

1000 Ways A Black Woman Dies: Stories from the Waiting Room
An original play

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Theatre

Bridgewater State University

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**1,000 Ways
a Black
Woman Dies:**

**Stories from the Waiting
Room**

Britney Lee-Anne Mallebranche

The characters in this play are to be only played by black women. The director of this show should also be black. The invention of this piece is to inform and educate as authentically as possible.

The set should be kept simple and preferably be performed in blackbox. There should be no props. Just however many chairs for characters needed, set up in a circle.

A dash notates a change of speaker

It is up to the director how many women the show needs. There must be at least 3, and at most 6.

When rehearsing, the appropriate research surrounding the topics in this play must be done with the whole company cast and crew during the rehearsal process. This is imperative to the success of this play.

A drive containing additional information on the development of this play will be in the link below.

<https://britneyleeannemall.wixsite.com/1000waysblckwomendie>

Enjoy, and thank you.

Songs

Sim la toujou

Haitian Creole Hymn

English adaptation by Britney Lee-Anne Mallebranche

Si Jodiam Vivan

Haitian Creole Hymn

English adaptation by Britney Lee-Anne Mallebranche

Alone

Original song by Britney Lee-Anne Mallebranche

Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child

Old traditional negro spiritual.

There is no sheet music for a reason. Demo tracks are in the drive link previously noted above, but arrangements are fluid. Think classic baptist gospel choir.

Barren, Gray Stage. Chairs are set up in a circle facing each other.

Starts in Blackout

Lights up on one woman

Sim la Toujou..

Sim la toujou se gras a ou Senye
Sim ekziste se gras a ou Senye
Si van lavi a, pa potem ale
Sim la toujou se gras a ou Senye.

If i'm still here, it's by your grace my God
If I still exist, It's by your grace my God
If the ways of the world don't send me away
If i'm still here, it's by your grace my God

Loud Bang

Blackout

A woman begins on the ground, and stands up. Starts looking all over the stage

- Hello??

The woman continues to wander

Another Woman comes behind her

- What did you do?

- What?

Enter

- What did you do to end up here?

Enter

- You know, besides being black

- I'm sorry where exactly am I?

Enter

- Depends on who you ask. Some call it Hell. Some call it a Utopia. I think of it as an in-between; A waiting room.
- A Waiting room? Wait- am I dead?

All Laugh

- Poor thing
- A clear newbie
- There's no real correct answer
- Like we said it's a waiting room
- No longer alive, but not totally gone
- So what, I just sit here & WAIT?
- That is ridiculous, I am not doing this. I don't deserve this.
- Do you think any of us deserved this?
- Do you think that we all just voluntarily strolled in here?
- Take a look around you
- We are all just as stuck as you are
- Nowhere to go
- I just, I don't understand
- There's nothing to understand
- All any of us really did.. is live
- But what happened?

All Stop

- Take a seat, I think it's time
- Time for what?
- To listen?
- Look, No one knows exactly what we are at this point, but I can tell you right now, we are not alive

- Something happened to each of us on earth before we ended up here. It's worth talking about.
- So we just sit here? And talk?
- Yes
- Like AA
- Well, Yeah
- More like DA
- Deaths anonymous
- Alright Ladies, let's go.

Si Jodiam Vivan

Si Jodiam Vivan

Se Gras a Ou

San ou Senye

Mwen Pa Ayen

If I Live Today

It's by your grace

Without you lord

I am Nothing

Map Leve Minm Anle Poum Adore

Met agenou anle pom post terne

Kite Voi mwen Rive Devan Throne ou

Vine ta Vi wa Yon mou

Kite Voi mwen Rive Devan Throne ou

Vine ta Vi wa Yon mou

I lift my hands in pain begging for peace

Down on my knees, I see no end for me
When will this nightmare end so that I can live free
The skin that I have won't let me be

When will this end

When will this nightmare end so that I can live free
The skin that I have won't let me be

Lights dim in centered on woman speaking

- I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America. To the republic, for which it stands, one nation. Under God. Indivisible. With Liberty and justice for all. I said these words faithfully my whole life. My family thought that it was absurd for me to go to the army. They told me everyday that the military does not protect people who look like me. Especially women who looked like me. But I didn't listen. I thought they were being overly dramatic. If the military didn't care, why would they try to come to my high school to specifically recruit girls like me & offer all of these amazing benefits? God knows my family couldn't afford school. And I wanted to study to become a clinical psychologist, so that was going to be years of schooling. The army was the perfect way to offset that cost. I serve for a few years in a low-risk zone, & they cover me for life.

Wishful Thinking

Basic training & shipping out wasn't horrible. It was challenging of course with the physical demand and even down to appearance, black women aren't given much to work with in terms

of hairstyles. Female soldiers' must always have their hair in a bun, and it can't be shorter than $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch or have braids, twists, locks, or cornrows that are wider than $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch. You can imagine how restrictive that is for black women. But, I survived.

In training, they emphasized the point of allegiance & brotherhood. That on the field we are all that we have. We need to protect and do the right thing for each other. I was so optimistic. It felt like I had a family away from my family. There was a certain pride in serving. You were taught that risking your lives is all worth it when the favor is returned.

When I got deployed and put on location, I was one of 5 women in my troop and the only black woman at that. Being a woman in the military is already a pretty unique experience as we are in a weird place in life where it was only recently acceptable in society for women to join.

- Seriously, really only within the last 30 years or so.
- What?!
- Yeah, most women's rights were only granted within the last few years.
- If you think about it, women's suffrage was granted in 1920
- Over a Hundred years after men were already voting
- Black women didn't even get a chance until 1970.
- I thought women's suffrage was in 1920?
- It was, but in order to make the movement more appealing to southern white women, they purposely excluded black women from the campaign process, so it carried into individual state laws once the amendment was passed.

- So you're telling me that black women basically didn't get to vote until 1970?
- Pretty much, yeah
- Fucked. Up.

- So with a history like that, it was pretty obvious that white women were still the clear favorite even though we were all the minority gender-wise. It felt a little isolating at times but nothing new.

One night, I was preparing for bed in my tent when 5 men from my troop entered. They were all fairly friendly to me most days, so I wasn't freaking out, but something about their entrance was unsettling. They came around me & began weird small talk. Talking about their day and asking me how I am, things like that. It felt more and more unsettling as the conversation continued, but I remained calm. Then, The mood shifted. One man started asking me how comfortable I've been since I arrived. That they wanted me to feel comfy, since "I'm a part of them now". As they were talking, they kept getting closer and closer and for the first time, I just felt pure fear. I slowly began backing towards the entrance of the tent. I tried to turn around to bolt out the entrance, but all I felt was a pair of hands reach out and grab me to pull me back in. Multiple pairs of hands were grabbing me and ripping my clothes off like it was nothing. Like I was nothing. I felt a sharp pain enter me and I remember kicking and screaming trying to get free but then one of the men began to punch me trying to get me to shut up. He just kept punching, and punching and I kept fighting until I felt my whole body go limp as I was still continuously getting hit. Then everything went dark, and I ended up here.

- You know, the most painful part of being here is that you can still see what's going on on earth. Those men USED me and just walked away. They left my body there like trash.

- Did someone find you?

- Twelve hours later. But they just took my body, packed it up, asked my troop some questions for one day, and then labeled it a suicide. A suicide. They saw the bruises & wounds all over my body, And then said it was a suicide.

- What did your parents say

- My parents weren't even notified until 3 weeks later. In a Letter. All it basically said was that "hey, your daughter killed herself. So sorry". My mom broke down as she read that. All I could do was cry & be forced to watch from here. I would give my all to just have been able to hold her at that moment.

- Even when my parents reached out for more answers, the army gave nothing. It took my dad filing a lawsuit for an autopsy to see what really happened to my body. Even after it was taken to court, every single person in my troop stayed silent. Not a word. They just left my existence to be in vain. When I joined, I was told to serve & protect each other as they would for me. But who was protecting me then? Who was serving my justice?

Alone

Alone

That's all I feel

Alone

I don't know how to deal

With the loneliness

Inside

Alone

You come into this world

Alone

And you leave just the same

Alone

With nowhere to turn

All the walls are coming closer

What do you do when your world comes crashing down?

Who do you turn to?

When in the this world

You're destined to be

Alone

Alone

Alone

Alone

Betrayal

That's all that I feel

Betrayal

Left with nothing but grief

Betrayal

What else would I feel

Out here

The truth is coming clear to me

Where do I begin

When the people sent to stand by me

Are the first disappear

When the facts no longer matter

How do I move on

When my pain is left in history

Please help me, oh God I'm

Alone

Alone

Alone

Alone

- I don't understand
- I think the whole spiel was pretty self-explanatory
- No, I understand the story, I mean I just don't get how your own comrades could do such a thing
- It's not surprising. Women in the military are notoriously disrespected
- Nevermind black women
- I don't know, maybe it's just a military thing. There's no way blatant ignorance happens everywhere
- Well, not everywhere
- No, everywhere
- You're telling me that everywhere you go in life, you see Tragedies like this happen?
- Just because you don't see things for yourself firsthand, doesn't mean it's not happening
- True
- Well I'm not military and I had a fucked up death too
- Wow I'm so happy for you
- No seriously, I died doing the thing in life that was supposed to bring me the most joy. Childbirth.
- Seriously?
- Yes. You know, growing up, As a girl, they tell you the number one joy in life that you will have as a woman is the day you give birth to your own child & start your family.
- That statement screams social construct

- Yeah, I mean this is the 21st century, not every woman wants kids & not every woman can have kids. So what, life will never have any real joy for them?
- Yikes
- Fuuuccckkkkedddd upppppppppp
- Look I agree 1000%, but that isn't how we were raised.

It was mentally beaten into me that the very purpose I held as a woman in life was to nurture, provide, procreate, and repeat. There was a certain glory behind having your own family and just having a child of your own. You know, when I was a kid I would always play with baby dolls imagining what mine would be like one day in real life. Even as I got older as I started dating and eventually found my husband. I made sure I found someone who not only had everything that I wanted in my partner but everything I wanted in the father of my children as well. So after I got married we immediately started trying for children. It took a little bit of time for us and honestly it was some of the most nerve-racking months of my life. For some people, all it takes is one time and they're pregnant. I was hoping that that would be my case as well, but it didn't end up working out that way for me. It took a lot of doctor visits and medications but eventually, I did get pregnant and I was so excited.

Everything that I had dreamed about and that my mom had dreamed about and her mom dreamed about was finally happening for me. I was going to be a mother. I immediately started reading every parenting guide out there. I was in every single Facebook group and I was constantly asking other people who I knew had children what to prepare for and what to do once the baby was here. Every time I went to the doctor I would bombard them with future questions about what I needed to know while the baby is growing

and questions about the baby itself. No one ever taught me that I was supposed to ask questions about my own body. About myself.

When we talk about pregnancy we talk about everything that's happening for the child. But we never talk about what's happening to the woman herself. It never crossed my mind when I was having this baby that I was also a major factor in it. We are so trained to constantly focus on the end product that we neglect to check what's happening to the woman herself at that very moment.

Towards the end of my second trimester I went in for a doctor's appointment and the doctor noticed there were some issues as to where the baby had lodged itself into my Uterus. For me, the main concern was how the baby was going to be delivered. It had never been brought to my attention that I myself would also be in danger. It was all about the baby. Granted even in my mind, it was always about the baby. I had just naturally assumed that if there was something that was going to be wrong with me, motherhood aside, the doctors would protect me and make sure that any concern about myself would be handled immediately. Unfortunately, I miscalculated that all the way.

My doctor had told me to just take it slow and relax during the last trimester and come in for a weekly appointment so they can make sure the baby is safe and worse comes to worst I would have to get a C-section rather than naturally deliver the baby. Once again, nothing had been brought up about me. So I went home. I was drinking all the natural remedies and herbs to make sure that the baby was getting any nutrients it needed.

I was up every night googling stuff about the baby and different things that could happen to the baby and what I needed to look out for. For the baby.

In the last month of my pregnancy, I began to feel some chest pains every once in a while. For the first time in the whole pregnancy, I began to feel concerned about myself. I had been so wrapped up in making sure the baby was okay that it took this chest pain to make me wonder if I was okay. So I called the doctors and tried to explain the chest pains I've been having and the doctor just dismissed it out of hand. They Assumed that it might be the food I was eating and simply advised me to start sticking to a more strict and cleaner diet. And I did. I trusted my doctor. I trusted that if he wasn't concerned about what was happening to me I shouldn't be concerned about what was happening to me.

Around two weeks later I was in my kitchen cooking dinner and suddenly the constant chest pain I was feeling was no longer a minuscule thing. I suddenly felt the most agonizing pain in my heart that I had ever experienced. I immediately dropped to the floor and thank God my husband was there in the next room and frantically called 911 as he tried to help me. We went to the hospital and I was immediately taken to my Doctor and they began to run a series of tests.

That whole time I was thinking that they are running tests for me as I was the person who is having the pain. Come to find out they were running tests on the baby. When I found this out, I was asking the doctor why they were doing that and why I wasn't receiving the test and the short answer was something along the lines of "mothers' pains can sometimes be dramatized due to the

stress of pregnancy". That symptoms or pains that seem like their major aren't really that big of a deal. I only feel as bad as I do because I'm paranoid about my pregnancy.

- "paranoid about your pregnancy"?

- How does that even make sense

- It's your body. Isn't any pain your pain?

- You're literally pushing a fat-headed baby out a 10-centimeter long area, you'd think they know you know the difference between "dramatized" and real pain

- Fucked. Up.

- At that point, I just silently sat in the hospital bed. What was I supposed to do? These are the people that are supposed to bring my baby into the world and keep both my baby and me alive. I am at their command. So I sat there and accepted it. I just kept replaying the narrative in my head that doctors are here to keep me safe. Yes, I am here to deliver this baby but their job is to keep me and the baby alive and well together.

I remember out of nowhere I felt the sharpest pain in my chest ever and just began shaking. I lost total control of my body and was just thrashing around in pain. Doctors came in frantically looking around because realistically no one really cared that much until it was too late. I remember my husband looking mortified and was screaming my name. I wanted to respond to him so badly and tell him how much I was hurting but I couldn't. The doctors got my body to stop shaking and immediately rushed me to surgery. However, while I was on the table, they gave me medication that numbed me, but I still was awake and conscious. It was then I saw that I wasn't their main focus. I literally saw them immediately start to go to work on my baby and get my

baby out. It finally dawned on me that they had no intention of figuring out what was wrong with me or saving me, they were just trying to get my baby out before my last breath was drawn.

Sure enough, the pain in my chest returned and the next thing I know, everything went black. To this day I don't think my husband knows that the doctors didn't do much to save me. That they just went in to save our kid so that they at least had something to bring back to my husband and ween off any suspicions. I Still sit here in this in-between wondering why. Why would the people who are literally trained to save me ignore me? Why would the people who spent years in school learning about symptoms, and learning about patient care just literally leave me out to die?

I love the child that I created even now while they're down there and I'm up here. I still love that child with all my whole heart. But this feeling like having that child I had to sacrifice my own life was not something I signed up for. That is not something that I was made aware of. I never knew any of this could even happen to me. It's like when you're pregnant there are always hidden fees in the terms and conditions that no one ever talks about. And now I've fallen victim to that.

- Unbelievable

- Uhm, very believable

- The medical world is notorious for neglecting black women

- You know black women are 2.5 times more likely to die of pregnancy complications compared to white women?

- Yeah, for every 100,000 births, 37 black women died while pregnant or within six weeks of pregnancy compared to 15 white women.

- Because the desire to save black women is less charged.
- sickening.

- Are you saying that you regret having your child?

- No. I will never regret bringing life into this world. Like I said I love my child and I know my husband loves them too. But I also loved my life. I loved what I had done with my life. And I had so much more I still wanted to do, but that opportunity was taken away from me by the last people I would expect to do so. So now not only am I somewhere where I had no business being this early in my life, but now my husband is left to raise our child by himself, and now my child has to grow up without a mother as well too.

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long way from home, a long way from home.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost done,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost done,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost done,
And a long, long way from home, a long way from home.

A long, long way from home,
A long, long way from home.

- I don't think I can do this
- you don't really have a choice
- No, I really can't do this
- What is the left for you to "do"? you're not alive anymore
- Yeah well, I need to be undead. I don't know what needs to be done but I need to get back down to my life. I wasn't ready.
- Do you think any of us were ready for this? Do you think any of us woke up and said yeah sure I want to go through an untimely death, why the hell not?
- No one asked to die the way that we died. All we can do is sit here and wait.
- Wait for what? For me to get into heaven or hell for me to resolve any unsolved issues in my mind I don't know what I'm waiting for.
- No one knows what we're waiting for. No one knows anything. And you bitching about it isn't going to change anything that is happening right now. So suck it up and deal with what's going on.
- I don't want to deal. I didn't deserve this. I was living a full fruitful life on earth. I had parents who cared about me. I had siblings who got on my nerves but would back me up in any situation. I did everything right. I got straight A's in school. I went to a great college with a huge scholarship and graduated. Got my masters. I was the first in my family to make a six figure salary. I did everything right. I never broke a single law in my life. I did everything by the book. But your accomplishments don't matter when this is your skin color.

Do you know I grew up telling myself that racism is no longer a thing? That black people just used it as a crutch

to give themselves an excuse to not exceed in life. To fail to be everything that our ancestors wanted us to be. I worked so hard to rise above stereotypes and everything that is attached to the color of my skin because I thought I was beyond that.

- What kind of self-hatred?
- Why would you ever think we would WANT to keep ourselves down?
- Well the media always portrays it that way
- That is true, if you go on any major news network, they are always talking about the poverty and violence that surrounds majority-black areas
- They even do it to black countries. Honestly sit here and ask yourself if you have ever heard an American news story on a black country that shed any positive light on them.
- It's always the bad things.
- Because people only see us for our "bad things". There's no pleasing news with good news.
- It's all about the greater agenda of always painting "Americans" A.K.A white people in the most positive light they can
- So they make these stories to make it seem like they care and are trying to spread awareness when it really is just helping them look good and black people look voluntarily helpless.
- But you see when I saw stories like that, I always saw myself above it. Like it did not pertain to me. But in this world, I will never escape that. I died at the hands of that.

I was driving home from dinner at a restaurant around 10 o'clock at night. I didn't have anything to drink besides one glass of wine but I was entirely sober. I was driving perfectly fine. As I was driving home I noticed a car on the side of the

road and a white woman was standing there looking for help. So I pulled over to see what I could do for her. If I could offer her anything or help her out. Her tire popped and she didn't know how to change it to put the spare on. Luckily my dad taught me how to do that when I was younger so I offered to help her and she said sure.

As we were talking and I began to rummage in her trunk to find the spare tire and the tire changing kit, the woman next to me was obviously still very stressed out about the situation.

That's when a cop pulled over behind us. Like I said I've never had a single offense in my life. I'm a stand-up citizen. I have done nothing to aggravate anyone. But immediately a cop came out with guns drawn. The interaction ended as soon as it started.

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

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

And it's not even like death itself is something that sticks out in the crowd, you know. Because black people die like this all the time. Men and women. But the problem with it is that typically once you hear about stories like this in the news, you constantly are hearing about how they had a drug past or a violent history, or a record of owning or criticizing the

police. I had none of that. I was just a normal person who did the right thing, who never ever crossed anyone. But no one sees that. For the first time, I am being forced to understand that the reality of my life is the color of my skin. That racism is very much still alive and well and that there's nothing that I can do.

I can rise above as much as I want to but I will never get anywhere as long as this is the color of my skin. I want to do better for myself and for my culture, but as long as people like that run this earth I will never get the chance. Nor anyone else like me.

- I understand how you-

- Do you understand how I feel because clearly, we're on two different pages it seems

- Excuse me?

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

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

- It's a generational curse.

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

- As black women, we carry the pain and traumas of not only ourselves, but the black women who came before us.

- It's a cycle that never fails to repeat itself

- You know there was a massive decline in health in black women during the Jim Crow era due to racial stress?

- Generational trauma

- In fact, black women diagnosed with breast cancer born in racially charged areas were more at risk to get more violent tumors that were less responsive to regular chemotherapy?
- Generational trauma
- Even now, the majority of women in the U.S. who have Uterine Fibroids are black women. Which have been linked to stress
- So what I thought fibroids are harmless
- So they say. But they never tell you what it can affect. What it can block.
- Now that you say that, they never explain what to really DO with your fibroids and what can happen or what to look out for
- That's because they don't know the answers to those questions
- It's the 21st century how do they not know
- No one cares enough to do the research or to fund the research
- You know why?
- Because it's a "black disease"
- And "black diseases" are a black people problem
- Generational. Trauma.
- Okay so we have some restraints, I'm not going down like this.

- Oh my- What do you want us to do? We are already here. I can't reverse anything, you certainly can't either. There is nothing we can do.

Women sit for a beat

- You know what? there is. I can have hope
- Hope
- Yes hope. Give a prayer so loud it shakes the earth, and may the right people hear it.

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

Dear Woman,

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

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

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

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

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

I'd like to think we didn't necessarily fail. Sometimes some stories have just really senseless and harmful deaths. Unfortunately, we fall under that. But Allow our pain to be used as armor around your bodies as you put into battle in this war. The blood that we have shed to cover you and give you the strength to push through. Because our stories are not over. The legacy of our lives does not end after death just because we are no longer a part of this world. They carry on through you. How

you choose to continue the story is your choice. There is no defining ending to this tale. And for good reason. We give no end because the work is not over, the pain has yet to end and the unimaginable tombstones continue to be engraved. So I refuse to give you an end, I guess you'll have to find that on your own.

Clock beat going

***1**

2

3

4

1

Serving

2

Caring

3

Living

4

Surviving

1

Serving

2

Caring

3

Living

4

Surviving

**Ending is up to directors discretion. This part is to be done as a spoken word piece beginning with those first 4 "ways" from there it is up to the director on how the counting up to 1,000 can go, whether skipping numbers or having multiple people do it in a cannon-like manner. Director should speak with the company on words they would like to use for the production, some suggested words will be listed below of instances where a black woman has died. Words can be repeated as the count to 1,000 happens*

Breathing

Working

Walking

Sleeping

Reading

Jogging

Eating

Cooking

Driving

Helping

Existing

Shopping

Teaching

Complying

Crying

Singing

Praying

Learning

Writing