

Sound in the Silence: The Legacy of the Black Panthers



Teaching Artist Carlos Aguirre starts his writing workshop with 11th 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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Sound in the Silence: The Legacy of the Black Panthers

This project – a collaboration between the 11th 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 2nd 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 brainstormers 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

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