

Illegally Black

A Play Written by: Anthonia L Adams

Set: Bare

Props:

Music stand

Coat hanger

Chair

Actor(s): one black female, 20+ years old

Costume:

Female blazer

Apron

Being a black woman is hard. I often hear my black male friends say that it is harder to be a black male in American than it is to be a black female, but I think for them they still have that male factor. And for us we have that double jeopardy of being black and a woman. So that causes all kinds of interesting experiences. I love being black, I love the fact that we are so resilient and that we can go through hardships and struggles since that has been inherently presented to us, but we can make it on the other side. Our history has forced us to be strong and to endure stuff that I don't think a reasonable person would be able to endure otherwise. So I think that is what I love about being a black woman.

Just Because

I should change everything. How I look, talk, dress, walk, speak, smile etc. etc I should change the way I think about life, where I fit in the world. I should give up a part of my **self!**

I should even change my hair. Mutilate the stuff that grows out of me because you don't understand it. Because braids would leave my mind twisted in knots so it would be better to just let my hair hang straight and narrow.

Speaking of straight her let me tell you how a perm works. I mean perms for black people. It's not a magic cream or a keratin treatment. We have to wear gloves and cover our hairlines to protect our skin. We must mix chemicals in a thick cream. We can't scratch our heads a week before getting a perm because the chemicals will go into the scratches. We also can't leave the perm on our hair for any longer than ten minutes. Why? Because perms are made with acid. We have to mix together active chemicals that dissolve the sulfide bonds in our hair that cause the hair to curl. It's equivalent to pulling the rungs out from under a roller coaster so it will like a limp spaghetti noodle. We have to use neutralizing shampoo with a color indicator in it to make sure all of the acid is rinsed from our hair. Perms have been known to give men and women 2nd and 3rd degree burns, cause massive hair loss and have left scabs on my own head. It's not a magic trick that happens in a hair salon. People get perms knowing there is a risk. We use actual acid. Acid. Burning acid in our hair. So the next time you laugh at a black

woman's hair for not being luscious like Beyoncé please know that strangely everyone's hair doesn't respond well to acid.

All because I and everything that comes out of me have been deemed a problem.

I should change how loudly I speak. But sadly, quietness isn't in my background. See, me and my family liked to yell across the house when I was growing up. If you were in the kitchen you heard the person that was in the garage. We heard mom calling from her room and waited until the last syllable came out to find out who was in trouble. But not with you. With you I should be submissive, docile, humbly knowing how honored I am for being in your presence. I should wrestle to restrain my wild, rampant attitude that could possess me at any moment.

I calculated how many times I should say 'like' in between my sentences in order to communicate effectively. In return, to show me that you understand what I'm saying you reply with the solemn nod and say 'word'. Plus more words that I've never spoken to you because I knew you wouldn't understand my vernacular. When you throw in a simple word or two you are hip and 'open to all cultures'. But when I say those kinds of words in front of you I am deemed uneducated.

All because I and everything that comes out of me have been deemed a problem.

My kids, whenever I have them, should be well-trained and as docile as I am or I might as well just oil them down well enough so they can more easily slide

through your pipeline from the school system into the prison system. My son should memorize his Miranda rights and the Constitution, but mindfully place an asterisk next to the words that don't apply to him, like 'unalienable rights' and 'all men are equal'. He should be extremely flexible and have a strong jaw in case the police want to slam him to the ground and arrest him. My daughter must smile constantly and keep her mouth shut, only walking in the daylight to remain safe. She also has to keep an open mind when her bosses weigh her promotions against sexual favors. Yes, I know I should have a lot of this kind of responsibility as a future mother.

All because I and everything that comes out of me have been deemed a problem.

I have to see the world through your eyes. Understand that close-mindedness was just the way you were raised and it's hard for you to see past that. I have to understand that you grew up in a homogenous environment. I have to understand that change is long and hard. Change takes generations. I need to forgive you when you attack me and learn to turn the other cheek. I have to overcome the problems you intentionally put in my life. I have to be nice to you when you are cruel to me. I have to eloquently persuade you that I was actually made for a reason. Then I have to reconcile with my deep rage and hurt as I attempt to process why blacks are treated so horribly in an age where our history is easily accessible. Knowing that a person need only look up facts about black people on Google to find out that their assumptions are completely incorrect I go

to bed with the unsatisfactory answer of why I am treated as less than: just because.

And you still have the audacity to question my humanity.

All because I and everything that comes out of me have been deemed a problem.

It seems no matter how hard I try, my two cents won't buy me the two-fifths I need to make me someone you respect.

See I bleed red just like you do. My folk's skin is black enough to look blue. It's just that white. That white. I can't quite get that part right. That one escapes me. But that doesn't have to be a bad thing.

By the way, why is it that it takes white people a couple hundred years to just change their minds, but I have to change everything about me just to get a job?

That doesn't sound right to me. That sounds like an excuse not to do anything. I mean if I can change, surely you can change. Right?

But in the mean time I guess I'll just keep wrestling myself to sleep knowing the reason behind it all is: just because.

Introduction of the show:

Good evening. I have written a play. In this play are interviews by two anonymous black women and the subsequent monologues I have written that were inspired in part by these interviews. I will be playing multiple characters, sometimes myself, throughout. I'll change character when I change what I'm wearing. So without further adieu here is: *Illegally Black!*

I had a lot of family support from my siblings. My older sister and I were the only ones with kids. In the summer my sisters would come when my son was five and expose him to a lot different places. I couldn't afford to travel. Listen, it wasn't all peaches and cream. Well He never promised us a rose garden anyway. I just knew what I wanted out of life. I grew up in a home and I wanted to put my son in a home. So I kept riding by this property every day. My dad owned it actually, and I kept saying 'I want that'. I visualized the house on the property. And in 1996 I got it. I worked at the school at head start and there was a janitor that said... I spoke to him about it about wanting a house of my own and I said 'I can't get it' because I can't afford it. Not off my salary. And he would push his mop up and down the hallway. And as I passed him he would go 'Faith with out work is dead; and he would just keep going. That motivated-. I didn't tell them that things came through for me until after they did. He kept saying....when he would see me. That's all he would say-he would be pushing -I can see him now- pushing that mop up and down that hallway. As we passed each other, he would be pushing a mop, never stop, he would just say faith without work is dead.

Graduation day is probably my favorite day. It's bitter sweet because I hate seeing students go. In four years I watched students come in as first year students who are scared and unsure, watched them navigate the whole four years, then on graduation day it's certainly a rite of passage and every time I see a student walk across the stage, all four years kinda flash before my face and I'm like oh my gosh I remember when this student was in my office, crying in the fetal position because they didn't think they were gonna make it this far and look at them now. They're on their way to med school, law school, grad school, on their way to get a job, so I think those are the positives, that you see students come full circle. Passion. Passion. I absolutely love what I do. I love the students, in spite of... (chuckles). But yea that drives me, that's what gets me up every morning. And sometimes what causes me not to sleep at night. I saw a meme of Facebook that said education is the only profession where you lose sleep over someone else's child. And I think that that is so accurate. I don't leave work at work. If I know a student is struggling and going through something I bring that home with me. I pray about it at night. You want to fix it you want to see them ok. Sometimes it's like parenting. You have to let them figure it out for themselves and that's a hard process to watch. You know it's gonna happen and you know that they're gonna be better on the other side of it going through those experiences, but it's hard.

Jesus' Momma was a black Woman

I bet you that Jesus' momma was a black woman. Yep she sho' was. How I know?!

Cuz. She had to been black to suffer how she did.

Yea, I read the story. I underlined and high lighted all up in my Bible. I know it front to back and back to front. You must nota been reading what I was reading because that whole story said that Mary was a black woman.

Whatchu know about Mary hmm? Not no more than me. Shh let me tell ya something.

First off, Mary was just out minding her own business when this dude rolled up and was like "Hail Mary full of grace!! Blessed are you above all women!"

You just gon' fly up on somebody and say they won something? Ya'll know that was too good to be true.

"You're gonna get pregnant and name your baby Jesus!" said the angel.

Surprise!

Now, Mary had some sense. The Bible said she was “greatly troubled” and kept revolving in her mind what such a greeting might mean. Like, what is this dude talking ‘bout?

I mean, Mary didn’t *remember* signing up for a baby delivery service. She also knew she didn’t have a **cosigner** for this delivery...

Mm mm. Mary said “ How I’m s’posed to get pregnant and I ain sleep with nobody?”

The angel was like “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and then a baby’ll come out.”

Mary was like “What?!” Oh, is that what you call it now? I’m just gonna say a Spirit did it. Alright.

But she got over it. Mary got hit with some hard, life changing news but she just picked her self up and learned how to work with it.

So yea, on the outside it looked like Mary was just gonna be another statistic passing through the system.

And on top of that Mary was a single mother. Joseph wasn't the daddy, God was...But who was gonna believe that? Shoot, Joseph didn't believe it neither. He had to get an angel to talk to him too.

Mary must have been real scared trying to figure out how she was gonna raise a child. Especially when the man she was with didn't wanna have nothing to do with it. That's a hard place to be in. But that happens all the time too.

Mary, a teenager was given a big promise of carrying the weight of the whole world in her little skinny arms. She had to grow up real fast and learn how to be a mama real quick.

And since she wasn't married she would have been stoned if someone found out. Having Jesus was a crime. Already before her baby was born He was seen as a problem. But we know how to make do when things get tough.

Still Mary said deep in her heart, "God told me I'm blessed."

Now ya'll know God ain't have to do that. He didn't have to give a little kid Jesus. The Son of God should be in a palace, born to kings and queens, treated like royalty. But no... God didn't make the story easy cuz He wanted us to see that life ain't easy, but something good can still come out of it.

Some time later they walked far from home doing the best they could with what they had. They weren't ready for no trouble. But you don't need a God when you just got peace. You need a God for when things get hard.

Afterwhile Mary, a little girl and Joseph her old man tried to get entry into this inn. The owner of the inn could see that Mary was pregnant and they had nothing with them. But he shut the door in their faces, when they were standing in the dark with nowhere to go, just asking for help. He couldn't find no room? None? Shoot, it's cold outside. They just needed a chance to make it through the night without worrying. One night. But the man in charge denied them.

He didn't have to take the walk for them, he didn't have to bear their burden, he didn't need to know their secret. He just needed to let them in. Funny how there's always someone in charge of whether you get into the "inn".

Mary wasn't so lucky that night.

Left out in the dark they went to the barn.

Jesus. With a donkey. Laid where they poured food for the pigs, wrapped in milk rags found in a pile somewhere. Talk about humble beginnings.

Still Mary said to herself, "God told me I'm blessed."

God sent a star up in the sky to let the world know Jesus was born and it got the attention of some wise men that told King Herod about it.

“Where is the baby that’s been promised to us?” they said. “Where is the savior?”
They asked him.

When King Herod heard about the baby Jesus he was so afraid he made a plan to take Jesus’ life. A baby. But somehow Herod feared Jesus like He was already a grown man and a threat.

That sounds familiar. It’s like what happened to Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy who was playing with a toy gun on the playground. The police killed him before they even getting out of their car. Yea, it turns out stuff like that’s been happening for a long time.

The *Wisemen*, on the other hand, came bearing gifts.

They got word from an angel not to go back to Herod so they went a different way. When Herod didn’t hear back he got so scared he made up an even worse plan:

He told his soldiers:

“Kill all the little boys 2 and under. Maybe one of them will be Jesus.”

Herod killed an entire generation of people for the fear of one. I've heard of that before too.

Jesus was born to set people free. Only a person who makes their power oppressing people would be afraid of someone who came to set people free.

Still, Mary whispered to herself "God told me I'm blessed."

Mary and Joseph ran to Egypt and finally settled in Nazareth where Jesus got to grow up.

Then Jesus started to do His thing. You know, preaching and thangs.

And don't you know the first people to turn on Him was His family. His own brothers and sisters didn't believe Him. Told Him He was nothing but a carpenter. That's all He was and that's all He's ever gonna be. So Jesus had to take His show on the road to go find somebody to listen to Him.

One day there was a wedding and everybody ran out of wine. Wasn't no big deal, no sick child, dead parent or nothing, folks just ran of wine. Mary, loving mother that she was, went right up to Jesus and told Him to fix it. She knew He didn't have enough money as a carpenter but she also knew that Jesus was something special. Mary looked them disciples in the face and said,

“You betta do **whatever** my baby tell you to do.” Mary knew who the real Jesus was. That He was the Chosen One, the blessing from God. Even Jesus asked, ‘why bother’? He said His time hadn’t come yet. But Mary pushed Him anyway. You don’t always have to wait until there’s a problem before you start making things happen. Mama bird saw that it was time for her baby to show up and show out. That miracle put Jesus on the map. Listen to mama, she always knows!

Mary drank that wine and said, “Yes Lord, I know I’m blessed!”

But of course, no matter how many miracles Jesus did, people didn’t believe what was right in front of their faces. They ain’t wanna hear that they weren’t livin’ right. People just walking ‘round loving sin and stank. Shoot, they were so jealous they wanted to kill Jesus instead. Kill Jesus. The Son of God.

Every day they kept thinking of a plan to kill Jesus. Get rid of Him, shame Him, shut Him up, and outsmart Him. Everyday they lied on Him, tried to trip Him up and get Him in trouble. They tried to stone Jesus, even push the man off a cliff.

Jesus prayed to God to pass Him by, to have mercy like He’s had mercy on everybody else, but God didn’t change His mind.

They bribed Judas to betray Him. They tied Jesus up and asked Him to admit He was just a man. And Jesus didn’t say nothing. Because He ain no liar. Barabbas, a

murderer, was picked over Jesus who came so that we may have life and have it more abundantly.

They whipped Jesus, beat Him, humiliated Him, and hung Him up by His hands.

And there was Mary. Watching her Son, guts hanging out, choking on His own blood, dying. Her boy. Jesus. The child she had when she was a little girl because she was blessed. Dying, right before her eyes. Mary laid weeping for her baby boy, naked and ruined for all to see.

“GOD! WHY?! YOU TOLD ME I WAS BLESSED! YOU TOLD ME I HAD FAVOR!
WHY **MY** SON? WHY, GOD, WHY?!”

And Christ died.

They wrapped Him up, put Him in a tomb and left Him there. Finally, they thought, we outsmarted Jesus.

Well, they were celebrating on Friday, partying on Saturday, but on Sunday something happened. Mary came to the tomb looking for Jesus and couldn't find Him.

An angel came to her and said,

WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT
HERE!

And before Mary could worry there was Jesus. The Son of God. Alive and
standing in glory and majesty.

Mary couldn't touch Him, Jesus still had work to do, but Mary got to her see her
baby one more time after she thought it was all over. Mary got see her boy stand
in glory, risen again stronger than ever before.

Through her tears, Mary looked up at her boy and said, Thank you God, I am
blessed.

And that's how I know Mary was a black woman.

(I) Moved to New Jersey with a cousin. Attended a community college, stayed there for two years, working at literacy center for adults. (I came) back to Lexington for a short period. (Then I) attended national business college in Roanoke. (I) Graduated in 1975.

Racism stands out. Now, I don't let that bother me. That still goes on around here. But that doesn't bother me now. Job opportunities. Being turned down for jobs that I know I would qualify for. 'Over qualified, wow'.

I like to be creative and decorate...at home. This summer, I saw this on one of the home shows, I took the doors off my closet and made a space. So I thought about putting a small cabinet and...I do a little at a time. Working two jobs I don't do a lot. I enjoy my grandson who comes to visit every other week. I like to do little crafts with him. I'm geared toward children. I love to see their development and growth. When I first started working with kids I didn't realize they all develop at a different level. When I first started...But when you see that light bulb click on (shoo) what a joy. **What a joy.** When kids learn how to read, you should see them light up like a light. It is a joy.

It's not always easy when you see injustices occur and you know that they're injustices.

I'm sick

What am I in for?...No. I'm not fine. I'm sick. I know it. I know I am. And I'm not leaving until they fix me. The doctors are trying to tell me otherwise, but I know I have a problem...No...no. It's not that simple...No I don't know *what's* wrong I just know something IS wrong. I know it. I'm not crazy. I went to college. In the big city too. I've got sense...I majored in... Business Administration. That's it. Business Administration.

I didn't know I had been sick this whole time. I just found out when I came back home.

See, I was walking down the street when a policeman appeared and shot an unarmed man coming out of the gas station. Right in the head. Blew his brains all over the window. He was stealing beer, but was too drunk to find his way out of the store. Doesn't matter now. He's dead...he put his hands up in the air, case in each hand and swayed back and forth. The cop just shot him. Broad daylight. At 11:23am.

I was home on break when that scene stopped me. Now I'm a major in Business Administration you understand? So I'm sure I know what I'm talking about when I say I did not think it was the cop's business to administer that kind of force. I couldn't yell at him, he just shot a black person, I didn't want to be next...so I looked around for help, for witnesses, maybe even some white people. Surely someone must have seen, must have HEARD what just happened?...But No.

Everybody just kept walking. Like there wasn't a dead guy lying 200ft away with half his head on the window and the other half flowing down the drain in the sidewalk. Right there. I saw him. At least I thought I saw him. But everybody just kept walking! I didn't understand. It can't be me, right? So it must be them. What was going on here? What's wrong with these people, you know? Any normal living breathing person could see...But then it hit me: maybe they're sick. You know, like their stuff just isn't working right. That's why they didn't help. So I started looking for signs of their illness to get a better idea of this problem in order to administer a solution.

I looked at a group of people and concluded they must have had a neck injury because they wouldn't turn their heads and look. All their heads hung down at strange angles and either fell into a newspaper, magazine, cell phone, iPad, even their fingernails. For whatever reason those people couldn't bring themselves to look at that man. And you can't help a problem if you don't acknowledge it.

Then I heard something.

I heard some people clear their throat, cough and cover their mouths...but they didn't say anything. No words came from them as they kept walking...they must have had a soar throat, I thought, maybe bronchitis or even strep. Maybe they even had walking pneumonia. There's no other reason for why they wouldn't speak up. That must have been it.

I saw some people by the way, sitting on a bench. Window shopping. I stopped and stared, even started to hope because these people weren't like everyone else, they weren't walking away. They were pretty close to the dead man, they would have heard a shot. They were even white! They could have said something and the cop would listen. They could have stood up to him! That was it, stand. How could I expect those people on the bench to walk if they weren't even standing? Sitting during an emergency could be a sign of a number of issues: lower back problems, swollen feet, slipped disk, who knows? I just knew they wouldn't do anything either.

It was them right? Not me. But nobody else was doing what I was doing.

So I got to thinking.

Maybe earlier, this whole crowd of strangers came together and decided to go blind that day. But that would be crazy. That wouldn't happen in a million years, right?! So I had to have been the one who was sick.

It must have been me. Standing still when everything else was moving past me. I know it must have only been a few minutes, just a handful. But it was enough for me to realize that something was very wrong. So I made an appointment with my doctor.

I have a psychological problem. No! Listen! I'm telling the truth! That's what they told me. I'm hallucinating, hallucinating, hallucinating! That's it! My mind is all

messed up. Because I keep seeing and hearing things that aren't there. My eyes and ears must have been broken this whole time and I didn't know it. I'm still trying to wrap my head around this newfound knowledge that I have lost my ability to perceive reality. I can't even tell you what's real anymore because there's too much stuff in the way. Stuff that's not there.

I thought I had it figured out, see?

I thought it would only happen once, but now everywhere I look I see someone else getting killed. And when I ask someone that doesn't look like me why, they say they don't know what I'm talking about, they don't see anything.

No, I'm not making this up! That's what the doctors say too!

The doctors told me 'I have the proclivity to create images in my mind for my own fascination that are not based on any natural evidence'...basically...I'm making it all up. They told me that I just imagine my problems. That I make up my issues, and think myself down. They told me that my poor thoughts are what keep me thinking like a victim. That there's nothing and no one coming after me too, coming to take my life. That it's all in my head. They won't say I'm "crazy", but I see it their eyes. And when I asked 'why would I want to keep seeing these dead people', they told me not to worry because there was never anyone there to begin with.

I'm hallucinating, don't you get it?! I'm seeing people die... killed by the police, all day, on television, in my dreams. Age and gender don't matter either. They just have to look like me. It's like they got a bulls eye on us. Like we've been marked. That's what I've been telling Ray's son! He's marked and they're coming for him. He won't make it, so he should hide in here with me! Sometimes I tell him what I see; he asks me all the time. He tells me I'm not crazy, tries to make me feel better, says my visions are real, but I know otherwise...have you seen him? He hasn't been here in a while... I'll see him...No! I'm not leaving till I get some help! Yes I know this is an abortion clinic, but I have nowhere else to go!... Yes, yes... I'll quiet down. (closes eyes and hums "We shall not be moved")

I think sometimes being taken seriously is an obstacle. I don't think people realize the magnitude of what I do in my field or respect that. Microaggressions are very real. So when people say "oh you did such a great job on that presentation, you were so articulate. Chuckles. 'Oh, what did you think?' I kinda do have 2 and half degrees. Often times they'll say it and not mean it, but would you say that to someone else? What were you expecting from me? That's often harsh. My grandmother told me when I was younger that I was always going to work twice as hard to be respected and to prove myself. That I would have to dress a certain way. Be the first one there and the last one to leave. I'm certainly not the first one there, but there are often times when I am there at night or on weekends. So I think that those are some of the obstacles.

I know that when I walk into the room, the first thing they see is a black woman. So I think those are hard. Microaggressions, inequities that you see.

I hate music videos, I hate the songs. I think that's a part of the problem. We have this very warped sense of love and respect and the image of what black women should be now.

I value our history. I don't know if I necessarily value what we have become. But I value who we are. When I see programs on television like *Real Housewives* and the way that they portray us, that's hard for me. We were queens. We *are* queens. And somewhere along the way we lost it. I think we gained it at some point. We gained a level of dignity and respect, but somewhere along the way, and I don't

know where it happened, it's turned back around for us. So I value who we were,
not necessarily now.

Suffering is Sexy

When I walk into a room I already know how I'm supposed to perform. I need to have a deep, steady voice and a quiet, solid demeanor. By entering the room this way I know I can grab and retain some respect from my audience. Why? Because it looks like I've garnered up a lifetime of experiences. That I've overcome many obstacles to be in my present position and therefore have wonderful stories to contribute.

When I walk into the room there is an assumption that I have had to deal with horrible injustices my entire life and have made a multitude of sacrifices to get to where I am.

All of this is true, of course, but I take issue with this common belief.

It upsets me, to say the least, that there is a wide expectation, a standard that all black women are required to meet in order to be taken seriously.

Sadly, the first thing that is assumed of me when seen on the street is not that I am educated or polite, or anything else.

What I, as a black woman am expected to have is an accumulation of suffering. Those that claim not to be racist and openly belittle us instead show black women respect by acknowledging how much we suffer to do anything. After all, we are

expected to slave away in our homes, hustle to make ends meet, and fight in the daily grind.

If not pity we receive a perceived-to-be sincere form of compassion: a pat on the shoulder, from those who see the desperation of our situation but lack the impulse to do anything to help lighten our load. Because if someone started to assist the black woman she wouldn't **have** to suffer, but then, she would no longer have anything to respect now would she?

A strong black woman is a suffering black woman. Those that play the role of single mothers are applauded and romanticized. There is even a beloved fable that says the more you take away from a black woman, her family, her wages, her security, and her identity, the stronger she becomes.

What I mean to say is “People justify not only doing nothing for the black woman, they also deliberately add to her misery because they think struggling to survive builds character.” This struggling black woman is still expected to bring in the street sense to round out the group of intellectuals with whom she works. Her CV should show she knows of every urban scene in the country, comprehends and fluently speaks Ebonics, while still being able to gracefully place her salad fork in its proper position during dinner meetings.

The black woman is expected to suffer. And by expecting her to suffer assailants justify their own atrocities they play out against her. Those that believe black

woman suffer because they are treated with less respect enjoy disrespecting black women in order to help them ascend into the ultimate being of suffering. Men who know enough about black women and sexual harassment gladly harass the black woman as a favor. Police officers often prey upon black women to give these invisible people the attention they so rightfully reserve. All of these experiences can be added to the heavy repertoire of stories the black woman can share with her colleagues. Through these traumatic incidences she earns her two cents to throw into the pot. The black woman now has a diverse and valued perspective of life.

Because clearly none of her creative ideas and intellectual aspirations are interesting enough.

What I mean to say is “people play out the suffering they want black women to face. They expect black women suffer and then go out of their way to make sure that they do.” It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Be the change you want to see right?

There’s no reason for white guilt to rise if you believe that black women are **supposed** to be treated poorly. You know enough about us to know that our lives are hard, so why feel bad about making sure our lives remain consistent? Saying, “that’s just how life is” takes the responsibility away from the individual and so allows that individual to sleep well at night. You may only do one form of micro

aggression toward a black woman in the work place. What is one form micro aggression multiple times a day going to hurt? Our lives could be much worse. There are homeless people. There are people dying all around the world from starvation and illness. The complaining black woman has no idea how good she has it.

Suffering is the beauty mark lying above the tightly pressed lips that hold back the cries of rage, sorrow, anguish and joy of the average black women.

Suffering is so attractive on a black woman it has even become a prized trope commercially. The Academy, for example, has given Oscar nominations to a handful of black women over the years.

The first was given to Hattie McDowel who played an illiterate servant in *Gone With Wind*. She is best remembered for saying “she don’t know nothing ‘bout birthing no babies.”

Diana Ross was nominated for *Lady Sings the Blues* for playing Billie Holliday, a wonderful jazz singer who suffered from a drug addiction and lost everything.

Cicely Tyson was nominated for *Souther*, a movie of a black family of sharecroppers where the husband is arrested and taken to prison and the son is sent to find him.

Diahann Carroll was nominated for *Claudine*, a movie where she played a single mother with six kids in Harlem. She is unemployed and lying to stay on welfare, worried about marrying the neighborhood garbage man because the social worker would take away her financial aid if she found out.

Whoopi Goldberg was nominated for *The Color Purple*, playing a woman who became pregnant twice by her own father, then was bought to be raped and abused by another man for over 15 years.

Angela Bassett was nominated in *What's Love Got to Do with It* for playing the physically beaten and abused Tina Turner, who, in one scene, drove herself home from the hospital.

Halle Berry won an Oscar for *Monster's Ball* where she played a single mother who can't afford her car and soon her house while her husband is in jail. Ms. Berry is most remembered for getting drunk and having sex with the cop that oversaw her husband's execution.

Gabourey Sidibe was nominated for *Precious*, a movie where she starred as an obese, illiterate 16 year old who is mentally, physically and sexually abused by her own mother and raped by her father to have two pregnancies in her section 8 housing complex in New York.

The lovely Viola Davis was nominated for the Help as a maid who spends her entire life raising white children after losing her own child.

Quvenzhané Wallis was nominated for an Oscar as a girl left behind after hurricane Katrina who must deal with a dying father, an absent mother and raging social change. The five year old ends the movie with both her parents gone.

Finally we have the wonderful Lupita N'yong'o who won for her role as Patsy in 12 years a slave. The hardest working slave man or woman on the plantation, she was rewarded with rape from her owner and had her flesh slashed away from her body due to the jealousy of the owner's wife. She died in captivity.

I gave you this incomplete list because I want you all to see a pattern.

It is clear that many people have not only acknowledged the suffering of black women and the social and economic disparities that cause the suffering while doing little to change that situation, but also they have bottled up her life and placed it in a box for entertainment.

Note that the movies nominated were women playing biographical roles or struggles in the midst of real disasters. There clearly were black slaves, maids, suffering artists, and abused women. I support movies that show the real

struggles of black women. I just don't appreciate the fetishizing of the black woman's body in pain.

Could one possible reason that little help is given to the suffering black woman be that there are millions of people who get personal and sexual satisfaction out of watching this woman suffer?

It's as if watching a black woman's life is like reading a novel or watching a play. The viewer is so disconnected from her humanity that they view a traumatizing incident as an exciting twist in her story.

Like a little kid trapping a bug in a jar and lighting a match inside, watching the bug run around in circles with no way to escape. That sort of fascination.

That is sick.

But how many of you have celebrated and respected a black woman for her suffering?

Or maybe some of you just want something to watch and cry about to make you feel more aware about the life of the simple black woman. Of course, while you rest easy thinking, "Aw, that's so unfortunate. But that's just how life is for some people."

What is more terrifying than the pleasure viewers take from watching others suffer is that programs and films end with black women still suffering. Black actresses experience a full dramatic arc but end the movie in the same situation as before or worse. Examples being *The Help*, *12 years a slave*, *Beasts of a Southern Wild*, etc.

Black Women are not only expected to suffer for a time, no, we are expected to suffer our entire lives. Suffering is meant to perpetuate itself through generations. From the day black women were brought over as slaves to the present day we have been expected to suffer.

Some even believe that black woman should remain on the bottom and never advance. Black women are expected to stay suspended in this perpetual state of suffering and never move up from a place of survival to a place of living.

But there is something romantic and noble about constantly reaching for something and never achieving it. We read about it in poetry and plays. There are star-crossed lovers, knights, heroes, and princes. Why not add in the tragic story of a woman losing her children to another plantation after they bred her with the strongest male in the field? Or a mother who cleans the blood of her child off the sidewalk after the police had murdered him?

Do you know what it's like to be a black woman, turn on the television and see other black women celebrated for being in bondage? We are applauded for having

immeasurable amounts of strength to endure the worst atrocities of human creation and not die. That's the only purpose for our strength: not dying.

By withstanding everything the world throws at her and not dying, the black woman has fulfilled her only real purpose in life.

But no worries. Now we have shows like *Scandal* on television.

Olivia Pope. A black woman sleeping with the white president, keeping a hidden relationship. She's killed for him, hidden his secrets, cleans up all his dirty work and has no problem giving him a nightcap as well. But Olivia, no matter how hard she works, will never be able to advance from being the president's side chick professionally or personally. I see the trope of a strong, intelligent black woman hidden in the wings doing all of the dirty work for the man in charge.

And the suffering black woman is not only admired in fiction. Why just turn on the news. Black women around the world, well basically here and places in Africa to be honest, cry for their dead or dying children all day long. Either killed by police brutality, terrorism, bombing, or starvation there's always plenty of footage to keep a viewer satisfied.

They say that sex sells. If that's the case, then one must conclude that suffering is sexy.

Being an actress I find this information to be very disheartening. I shouldn't have to spend my life training to play the same character in different settings. You can't take a class on suffering you just live it. I have an imagination that would be stifled if I only spent my screen time crying or on my knees. My neck would soon be tired of rolling, my fingers sore from snapping and my tongue too numb to suck my teeth. I'm certain God didn't give me a plethora of emotions just to cry on tv.

Hearing this I challenge you: the next time you turn on the television, look for the suffering trope. See, really see the suffering black woman, through the romanticized perspective. Look down on her and feel for her perpetual sorrow and pain. Look down on her....

Then ask yourself: How does it feel to be up here?

It's hurtful when you're taught to be truthful, and, especially in your younger years, you just don't find that anymore. I didn't. Me being honest and truthful I had people to walk over me, make fun of me, everything except physically abuse me. They tried to mentally abuse me and those kind of things hurt. As an adult, and I've grown spiritually, I learned that it's not me. It's not me. Some of those were hurting. Especially when adults would say mean things to me. But it doesn't bother me anymore. You're gonna learn to say no, you're not going to talk to me that way. One day you'll wake up and it's going to be there. I still have a ways to go. But I'm not that same person, a yes person anymore. I don't let people talk (down) to me. (I say:) You're not going to talk to me in that tone of voice, I'm an adult. If you need to say something to me you need to come and say it. I've got to that point. It's just something that happened. You can say it in a nice way. No, you're not going to speak to me in that tone of voice. Excuse me, you're not talking to me are you? I'm sure you're not talking to me. You gain a lot more respect. I did.

Sometimes students come into my office and call me by first name. It's like wow. You're very familiar with a person in authority. And I know I may be the first person in authority who looks like me, that you've ever had to deal with but, authority is authority, I have a title. Sometimes that's challenging. And you never know whether that's an issue of race or if that's just an issue of where they've been. I believe in respect in position.

I have standards and expectations and I think that young women should have standards and expectations too. It doesn't matter where you come from. It may mean that you have to work a little harder to get there. And you have to find resources to help you get there. If you grow up in the projects, if you come from a single parent household, if you were raised by your grandparents find somebody to help you get to where you wanna be, to follow your dreams and achieve your goals.

Somebody

No! Nuh uh. No more! Not today! Not me! No, I'm not sorry. It's my time. I don't have to take this! I am somebody! Yea, that's what I said fool. I am somebody! And somebody ain't gon' take this no more!

Somebody used to take whatever you gave her and not speak up. Let you treat her any kind of way. Somebody been dealing with ya'll for too long. Taking your crap and not saying nothin' back. No!

Somebody tired of this. You say "don't worry about it, somebody will get that. Leave that, somebody will clean that up. Clock out, somebody will finish that. Just turn it in, somebody will fix that. Somebody will edit that. Somebody will send that. Somebody will get us more of that!

Well Somebody ain't cleaning, fixing, sweeping, filing, faxing, writing and taking care of your kids no more! Somebody's foot is down and she is walking out. Somebody got dreams to fight for, got a future ahead of her and knows she ain't gon have it unless she get up out of here.

Somebody is tired of being mad at you. Tired of worrying about what ya'll gon do, what you gon say, when she gon have her last day up in here. Somebody is tired of looking behind her back, taking up all the slack while ya'll get all the credit.

Somebody don't care about the petty stuff you make up no more. Somebody don't care about what who-said-to-who and why who don't like Somebody.

Somebody **else** can waste they time with your foolishness, But **this** Somebody got to go.

You heard right. Somebody not gon make it in tomorrow. Somebody is Done. Finished. Checked out. Gone.

Somebody not gon stay up late worrying about what's next. Somebody not gon be afraid of the future and ain holding on to the past neither.

You know how many hours Somebody wasted tryin' to fight little fights with little people over little problems? Somebody don't care what he and she said, let em talk all day, Somebody not listening anyway.

See Somebody got some wheres to go and some things to do. Somebody been taking it for a time, but please know that Somebody was always on the way out. Somebody been planning for the day when Somebody could stand up and say "Goodbye! Goodbye ya'll!

Hahahaha! Feels good to be going. Somebody ain got no regrets about moving on and moving up, cuz Somebody been living too low up till now. Somebody didn't have a good beginning but she gon' have a great middle and end hallelujah! Let freedom ring Jesus she's outta here!

Yes sir! Take a good look at Somebody's face cuz all you gon see next is her back when she walk up outta here.

Where'd all this come from?

Well, once upon a time Somebody couldn't sleep because Somebody was worried about the crappy present and the unknown future. With all that free time Somebody did some reflection and later decided that this is not the end of the line for her. See, Somebody realized that Somebody was worrying about small things and small people with small minds. Well, Somebody couldn't think small long, cuz Somebody's ideas are too big. Therefore, Somebody decided to move on that night and went to sleep until 12:45pm the next day.

(Sigh.) It turns out that Somebody was not given the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.

See Somebody realized Somebody is above all this. Arguing ain gon change nothing. It ain Somebody's job to change your mind, that's up to you. Somebody's gotta better stuff to do anyway. Somebody is looking above to greener pastures and mounting up on eagles' wings.

Somebody used to like rolling in the mud with you, but now Somebody is starting over clean and getting in the race. Life won't be easy, but Somebody is more than ready to fight the heavy weight champ.

Somebody been through too much to stop here.

Goodbye ya'll! You thought you had her, but you were wrong all along. Out of her way haters, Somebody is coming through!

Oh and by the way, Somebody's not going by Somebody anymore. Somebody was given a real name. Say goodbye to Somebody forever.

Hello world my name is Anthonia Adams.