Antiracism Inc.
Felice Blake, Paula Ioanide, Alison Reed

Published by Punctum Books

Felice Blake, et al.
Antiracism Inc. Why the Way We Talk about Racial Justice Matters.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66825

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2331805
Part III

CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS
Pleasure as an Imperative (for Black Femmes) in 5 Acts

Ebony P. Donnley

I. Act Natural

i command you to feel good
i command you to feel good
i command you to feel good
break the trancy cadence typical of pseudo spiritual guru miracle mumbo jumbo that’s nothing remotely like the saccharine self-help for justified skeptics, agnostic cynics who didn’t know that all the God that’s left here on this earth on this dreary day in the blood red dirt somewhere in america
is in they/them
in she/her. any pronoun
a name they don’t know
can’t pronounce correctly
won’t say

Pants not fitting
Caretaker to old white lady who can’t open her own corner store bought parfait, both sitting on the bench outside the Bean and I just want to talk to you
I want to talk to her
“What happens when your pants don’t fit?”
I’d imagine she’d say,
“Wear them anyway”
Because you have to
Live life like you play the bass
Another occult figure in my origin story of how black women peopled the earth
so sweet, self-effacing even,
saying yes cus we dont/havent gotten to know my/our nos yet,
saying no like no means death—an advanced directive for the young and disaffected
Tiarah Pouyah
Joyce Quaweay
I’m charged to write about human death and make it poetic.
Til this day, more than 64,000 black women have gone missing in the United States
scant coverage for the poor
or rich
now just a pointless schism, a pointed criticism of both,
none matter the day after you never made it home

II. Ack Up

when they put my little brown body in a box
a wooden box is where my body will go
i will continue to say thank you from the bottom of this box
i will end well
i will be gracious
niced and polited out of life and even now i’ll be less transgressive in my behavior
a corpse smacking its lips and contorting its neck, talking shit mid rigor mortis
from a bloated mass of formaldehyde
once a grandmother, a mother, a patron at the shop in Fort Greene, the last vestiges of black anything over there, sitting in her wheelchair, hair slicked down close to her scalp, listening to
an obscure trap song by rihanna about shopping in paris throwing bands.
Lovely, underneath the drier station that looks like the astronaut helmet tattooed on a brown guy’s wrist on a visit to new york to see her girlfriend whose skin is brown too, thank God. I prayed for such skin.
i want to talk to her too not rihanna not my lover but this woman in her chair in Fort Greene getting her hair done and i just wish she would notice me i strike up conversation with every black woman i see

i’m trying to stop writing about death I have to grasp, oxymoronically, the Buddhist tenant of impermanence that discourages grasping, discourages longing the indelibly finite as veiled suffering at its core, unfettered like his namesake, I convince myself to celebrate having already died, rather than grasp at the primordial finite — this life So many of us have already died Enough to fill an entire museum Enough to fill every museum in America I can’t keep up with the faces or the names Alas, impermanence is not imperative Like pleasure is

III. Act Now

I’ve been to the meadow and the creek where there was no water where there was no lead in said water where that rhyme scheme could not possibly make sense to a single audience in a developed country in the 21st Century i’ve been to the prairies of old towns deserted with old folks who still consider dessert presents for christmas cake foods named after the pontified dead
i’ve been to the nail shop and salons
filled with Sunday Saints pontificating over pompadour fades in
preparation for well deserved sin to be had on Saturday
well deserved
long overdue
pleasure

this poem could end right here in black

In East Oakland, at a quaint middle school on one of the posher
blocks that intersect International Avenue, several small chil-
dren are seated in a large dining room, possibly adjacent to a
kitchen that houses an industrial-sized freezer, a pair of micro-
waves and an antique faux-porcelain gas stove blackened from
the pinguid resin that accompanies feeding bleeding chickens to
black children who’ll die soon too
not in a pool of their own blood — like poultry
but because school lunch is now the first and last meal of the day
and possibly, of their lives
themselves
each other
each one an omnipresent apparition to a disheveled orchid carpel,
a wrought iron laurel whose innermost whorl we call ovaries
hardened from one too many millers after her seed was bore and
couldn’t grow no more
i’m speaking of her daughter who is now in highland hospital
cross-pollinating with diabetes patients awaiting amputation on
the corner of a ward that
feels eerily similar to the block where she was once posted, sup-
planted, in front of Lee’s 99 cent store
waiting for savings
like corporations
like hoes who can’t no more, precisely the type of death that this
world enjoys
Her mother can’t wait til she also dies — an easier way to justify
why she sleeps the entire day, a slumber not nearly as metaphor-
ical as it seems
just plain old ass not having a reason for breathing, much less staying awake in the kind of darkness that a cis man would be afraid of a supreme darkness that feels nostalgic, like we’re a part of it I’m writing about writhing in pleasure

is it just me or are you melting too?

IV. Acting Lessons

Is the ocean black? Does it wear bowties? Does it milly rock at the Blue Flame on snapchat O’ Oshun Did it go topless at Afropunk leaving outdated perceptions of illness in its wake? Do the waves ride together and vibe together to Badu, and debate her occasional, off-kilter misogyny and her love for us and for money and our devotion to her regardless Eyes glistening, don’t know if we listening or submitting Donny Hathaway on highway 1 laughing the whole way down Brain awash with filthy water even when it knows that holy requires only permission Is the ocean of a visage of Her teachings, a God with a vagina that only weeps in diegesis, only speaks in laymen Jesus Living on a prayer and surviving on a diet of frozen pizza she is dying to meet you O’ Oshun she is dying to meet you does the ocean effortlessly give to those who only take, is it chipped fingernail polish and not giving a fuck The ocean has no mechanism to support our survival The sound never stops water hitting the shore
like a thousand Tibetan monks chanting a dirge in 6/4 time for me, like 32 St. Bernard parishioners second line for me, the timbre
Never gets tired
Never stops for the comfort of someone else
The ocean does what it does
Because that’s all it’s there to do
It’s not here for our enjoyment

V. Tired of Actin’

I want white people to know that they confer the benefits and magnanimity of a black love ethic everyday we choose emotional intelligence or spiritual intuition or timidity or fear or paralysis or whatever and not burn this bitch to the ground and write the names of all the people who’ve died in soot on your door frames of your houses, and your gates, instead of these generous, thoughtful and oft well written open letters to closed coffins, poetic musings and dense, academic rants in these status boxes in a fit of emotional exhaustion

da song of song for the mangroves that house no bird species, much less cages
we are not palm trees
we do break
bending is commendable but some of us do break
it is okay to break
it is okay to be bent to an unrecognizable shape
it’s okay if you’re not okay

rightly do i love you

Draw me after you, Mercedes, Keyonna, Diamond, Shante…let us run

where you pasture your flock,
where you make it lie down at noon;
a flock of shorn ewes,
    come up from the washing, black and holy
    though many among them have lost their young,

Dee Whigham
Rae'lynn Thomas
Say her name for it is oil poured out
Her name is oil poured out;

a sachet of myrrh
    that lies between my breasts.
Picture India Clarke covered in a cluster of henna blossoms
    in the vineyards of Engedi.

i really wish this was an ode to black girls, from pure sin to gnostic text—
talking nasty and ratchet from the same orifice from whence the 8 octave range came and hands that threaten to rewrite the magna carta
black femmes
i didn't intend for this to be worship,
but a deep longing for a call to arms,
for us to lock ours
an Audre-esque amalgam of mythology, teetering on the precipice of dreamscape and legends of watermelon women before me mistaken for men so i could at least know there was a template
for the experience of being in a barbershop, looked upon like a lamb shorn by sheep just as black as me who ask, with faded nape and razor line like mine across their heads, if i want to be a man, that this type of cut would look more feminine
that ask me if i’m male or female, to which i reply woman but really mean neither, then with a sigh of relief at bus stops and corner stores and farmer’s markets, say,
“whew, i thought you were a guy
“can i have your number?”
this was all prior to the binding
ANTIRACISM INC.

working through the weeping while he tells me to wait because he’s almost there and i let him keep moving because mangroves never really float to shore, never reach nowhere