CAN YOU SEE THEM?

GABRIELLANEVERAZMICHELLECUSSEAUTAN
ISHAANDERSONPEARLIEGOLDENNATALASHAMC
KENNAAXURAROSSERSHELLEYFREYTARIKAWIL
SONAIVANANASTANLEYJONESELEANORBUMPUR
SANDRABLANDREKIABOYDISHANTEDAVISA
LBERTASPRUILLMARGARETMITCHELLFRANKI
EPERKINSKAYLAMOOREMIRIAMCAREYKYAML
IVINGSTONALEXIACHRISTIANMEAGANHOCKA
DAYMYAHALLTYISHAMILLERSHEREESEFRANC
ISYVETTESMITHKENDRAJAMESBETTIEJONES
MARQUESHAMCMILLANINDIAKAGERREDELJO
NEMONIQUEJENEEDECKARDJANISAFONVI
LLEYVETTEHENDERSONKORRYNGAINESJESSI
CAWILLIAMSDEREHAARMSTRONGKHARA
ONELARONDASWATTINDIABEATYKISHAMICH
AELSAHLAHRIDGEWAYJANETWILSONDEBOR
HDANNERMICHELLESHIRLEYCHARLEENALYE
SDECYNTHIACLEMENTSATATIANAJEFFERSON
REGISKORCHINSPISAQUETBREONNATAYLOR

CHIME SPECIAL
“Somebody was going to recognize that the police had murdered my daughter in her home.” Fran Garrett, the mother of Michelle Cusseaux

On August 14th, 2014, Michelle Cusseaux was killed in her own home by Phoenix police. Her killers had been called on a mental health pickup order. When she declined their help, an officer forced entry and shot Michelle through the heart within seconds of encountering her.

Her death, like that of many Black women before her, may nary have registered a blip in the national discourse. But her mother, Fran Garrett, refused to accept that her daughter’s fate seemed doubly sealed – she was killed by the state, and hardly anyone would ever know her story, bear witness to the loss of her life, and fight on her behalf. Fran’s decision to march her daughter’s casket to Phoenix City Hall gained national attention and inspired the African American Policy Forum’s #SayHerName campaign.

In much the same way that Fran’s march broke the silence around her daughter’s death, the #SayHerName campaign breaks the national silence around the killing of Black women by the police. The campaign is grounded in the belief that while Black women’s names are not on our tongues, their mothers don’t grieve for them any less, their children don’t miss them any less, and we should not tolerate their killings any more than the killings of their Black brothers.

And while Black people have protested the killing of other Black people since we arrived on American shores in chains over four centuries ago, Michelle’s death became a rallying point to inaugurate #SayHerName in much the same way that Michael Brown’s death was a crucial prelude to the formation of #BlackLivesMatter.

#BlackLivesMatters’ current cultural resonance marks an essential moment. It forces a long-overdue reckoning, shifts anti-racism into the center of American discourse, and serves as a beacon for better days to come. The possibility of this moment makes it all the more important that social movements address the intersectional demands of injustice. And those intersectional demands start with bearing witness.

Historically, Black women, girls, and femmes have not fit the most accessible frames of anti-Black police violence. Consequently, it is difficult to tell stories about their lost lives that people recognize and remember. Their precarity is buried beneath myths, stereotypes, and denial. But the
heartbreaking truth is that Black girls as young as 7 and women as old as 93 have been killed by the police. They’ve been shot, beaten, and tasered to death for driving while Black, having a mental health crisis while Black, being homeless while Black, and sleeping in their own beds while Black. They’ve been killed when they don’t conform to gender stereotypes, and executed when their very existence strikes fear into the hearts of police officers. Many times, they’re killed for simply being while Black.

It is more than likely that you’ll engage with stories, images, and sounds in this Zine that you have not experienced before. You may find them overwhelming, upsetting, and painful. But bearing witness means confronting what’s ugly and uncomfortable. It means seeing the ugliness of beautiful lives lost, and refusing the collective comfort where the loss of that loss happens.

Crucially, #SayHerName has no marquee women. There is no one story that rises above, no family grief that is more important than another’s, and no demand for justice that rings louder than the rest. This equal footing is the glue that holds the campaign together, and entrenches the work of the #SayHerName Mothers Network. Naturally, and regrettably, some stories stick to public consciousness in ways that others don’t. But the story of the whole is the story we want to tell.

We of course recognize the broader precarity of Black women – precarity that goes beyond the higher risks that they encounter police violence. Activists often note that Black women, along with Native women, have the highest homicide rate among women in America – an increased risk that stretches across age, class, gender expression, and identity. Our lives are precarious. From start to finish, and from sea to shining sea.

#SayHerName focuses on lives lost due to police violence because we view it as the quintessential expression of precarity. If the very institution that is supposed to protect you kills you...then what does that portend for all other aspects of our lives?

Certainly, the #SayHerName campaign’s bold insistence that Black women’s lives matter won’t by itself reverse the long history of Black women’s vulnerability and erasure that suggests that, in fact, they don’t. Nor will the more specific focus on state violence fully address the most common ways that Black women are killed. But addressing the most vivid illustration of Black women’s irrelevance places the matter in sharp relief: if the police can kill us with impunity, then why would we expect any other institution to protect our lives?

To prevent this tragic drumbeat from echoing far into the future, we need to rewrite the script. And to do that, we need to start by making sure that our names are spoken, that our stories get told, and that witnesses will carry those stories across time and space to inform, to galvanize, to insist, and to demand.

Say. Her. Name.
BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE KILLED BY THE POLICE, TOO. FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA. CAN YOU SEE THEM?
“I’m not ashamed. I want the world to know she was killed, she was murdered by the police. I want to keep these women’s names alive. I want us to continuously say their names.”

Fran Garrett
Mother of Michelle Cusseaux

“We can’t be quiet. We need to come together as sisters and fight for justice for our daughters. They did not deserve this. Nobody deserves to die like this.”

Sharon Wilkerson
Mother of Shelly Frey

“Every anniversary, every birthday, every special moment, looking at old photographs always brings it back up. We never forget, we never stop grieving. Time goes by but the emotion doesn’t fade, the grief doesn’t fade.”

Maria Moore
Sister of Kayla Moore

“How people know Breonna Taylor’s name, but even Breonna Taylor’s murderers are still free. Even in the face of global scrutiny, they still haven’t done right by Breonna Taylor. So do I have hope? No. Do I want to have hope? Yes. I want to believe that people will start to say, ‘It could have been me, my baby, my daughter.’”

Gina Best
Mother of India Kager

“When the men are killed, the men are uplifted. You hear about them, you know their lives, you know their families. But we have to make sure that we uplift our daughters and we do it collectively. Because there’s strength in numbers.”

Rhonda Dorn
Mother of Adrionna Gaines

“If it hadn’t been my daughter, would I give it this much fight, this much thought? Of course not. It has to take something to wake you up. So since she’s not coming back, how can I live on through her? Speak. How can she live on? Speak.”

Cassandra Johnson
GINA BEST
AMPUTATED HEARTS
I.

It begins with a fluttering... of the heart.

How does a Woman react when she learns that within a span of eight to nine months, her life will forever change, and she will become the Mother of a human being, separate from herself? Some women experience alarm, while others experience elation. Either way, she allows that realization to take root in her heart — while she ponders.

What does a Mother do... when she’s made conscious decisions and taken specific actions to ensure the life growing within her womb emerges healthy? She follows the intuitive “inner-voice” of her heart and takes multi-faceted, holistic steps for good care during her pregnancy.

What does a Mother do... when, for the very first time, she hears the rapid, rhythmic “whooshing” of her baby’s heartbeat through the stethoscope or heart monitor during the sonogram examination?

What does a Mother do... when the labor pains have begun, and she’s cognizant that within hours she’ll meet and embrace the special little one she’s dreamt about? She courageously rides the body-wrenching waves of each involuntary contraction, knowing in her heart that the pangs of her childbirth journey will eventually cease.

What does a Mother do... as she hears the first whimpers of her little angel moments after birth? She hopes within her heart that her prayers of health and protection for her baby have been answered. She then relaxes within her heart and releases grateful sighs of relief upon hearing the news that her baby is healthy.

What does a Mother do... when for the very first time, she embraces the precious, cherub-faced little being she’s birthed? She stares with mixed emotions of hope, curiosity, concern, and uncertainty, while her rapidly-beating heart is flooded with loving warmth and maternal resolve.

What does a Mother do... as she nurses, nurtures and watches over her little one during the formative years of growing, playing, sleeping, and developing socially in a world fraught with land mines between each of life’s “milestones”? She continues to pray within her heart that her precious child will experience the very best that life has to offer. She makes an eternal pact within her heart that she’ll continue to be a wise protector and “guide” for her child, helping her navigate life, every step of the way.

What does a Mother do... as her daughter approaches the teen years where turbulence and external attacks on her self-confidence are guaranteed, and will most certainly permeate her heart and psyche? She listens, steadies her heart, and reinforces her daughter’s self-worth with loving encouragement, coupled with the stark reality that life isn’t fair. Especially for Black girls living in a world that devalues them, upon sight. She reminds her daughter to be strong of character and fosters a heart of steel amongst people and amidst situations that will try to break her.

What does a Mother do... when she’s done everything within her abilities and her heart to love, nurture, protect, educate, guide, and to facil-
iterate the desires, aspirations and dreams of her daughter through the years, and then she ultimately receives that call? The very call that every Mother dreads within her heart! The dreadful call that sends her heart into audible palpitations upon hearing the icy words: “Your daughter is dead. She’s been killed by the police.”

What does a Mother do?!

What does a Mother do... when in that flash of a moment, the ONLY thing she can see is her daughter’s beautiful visage? And then the vision of her daughter’s face morphs and becomes... contorted. Contorted with excruciating horror, pain, and fear as the fiery hot bullets from the police shooting her— piercing her flesh! Bullets from police with depraved hearts, tearing into the body of an innocent Black Woman.

What does a Mother do... when in that very moment, her heart is amputated?

What does a Mother do... when there are NO immediate answers or solutions to the persistent question: “WHY did the police KILL my daughter?!?”

What does a Mother DO... when she doesn’t know what else to do in a world that INSISTS on doing NOTHING to prevent Black Women from being killed by police?

What does a Mother do?!!

II.

Living with an Amputated Heart

My beloved, sweet, soft-spoken daughter, India Jasmine Kager, was one of the many Black Women who’ve been mercilessly killed by police, and then subsequently and methodically erased and forgotten.

India was also a young Mother of two little boys, Roman and Evan. She undoubtedly experienced all of the heart-felt moments of Motherhood that I experienced. Unfortunately, like hundreds of other Black Women, India had her life stolen from her AND her sons, and at the hands of men working for law enforcement whose hearts were amped on adrenaline while they carried out their murderous acts. Unlike India, those men were allowed to return home to their families and children! With callous hearts, they knew they would be granted legal protection for committing egregious, extra-judicial killings. It is with DEPRAVED hearts that they continue to prey upon and kill unarmed, defenseless Black Women.

With an amputated heart and crushing grief, I recall the dizzying confusion and nausea accompanied by disbelief,dense mental fog and torrential tears as I wrote India’s obituary and picked out her white casket.

With an amputated heart, crushing grief, spinning thoughts and buckling knees, I approached India’s casket as she lay for the viewing. My mind flashed back for a moment as I remembered my sweet Indy when she was a baby sleeping in her white bassinet. I leaned over Indy and kissed her forehead while wishing that her warm-hearted nature would miraculously return, and her heart would begin to beat again.
With an amputated heart, I struggled with the burning visual contrasts of seeing beautiful Indy laying in her white bassinet, then, and her white casket, now.

What does a Mother do... and why must we now live with amputated hearts and unrelenting, crushing grief? It is a question that I ask myself every day.

Like our daughters, we were violently forced into this excruciating space by cold-hearted killers, who have given NO consideration for our lives. There exists no amount of anesthesia that can numb or alleviate the pain of our amputated hearts.

With amputated hearts, we are forced to somehow endure and make it through the dark, oppressive nano-seconds, seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years that have passed since our daughters and other Black Women have been killed by police with impunity.

With amputated hearts, we are plumbing the depths of our sorrow in a world that chooses to separate, defer and ultimately detach any semblance of legal justice for Black Women who've been killed at the hands of cold-hearted men.

What kind of heart does an individual possess when they stand by idle, inactive, and silent when a Black Woman is gunned down by police?

With an amputated heart and crushing grief, I observe the societal climate and ask why is it that the stories of Black Men who are killed by police are subsequently amplified and receive immediate public attention? Conversely, the complete opposite response is evident when it is discovered that a Black Woman’s life has been snuffed out by police.

With amputated empathy, individuals working for and within “the system” choose to continue regurgitating convenient platitudes instead of dismantling the misogynistic laws that support them.

People hastily make the defiant declaration that “This is NOT America” and “We’re better than this!” when they decry evil crimes committed against children, the elderly or other defenseless people. But what has happened to our collective hearts as we stand by and watch, while Black Women continue to be killed by law enforcement agents, unabated?

Our Ancestral Mothers and Grandmothers suffered with broken hearts while living in a world where they were assaulted, viciously raped, and impregnated, and then had their children literally ripped out of their arms and sold away by enslavers with hate-filled hearts.

With an amputated heart and crushing grief for my precious daughter and her little sons, I ask: has anything really changed?

Are you willing to examine your heart? Are you willing to step up, and make a tangible difference to prevent another amputated heart?
SINGING TO REMEMBER
SINGING TO RESIST:
SINGING TO SAY HER NAME
As artists, we hold up a mirror to society to reflect its beauty, flaws and deepest wounds. As a Sonic Conceptual Performing Artist and Composer, my mission includes creating music-based cultural works that serve as both salve and shield in turbulent times, and helping to re-imagine and build a just world. As a Black woman who sings and writes to help us all get free, I am interested in more than just symbolic notions of freedom, equality, protection, and justice. My responsibility to my communities, particularly Black women and girls, is my call to action as an artist, scholar, activist, and global citizen. My cultural work is undergirded by the sensibilities and practices of Black feminists, who help us imagine Black futures where our whole selves and humanity are resoundingly recognized, supported, and protected.

The African American Policy Forum’s (AAPF’s) work to increase awareness of police killings of Black women and girls, as well as other forms of gendered and racialized violence against us, shook and galvanized me. AAPF’s #SayHerName campaign changed the trajectory of my life. It propelled me to take my responsibilities as an artist even more seriously and reminds me of my purpose.

I want to tell you a story about the birth of a sonic intervention. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January 2015, I was one of many who rallied in Harlem, New York, and marched to the United Nations to protest police brutality of Black and Brown bodies. As a Black feminist, AAPF’s work to foster transformative social justice inspires me as does the work of its founding Executive Director, Kimberlé Crenshaw, promoting intersectional racial justice. I marched with AAPF from Harlem to midtown Manhattan, helping to hold up its #SayHerName banner, one of the few to address police brutality against Black women and girls, in a sea of signs focused on Black men.

During the final stretch of the march, tears rushed forward, threatening to escape from my eyes and unto my cheeks as “Glory,” by John Legend and Common, boomed from speakers. The song helped re-energize us to keep moving, fortifying us for the remaining journey. But something was missing. I also wanted to hear a contemporary song that spoke to the specific experiences of Black women and girls and our longing for true inclusion, equality, justice, and freedom.

As a New Yorker, I began to reflect on stories of Black women and girls who had been killed or otherwise brutalized by the NYPD, women like Eleanor Bumpurs and Rosann Miller. I began to wonder, what can I do in the face of unwarranted, unjust, and perennial violence? What can we all do in the face of practices and systems that make life so challenging for Black women and girls? How can we shift the culture’s appetite for Black death, devaluation, and dehumanization? How can we remind people to feel for Black women and girls? As an artist, one pathway forward is to create art in response to pain, erasure, and brutality. We create to insist on truth-telling and radical societal transformations. We create to help shift our collective conversations and consciousness. We create to resist.

Four months later, in May 2015, I attended the #SayHerName vigil in Union Square. I listened as loved ones and concerned citizens told stories of Black women and girls who had been killed by police officers. Surrounded by images of Black women and girls murdered by police, as
we called out their names and listened to their stories, I vowed to com-
pose a song that could be of some use. I resolved to craft a song that
could be a soundtrack to the #SayHerName movement for intersectional
racial justice, a song thick with weight and rooted in history to privilege
our experiences, knowledge, memories, and demands.

The singing voice in flight is powerful. Sonic narratives move and pro-
pel us to soar beyond limiting forms of life. As observed by Dr. Bernice
Johnson Reagon, founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock, when we sing,
we announce our existence. I believe we sing ourselves into view. We
sing to marshal another way to push back against forces that seek to
dehumanize and marginalize us.

I created the song, “Say Her Name,” to be a sonic expression of our
unique positionality and precarity as Black women and girls, and specif-
ically with respect to policing. I hope to transport the listener to a space
where s/he can feel and understand why the stakes are so high. The
song conveys why, as individuals and a community, we cannot afford to
wait to address barriers facing Black and Brown women and girls dis-
proportionately vulnerable to: extrajudicial killings when suffering from
mental illness; seeking protection; and traveling while Black.

It is important to note that Black women have historically used art to ren-
der ourselves visible and to transform hostile realities. Just listen to the
catalogs of Bessie Smith, Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin, Sweet Honey
in the Rock, and Tracy Chapman, who offer examples of this vital prac-
tice. We are creating sonic narratives to give voice to and evidence our
subjectivity. As Black women and girls, we have radical dreams for our
protection, equality, and freedom beyond mere survival. We want to live
in a world where our stories are possible. A world where our vulnera-
ility and subjectivity are acknowledged, met with empathy, and inspire
world-building, by, for, and with us.

The singing of Black women constitutes sonic remembrances of melo-
dies and blood memories uncovered and handed down to those of us
fortunate enough to sound the canary’s cry or the lullaby of the caged
bird who sings of freedom. Composing the melody and lyrics to “Say Her
Name” was emotional for me. In songwriting, simplicity is king. I posed
some questions to myself and then tried to answer them through song.
How do you remind people that Black women who mourn their daugh-
ters killed by cops deserve our recognition, empathy and support? How
to give voice to a mother’s undying ache compounded by community
silence and erasure of their loved one’s lives? They deserve to hear us
acknowledge their daughters by name.

An a cappella composition, “Say Her Name” is a lullaby and lament that
brings our ancestors into the space with every hum and every wail. The
sonic citation of “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” is intended to extend the
Black national anthem to explicitly reference the particular experience
of Black women on this ongoing march towards freedom.

“Say Her Name” is a modern-day spiritual that cavorts with breath, si-
lence and memory to name the de-valued and disappeared to declare
that we, as Black women and girls, matter. It calls us to place this era-
sure on a continuum of violence connecting Black women victimized
since the Middle Passage. The song’s lyrics and melody implore us to
“Say Her Name for all the names [you] cannot say. Say Her Name for all the names [you’ll] never know. Say Her Name. Black Girls Matter. Say Her Name. Black Women Matter.”

The potential power of sound is embodied by the singing voice. Music-making is about place-making; it performs critical work. “Say Her Name” insists on the “hearing” of Black women’s concerns and demands. Vocal music has the potential to inspire empathetic connection and civic engagement in everyday people. As an artist and scholar, I examine the connection between art and politics, specifically how music and sonic-based performance can function as a civic tool for empathy cultivation to promote and model transformative change. As Artist-in-Residence with AAPF since December 2015, I sing “Say Her Name” as a call to action, to document the movement in song and serve as a living text and testament to Black women killed by police.

To create art that illuminates everyday Black women in crisis is an important task. In doing so, I help to create opportunities for all of us to bring neglected voices into spaces typically closed to Black women and girls. I privilege music as a tool to encourage communities to engage with marginalized voices who reveal and re-frame themselves through their stories. It is one way that African diasporic people wade in troubled waters to get to the other side of dehumanization to better frame and see ourselves and each other.

My artistic work seeks to cultivate and inspire empathetic feelings for Black women and girls to help change how people in the world see, hear, address, protect, and treat us. “Say Her Name” seeks to sound a historical (re)membering of Black women’s voices, our petitions, our pain, our bodies, our struggles, our sacrifices, our memories, and our recommendations and prescriptions for future possibilities. It creates space for ritualistic honoring of Black female lives through music to help conjure alternative futures to the white supremacist, patriarchal, and heteronormative realities we know. The ritual of naming women out loud is about correcting the historical record and tending to our Black feminist archive. With “Say Her Name,” we use song and the voice to remind people of our humanity as Black women and girls.

It has been an incredible journey contributing to the #SayHerName movement. The campaign has been remarkable in its use of artistic activism, including curating performances at the Nuyorican Poets Café, Columbia University Law School and Pratt University; creating a short film; partnering with cultural institutions for AAPF’s annual Her Dream Deferred series; creating an original play imagining the lives of Black women that might have been but for police brutality; and facilitating art-based workshops at AAPF’s Breaking the Silence Summer Camps for activists and family of Black women stolen from us. Since 2015, I have seen firsthand the trajectory of societal change on the issue of police brutality. This is largely due to AAPF and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s tireless efforts to demand justice and insistence that we reckon with the erasure of Black women and girls. I’ve seen the looks of reckoning on faces as we mourn during ceremonies that ritualize re-membering through naming and storytelling. I’ve seen people wrestle with the spectacle of Black female death by cops, recognizing that these are modern-day lynchings by police to extinguish what they see as undesirable and intolerable forms of Black life, self-possession, power and joy. At times it seemed the public’s will for
accountability would forever lag behind AAPF’s calls for justice. AAPF’s insistence that we center Black women as more than afterthoughts tilled the soil for our collective will for justice for our mothers, sisters, aunties and daughters – like Breonna Taylor – to grow.

“Say Her Name” is more than a site of remembrance. It is spirit work necessary for radical societal transformations. I have seen the way singing and spoken words grab hold – facilitating a laying on of hands on listeners. “Say Her Name” is ritualized performance as sonic ministry in spaces made holy by our collective intentions, be they conference rooms, street corners, stages, or digital platforms. This sonic ministry mines sound to help care for the hearts, minds and spirits of our communities. It prioritizes the sanctity of Black lives and offers a collective space for us to move from remembrance and mourning to purposeful petitioning for change.

“Say Her Name” is an embodied sonic petition reinforcing today’s progressive social justice movements rooted in a Black feminist ethic. It was created to cultivate a political subjectivity that marshals civic and political actions to help transform the world based on an empathetic ethic of community care. Who could have predicted that in 2020 the nation would rise up to support the Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name movements? “Say Her Name” sounds that Black women and girls are human beings deserving of dignity, empathy, justice and care, in life and in death. It is a sonic quilt stitched together with fabric made of memories, cries and names, to shelter us all from veils of ignorance that would hamper our ability to achieve intersectional racial justice.
“SOMEBODY, ANYBODY, SING A BLACK GIRL’S SONG”

PORTRAIT OF NTOZAKE SHANGE BY LEHNA HUIE
NICOLE YOUNG
WHY WE SAY HER NAME
When we march, we chant. Chanting is the drumbeat of sound that helps carry us past cops with billy clubs in their hands. It’s the sonic reminder as we trudge through hot, humid, rainy days that we are here for a purpose, one bigger than ourselves. A chant is a call to those who may be watching, an invitation to join us as we fight for a brighter, freer world. We chant so many things, “No Justice, No Peace, No Racist Police” and “This is what democracy looks like!” But the chant that always jangles my soul and forces even my most tired voice into a frenzied scream is “Say Her Name!”

We say the names of Black women murdered by state violence because there is no other place in which their names are spoken. The elected officials responsible for bringing them justice ignore them. The police officers sworn to protect them dismiss their deaths. The journalists charged with telling their stories are complicit in the erasure of their lives. We chant their names so that they are not lost to time. But #SayHerName is more than a hashtag or a chant, it is a campaign for specific, targeted justice.

Over the past many years, we’ve become accustomed to speaking the names of fallen Black men and boys: George Floyd, Tamir Rice and Philando Castile are all names we know. And while the justice we seek on their behalf will never equal the horror of the deaths they suffered at the hands of police and white vigilantes, their names give us power. Their stories provide us clarity into the depth and depravity of white supremacy in America.

When the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) launched the #SayHerName campaign in 2014, they did so to bring that same level of focus to the families of Black women and girls killed in similar ways. Without her name, it is easy to believe that the violent tendencies of a white supremacist society only touch Black men. When we don’t say her name, we recklessly assume that womanhood is protection against this particular type of harm. Without her story, Black families grieving the violent deaths of their daughters, sisters and friends are left without support or justice.

Black womanhood amplifies the menace that accompanies interactions with police, precisely because we don’t say her name. Black women’s invisibility provides a shield behind which murder, sexual assault, and home invasion at the hands of the state go unchecked. #SayHerName is a tree planted against the stream of misremembering.

It is crucial then that we listen to the mothers and families who began #SayHerName. It is critical that we support them with the specificity their injustice demands because we dishonor Dominique “Rem’mie” Fells, we forget Breonna Taylor, and we erase Atatiana Jefferson when we water down this rallying cry. It is not #SayHisName, nor is it #SayTheirNames. We say her name, and we do so loudly and on purpose.

We shout HER name as we continue to protest, because her name has power. Power that one day will bring an end to a system intent on our destruction.
MELANIA BROWN
MY SISTER’S KEEPER:
LAYLEEN XTRAVAGANZA
CUBILETTE-POLANCO

JUSTICE FOR LAYLEEN
My baby sister Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette-Polanco died while in the care of the notorious Rikers Island in New York City on June 7th, 2019. Layleen was a beautiful, vibrant, and proud Afro-Latinx transgender woman. She was being held on a $500 bail she could not afford. She was only 27-years old when she died alone while being held in solitary confinement. These truths pain me every single day.

What happened to Layleen is a reality for so many Black trans women who are fighting for their survival. Her story reflects a blueprint for how many transgender women of color are harassed, targeted, profiled, and funneled through a violent system that for many results in death. This is the case for far too many who are barred from accessing sustainable employment.

My sister was arrested in 2017 in a sting operation for prostitution. Layleen had tried hard to find employment with no luck. She told me stories of going into fast food chains with “now hiring!” signs displayed only to be denied a job application and discriminated against for her gender identity. She turned to sex work as a way to provide for herself and be self-sufficient. This was important to her – to be financially independent. That is probably why she never told me or the rest of my family she was even arrested. If she had, we would have paid her bail and she’d be alive with us today.

This prior prostitution charge meant automatic lock-up for any other interactions with the police. So when she was arrested in April 2019 for an alleged altercation with a taxi driver, a claim made by the police that my family has yet been able to verify, she was immediately taken to Rikers Island. Shortly after, as shared in a report by the New York City Board of Corrections, there was a pressure campaign to put Layleen in solitary confinement simply because she was trans.

They put my sister in a box, alone, with her pre-existing medical conditions, because she was a transgender woman. Solitary confinement is a practice that isolates inmates in prison for upwards of 23 hours a day with little to no contact with another person for an indefinite period of time. No human being should be subjected to this state-sanctioned torture, let alone simply for who they are. It is a horrific practice that is condemned by the United Nations and that takes too many lives year after year.

In a video released by my family to the press, it shows the correctional officers not checking in on Layleen for long periods of time. In one critical moment, video footage shows the correctional officers opening my sister’s cell door and visibly laughing just moments before she is pronounced dead. The thought of her suffering when she could’ve been saved will haunt my family and me for the rest of our lives.

The criminalization of sex work, rampant transphobia throughout society and in workplace environments, the targeting of trans women and sex workers by the police, the violence that is the prison system, and complete disregard of human life, all contributed to my sister’s death. We could as a society address the systemic barriers in accessing resources like safe housing, employment, and trans inclusive healthcare...
that otherwise could create safety for trans women like my sister. Instead, the systems we currently have in place took my sister’s life.

But Layleen’s memory should not be one solely of violence, she is not just another hashtag. Layleen was so caring and full of life. She would give her last to a stranger, something I witnessed many times over. Everyone knew her for her bubbly personality, her laugh, and big heart. She loved house music and dancing and getting on my nerves. Layleen was part of the House of Xtravaganza, her second family, and had many “daughters” she took care of. She was an angel to many of us, myself included. That was Layleen, that was my sister.

My sister was so full of life before it was prematurely taken from her. I will continue to scream her name, to anyone who will listen, until there is justice. I will fight until what happened to my sister doesn’t happen to any other person simply for being brave enough to live in their truth.
I am a woman carrying other women in my mouth
Behold a sister, a daughter, a mother, dear friend
spirits demystified on my tongue. They gather
to breathe and exhale, a dance with death we
know is not the end. All these nameless bodies haunted
by pellet wounds in their chest, listen for
them in the saying of a name you can not pronounce
black and woman is a sort of magic you cannot hashtag,
the mere weight of it, too vast to be held. We hold
ourselves, an inheritance, felt between the hips
womb of soft darkness, portal of light, watch them
envy the revolution of our movement, how we break
open to give life flow. Why the terror of our tears,
the torment of our taste? My rage is righteous, my love
is righteous, my name is righteous. Hear what I am
not here to say; we too have died. We know
we are dying too. I am not here to say, look at me!
How I died so brutal a death, I deserve a name
to fit all the horror in. I am here to tell you how
if they mentioned me in their protests and their rallies
they would have to face their role in it, too, my beauty,
too. I have died many times before the blow to the body
I have bled many months before the bullet to the flesh
Women know the body is not the end. Call it what
you will but for all the hands
cuffed wrists of us, the shackled ankles of us, the
bend over to make room for you of us. How dare
we speak anything less than, I love you.
We who love just as loudly in the thunderous rain
as when the sun shines golden on our skin and the world
kisses us unapologetically. We be so beautiful when we be,
how you gon be free with out me? Your “freedom” is
tied up with mine, at the nappy edge of my soul, singing
for all my sisters. Watch them stretch their arms
in my voice, how they fly open chested toward
your ear, listen, listen for
Rekia Boyd
Yvette Smith
Aiyana Stanley-Jones
Kayla Moore
Shelly Frey
Miriam Carey
Kendra James
Alberta Spruill
Tarika Wilson
Shereese Francis
Shantel Davis
Malissa Williams
Darnesha Harris
Michelle Cusseaux
Pearlie Golden
Kathryn Johnston
Eleanor Bumpurs
Natasha McKenna
Sheneque Proctor
Sandra Bland...

We do not vanish in the bated breath of our brothers. Show me, show me a man willing to fight beside me my hand in his, the color of courage. There is no mountaintop worth seeing without us. Meet me in the trenches where we lay our bodies down in the valley of a voice

Say it. Say it. Say her name.
MONÈT NOELLE MARSHALL

EVERY STORM STARTS SOMEWHERE
As wind, cloud, an ocean wave. It starts here, at the beginning, because when the storm comes they will say that it came out of nowhere. They will say that they didn’t see it coming. It didn’t pop up on their radar. Either they are lying or they are ignorant. But it don’t matter. The storm won’t care.

When the storm comes it will start as a cloud, a big, gray cloud. Even before seeing it the grandmamas will feel it in their bones. They will stand up slowly rubbing their knees. They will shuffle through the screen doors and stand on their porches with their hands on their hips. They will crane their heads to the sky and squint, affirming what they already know. And they will call their babies inside from their play and tell them to turn the lights off and watch the Lord work.

And she will.

When the storm comes, it will drop big, thick, round drops of water on potted plants that sit on windowsills and fire escapes. Some people will start to rush home, cursing the rain they weren’t expecting. But some will make cups of tea, listen to Nina sing little girl blue and sit by the window, ready for a visit from a long-awaited friend.

When the storm comes, and it will come, they will underestimate it at first. They will call it seasonal weather, unworthy of a name. They will hardly track it. Until it takes an unexpected turn and comes their way. Still they will tell people not to worry. Not to board up their homes. Not to take cover. They will regret this in the end. Because it will grow. It’ll become a tropical storm and then a category 1, then a category 2, 3, 4 before they call it a storm of the century. They will call it Hurricane Claire or Katie or Hannah. But every raindrop will say Atatiana Jefferson. The pregnant rivers will roar Eleanor Bumpurs. The winds will howl India Beaty. The crashing waves will scream Darnesha Harris. The floods will trade their rushing for Rekia Boyd.

They will call out for God but she’ll be too busy to listen because she is a Black woman who knows all too well the hurt of being called out her name. And she’ll know that they had so many chances. When it was just a drop, when it was a simple rain cloud, a summer breeze. If they had acted, if they had done something when it was Tyisha Miller or Danette Daniels or Frankie Ann Perkins, then maybe just maybe this could have been avoided. But it wasn’t because they didn’t. Maybe they thought they didn’t have the time or it wasn’t their fight or maybe all the Blacks really are men and all the women really are white. Whatever it was that kept their jaws locked tight and their mouths unmoved, this is the price. And God, in all her Angry Black Woman Glory, will conduct a chorus of stones to sing Breonna Taylor in 4-part harmony. And they will remember the words of her child who said, “for surely if you don’t say her name, the rocks will cry out.”
SYDNEY COLSON
HAVING OUR SAY
BLACK WOMEN ATHLETES DEDICATE A SEASON TO SAY HER NAME
Having a WNBA season seemed like a long shot about five months ago when the Coronavirus pandemic postponed the start of training camp. Our union, the WNBPA (Women’s National Basketball Players Association), was working with the league to renegotiate our collective bargaining agreement and agree on terms for a potential season. Players were still working out in our respective hometowns with hopes that we would reunite with our teams, but the excitement for that reunion quickly diminished, and even disappeared for many of us, when George Floyd was murdered.

For those who may not know the makeup of our league: Black women comprise 80% of all players. Following Floyd’s death, we had to navigate the bevy of emotions we were experiencing as Black women while having weekly calls with our teams, our union, and the league. Once we could sort through our anger and pain enough to have productive conversations, we realized that the only way we could move forward with having a season, in good conscience, was if we spoke up about things that affect us most. We were going to talk about Black issues and it was a non-negotiable for us.

The league’s commitment to providing opportunities for us to speak about important issues was vital. The creation of the WNBA-WNBPA Social Justice Council has given the players an opportunity to bring our own ideas to the table and has shown that the league embraces its players as advocates and understands the power of our collective voices. Our council’s collective initiatives are referred to as The Justice Movement and our focal points center race, voting rights, LGBTQ+ advocacy, and gun control. This platform has already given us virtual roundtables and educational sessions led by national leaders and educators. We have already spoken to former first lady Michelle Obama, former senior advisor to the President Valerie Jarrett, the Hon. Stacey Abrams, and UCLA/Columbia law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. Every conversation that we have been a part of has served the same role: educate, amplify, and mobilize for action.

After our council was developed and players pushed to make bold statements, such as plastering ‘Black Lives Matter’ on the game courts, wearing ‘Say Her Name’ on the back of our pre-game shooting shirts, and dedicating our season to Breonna Taylor and Say Her Name, I saw a tweet from someone calling attention to the frequent hijacking of the Say Her Name hashtag. To avoid being perpetrators, I wanted to get in touch with someone who started the campaign. As fate would have it, Professor Crenshaw had an early morning MSNBC interview and randomly decided to stick around to watch the next segment, which happened to be mine, and had the show’s producer reach out to me. The rest is history.

The WNBA has partnered with the African American Policy Forum on the #SayHerName campaign and Professor Crenshaw is now one of the advisors for our council, along with Alicia Garza (co-founder of Black Lives Matter), Carolyn DeWitt (CEO, Rock the Vote), Raquel Willis (Director of Communications for the Ms. Foundation for Women), and Beverly Bond (Founder/CEO, BLACK GIRLS ROCK!). It has been an immeasurable privilege to be learning from someone who has dedicated so much of her life to organizing and protesting for the rights of Black people.
We all know Malcolm X’s famous quote about the Black woman being the most disrespected, unprotected, and neglected person in America. He uttered those words over a half-century ago and they continue to ring true. It is no secret that Black women are discriminated against from birth to death in this country:
- Black women face a mortality rate at the hands of police that is 1.4 times that of white women;
- Newborns born to Black women are three times more likely than white newborns to die under the care of white doctors;
- Black girls are suspended and expelled from school at six times the rate of their white counterparts and are expected to “know better” than their white counterparts, because studies show that adults view us as less innocent and more adult-like; and
- Black women who work full-time year-round earn about 62 cents on the dollar compared to white men and have a medium net wealth of $200 compared to $15,640 for white women.

The list of lifelong inequalities and quiet indignities Black women face could go on and on, extending even to high profile spaces like professional sports. We even have to deal with anti-Black racism in a sport where, for one of the few times in our lives, we are actually the majority. I am fully aware that these examples of racism pale in comparison to being physically abused or killed by police who have no desire to protect you, but for 80% of the women in this league, we know that Breonna Taylor, Michelle Cusseaux, and Sandra Bland could on any day, be any of us. We understand that, at any moment, our names could be reduced to a hashtag – or less.

This sobering reality made it evident we could not miss the opportunity to speak up on behalf of Black women who are victims of state violence and receive no justice. We will continue to #SayHerName long after this season ends.

This is the way Black women center our voices in the midst of change. In 1968, Black women at the Olympics offered their support for the Olympic Project for Human Rights, but they were turned down – in fact, gold medalist Wyomia Tyus and her fellow runners on the 4x100-meter relay team dedicated their victory medals to Tommie Smith and John Carlos, but their contribution to the cause was barely reported.

Today, more than a half-century after they were ignored in their quest to support a protest on behalf of Black people, Black women athletes no longer ask for permission. WNBA athletes speaking out – in our own way and in our own voices – are lifting up the fight against police violence for all of us. In this season of challenge and change, we are “lifting as we climb,” as women before us have done many times in the fight against racism and sexism, and for intersectional justice for all. To quote Anna Julia Cooper, in explaining the significance of raising Black women’s voices on behalf of Black people: “Only the BLACK WOMAN can say ‘when and where I enter…. the whole race enters with me.’”

By taking this stance, dedicating our season to #SayHerName, we are making history on behalf of everyone.
Black women are traumatized by those who are supposed to protect us. Then we are forgotten or discarded. Fighting for our humanity is a part of our daily lives. We must amplify and share the stories of Black women whose lives were taken by systems of state-sanctioned violence. We also deserve to be loved out loud when we are alive. I photographed the women of my family to honor the beauty and infinitude of Blackness as it lives and breathes.
TELL HER STORY
#SAYHERNAME

LINK TO FULL TELL HER STORY DATABASE
MARIA MOORE
IF KAYLA HAD LIVED
It was seven years ago that I received a phone call at work that changed my family’s life. As I rushed home to my Dad, all I could think was: “My sister is dead, my sister is dead, my sister is dead.” That mantra ran through my frantic mind as I tried to navigate traffic and while absorbing the reality that I would never see her alive again. I never got a chance to return her phone call from two days before, I never got a chance to update her on the latest family gossip, and I never got a chance to keep her safe.

In my dream world I would have received a frantic call from Kayla, stating the police were at her door. I would have told her to be calm, and that Dad and I were on our way. Dad would have arrived first, and would have urgently entered her apartment and instantly diffused the situation, as he did many times in the past. This situation would be no different. He would have escorted Kayla into the ambulance, as he did many times in the past. He would have explained she needed mental health services, as he did many times in the past.

In my dream world, Kayla would have lived.

She would have lived... to see the rise of #BlackGirlsMatter, and #SayHerName, and #BlackLivesMatter—the new awakening of social movements and social transformation that finally begins to embrace the lives of women, trans communities, and intersectional allies in the fight against racism and sexism. She would have seen the connection between COVID-19 and systemic racism as dual pandemics—both in need of attention from around the block, and around the world!

Kayla would not be content staying home, watching all of the chaos in the streets after the deaths of Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, and so many others. She would gather her squad, and contact her Berkeley city representative, whom she addressed by first name only, Kriss, as they were close friends. But Kriss Worthington would try to get a word in, without success, because Kayla was outspoken and could talk circles around anyone. Kriss would, nevertheless, take up the cause as articulated by Kayla, and help lead the movement for police reform—today, if Kayla were alive.

But since she has been taken from us, we must advocate on her behalf for alternatives to calling the police when a person is experiencing a mental health crisis. Inviting the police into a tense situation can lead to escalation and increase the risk of harm to the individual in distress.

We, as a community, need an increase in the number of Mobile Crisis Teams in the East Bay. Instead of calling 911, the community should be able to access help via phone dispatch. A trained civilian point of contact in crisis situations would ensure police are not first responders, and allow the civilian contact to take the lead and interact with the person in crisis.

Unfortunately, killing a Black woman in crisis is becoming more and more common. For those who have mental health challenges, the constant dehumanization is debilitating. Mental health problems are seen as crime problems, which invokes violence through restraint and punishment as the “first response.”
The City of Berkeley has had seven years to implement change and have yet to get it right. Since Kayla was killed, we have seen minimal improvement. One hour of availability has been added to the city’s mobile crisis response, and police continue to be called in as first responders to mental health emergencies. This is not good enough!

Even though I feel contempt in my heart, my mind is still rational. I am here to prevent the next death, and I am here for all the families who have loved ones with mental disabilities. Kayla was obese, she was on drugs, she was poor, she was Black, she was schizophrenic and she was killed because these characteristics are all the cops saw. What the police did not know was that Kayla was a daughter. She was a sister, she was an auntie, she was loved by her friends and family, and she did not deserve to die that night. She did not deserve to die on that floor, left exposed and uncovered, while referred to as an “IT…” She was and still is an “IT” to police. That is how they see us. As subhuman. And that is why nothing of value has been done. The next “it” will receive the same murderous treatment by the cops.

In Kayla’s case, the use of force could have been avoided had the officer followed basic guidelines. The call was for a disturbance involving someone who was off their medications, and in mental crisis.

“Did that person assault someone?” No.
“Was that person clearly psychotic?” Yes.
But instead of asking these basic questions, the first thing the officer did—before calling for an EMT or even speaking to Kayla to assess her mental state—was to run a warrant check. All the training in the world cannot change the mindset of someone who does not bother to provide assistance or counselling to keep the peace, and instead offers violent “enforcement” to conduct the law. The role of police in addressing non-violent 911 calls needs to be eliminated.

We need alternatives to police responding when a person is experiencing a mental crisis. Thirty-five percent of emergency calls in the City of Berkeley are mental health calls, and yet Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) has been trimmed down from a voluntary 40 hours of training to now a mandatory eight-hour training for all police officers who are in direct contact with the public. The police who responded to Kayla’s call for mental health treatment did not have anyone from the Mobile Crisis Team (trained mental health professionals) to assist with assessing Kayla. The officer ran a warrant check on Kayla, before she finally spoke to her, for approximately five-to-seven minutes, and then attempted to arrest her on a faulty, unconfirmed warrant that described a person with Kayla’s birth name, but with a different date of birth. The officer’s insistence on serving the wrong warrant led to Kayla’s death.

But Kayla committed no crime. She was not a danger to herself or others; her roommate called for help because Kayla had become agitated without her medication. And she had no one else to call. Previously, Kayla had waited over two months to see a psychiatrist in Berkeley, but when she arrived at the clinic she was turned away, as the provider was not available to see her.
Seven years later, I still hope for change. It has been a crushing, draining, uplifting and empowering exercise in patience that I pray will end with more positive results for others. What began seven years ago was a movement that gave a voice and humanity to a Black, transgender, mentally disabled woman named Kayla Moore.

We continue to fight for change, and create much-needed policy reform to mental health responses in the city of Berkeley, where Kayla lived and where Kayla died, unnecessarily, due to police negligence in a mental health call that went awry.

Resources:
Poor Magazine: https://poormagazine.org/
Berkeley Cop Watch: https://www.berkeleycopwatch.org/
#SayHerName: https://aapf.org/sayhername/
Justice for Kayla Moore: Sign the Petition
THE #SAYHERNAME CAMPAIGN WAS CREATED BY THE AFRICAN AMERICAN POLICY FORUM (AAPF) TO BRING AWARENESS TO THE OFTEN INVISIBLE NAMES AND STORIES OF BLACK WOMEN, GIRLS AND FEMMES WHO HAVE BEEN VICTIMIZED BY RACIST POLICE VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES. AS A RESULT, THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF CHIME ZINE FOCUSES ON AMERICA, THE VITAL WORK OF AAPF, AND THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNITY THEY HAVE BUILT. HOWEVER, WE ALL KNOW THAT STRUCTURAL RACISM, MISOGYNY AND TRANSMISOGYNY ARE NOT UNIQUE TO THESE SHORES. THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS HAVE SEEN LARGE SCALE BLACK LIVES MATTER DEMONSTRATIONS IN CITIES AROUND THE WORLD, AND WHEREVER STATE VIOLENCE REIGNS THERE ARE CALLS BEING MADE FOR INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE, CALLS LIKE THE #SAYHERNAME CAMPAIGN. FOR EXAMPLE, IN 2014, AFTER MOTHER-OF-FOUR CLAUDIA DA SILVA FERREIRA WAS SHOT AND DRAGGED FOR HUNDREDS OF METERS BEHIND A POLICE VEHICLE IN RIO DE JANEIRO, ACTIVISTS AROUND BRAZIL PROTESTED THE PATTERN OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND THE WAYS IN WHICH CLAUDIA’S STORY WAS ANONYMIZED IN THE PRESS. WHILE THIS ISSUE OF CHIME ZINE FOCUSES PRIMARILY ON THE UNITED STATES, IT WOULD DO A DISERVICE TO THE VICTIMS, THEIR FAMILIES AND ALL THEIR ADVOCATES TO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THE GLOBAL REACH OF STATE-SANCTIONED VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK WOMEN, GIRLS AND FEMMES. HERE, JUREMA WERNECK, THE DIRECTOR FOR AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IN BRAZIL, TELLS ANOTHER STORY FROM BRAZIL THAT DEMANDS TO BE HEARD.
Marielle was one of us. A bisexual Black woman and mother, born and raised in Complexo da Maré, a set of favelas located on the way to the Rio de Janeiro International Airport and home to about 140,000 people. In the favela, Marielle faced poverty, the violence of the so-called “war on drugs,” and heteronormative patriarchal racism, which all inspired her activism. When Marielle was a teenager, she lost her best friend who was shot and killed in a crossfire between the police and drug dealers in her favela. Her friend, like so many other favela residents, was young and Black like her.

Marielle was a strong, forceful, and vigorous human rights activist who never allowed herself to be silenced. In her first campaign for public office she ran on a platform centered around Black women, Black lesbians, Black people from favelas, and LGBTQI+ communities. Marielle received the fifth most votes out of over 1,500 candidates for the City Council of Rio de Janeiro. Upon taking office, she actively promoted the agenda and practices of progressive, inclusive, and feminist social movements. Elected to represent the entire municipality of Rio, she considered her role to be part of a collective project committed to promoting the empowerment and breaking the invisibility of Black, poor, transgender and lesbian women, as well as youth, mothers, and victims of state violence. Marielle recognized that the interests of these marginalized groups and the inequalities they were experiencing were absent from political discourse. She not only uplifted the stories and experiences of historically marginalized communities, but brought community members with her to the City Council to advocate alongside her. Marielle’s presence was powerfully disruptive.

Marielle was 38-years old when she was murdered on March 14, 2018, leaving an event she coordinated which focused on the empowerment of young Black women.

More than two years after the brutal murder of Marielle Franco, we still repeat the same questions every day: who ordered Marielle Franco’s murder? Why?

So far, the State has not answered these questions, nor have they guaranteed justice for Marielle. Criminal investigations resulted in the arrest of two former State agents — a retired military police officer and another former police officer expelled from the department for prior criminal involvement. However, the question of who specifically ordered the murder remains unanswered. Marielle, who dedicated her life to denouncing state violence, police brutality and the systematic murder of Black bodies, lost her life as a consequence of these same systems. As long as the case remains unsolved, the Brazilian state remains implicated in the indifference towards Marielle’s death and the deaths of so many others.
It is essential for Brazil to break from the cycle of murder with impunity that affects all Black people, LGBTQI+ communities, and human rights defenders in the country. According to data recently published by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), Brazil is already one of the most dangerous countries in the world for these groups and the risks are growing. It was this violence and murder of young, Black, poor women and LGBTQI+ people that Marielle fought against on a daily basis. As a representative and member of these overlapping communities, she knew that their risks made her vulnerable as well. Her courage to speak truth to power in the face of this danger made Marielle the remarkable leader she was. It may also be why she was targeted.

Recent data from the organization FrontLine Defenders affirms that in 2019 alone, 23 human rights activists were murdered in Brazil. Brazilian authorities need to ensure that a serious, impartial, swift, and effective investigation is carried out on the circumstances and motivations of these murders, as well as to reveal the authors of Marielle Franco’s death. The resolution of this case is fundamental to guarantee justice not only for Marielle’s family and friends but also for all of us who have walked alongside her. The outcome of the investigation has the potential to contribute to the safety of human rights defenders, and to convey the message that there is no impunity for groups that specifically target activists.

Marielle Franco’s death, the result of a brutal act of violence and violation, leaves a void—an immeasurable grief and pain. I still remember the day after her death, when, on a sad, cloudy Thursday, hundreds of us women, black, and LGBTQI+ Brazilians gathered in front of the City Council to protest against her death. We screamed at the top of our lungs, “Marielle, Presente!, Marielle, Presente, Hoje e sempre!” (in English, “Marielle, Present!, Marielle, Present! Today and Always”). This ritual of remembering and shouting the names of Black women who were violently taken away from us is one of the forms of resistance for Black feminists in Brazil. When speaking their names we remember their lives, denounce their deaths, and affirm that their legacy is still in us.

Marielle’s work inspires a different and passionate way of doing politics, from new collective bases, to assure rights to those who have been historically and systematically denied them. Her legacy has galvanized innovations, such as the new collective parliamentary terms, a type of collective political mandate that was adopted in several cities in Brazil. In March of 2020, Marielle’s family founded the Marielle Franco Institute, a non-governmental organization whose mission is to inspire, connect and empower Black women, LGBTQIA+ communities, and those living in favelas to continue pushing the structures of society towards a more just and egalitarian world.

For us and for each of the women and girls she inspires, Marielle’s mission remains alive, loud and clear, echoing around the world. Marielle’s struggle will always be present among us. This is why we SayHerName: Marielle Franco. Today and always.

2. In Brazil, from 2008 to 2018, 628,595 people were murdered. In this period, the number of Black people killed in homicides increased by 11.5%, while the homicide rate among non-Black people dropped by 12.9%. This pattern of disparity is also reproduced if we consider the intersections of race and gender: the same research reveals that while the homicide rates of non-Black women decreased by 11.7%, for Black women this rate has increased by 12.4%. The LGBTQI+ community also faces increasing violence. From 2011 to 2017, the murder report of LGBTQI+ Brazilians increased by 127%, before notching a small 28% decrease in 2018.
Thandie Newton
Scripting Sexual Violence
In Person & On the Screen
Back in 2004 I played a leading role in *Crash*, directed by Paul Haggis. In this Oscar-winning movie, my character and her husband – a successful Black television director – are driving home through Beverly Hills one night, in their big expensive car. They are pulled over by a racist cop because he mistakenly thinks my character is a white woman being intimate with a Black man. In a show of the most perverse kind of power, the cop hand-rapes the woman while her husband looks on, and chooses not to risk defending her.

It was, as you can imagine, a very difficult scene to shoot. Partly because I wasn’t even sure that I agreed, ethically, with what the filmmaker wanted to portray. The cop was racist, absolutely, but to suggest this level of abuse, surely that was an assault to expectations about police officers, whose credo is “To Protect and To Serve”?

I realize now, nearly two decades later – as an abuse survivor myself, as an activist, as a board member of V-Day (dedicated to ending violence against women and girls), and as a champion of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work with the African American Policy Forum and #SAYHERNAME – that back then, I was like so many people in denial. I believed that a cop raping and/or killing a Black woman was too incredible and unrealistic to portray on the screen. At the time, I was shocked and upset that I was being used to foster an abhorrent image of American policing. Perhaps I was naive to believe in policing’s sacred position towards the public.

Since then, I’ve learned differently: Black people – and Black women in particular – suffer sexual abuse at the hands of police far more frequently than the public knows or recognizes. Sexual abuse is the second most common complaint against the police. A study in 2012 on police sexual violence recidivism demonstrated that 41% of police sexual violence cases are committed by officers who average four victims a year! And there’s so much more that emerged during this summer’s congressional hearing on the Justice in Policing Act. The reforms in that act were a good first step, but sexual violence against women in custody was not fully addressed.

The unfathomable truth is far worse than imagined; racist and sexual abuse are part of the dangers faced by Black women at every level of society. Take the case of Oklahoma police officer Daniel Holtzclaw; he ran background checks on female victims (all African American) before forcing them to engage in sexual acts. He used the stereotype of depraved Black women to his advantage. During his trial, the defense cited the victims’ criminal records to question their credibility (testimonies from the victims will leave your jaw on the floor – they are available online). In 2015, Holtzclaw was convicted on charges of rape, sexual battery, stalking, sodomy, and forcible oral sex. Twelve women and one teenage girl came forward, but there were probably others.

Holtzclaw’s case ended with a conviction, but now, his defenders have begun to attack survivors of his calculated predatory acts, by accusing them of lying, using drugs, or of being criminals – all stereotypical memes used to undermine Black women’s testimony about rape and sexual abuse. The fact is, Officer Holtzclaw tracked and stalked Black women before using his badge and his gun to assault them – knowing that their voices would be silenced and their testimony subjected to ridicule and disbelief.
But no longer – through the work of AAPF and worldwide movements against systemic racism, Black women’s voices are being heard. Mothers, sisters, families and supporters have already begun to change the narrative about state-sanctioned violence against Black women which occurs at disproportionate levels. If we are to reform law enforcement, policing, and address systemic racism, we need stronger actions than those included in the George Floyd Justice in Policing bill. Given the urgent political climate, I urge activists to revisit AAPF’s call for further reforms.

At this critical time in our history, this is a chance to see that the current SYSTEM does not work. But we will prevail. After all, the grandmother of all humanity was a Black woman out of Africa, named “Mitochondrial Eve.” Her “story” is our legacy.

When I see the erasure of Black women victims and survivors, I see a narrative in need of a new script! We can “flip the script” on our erasure in countless ways. If Black and Brown women the world over are provided a stage, or a silver screen, to tell our stories, we will show that the beauty and bounty of our lives can save this precious world.

JAMILAH

GOOD ENOUGH TO MOURN

LEMIEUX
In death, Breonna Taylor has become a symbol for what is so often denied to Black women during their earthly lives: recognition. People across the world have ‘seen’ her and have acknowledged the brutality and senselessness that killed her. They’ve also acknowledged the significance of her contributions to society before she was shot to death during a no-knock raid by members of the Louisville Metro Police Department as she slept on March 13.

However, while it is tempting to feel somewhat heartened by the number of people who have finally, finally taken time to speak the name of a murdered Black woman and acknowledged police violence as a persistent threat faced by Black women, the reason this has compelled international outrage should not be lost on us. Breonna Taylor is the rare Black woman victim the world can rally around because she was sleeping while she was killed. Otherwise, we’d be arguing not over what sort of punishment is appropriate for the officers who killed her, but how responsible she is for her own death.

Had Taylor been awake when Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison and Myles Cosgrove burst into her home unannounced, there would still be those who speculated about her tone of voice, her mannerisms, what she might have said or done to make herself a target. If she’d been smoking some weed or having a drink, as people often do to unwind after a long day at work, it would have been that she was belligerent or intoxicated. Were she in the throes of a mental health crisis, her face and name would not have emerged as part of the protest iconography that will define 2020 in the history books.

Black women and girls are not safe in their sleep; too many bullets have travelled into our bodies through walls and windows, fired by familiar and unfamiliar hands alike, for us to think otherwise. In fact, it’s a reality we’ve taken so much for granted that the 2010 shooting death of 7-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones, under circumstances similar to Taylor’s killing, has never inspired the same level of attention and outrage as the death of Tamir Rice, the 12-year-old who was shot and killed by an officer as he played with a toy gun in a Cleveland park in 2014.

Aiyana’s death could be considered a Sandy Hook moment. Just as the massacre of primary school children in a Connecticut suburb reminded us of the devastating apathy of Americans and elected officials when it comes to the nation’s children, the lack of outrage over this child’s shooting death (that was filmed for a true-crime show, First 48) implied that people—Black and otherwise—would not be moved by the deaths of little Black girls.

Bettie Jones (no relation), was killed by a stray bullet in 2015 by Chicago Police officers who responded violently to a call to aid a young man in the throes of a mental health crisis. Local activists would protest and demand justice for both the 55-year-old and her neighbor, Quintonio LeGrier, who was the intended target; however, despite the horrific details of the incident, few outside of the area would ‘say her name.’ The death of a beloved grandmother of nine was not enough to inspire hashtags, not enough to be a rallying cry – a sobering reminder of the lack of regard for the lives of Black women.
The subtext is that because these Black women were not intentionally targeted, their deaths do not warrant the same condemnation of the justice system as the deaths of the men and boys who are shot between the eyes. Sleeping girls and grandmothers just die sometimes. It’s just part of our reality, at the hands of the state, at the hands of men who look like us. Violence is apparently our birthright.

Taylor’s profession has also impacted the level of visibility given to the incident that took her life.

The 26-year-old was employed as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), a profession that has only been recognized as “essential” in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic. Prior to the sheltering-in-place and shutdowns, these first responders were rarely acknowledged for their contributions to public safety in the same regard as police or firefighters. Many folks have reflected on the particular cruelty of a woman who was in the business of saving lives being gunned down by an agency that purports to do the work that EMTs actually do. Taylor was among the majority of Black women in America who work service-oriented jobs. That so many Black women serve a society that is hell-bent on denying our basic human needs is a devastating reality, and this woman’s body being riddled with bullets while in her own home is a horrifying example of that.

Taylor’s is only the second officer-involved death of a Black woman to make international headlines. In 2015, Sandra Bland was allegedly found hanged in her cell in a Waller County, Texas jail three days after being detained following a traffic stop. The fact that she attended an HBCU (historically black colleges and universities), where she’d pledged the Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, and had made a number of social media posts denouncing police violence, would arguably have a lot to do with the amount of attention her death received. Because without the auspices of ‘respectability’ and those large networks of people who felt connected to her, it’s unlikely we’d know her name at all.

Furthermore, Bland’s behavior while interacting with the officer who pulled her over was scrutinized and there were certainly folks who argued openly that had she been more compliant, she might still be alive. One can’t help but to wonder: if Officer Brian Encinia had shot Bland to death after she ‘mouthed off’ to him, would she still have become one of the rare Black women recognized as a face of police violence? Would people still find her to be a sympathetic figure, or would we be debating over whether or not she was to blame for her own murder?

At every level of our society, cis and trans Black women and girls are without protection. The criminal justice system, designed with our post-chattel slavery subjugation in mind, does not seek to keep us safe nor hold those who harm us accountable. Pervasive mythologies suggest (and in some cases, blatantly state) that Black men and boys are in infinitely more danger and, as such, require the vigilance and solidarity of the entire Black community and its allies; meanwhile, Black women and girls are thought of as too “strong” to be vulnerable, or simply too insignificant to be worried over regardless of frailty.

Justice, of course, will not come simply when the killers of Black women—be they ‘respectable,’ or ‘mouthy,’ upstanding members of society or the cruelest, most vile among us—are being held accountable. True
justice would entail the ability of those women to exist without the threat of dying at the hands of the police at all.

Breonna Taylor should have been able to go to sleep and wake up. It doesn’t matter what kind of woman she was inside or outside of her home. She deserved that, and that would be the case even if she had been wide awake when those officers showed up, and told them to go to hell. That would be the case if she was the reason for the raid, or if she was a sex worker, or a person struggling with addiction, or a drug dealer. She was not “essential” because she was an EMT, but because she was a human being. May we honor her life by extending that recognition to all Black women and girls.
On March 13, 2020, just after midnight, Louisville police officers shot and killed Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman and trained Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). Taylor had committed no crime. Still, the officers, armed with a no-knock warrant for a drug investigation involving a man already in custody, kicked down Taylor’s door while she was sleeping. Taylor’s boyfriend, reasonably thinking that the officers were intruders, shot at police with his lawfully registered gun. Three officers returned fire, striking Taylor eight times. For nearly twenty minutes, Taylor received no medical care, demonstrating just how little regard the officers had for her life, and her dreams of becoming a nurse, having a family, and owning a home.

In the roughly 160 days that have passed since her murder, I think about Breonna Taylor often. I think of a particular photo of her that was published by news outlets in the wake of her death. In it, she appears to be at her school graduation, flashing a brilliant smile as she proudly stands in front of an American flag in her EMT uniform. I think about the goals and dreams she was working toward and the people she kept safe as an emergency room technician in the midst of a pandemic. I wonder if Breonna felt safe as a Black woman in this country. Did she expect security and privacy as she rested in her home on that fateful night?

Now, as I prepare to teach first-year law students this fall, I think about Breonna and the ways in which American law conceptualizes the home as a safe harbor and a sacred space in which individuals are entitled to heightened forms of legal protection. In the cases that I will teach, courts describe the home as a “castle,” a “refuge” that is safe from the prying eyes of the public and the government. In the materials I teach,
judges will say that because of the protected status of the home, police must obtain a warrant before entering and that residents have the right to use deadly force in defense of their homes. What these cases and judges seldom admit, however, is that there are many exceptions to this general rule and that these exceptions disproportionately impact Black women, ultimately making them less safe in their homes. What these cases will not say is that Black women like Breonna Taylor or Marissa Alexander do not get the benefit of using deadly force to protect themselves. Courts rarely admit that judges often fail to carefully examine warrants in drug cases, with fatal results. The sad reality is that instead of protecting Black women, law facilitates violence against them in their homes.

Indeed, law has long sanctioned punishment of and police violence against Black women in the home. Enslaved Black women were raped and beaten with impunity by whites both in their homes and in the fields. Following the formal abolition of slavery, states like Georgia forced Black women to work in white households without pay as a form of criminal punishment, as is documented by historian Sarah Haley in her groundbreaking book *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment and Jim Crow Modernity*. While the use of domestic servitude as a form of punishment has fallen out of favor, Black women continue to be subject to state-sanctioned violence and punishment in the home.

In *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*, legal scholars Kimberlé Crenshaw and Andrea Ritchie document numerous instances of police killings of Black women in their own homes. The stories are simply heartbreaking: Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Kathryn Johnston and Alberta Spruill were killed under circumstances similar to those of Breonna Taylor when police entered their homes during botched drug raids. Eleanor Bumpurs was murdered when police attempted to evict her from public housing over an outstanding balance of less than $99. Atatiana Jefferson, Michelle Cusseaux, Shereese Francis and Kayla Moore were murdered by law enforcement when police responded to calls to check on their well-being. Meagan Hockaday and Janisha Fonville were killed when police responded to reports of domestic violence against them. These Black women, who range in age from 9 to 92, were killed by police because they were viewed as dangerous, as criminal, and as people who needed to be subdued with violence instead of women in need of support. None of the police officers who killed these women were ever prosecuted. Rather, the deaths of these women were ruled “justifiable” by law. In each of these cases, law elevated the rights of police over Black women’s rights to safety and security in their homes.

It’s not just police, however, who violate the rights of Black women and undermine their feelings of safety and security in their homes. Black women are routinely subject to warrantless searches of their homes by social workers and welfare enforcement agencies. In many states, social workers are authorized to conduct warrantless searches of the homes of women who rely on government support to feed and house their families. Black mothers who are disproportionately represented in the foster care system must submit to intrusive questions about their lives and open their homes to government scrutiny if they want to maintain custody of their children.
Despite the pain and humiliation this kind of surveillance inflicts on poor Black women, warrantless home searches by social workers and other governmental officials are perfectly legal. Time and time again, federal courts have held that welfare officials can “visit” or “inspect” the homes of poor Black women without a warrant in order to ensure that they are not misusing state resources (other recipients of government aid, such as college students or big corporations, are never subject to these kinds of indignities). When courts uphold these home searches, they often rely on stereotypes associated with the Black “welfare queen,” arguing that because welfare recipients may be irresponsible and prone to fraudulent behavior the state is justified in breaching the privacy of their homes. As a result of these state policies and judicial decisions, people who rely on welfare support have a lesser expectation of privacy in their own homes, which leaves poor Black women vulnerable to ongoing forms of state surveillance and harassment in a place where they should be safe.

As I reflect on the life of Breonna Taylor and write about the vulnerability that Black women like her experience at home, scores of us across the country have been ordered to “shelter in place” to slow the spread of COVID-19. Schools, restaurants, shops and salons are closed. We are encouraged to stay home and limit interactions with the outside world. To promote this effort, cities have declared that we are “safer at home.” But like COVID-19 itself, the notion of “safer at home” isn’t evenly applied. In the midst of this public health crisis that requires us to be home-bound, the number of Black women who are affected by state violence in the home continues to grow longer. In the midst of a historic uprising against police violence, the legal rights of Black women in the home remain under assault. Instead, for many Black women, the home is not a safe harbor, it is a prison. Black women will continue to be unsafe in their bodies and in their homes until we collectively name the places where they are unsafe, expand our understanding of state violence to include the experiences of Black women like Breonna Taylor, and hold the state accountable for the harms inflicted upon Black women. Only then can we say that Black women are safer at home.
Her heart beats in realms you cannot see
these fleshy, fragile suits are but vessels
you can’t box up the sun or hold the milky way hostage
can’t capture the wind, chain something as illusive as sound
her name is written in the ridges of your palm
hidden beneath your first waking breath
she is in the sky, in sunsets golden violets and blues
in the clouds, in the waves, her name is written there too.
Her womb, the cradle of civilization
Akashic Records trace it back, everyone is Black.
Do you not hear the wind testify?
We made you possible.
And what have you become?
What have you done?
Strayed so far from your own humanity, you can’t see ours.
What God do you pray to?
What laws do you live by?
Are you not ashamed to breathe
having stolen so much breath?
Karmic debt
almost beyond repair
who dares such barbarity?
Violence as generational practice, as tradition.
Such sins are cancerous to the collective soul
and we are all connected to the whole.
You violate the most sacred
carriers of light
divine feminine
we are the moon
we are life.
What upside down world did you create to take
the sanctity of our bodies and make it a thing?
The blessing of our skin, and make it wrong when all along
we are built by divine design.
You are haunted by your own doing
some sick sibling rivalry
you hate us, but want to be us.
No booty lift, lip injection, tanning salon can give you soul
no redemption, no ascension can be bought with silver or gold.
Just say her name, the constellations spell it out.
Say her name, it’s your passport to freedom, your only route
repent, confess.
Stole our bodies, our culture
the shoulders we stand on, but the ancestors’ spirits are not for sale.
Our regality and resilience are not for your taking.
Every peak and valley, her name is shaking
it echoes out from that core
she is both after and before
the very earth you walk on
the air in your lungs
the rhythm of your breath.
Say her name, it’s all that will be left
when you are called to judgement
stripped to ash and bone
say her name, that’s your only way home.
#SayHerName

ARTWORK BY OMARI BOOKER FOR GINA LORING’S SAYHERNAME
UNAPOLOGETIC

NYKI ELLE

CELEBRATING BLACK WOMEN
CONTRIBUTORS

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW is the co-founder and Executive Director of the African American Policy Forum, the host of the podcast Intersectionality Matters!, the moderator of the webinar series Under The Blacklight, and a Professor of Law at UCLA and Columbia Law School. She is popularly known for her development of “intersectionality,” “Critical Race Theory,” and the #SayHerName campaign, and is a leading authority on Civil Rights, Black feminist legal theory, and race, racism and the law. She is the most cited woman legal scholar in the history of the law, and was named one of the ten most important thinkers in the world by Prospect Magazine in 2019. GINA BEST is a founding member of the #SayHerName Mother’s Network, a group of mothers and family members of Black women lost to police violence. As a collective, the Network advocates for justice for their daughters and for other Black women whose lives are taken by police violence, and offers support to the family members of other victims. Gina’s daughter, India Kager, was shot and killed on September 5, 2015 by Virginia Beach police officers while parked outside a 7/11 with her infant son. Since India’s death, Gina has been a tireless fighter for justice, not only for her daughter, but for all Black women and girls killed by the police. ABBY DOBSON is a Sonic Conceptual Performing Artist/Composer, Activist and Scholar, who received a Juris Doctorate from Georgetown University Law Center and Bachelor’s from Williams College before accepting her artist’s calling. Artist-in-Residence with the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and NOW-NYC Board President, Abby is passionate about music as a tool for transformative change. abbydobsonsings.com. LEHNA HUIE is a multi-disciplinary artist, educator and cultural worker of Jamaican heritage born and raised in New York City. Lehna is committed to uplifting stories of Black life as a means to explore connections in the African Diaspora. Her work concentrates on themes such as spirituality, non-linear time and remembrance highlighting communications with her departed relatives and ancestral guides. Huie’s practice weaves together personal narratives of city life with Pan African and Caribbean imagery to make the unseen realms, seen. Often layered with diverse materials – paint, plaster, sawdust and beads – Huie’s work brings forth a symphony of moods through a hybrid of representational portraiture and abstract expressionism. A long-time arts educator, Huie is deeply committed to the fusion of arts and social change as a path to liberation. NICOLE YOUNG is a freelance writer, educator, coach, and policy wonk who is working to build a world with liberation and equity at the center. Nicole has pieces featured in ZORA magazine, is a contributing editor at Book Riot, and serves as a writing assistant at the African American Policy Forum. MELANIA BROWN, an activist, is the sister of Layleen Polanco Xtravaganza, an Afro-Latinx trans woman who died in solitary confinement in Rikers Island prison in New York in June 2019. Layleen was held at Rikers because she could not afford a $500 cash bail stemming from a previous charge for survival sex work. In June 2020, the Bronx DA’s office declined to press charges against the officials responsible for Layleen’s death. Her family recently won a suit against the city for its reckless indifference to Layleen’s life for $5.9 million, the largest settlement amount paid for a death in custody in New York City. AJA MONET is a surrealist blues poet, storyteller and organizer born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. She has won the Nuyorican Poets Cafe Grand Slam poetry award, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Award for Poetry, and was nominated for a NAACP Literary Award for Poetry. Her poems explore gender, race, migration, and spirituality. Her first full collection of poems is titled My Mother Was a Freedom Fighter, and she is currently working on her next full collection of poems entitled Florida Water.”
MONÈT NOELLE MARSHALL is a director, playwright, actor, curator, cultural organizer, and arts and culture consultant who produces words, performances, installations, gatherings and happenings that reflect the glory of the Black Femme experience and invite viewers into a Black radical imagination. Monet-NoelleMarshall.com. SYDNEY COLSON is a basketball player for the Chicago Sky of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA). Having dedicated the majority of her life to basketball, it was a dream to become a WNBA player. She now plans to pursue an acting career and use any platform she has to continue protesting racial injustice. ASHLEY MARSH is a student of photography whose work focuses on promoting self-confidence through the documentation and reflection of Black women especially. She has partnered with the Smithsonian and MSNBC, and is a constant photo contributor for Team Mag where she captures and magnifies often suppressed identities and youth expression. MARIA MOORE is the sister of Kayla Moore, a black, transgender, mentally disabled woman who was killed by Berkeley Police when friends called for a mental health evaluation. Maria is an advocate for women of color who have been killed and terrorized by police violence. She works closely with Berkeley Cop Watch, who started the Justice for Kayla Moore coalition, and has been a member of the African American Policy Forum #SayHerName campaign since 2014. Maria was born and raised in Berkeley, CA, and graduated from UC Berkeley in 1995. She has one daughter, and currently lives in Oakland, CA. JUREMA WERNECK is a Black activist, a doctor, and holds a PhD in Communication & Culture. She is the founder of the NGO Criola and Executive Director of Amnesty International Brazil. THANDIE NEWTON OBE; BAFTA- and Emmy-winning actress well-known for her roles in Beloved, Crash, Mission Impossible 2, The Pursuit of Happyness, BBC 1 drama Line of Duty, and most recently HBO’s critically acclaimed series Westworld. Among other memorable achievements she spoke at the 2011 TED Global Conference on the topic of “Embracing Otherness”. And as an activist and philanthropist, Thandie is a board member of the V-Day Foundation whose goal is to end violence against women worldwide. JAMILAH LEMIEUX is a writer and cultural critic (MSNBC, CNN, Lifetime’s Surviving R. Kelly). Her work has been featured by a host of print and digital outlets, including Essence, Buzzfeed, the Columbia Journalism Review and The New York Times, and she currently hosts Slate’s ‘Mom and Dad Are Fighting’ parenting podcast. She resides in Los Angeles. PRISCILLA A. OCEN is a professor of Law at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, where she teaches criminal law and writes about the impact of mass incarceration on women of color. She is also a member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission. GINA LORING Of African American, Eastern European Jewish and Muscogee Creek Native American descent, Gina Loring has performed her poetry and music in over ten countries as guest artist of the American Embassy under the Obama administration. A doctoral student at Clark Atlanta University, she teaches poetry workshops with incarcerated teens and youth transitioning out of trafficking. OMARI BOOKER takes a process-oriented approach to his art, embracing it as a therapeutic modality through which he is able to express his passion for the freedom and independence that the creative process allows him to experience. His art is his personal therapy, and his desire is that those viewing it will have personal experiences of catharsis. NYKI ELLE is a passionate NYC-based, Metro Detroit-bred Fashion & Lifestyle Photographer with over 20 years of photography experience and a Masters in Fashion Photography. She creates images that are uplifting, authentic and celebrate the beauty of diversity, with clients including Fashion Bomb Daily, ALEX AND ANI, and ESSENCE.com, to name a few.