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An Excerpt from the Play, *1000 Ways a Black Woman Dies: Stories from the Waiting Room*

BRITNEY MALLEBRANCHE

1000 Ways a Black Woman Dies: Stories from the Waiting Room is a play based on real stories of discriminatory events that Black women have undergone in the United States. I am a firm believer that art can take the shape of the silenced and give them a voice. This play intends to reflect the voices of those we unfortunately never got to hear.

The play is composed of a group of women sitting in a circle on a dimly lit stage having an A.A.-style group-therapy session. They are in a type of waiting room, anticipating their final judgment after death. The women share the stories of their deaths and have conversations with each other. The script is purposely written so that no lines are assigned to a particular character. That fluidity in the script allows a director to choose the cast size they desire, and it offers flexibility in the rehearsal process to mold the show in any way the company sees fit. In the following excerpt, the dialogue is ascribed to four different women, but those lines could be shifted among a smaller or larger group of actors.

The full script, notes on my research process, video logs, and recordings of the music that accompanies the play, including two Haitian hymns (one remixed and translated into English by me) and an original song I wrote,

titled "Alone," are at <https://britneyleeannemall.wixsite.com/1000waysblckwomendie>.

Woman 1: Do you know I grew up telling myself that racism is no longer a thing? That Black people just used it as a crutch to give themselves an excuse to not exceed in life. To fail to be everything that our ancestors wanted us to be. I worked so hard to rise above stereotypes and everything that is attached to the color of my skin because I thought I was beyond that.

Woman 2: What kind of self-hatred?

Woman 3: Why would you ever think we would WANT to keep ourselves down?

Woman 4: Well, the media always portrays it that way.

Woman 2: That is true. If you go on any major news network, they are always talking about the poverty and violence that surrounds majority-Black areas.

Woman 4: They even do it to Black countries. Honestly, sit here and ask yourself if you have ever heard an American news story on a Black country that shed any positive light on them.

Woman 1: It's always the bad things.

Woman 3: Because people only see us for our "bad things." There's no pleasing news with good things.

Woman 2: It's all about the greater agenda of always painting "Americans," a.k.a. white people, in the most positive light they can.

Woman 4: So they make these stories to make it seem like they care and are trying to spread awareness when it really is just helping them look good and Black people look voluntarily helpless.

Woman 1: But you see when I saw stories like that, I always saw myself above it. Like it did not pertain to me. But in this world, I will never escape that. I died at the hands of that.

I was driving home from dinner at a restaurant around 10 o'clock at night. I didn't have anything to drink besides one glass of wine but I was entirely sober. I was driving perfectly fine. As I was driving home, I noticed a car on the side of the road and a white woman was standing there looking for help. So I pulled over to see what I could do for her. If I could offer her anything or help her out. Her tire popped and she didn't know how to change it to put the spare on. Luckily my dad taught me how to do that when I was younger, so I offered to help her and she said sure.

As we were talking and I began to rummage in her trunk to find the spare tire and the tire-changing kit, the woman was obviously still very stressed out about the situation. That's when a cop pulled over behind us. Like I said, I've

never had a single offense in my life. I'm a stand-up citizen. I have done nothing to aggravate anyone. But immediately a cop came out with his gun drawn. The interaction ended as soon as it started.

All I could hear was him screaming, put your hands up, put your hands up, and the woman next to me was screaming, and I turned around because, like I said, everything was happening so fast, and all I could feel was six bursts of pain all throughout my chest. I dropped to the ground, and everything went dark.

That was the end of the story. I opened my eyes, and I was here. No prelude to the story, no extra information, it was just senseless death. It had no purpose. Had no impact afterward. I was just alive and then I wasn't. I was alive and then I wasn't.

And it's not even like death itself is something that sticks out in the crowd, you know. Because Black people die like this all the time. Men and women. But the problem is, typically once you hear about stories like this in the news, you constantly are hearing about how they had a drug past or a violent history or a record of owning or criticizing the police. I had none of that. I was just a normal person who did the right thing, who never ever crossed anyone. But no one sees that. For the first time, I am being forced to understand that the reality of my life is the color of my skin. That racism is very much still alive and well and that there's nothing that I can do.

I can rise above as much as I want to but I will never get anywhere as long as this is the color of my skin. I want to do better for myself and for my culture, but as long as

people like that run this earth, I will never get the chance. Nor anyone else like me.

Woman 3: I understand how you—

Woman 1: Do you understand how I feel, because clearly we're on two different pages it seems.

Woman 3: Excuse me?

Woman 1: You seemed to have made peace with this. I refuse to make peace with this. I didn't deserve this.

Woman 3: You didn't deserve this? We didn't deserve this. Our ANCESTORS didn't deserve this. The people who will come after us won't deserve this. But guess what? It's still happening.

Woman 2: It's a generational curse.

Woman 3: You think what's happening to us is anything new? Hate to break it to you but we are just one part of a mile-long line of generational trauma.

Woman 4: As Black women, we carry the pain and trauma of not only ourselves, but the Black women who came before us.

Woman 3: It's a cycle that never fails to repeat itself.

Woman 4: You know there was a massive decline in health in Black women during the Jim Crow era due to racial stress?

Woman 2: Generational trauma.

Woman 4: In fact, Black women diagnosed with breast cancer who were born in racially charged areas were at greater risk to get more aggressive tumors that were less responsive to chemotherapy?

Woman 2: Generational trauma.

Woman 4: Even now, the majority of women in the U.S. who have uterine fibroids are Black women. Which have been linked to stress.

Woman 1: So what? I thought fibroids are harmless.

Woman 4: So they say. But they never tell you what it can affect. What it can block.

Woman 2: Now that you say that, they never explain what to really DO with your fibroids and what can happen or what to look out for.

Woman 3: That's because they don't know the answers to those questions.

Woman 1: It's the 21st century. How do they not know?

Woman 3: No one cares enough to do the research or to fund the research.

Woman 4: You know why?

Woman 3: Because it's a "Black disease."

Woman 4: And “Black diseases” are a Black people problem.

Woman 2: Generational. Trauma.

Woman 1: Okay so we have some restraints. I’m not going down like this.

Woman 3: Oh my. What do you want us to do? We are already here. I can’t reverse anything, and you certainly can’t either. There is nothing we can do.

The women sit for a beat.

Woman 1: You know what? There is. I can have hope.

Woman 3: Hope.

Woman 1: Yes, hope. A prayer so loud it shakes the earth, and may the right people hear it.

In the distance, a woman begins “writing” a letter while speaking it aloud.

Dear Woman,

I’m sorry. I’m sorry that we have to live in a world under these conditions. I’m sorry that we come across ways of us dying and crying and feeling less of ourselves each and every single day. I’m sorry because we don’t deserve that. I’m sorry because no one handed us “a spoonful of privilege on a Silver Platter” like the others. I’m sorry that it always feels as if we fall short of something greater.

But I’m hopeful. I’m hopeful that we will find eternal joy

one day in who we are. I am hopeful that we will rise above all the pain and spite and become what our ancestors have called us to be. I am hopeful that we will grow and evolve the world around us to make them see that Black girls are truly magic.

People often try to make special things feel small. Sometimes out of insecurity, sometimes out of hate, but primarily out of fear. Fear that the special thing may become bigger than life. Bigger than the person who’s doing the hating themselves. So it’s easier to oppress people than it is to coexist with them

Black girl, may you take every single way others try to bring you down as inner praise for your undeniable talent and strength. The fear they try to make you feel about them is the exact fear that they have when they look at you and see you shine.

Do not let them try to use your magic as a weapon against you. Change the narrative. Change the storyline. Break the shackles of this endless chain of oppressive violence.

I’d like to think we didn’t necessarily fail. Sometimes some stories have just really senseless and harmful deaths. Unfortunately, we fall under that. But allow our pain to be used as armor around your bodies as you go into battle in this war. The blood that we have shed to cover you and give you the strength to push through. Because our stories are not over. The legacy of our lives does not end after death just because we are no longer a part of this world. They carry on through you. How you choose to continue the story is your choice. There is no defining ending to this tale. And for good reason. We give no end

because the work is not over, the pain has yet to end, and the unimaginable tombstones continue to be engraved. So I refuse to give you an end. I guess you'll have to find that on your own.



BRITNEY MALLEBRANCHE

Theatre Arts

Britney Mallebranche majored in Theatre Arts with a minor in Digital Media. Her research project was completed in the summer of 2021 under the mentorship of Professor Miranda Giurleo (Theatre) and later workshopped for a presentation during the 2021-2022 academic year under the guidance of Professor Miranda Giurleo and Professor Sarah Bedard (Theatre). This was all made possible with funding provided by the Adrian Tinsley Program summer research grant. Britney presented this play at BSU's 2021 Mid-Year Symposium and BSU's 2022 Arts Week. Britney is now pursuing her master's degree in media science at Boston University and plans to continue her career in the entertainment industry.

