

## ***Sound in the Silence: The Legacy of the Black Panthers***



Teaching Artist Carlos Aguirre starts his writing workshop with 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Students from Envision Academy in Oakland, Ca. on the doorsteps of the Alameda County Courthouse, the location where rallies were held almost 50 years ago to demand the acquittal of Huey P. Newton.

*Sound in the Silence: The Legacy of the Black Panthers* project is the pilot program of *Sound in the Silence USA*, an intercultural, interdisciplinary remembrance project, that uses location-based performance workshops to transfer the meanings and lessons of history through the arts.

This edition was developed and directed by John Warren and Dan Wolf with teaching artists Carlos 'Infinite' Aguirre and Marlon 'UnLearn' Richardson.

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**HISTORY THROUGH ART**



### ***Sound in the Silence: The Legacy of the Black Panthers***

This project – a collaboration between the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade United States History class at Envision Academy of Arts and Technology in Oakland, Ca., Hip Hop music and theater collective Felonious, and Sound in the Silence USA – is the result of three months of historical study and creative activities. Throughout February and March 2018, the students learned about the Jim Crow South, the Civil Rights Movement, and the rise of Black Nationalism. In April 2018, they took a deep dive into the work of the Black Panthers and Black Lives Matter, including watching the documentary *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* and an assembly with Black Panther Erica Huggins and community organizer Melissa Crosby. In late-April 2018 artists from Felonious spent a week working with the entire 11th grade to develop spoken-word pieces about current social issues, inspired by the legacy of the Black Panthers. All students performed their pieces in class, and a select few were chosen to perform at The Flight Deck on May 2<sup>nd</sup> in Oakland, Ca. in front of a sold-out house. These students placed themselves within the continuum of history and created original poetry meant to inspire us all toward social justice.

### ***Sound in the Silence: The Methodology***

*Sound in the Silence* is the experience of history through art and expression. It is a living, breathing, organically evolving, creative process designed to inspire young people to understand their history and to create art from the thoughts, ideas, and connections that emerge. It is an experiential education project grounded in the methodology of New Forms of Remembrance - a practice that claims that we must use provocative, charged locations to inspire our work in order to give the next generation a chance to understand history and their place in it.

The project is broken down into three distinct phases - *Education, Experience, and Expression*. We study historical movements and events to develop a set of facts and stories that capture our curiosity. We visit historical locations to evoke our emotions, so we may better understand the nuances and complexities of the subject matters we are studying. We work with artists on-location and in the studio to help the participants express themselves through various performance modalities.

By studying, visiting, and creating art together on site at locations where historical events fundamentally prompt reflection on our collective future, the project aspires to establish the importance of creative expression, knowledge of self and true history, cross-cultural/generational connection, motivate the pursuit of justice, and cultivate empathy among participants.

*Sound in the Silence* was founded by MOTTE (Hamburg) and European Network of Remembrance Solidarity (Warsaw) under the direction of Jens Huckeriede. Past editions of the project include Neuengamme (Germany), Borne Solinowo (Poland), Gdansk/Stutthof (Poland), Auschwitz/Zilina (Poland/Slovakia), Ravensbrück (Germany), and Warsaw (Poland).

***Essential Question: How does the legacy of the Black Panthers connect to your own struggle for justice today?***



The students work with Teaching Artist Carlos Aguirre on the inspiration for their verses. They start with the prompt *“Look at the courthouse. What do you see? What does this place represent?”*



The students are asked to *“turn around and look at Lake Merritt. How does this area differ from your home neighborhood?”*



*“Look across at the big apartment building. Imagine who might live in the top penthouse apartment right now. What do you assume about them and their experiences?”*



*“What if we told you that Huey P. Newton lived in that penthouse later in his life. How do you think he felt looking down at the courthouse that played a role in his incarceration?”*



*“Now imagine a protest here in support of YOUR “Three Point Program”. Who is here? What do they look like? What are they wearing? What are they doing? What else do you see? What do you hear?”*



*“Imagine giving a speech to these protesters. What do you say to them? What tactics do you ask them to use in the days following this protest?”*



Teaching Artist Marlon Richardson works with students on chants and hooks. He speaks with them about the human voice being melodic and percussive, and how the process of rhyme and repetition connects us to our ancestors.



The students write chants from their own Three Point Program, adding rhythm, rhyme, and repetition to get them performance ready.



Community organizer Melissa Crosby and former-Black Panther Erica Huggins speak with students at Envision Academy.



Teaching artists Marlon Richardson and Carlos Aguirre conduct in-class writing workshops where the task is to use the free writes and brainstormed collected on-site at the Alameda Court House to create rap, poetry, or spoken word verses and choruses.

## Photos from the final presentation at The Flight Deck on May 2, 2018



The full company backstage before the performance.



Teacher John Warren from Envision Academy speaks to the crowd.



Marlon 'UnLearn' Richardson and Carlos 'Infinite' Aguirre ignite the crowd.



Activist Melissa Crosby puts it all in context for the family.



The young Fred Hampton.



"Uplift and unlearn!"



The crew and fam.



Curtain call.

## Final Student Writing

Veronica Canas

They took justice from my people  
They took freedom from my people  
They took peace from my people  
They are saying we are equal  
They took justice from my people  
They took freedom from my people  
They took peace from my people  
But we fight against the evil  
It started with columbus the first gentrifier  
anyone who claims he's a hero is a liar  
we all know the truth it's required  
in order to put out a fire  
they stole our land, communities were broken  
now we demand justice, best be awoken  
our people can't be displaced  
and we're losing our race  
less into college, more into jail  
less money into scholarships more money into bail  
innocent people behind bars  
it seems every single inmate is one of ours  
at home shedding tears is our mothers  
who just came here  
in hopes of her children having a career  
Those innocent people could of been the next leaders  
They're scared of  
Rather murder us  
Border us  
We have order STOP  
cause we don't want to be killed like lil Bobby  
We don't want to be another bleeding body  
They justice from my people  
They took freedom from my people  
They took peace from my people  
They are saying we are equal  
They took justice from my people  
They took freedom from my people  
They took peace from my people  
But we fight against the evil

We hustle to beat the struggle  
We hustle to beat the struggle  
We hustle to beat the struggle  
We overcome it together

We hustle to beat the struggle  
We hustle to beat the struggle  
We hustle to beat the struggle  
We hustle for living better

We hustle to beat the struggle of poverty  
My people need mules 40 acres of property  
Corruption was never voted into our democracy  
Deliberate and slow is disguise for hypocrisy

...Fact of the matter they tryna wipe us out  
Cops kill the innocent and get away without a doubt  
Cameras out they don't give a fuck who sees it  
Like the FBI stopping Hampton from breathing

History repeating defeating a law  
They created and downgraded for anyone who saw  
Hampton

laying in his home wit holes that DECORATE  
The unity of the people separated wit a BUNCH OF HATE

Snakes infiltrate the Panthers ask O Neil  
FBI informant the reason FOR the Hampton kill

RESPONSIBLE for the raid  
juss to get paid  
His hustle juss to beat the struggle got a leader slayed

His HUSTLE  
to beat the STRUGGLE was it worth it  
Tried to rap the revolution up like a turban

We still had hope... we told em free Huey  
We knew the whole time that his case was straight foey

So they let em go.. And we continue to hustle  
Issa still a struggle of brutality my people suffer casualties intimidation of a black male lead to  
tragedy

It wasn't long ago that BLACK LIVES MATTER  
Got cops indicted justice onna platter  
But will they ever eat it n digest  
Until they feel the struggle our hustle will never rest  
Hustle to beat the struggle like Huey n BOBBY  
Capitalism designed juss to rob me  
Pig wanna STOP ME badge got him cocky  
Black male dead meat shots hit like Rocky

I fight the world  
I fight you  
I fight myself

In the depth of HELL my mind dwells  
Hate when my eyes water, I feel them well  
All I ask is that YOU  
Water me watch me grow  
Pick me up when I fall  
Fill me up when I'm empty  
But instead you watch the fire grow

I ask is it too late to my pride seems  
I'm lookin' for answers no one can provide  
I study the blood in the seams of my jeans  
I wonder if this what King meant by  
    "I have a dream"

I fight the world  
I fight you  
I fight myself

Trying to find a blank space  
To write a righter story  
Paint a painless picture

But everywhere I look there's a spotted splash of red  
That spells bloody Revolution  
The kind that help find the so called better solution  
The BALLOT or the BULLET  
Being brave bathin' in blood  
    Or  
Boasting blacken bigotry bullshit  
Brings me to the brink of belligerence

I'm done fighting  
The  
World  
You  
myself

You say the youth ain't ready  
You claim that we don't know  
You think we could be silenced  
But that was ages ago

There's injustices committed  
Day and night  
There's obstacles faced daily  
Left and right

You say we ain't mature  
But this isn't true  
You just use this as a shield  
Which protects you

You refuse to give us power  
but you forget we're lanterns  
Lighting up our paths  
Like the black panthers

They all faced threats  
And were asked to retreat  
But we know this wouldn't happen  
We refused to be beat

You say the youth ain't ready  
You claim that we don't know  
You think we could be silenced  
But that was ages ago

We fight daily against these chains  
Trying to hold us down  
We swim daily against the current  
And we refuse to drown

Because we come from fighting  
That's just where we're from  
We are the best weapons  
United a bomb

We challenge our oppressors  
With courage and pride

We challenge the system  
Which wants us to hide

The system which expects us  
To work since sixteen  
But refuse to call us adults  
And ignores our needs

The youth will continue fighting  
With all our passion  
Until we get what we want  
Political action

My time

Black and white is all we've ever known  
Newspaper articles and those names on your phone  
Its funny how we associate our color with meaning  
Like black is bad and white has a superior feeling

We have white politicians and black males  
We have too many deaths of our innocent beautiful black brothers  
Our systems have failed

Too many times we are living on repeat  
Bang Bang  
We're losing pieces of our own true heartbeats  
Now I know this really seems like the purge  
But it seems to me like something new is trying to emerge  
Blood is dripping along the cracks that we've been beaten on  
But some of those people don't care, those white people, they just keep going on

Looking through a window and I see the shadows of my ancestors chanting for freedom..but  
shades of oppression still haunt me  
People throwing bricks at me, beating me until I become nothing. Tearing me up like shredded  
paper.  
Hearing my people say "it's better to die of infamy than to live a life of obscurity"  
I try to pull myself out of what I want to be a fictitious reality  
Not wanting to die  
Not wanting to be the next hashtag  
Is my time now?

On a daily basis I get feed the wrong information that blinds my twenty twenty vision.  
Hiding the truth from me  
I try to stay peaceful, self centered and not lash out  
I write to myself to keep it together  
I write rhymes like..  
"Ima about to send you to the infirmary  
I know you heard of me, I've been verbally on a murder spree  
My verses crafted perfectly  
You for certainly not merkin me..."  
This helps me remember that I can fight people verbally and not physically  
Is my time now?

I know a friend that is black but extremely light skinned and she said this to me before  
I find myself questioning my identity in my everyday life  
Not knowing if it's on for me to attend the black student union  
Not knowing if it's okay to share my knowledge on the black panther party  
Not knowing if it's okay for me to say "Black Lives Matter" because I'm not dark enough, not  
black enough, not enough.

My skin could be white as paper but my roots could be as dark as the pens we use to write on  
but you can't see that.  
Is my time now?

More and more I must learn to not think in terms of race or color or language or religion or  
political boundaries but in terms of humanity.  
Knowing that it's okay for me to be afraid of answers but I can't avoid them.  
Staying strong when people attempt to knock me down  
Not letting people make me question myself  
Knowing that I can't let my value decrease based on someone else's inability to see my worth.  
Is my time now?

I want to know the color of my freedom  
I want to be forever free  
Today I choose life, not to deny my humanity, but to embrace it  
I want to be a revolution, in a constant state of evolution....  
Because my time, is now.

[Verse]

I was just a youngin on my two little feet w/ a pocket full of dimes  
I had a lot of money on my mind , Im just tryna stack up  
Come up with the fam support my friends  
But it's getting kinda hard \\ all this pain in my head \\ it's getting kinda heavy  
So lemme tell you the thoughts of a young asian kid who ain't ever really fit in  
Growing up I aint really care how my peers looked  
So what we had different skin tones  
That don't make us any less than human  
You ain't gotta divide us into different zones  
We ain't tryna live inna world  
Full of these damn clones  
We all got 1 goal and it is to succeed  
We live in a society full of white supremacists tryna to divide  
Who the hell are you to judge a person by the color of their skin?  
Thanks to Rosa Parks for inspiring many movements  
Which lead to many brave souls standing up  
For our rights and freedom  
We don't act upon violence , we're just praying for peace  
MLK didn't go to jail for nothing, he ain't do it for the fame  
He did it for the community , for the all the black lives lost thru the marches of unity  
He did it so in the future everyone could have more opportunities

[Chorus]

Have you ever seen yo life flash before yo eyes?  
Have you ever been told nothing but lies?  
So you gotta watch out  
for those pair of eyes  
They're always hidden in disguise

[Verse]

All these black lives droppin left to right  
It's a damn shame  
All these cops abusing their power  
Creatin a world full of pain  
Which is where we had enough  
Kids losing their life just cause they weren't raised by the rich  
If only if our country was able to uphold  
The ten point program  
Then all these bodies wouldn't be droppin  
And we would still have our loved ones today

R.I.P to Trayvon

I bet if he didn't have brown skin

He wouldn't have been labeled as someone suspicious

So many lives lost its like we're losing our blessings

It's sad to hear all these kids go , man it's depressing

[Chorus]

Have you ever seen yo life flash before yo eyes?

Have you ever been told nothing but lies?

So you gotta watch out

for those pair of eyes

They're always hidden in disguise

**Jany Del Angel**

picture this: you're a newborn.... It all starts off with a heartbeat.... (heartbeat sound for 5 seconds).

When your eyes open up you can't see color. It's only at 5 months old that your vision understands and adapts to depthness. So why can't your heart do the same at age 16, 32, or 64? What's all the bullshit for? Love more.

Isn't color what you want and need in order to understand the world and people surrounding you?

Well the actions of some showed otherwise... It's the hate that showed otherwise. When we boarded interstate buses to test segregation laws and buses got bombed, passengers were beat and arrested. That's what showed otherwise. It's the same hate that caused boycotts, sit-ins, and walkouts.

And at that point I realized no laws can change us, only we can change us.

But our hearts can flourish just like like the hearts of the black panthers did. They never failed to help and fight for the rights of their communities. They fed kids at every hour no matter background, age, or color. They went above and beyond when the system fell low. Yet we still live in an era where black is synonymous to lesser.

Let's end the war. Let's be the 5 month old baby and have the tenacity and joy to grow cohesively. Babies are seen as powerless which is crazy because so young they have that eager to grow and learn. They don't speak the same language yet they STILL manage to find a way to communicate with and to their elders.

If a baby who can't speak can communicate, who's to say people who speak the same language can't? America the brave still fears what it doesn't understand, but let's remember with love you progress. There's less room to get depressed, and more room to decompress. Let's end the war because no laws can change us, only we can change us.



***"The moniker "Felonious" suggests a criminally-minded jazz genius, which isn't that far off the truth." – Eric K. Arnold***

Since the beginning *Felonious* has been a force in the Bay Area theater and music scene – often creating series, projects and productions that merge the two mediums. From the six-piece live Hip-Hop band to award winning theater productions, this collective of rappers, actors, beat boxers, musicians, dancers, and writers are "known to turn Hip Hop shows into ass-shaking Musical Theater".

Our mission has been to utilize the history and tradition of Hip Hop and its power as the most accessible and prominent mode of activism and communication for young people and people of color. Hip Hop music and theater are critical contemporary methods for sharing history, news, and information and for reflecting the lives of people who are often marginalized. By nature, and because we are a multi-cultural collective, our work fosters expression that is deeply reflective of the communities we serve. Felonious is committed to pushing the culture and elements of Hip Hop through the development of live Hip Hop theatre, music, performance, and training.

Felonious was born out of a need to create a voice for our generation and to encourage the next generations to do the same. We are a critical contemporary method for sharing history, news and information and for reflecting the lives of people who are often marginalized. We believe that Hip Hop permeates other performance elements and can be brought together to create a unique hybrid of work and training that goes far beyond the sum of its parts. Felonious is committed to creating inspirational work with a truly independent spirit, fusing the power and traditions of theater, music, dance, education, and outreach.

For more information contact Dan Wolf at [feloniouslive@gmail.com](mailto:feloniouslive@gmail.com)

Find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter **@felonioushiphop**