 15.

The remand hearing was held in Centralia, Washington, an all white town.

And there were no other black people there except for me and my mother.

I swear, it felt as I was in some type of circus, as I was on display before all these evil and wicked people.

I was very nervous, and I was trying to concentrate while listening to the rummage of paper and hushed voices of white folks talking and whispering about me.

I heard the reading of all these false allegations about how incorrigible I was, and how I was a bully and a troublemaker.

The only they forgot to call me was a nigger.

When it came time for me to speak, after my mom had already pleaded with them for mercy, I really did not know what to say.

And they were all waiting for me to begin talking, but all I could do was bust out laughing at the crazy look on my mother's face.

She seemed to be making a face at me.

And I laughed so hard, I almost fell out the chair.

Boy, were those white folks pissed, their faces all red like lobsters on down to the neck.

Which only made it much funnier for me.

They were all bug-eyed.

And well, I never!

And looking dead at my black ass, as I was trying to stop laughing cuz my mom was shaking her head in displeasure.

And I knew I had to stop, but I couldn't.

I don't want nobody else to go through that.

>> Yeah.

>> [SOUND] At age 15, you be laughing just because you be laughing, not because you meant no harm.

>> This piece is a tool inside of our movement.

And it's important when we come into each city and we're building out the performance piece, that we recognize and build with other black leadership.

So it's not just sort of taking these folks into a vacuum, And then releasing them after we're done, that would be exploitative.

[LAUGH] Rather, we're trying to build an entire community around the piece, so it's not just the performers.

The audience also feel like they're part of this piece, and they're accountable.

And the community feels accountable to the performers, and to this piece.

>> So, what do you expect the audience to feel, what do you hope they're gonna feel?

>> I want the audience to be reminded of their humanity, what anti-Black racism does is it disconnects us from our humanity.

And so I want the audience to show up, and feel deeply, express deeply.

And then if they haven't been called to action yet, after everything that has happened in this country.

That this is a moment for them to be called to action.

[MUSIC] >> I called a meeting with her teachers to find out what was going on.

And at this meeting, it was the first time that I was informed about all the negative behaviors my child was exhibiting at school.

Leaving classes, not returning to class after recess, being out of control in her classrooms.

>> I was then tackled by a bike cop, it felt like I had been hit by Kam Chancellor, Linebacker for the Seahawks.

After Starbucks, we went to our respective cars, but on our way to our cars, we were interrupted.

By the sight of an officer pepper-spraying a young man in the face without just cause, shocked, I dialed 911.

But then I realized that the 911 operator didn't give a fuck at all.

To my horror, I turned around and realized that I was being excessively pepper-sprayed.

After which, the bike cop tackled me with the force of what felt like a linebacker hitting a helpless wide receiver.

I begged, and I pleaded, what did I do, what did I do?

To which this White male officer replied, stop resisting his unlawful arrest.

I'm seeing brains spreading on the ground right there.

He's gonna die.

>> Dead bodies, last from first, and they just killed this nigger for no reason.

>> Mike Brown was murdered in the streets of Ferguson by an officer named Darren Wilson.

When Darren Wilson went to trial, to the Grand Jury, Darren Wilson said he was scared for his life, although he had the gun.

And we see this so much, law enforcement officers being scared for their lives, but they have the gun.

And as the world watched and waited, waited to see if Darren Wilson was also gonna be indicted by the Prosecutor, Bob McCullough.

We knew he wasn't going to, but we hoped that he would, and when he wasn't, the whole world uprose.

And that was when you saw Black Lives Matter, go viral a second time, cuz the first time was during Trayvon.

And this is the second time, where internationally and globally, people were using Black Lives Matter as they hit the streets.

To protest against the non-indictment of Darren Wilson.

>> Black Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter!

>> You had people that were shutting down freeways, we had people who were showing up in the thousands.

>> Black Lives Matter!

>> Many of us gathered and drove down to Ferguson, and we stood in solidarity with the community.

This was that time where I could tell that this movement was, really, it was completely blossoming.

[SOUND] >> What makes Ferguson important is that there was an uprising.

[SOUND] >> Mike Brown dies, the community comes out, and they really, they do a vigil that night.

But the police response with tanks and teargas the night of the vigil, and then the community says, we're not going home.

[SOUND] >> And these weren't organizers, these weren't nonprofit leaders, these were Black people who are fed up.

With the consistent level of harassment that was happening previous to Mike Brown's killing.

>> I said, you can't stop the revolution!

>> You can't stop the revolution!

>> I said you- >> And the police keep responding, and keep being reactionary, if they just allowed people to protest.

Imagine how different the outcome would be, but instead they repressed, instead they violated people's civil and human rights.

And then the rest of the world was watching in shock.

>> You need to get out of the street immediately.

>> I witnessed the first SWAT team, which is a militarized unit of LAPD, was developed in Los Angeles.

It was developed because it was in response to the Panther Party, but what you start to see in the 90s.

As the rise of smaller towns having access to military weaponry, because there was too much for the US Military.

So there's a program called 1033, that allowed for law enforcement agencies to say, we want those bombs, literally.

We want those hand grenades, we want those assault rifles, we want that tank for our city, and you see the raise of militarization.

[SOUND] >> Get out the street!

Get out!

[SOUND] >> When you're using tear gas, when you're bringing in tanks into a community, you're saying you are the enemy.

We must shut you down by any means necessary, that's not de-escalating violence, that's actually causing violence.

>> Do I say my name?

>> Nope, just straight into the story.

>> [SOUND] I was trapped.

TPD and DOC, led by Officer Steven DuPoister, had ganged up on me, they had me blocked in.

Tacoma Police Department and Department of Corrections, after dropping off a friend.

On felony probation, after a two-year incarceration, I had already served my time for yesteryear's crime.

The cop car spotlight was far too bright, they threw me in the back of a cage that night.

Anxiously, I watched as they rifled through my belongings, all up in my vehicle, with reckless abandon.

And they did not read me Miranda rights.

I couldn't put up much of a fight, as it was turning out to be a fucked up night.

I was just dropping off a friend, trying to get back home, trying to get back home.

>> Take your time, babe.

>> [SOUND] But I knew I was in trouble.

By the sound of their tone.

Where do you think you're going, Mr. Cotton?

The convicted felon has very few rights.

And that's what I learned in the terror of that night.

>> You all exit, whoops.

>> We are a generation that have been totally consumed by the police in prison state.

Most of our family members were addicted to crack.

We watched the complete decimation of our communities.

We watched the continuous defunding of the social welfare state.

And then you have a generation of Black folks who don't have access to jobs, unions have been completely destroyed.

The jobs we have access to are low paying jobs, no paying jobs.

We don't have access to healthcare, and the list goes on.

And so when someone dies in our community after the 15th time, something snaps.

Some of us will show up peacefully, some of us won't.

But what's the better question?

The better question is why, what made us end up in these conditions in the first place?

We don't have that conversation often because the media is obsessed with making it a sensation.

So we focus on the rioting, we focus on the looting.

Will coach actually talk about how Mike Brown was slaughtered in the street and forced to be in his own blood for four and a half hours while his family witnessed it?

How traumatic.

We're not talking about that.

The whole community, this was broad daylight, the whole community witnessed the slaughtering of a teenage boy.

His mom is there, she can't go past the yellow tape.

And we are being questioned on being violent.

It is the most abusive response to someone who's being abused.

>> She felt around under my hair.

Looking for the threat she wanted to find.

My eyes started to feel watery and I just closed my eyes.

As she was still patting down my hair, I heard, what are you doing?

Can't you see she's just a kid?

Why did you make her take her clothes off?

It was Kevin, He finally realized he was one sure.

And I could feel everything change in that moment.

The TSA agent looked at him, smiled and said, we're almost done, we had to be careful.

When I was writing my story, it was very hard to talk about state violence in the context of Seattle.

Because people mostly think state violence means a Black person gets killed, and black people do get killed here.

But it is a lot more often for the police to harass people, so they pull you over for no reason.

If you're hanging out with more than three Black people at a time, to come and say you're loitering, or you're selling drugs.

Those are the little stories that don't get amplified that makes the essence of state balance for Black people.

>> So do you feel safe?

>> Not really, no.

There's no such thing as complete safety because there's always somebody that's gonna be more afraid of you than they are of anything else.

And we don't know what's gonna happen.

There was one other time that I thought about telling the story but I felt like I had more agency in that incidents.

But I was going to Washington DC in 2012 for a school project.

And at this point I was in college, I already learned about Racial injustices and all these other things and I could textbook define it.

And I went through the security line and then it was just like, a weird moment when the TSA agent was like, ma'am can you stick your hands out and I didn't even think anything of it.

So I just went like this?

And then she put some powder on it and then put some other things.

And I was like, what are you doing?

And then she was like I'm just scanning you for explosives.

And I was like, excuse me?

And she was like yeah, you know, it's just protocol.

And I was like, you didn't scanned that guy and he's really tall blonde hair, blue eyed and I was like, he looks like Timothy McVay.

Timothy McVay is this guy who blew up, you know, Timothy McVay.

Why didn't you scan him and then she was like, we're supposed to.

And then she said, you fit a description.

>> I see an extra small.

>> [INAUDIBLE] >> Right, all right.

>> [CROSSTALK] >> Yes, yes.

>> Are you an extra small?

>> Is there barbeque sauce?

>> Yeah, yeah.

>> This whole interaction.

>> Wow, you're looking good.

>> [LAUGH] >> He's like- >> [CROSSTALK] >> I have the urge to- >> Narrate what you're saying?

>> Not narrate, have jokes to make the audience feel better but I'm like, I can't.

So it's real intense.

>> And it's also, it's the way you protect yourself from being vulnerable on stage.

[SOUND] >> [COUGH] >> Since Ferguson, we've had the uprising in Baltimore and we've had an uprising in Charlotte.

We've had uprisings really, across the country.

It's not because people just started killing Black people, it's not because law enforcement just started beating up Black people.

These are issues we have been facing since we came to this country.

>> So what changed now, why do we hear about them?

>> Social media.

Social media has changed the game.

Social media has allowed for Black people to actually be the story tellers.

If we had social media during the 1992 uprisings, we would have had a different conversation come out of the uprisings.

If we had social media during Hurricane Katrina, we would have had a different conversation coming out of New Orleans.

But Ferguson, and Mike Brown's killing, Trayvon Martin and his killing, we have seen a new generation of people utilize social media to tell the story on the ground.

>> [INAUDIBLE] >> Stay with me.

We got pulled over for a busted tail light in the back and the police just, he's covered.

They killed my boyfriend.

He's licensed.

He's carried.

He's licensed to carry.

He was trying to get out his ID in his wallet out his pocket and he let the officer know that he had a firearm and he was reaching for his wallet, and the officer just shot him in his arm.

>> I told him not to reach for it, I told him to get his hand off it.

>> You told him to get his ID sir, his driver's license.

>> Get the female passenger out.

>> Keep them up!

>> Where's my daughter, you got my daughter?

>> Face away from me and walk backward.

Walk backward towards me.

Keep walking, keep walking, keep walking, keep walking.

Get on your knees, get on your knees.

>> My phone is about to die.

I'm on Larbenter and Fry, the Rollsville Police Department just shot my boyfriend.

>> [INAUDIBLE] Okay.

>> Let me get out.

>> There are some days where I am just numb.

There are some days where it's just too much to bear.

It's the days when you've read several articles that tell you about Black people dying at the hands of the state.

Talk about another Black woman being killed.

This show in Seattle, I think, really does Give space to the types of violence and stories we've heard from black people throughout the country.

I think about Philando Castile's girlfriend filming him on Facebook Live.

And us all having to witness her grief.

The numbness I think has been most present for me lately.

It's in these moments where I create an art piece.

Where I can't be numbed to people stories.

I have to show them.

Where my rage and my deep, deep sadness surfaced.

>> I began my day with my daily routine, tending to my hygiene, breakfast, etc.

At this point in my life, I was heavy into the art.

>> I was trying to figure out how to process what just happened to me.

I wanted to cry, but crying at 17 in public was not cool.

>> I think I got suspended, I don't really remember since I was so young.

They teased me about my hair.

And after a while, I started believing things that they said, that I was stupid and ugly.

I remember going home trying, begging my mom to flat iron my hair.

Every time she told me no.

>> I witnessed the barricade, civilians curling them in different directions.

>> How do you make this institutional?

>> You amplify the stories beyond just the killings.

Our work is to amplify, and to have a broader conversation about why law enforcement is being forced to deal with all of our social ills.

Why aren't we investing into black poor communities?

Why is it that black people in a routine stop which was about a back tail light that was out, why does that turn into a deadly experience?

That's the question, right?

The question isn't why he reached for his ID in his back pocket, didn't he know he'd be suspicious, why he had his gun in his car in an open carry state?

No, the question is why have we deployed and why have we put so much resources into policing and prisons?

I don't need my glasses.

Let me ask everybody to please be single file.

Single file.

That means arms down.

You're starting the show.

Please get your bodies ready.

>> Stop resisting.

>> He's unlawful arrest as he called over two other officers who proceeded to put their knees and their elbows into my neck and my back.

The chemicals and the pressure cut off my air supply.

All I could think about in that moment was Eric Garner as I screamed and I squealed, I can't breathe, I can't breathe.

>> I didn't sell anything.

>> [INAUDIBLE] >> I did nothing, I was sitting here the whole time minding our business.

>> This guy right here is forcibly trying to lock somebody up for breaking up a fight.

>> Everybody standing here, they told, I didn't do nothing.

>> [INAUDIBLE] >> I did not sell nothing. >> Why did [INAUDIBLE] >> Because every time you see me, you wanna harass me.

You wanna stop me trying to sell cigarettes.

I'm minding my business, officer.

>> Hold up, hold up, hold up.

>> Now, listen, don't touch me, please.

Don't touch me. >> Girl came over [INAUDIBLE] gave her some bag of baby shit.

>> [INAUDIBLE] >> Let's go.

Move on it.

>> Damn, man.

>> Put your hands on the ground.

>> All right, he's down, he's down, he's on the ground.

>> Give us your hands, buddy.

>> [INAUDIBLE] >> Put your hand behind your back.

>> I can't breathe.

I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

I can't breathe. >> Watch that foot.

>> I can't breathe.

I can't breathe.

>> What kind of a restraint is that, you choke him in a headlock, my nigger, and then bang his head on the floor, I got the whole shit on camera, boy.

It's a wrap.

>> Late this afternoon, the New York City Medical Examiner said Eric Garner did in fact die after police put him in a choke hold.

>> His death now being called a homicide.

[NOISE] >> In Seattle, I'm just a black man considered a threat like most other black bodies in the city.

I think there is a real disconnect, right in the progressive ideal versus the black reality here.

And it does disorient you when you see police officers like for instance on my way to rehearsal yesterday.

You see a couple of police officers maybe responding to a call, but just the sight of those cars, and their stance and posture when they look at you, even though you have nothing to do with the crime scene.

I think that powerlessness, that helplessness, and that fear of being a suspect, or being criminalized by someone that has ultimate power out here when you see them, is beyond frightening.

[SOUND] I think you have the progressive morays, and you have the progressive beating of the drum that is Seattle.

But what you don't have is follow through in a consistent way with training, and policies, and practices.

>> [APPLAUSE] >> Bernie, Bernie, Bernie.

>> Thank you, Seattle, for being one of the most progressive cities in the United States of America.

>> [APPLAUSE] >> If you do not listen to her, that will be shut down right now.

Right now.

>> [NOISE] >> My name is Marissa Janae Johnson, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Seattle.

>> [NOISE] >> We have a message for you and a message for Bernie.

>> It wasn't about Bernie.

It was about the Democratic Party, and it was about living in a moment where black people are being killed every 28 hours, and reminding people that we're in a state of emergency.

And if we don't see and if we don't act upon that state of emergency, you will continue to be interrupted.

Elected officials, appointed officials, spaces that don't honor black people will be interrupted until we finally see changing.

>> [APPLAUSE] >> I was gonna tell Bernie how racist the city is filled with its progressors, but you already did it for me.

Thank you. >> [NOISE] >> Now that you've covered yourself in your white supremacist liberalism.

>> [NOISE] >> I will formally welcome Bernie Sanders to Seattle.

>> We knew the Republican Party wasn't gonna have a black agenda, but we wanted to hear the Democratic Party talk about Black Lives Matter, one of the biggest movements in our generation.

And at first, none of them were talking about it.

>> Racial profiling and scandals throughout the year.

>> Didn't you feel at any moment, we have to endorse one of the viable- >> No.

>> Parties in order to turn our voice into political power?

>> That's not the only way to turn, we don't believe that the presidency is the way to turn our voice into political power.

In fact, local politics change this to national.

We see that in Ferguson, right, tiny little town Tiny town, no one knew where Ferguson was?

What Ferguson was?

It was not about Ferguson so much as it was about this larger national issue around law enforcement violence.

Ferguson changed the conversation.

So we don't need to rely on a US President to change the conversation.

We have to rely on the people and the movement to push that President, who will eventually or not have to be a part of that conversation.

>> So right now we're going to honor this space and we're going to honor the memory of Michael Brown.

And we're gonna honor all of the black lives lost this year.

And we're gonna honor the fact that I have to fight through all these people to say my life matters.

>> [APPLAUSE] >> That I have to get up here in front of a bunch of screaming white racists to say my life fucking matters, my life matters.

>> [APPLAUSE] >> If there is a predominantly white population does it matter how progressive you are?

Racism still live, racism still exist.

And if you do something that's too radical in that progressive city, you will see the same type of vitriol that you would see in a white southern town, come out in this white progressive communities.

And that's exactly what we saw here in Seattle when Mara and Marissa shut down Bernie Sanders.

>> Okay, so you're sounding great.

Still wanna little bit more life in your voice, and I'll encourage you to move your hands.

You see me, where I'm like young, gifted and black, go.

You don't have to keep with the same two step.

You could totally move your arms, you could sing in the audience.

You could get down low, you could sing up high.

>> I'm a little scary.

>> [LAUGH] >> I'm gonna stare at them I'm gonna yeah I'm gifted and black >> [LAUGH] I'd totally do that, [LAUGH] totally do that.

And if she's gonna sort of take that sorta like that high like you can totally, yeah I'm gifted and black, play with it right.

>> We must begin to tell our young.

>> Exactly.

>> There's a whole world waiting for you, yours is a quest that's just begun.

>> [LAUGH] >> When you feel real low >> There's a greater truth you should know.

Young, gifted and black, your soul's intact.

>> Exactly, so much better.

Like even with that little bit of character, it's so much better.

And like totally organically laugh, it's playful, okay?

>> It's queer, black women who developed and really curated a movement that is not about us.

[LAUGH] It is our vision that our movement is leader full decentralized, But we are not focusing our movement on our own ideologies, or what we think is necessary and possible.

What we do is center, why we think that we should have all black lives mattering, right?

We center that this fight for black lives isn't just about young, six, hetero black boys.

This fight is for the black trans-woman who is transitioning and needs the support of her community.

This fight is for the black person who's disabled and needs us to fight for their rights.

This is a fight for all black lives, and I don't think our movement would have that as the central focus if it wasn't for black queer women shaping it and its ideology and its practice.

>> I came out when I was 15 years old at this high school.

It was a lot of queer, out-queer people.

And then being out, I also was able to take this place in being out.

We had a lot of mentorship from adults that helped us.

But a lot of us also experienced harm and violence when we came out from our own families.

Many of us were kicked out, were pushed out and were homeless.

>> When you're a teenager everything is possible and you're just sort of like fearless.

So it was scary, but it was also like I was being politicized and I was, I really stop feminist and I was burning my bra, and I was cutting my hair.

[LAUGH] So there was also powered agency in the moments of feeling absolute helplessness and hopelessness.

And I had a lot of, a lot of other people in my peer group who are queer.

So it was a bunch of queer women of color, and we were holding it down for each other.

>> So can somebody else join us on stage at some point for a little discussion when one of my audience gets here.

And tell us this day was hash tagged Black Lives Matter at school, but we need to know from you all what that would mean?

What do we have to do to transform our school system to make that a reality, right?

>> Yeah.

>> All right, young leader's pose, what's the young leader's pose?

>> [LAUGH] >> You've got it, there you go, there you go.

>> There we go, sweet.

>> Can we give it up for our teachers?

Give it up for our teachers..

>> [APPLAUSE] >> When I say black lives, ya'll say matter, black lives.

>> Matters.

>> Black lives.

>> Matters.

>> Were going to publicly wear on our bodies that we believe that black lives matters and that no life fully matters until all lives matter, which means black lives must matter.

>> [APPLAUSE] >> Well I think we've set something in motion and I know that we're all here greatly indebted to somebody who's with us tonight.

[INAUDIBLE] call [INAUDIBLE] tonight, one of the founder of the Black Lives Matter, [INAUDIBLE].

>> [APPLAUSE] [MUSIC] >> I think, what it serves and what it allows for is a broader narrative.

If we don't talk about all those black people, if we only focus on one set of black folks, we are actually getting to the root of the issue, right?

When we really push for our communities, the whole of our communities, right?

All of us or none of us, it gives us more space to actually win the things we wanna win.

[MUSIC] >> There's no light, wonderful.

>> This is locked.

>> It probably does [INAUDIBLE] >> There is like no light.

>> What the old civil rights movement was not able to accomplish in a lot of ways, it wasn't able to rid itself of the shackles of patriarchy.

>> Do we got the sound board up?

Somebody told me that wasn't gonna happen today.

>> It was heavily invested and the narrative of this individual black man that was gonna save black people from poverty.

When in fact, we know that one person can't save anybody and we also know that it's a myth.

Because if you really sit down and talk to people and ask, who was doing most of the labor?

During the time of the civil rights movement, it was black women, and I'm not just talking about the labor of being a secretary, The labor of cooking the meals for the community meetings.

Black women were at the table strategizing.

They were the architects of the Civil Rights Movement.

And they knew better.

They knew not to put themselves in the center of the movement, cuz it wasn't about them.

>> To be young, gifted, and black.

What a lovely, precious dream.

>> So let me have you stop.

Start lower.

>> To be young, gifted, and black, is where it's at.

>> There's a lot of focus in our movement, a lot of black people who really feel upset about three women being seen as cofounders.

Some people reject the idea that we're even the cofounders.

Some people say we co-opted the Ferguson movement. Some people say we, gay people co-opted the black movement to have a gay agenda, and Some days it makes me wanna scream, actually.

I'm like, this is what you're focusing on?

[LAUGH] Actually, this is what you wanna focus on?

But it show you how insidious patriarchy is, that people are willing to risk winning because women, and queer people, and trans people are at the forefront.

That's pretty deep, right?

It's like the white man who's drowning in a pool, but won't grab the hand of a black man that's trying to save him, cuz he's so fucking racist.

[NOISE] [MUSIC] >> Run, run. [MUSIC] Run, run. [MUSIC] Run, run.

[MUSIC] >> Black lives matter!

Black lives matter!

Black lives matter!

>> The black spring is everywhere, Charlotte, Ferguson, LA, Chicago, Detroit, Flint, South Africa, Nigeria, Brazil.

These aren't issues happening in a vacuum, these are connected.

We have connected struggles.

There's specificities in our struggles, right?

There's differences, but there's such a connectivity.

That feels most important to me, the collectivizing, blacks bring about collectivizing.

>> Black lives matter! Black lives matter! [MUSIC] >> Collectivizing to keep expanding, to keep bringing about new depth and new breadth.

[NOISE] I think that decentralization is so important.

Because we have different vantage points of anti-black racism, a different perspective.

But what we can do is connect the dots.

[MUSIC] >> Hey, how you doing?

Thanks.

[MUSIC] Well, it's our opening night.

Hey.

>> Hey. >> How you doing?

[MUSIC] >> Freedom is precious to me.

It's more precious to me now than when I was younger.

But anytime your freedom is taken away from you, and especially when you don't feel like you've done anything wrong, that's where the rage comes from in my piece.

It's a new experience for me to be in a play.

I get the chance to tell my story, cuz I've had this story in me for a long time.

But I'm just hopeful.

I wanna uplift my people, especially young people.

I don't want them to have to go through the system like I did.

Because I was very angry at America and at the way the world was for me, as an ex-felon, just feeling like an outcast.

>> And tonight, are you excited?

Are you nervous?

What's gonna happen tonight?

>> [SOUND] I feel a lot better because I got my piece pretty much memorized tonight.

We're gonna let our voice be heard.

[MUSIC] It's amazing how so many of us have similar experiences.

Physical weapons aren't the only weapons.

Word are wonderful weapons too.

[MUSIC] >> Of course, we are resisting.

Of course, we are uprising.

But at the end of the day, when the dust settles, there has to be a place where we're able to go back to, that we're able to develop, that we're able to build.

Our work isn't just about tearing down, it's about rebuilding.

The act of tearing down means you have to imagine what else you want there.

Building black leadership, and what I do in the form of building black artist spaces is about leadership development, is about reminding someone their worth.

There's nothing greater than asking someone to come onto a stage to tell their story to 300 people for three nights, right?

People are paying to come to listen to some of these performers who spent time in cages, in jail cells here in the US.

And then someone coming in and saying actually, you're really valuable, we need you.

>> Marcel Baugh.

>> Akilah Franklin.

>> Luzviminda Uzuri Carpenter.

>> Jah-Vi' Cotten-Cohia.

>> Yirim Seck.

>> Karen Taylor.

>> African and Native.

>> African-American.

>> I don't do this cuz I'm angry, necessarily.

I have a lot of rage towards the state.

I have a lot of rage towards white supremacy.

But it's because I love black people so much.

I love us so much, that I do this work and I show up for this work.

It's because I love my child so much, my black child, right?

So much, that I've invested my time to, To hope for and to see through the conditions changing for black people.

>> You are young, gifted, and black.

We must begin to tell our young.

There's a world waiting for you.

Yours is the quest that's just begun.

[SOUND] [MUSIC]