

Billie, Malcolm & Yusuf

A Play In One Act

with blues and rap music

By Fred Newman

Ghetto rap is by Dylan Brown.

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Cast of Characters

BILLIE HOLIDAY, a blues singer

MALCOLM X, an orator

YUSUF HAWKINS, a young rapper

EMMY STRAIGHT, an itinerant comedienne

Gallery Set:

Gallery walls are without a show hung. Draped with black to appear, in semi-Avant Garde fashion, as a funeral parlor. Somber lighting, colors of mourning, flowers in vases, urns, etc., possibly a guest register: all the trappings of a funeral home. Gallery video screens are dark.

Theatre Pre-Set:

All doors have been removed (except the one to production). There are no seats for audience (maybe some benches). Lighting is gloomy, nearly dark. There are three round platforms situated at some distances from each other around the theater; each granite (painted), 6' diameter and 2.5' high, resembling monument bases, with a staircase on each. Also, there's a rectangular platform, centrally located amongst the three round platforms which is a funeral bier prepared to receive a coffin. In front of the bier is a piano/organ set-up, decorated with candles and flowers as for a funeral service. These four platforms are the playing areas. Each is to be lit by its own bright splash/spot which is dark during pre-set. There are two large (30") TV monitors situated so the audience can see either or both. These are also dark for pre-set.

Seated at the piano is a pianist/organist. Situated on each of the round platforms are the three "famous" characters: **BILLIE HOLIDAY**, who is sitting wearily, on the edge of platform as if at a vanity table; **MALCOLM X**, standing, almost posturing; **YUSUF HAWKINS**, in a hip macho teenagerish pose. The audience is encouraged by unarticulated cues to remain in the gallery/parlor. (However, if someone wanders into the theater/chapel it's not a crime.)

Prologue

The audience is gathered in the gallery/parlor. Action is **SIMULTANEOUSLY** made up of:

- Q1 - As audience enters
- Q2 - Place Coffin
- Q4 - End of Heaven Song

A funeral procession begins at the ESC entrance. A closed coffin is borne by 4-6 African American pallbearers, who move slowly through the audience, gathering followers as it proceeds into the theater/chapel, ultimately bringing the entire audience into the theater.

The splash/spots go up suddenly on the four platform/playing spaces, revealing the three characters who are still (but not frozen) or performing a slight gesture, and the funeral bier.

The pianist/organist plays music.

Two TV monitors in theater and four TV monitors in gallery: GO UP showing end of a funeral procession in a cemetery, leading to a gravesite.

Conception: The audience goes nowhere—the play comes to the audience! Concept for TV: all action will appear on monitors in real life, on-location real action, i.e., a real funeral procession in the Black community at a real cemetery. **MALCOLM X** character on a real street corner in Harlem giving a speech, etc. The audience has now moved to the theater, and the procession has led to the bier where the coffin is placed. Video shows the end of the real funeral; then cuts/sweeps to show footage of clouded sky, tops of NYC buildings, tenements. This is the visual cue for the theatrical action. Organ music comes down slowly. TV comes down to bustling Harlem community. Players are relaxed in character, speaking casually as if at home in the living room, somewhat familiarly.

MALCOLM X: So, Lady Day... you singin'? You gonna sing for our new arrival here? (*Motions to coffin.*)

BILLIE: I... ah... I ain't feelin' so good today... I don't feel like singin' so much. (*Pause.*) Tell you the truth... I ain't felt much like singing' for a long time now Brother Malcolm. Ya see... I dunno why I'm singin' anymore... you know?

YUSUF: Come on. Word! Miss Holiday, you gotta sing! You the best singer ever was. You know. C'mon, Miss Holiday, hey, c'mon.

MALCOLM X: Sister Billie. You sang for me when I got here. I hadn't seen you since that time downtown at the Onyx Club. I remember you were still sick then. But you sang so beautiful. You sang for our young friend Brother Yusuf here when he got here back in '89. We need you to sing for this new (*laugh*) I dunno yet... brother or sister. And furthermore, (*more laughingly*) I just love to hear your voice, Lady Day. There's ... well, there's never been another like it, you know.

YUSUF: (*Teenage whining*) Really. I mean Malcolm heard you alot. But I almost never heard you. Word up, you gotta sing. That's it, Lady... uh, Miss Holiday... I'm sorry. That's dope, you gotta sing for us.

BILLIE: Child... you jest be cool, huh... jest be cool. My head is hurtin' me... Godamighty! I'm tired; I... just ain't got it in me no more... I'm afraid I'll make a damn fool of myself. (*Pause.*) Who'm I singin' to, Brother Malcolm? I was never sure who I was singin' to, you know. But now... now I dunno at all. White folks never really knew what I was singin' about. And Black folks don't wanna hear about it no more. So who'm I singin' for Brother Malcolm? I used to sing for me. I loved how it felt. I loved the music... I loved to be around music... I loved to make music. But they killed me, Brother Malcolm X. The white folks killed me; the Black folks killed me; the men folks killed me; I killed me. Well... now I'm dead. I don't feel the music no more. I don't feel nothin' no more.

(*MALCOLM walks to BILLIE HOLIDAY pedestal.*)

MALCOLM X: Maybe you'd feel better, Sister Billie, if you just sang a little bit. I know what you're sayin' though, Lady. I dunno sometimes who I'm talkin' to anymore. I dunno if anyone is listenin'. And I dunno if our people are feelin'. I mean, I know we're hurtin' but I dunno if we're feelin'. Maybe we be hurtin' so much and for so long that we can't feel no more.

YUSUF: Whatchu' two talkin' about over there? Sister Billie... (*Rapping*)

You're deep! the freshest
sweetest honey-crooning
Lady,
say your head is busting open
but when I was down there,
just a child, gropin'
for some meaning
some soul
feelin' young and cold,
OUT OF CONTROL

I seen ya in the movie, Lady Day
I heard your sweet deep wailin'
come to welcome me back home.

Damn... you gotta sing for this one... this... ah... *(laughs)* "new arrival."

BILLIE: Oh young brother, young brother Yusuf... you gonna drive me crazy you know.
(Pause.) Guess I'd rather sing a little than listen to you goin' on and on...

YUSUF: Yeah, yeah, c'mon, Sister!

BILLIE: ... Ok, OK, OK, I'll sing... I know at least you two... uh, maybe three... will hear me.

(Video shows live performance of Kathy Jordan/BILLIE HOLIDAY at a club. BILLIE prepares herself as video plays. Piano up and sings "Willow Weep For Me.")

MALCOLM X: Ah, Sister... that was exquisite. You are still the epitome of song, you know.
Thank you, Sister Billie. Thank you.

YUSUF: *(Flirtingly walks over in exaggerated hip walk to BILLIE's pedestal)* Word! That was so fine, so fine. Now I know why my folks loved to hear you. You're even more beautiful when you sing, you're soooo fine...

BILLIE: *(Playfully pushes YUSUF away)* Git outta here, boy... git outta here... *(Gets herself together.)*
Well, thank you, thank you, Brothers. Like I said, I thought you two would ... appreciate a song... so... *(she gestures toward the coffin)* who else did I have the honor of singin' for here today?

MALCOLM X: *(Walks slowly over to coffin; video of MALCOLM walking through Harlem.)* Ah, yes! *(Claps hands together almost slickly.)* Who have we here?

(YUSUF walks slowly over to coffin; young Black kids walking, etc. on video.)

YUSUF: Yo! Let's check it out. Let's check-it-out.

(MALCOLM and YUSUF slowly open coffin. Up pops EMMY STRAIGHT in weird costume; jacket, funny hat, etc. Enter EMMY STRAIGHT, a third or fourth rate stand up comedienne who is almost always doing some kind of comedy routine. She looks around and immediately starts in.)

EMMY: All right. I know where I am. Where in the hell is God?

(BILLIE, MALCOLM and YUSUF look at each other, shocked, non-plussed, as EMMY continues.)

EMMY: Where is he? Someone point him out to me. Which one of you... *(peering suspiciously at them)* which one of you knows where I can find him? *(Pauses for response.)* Go ahead. Show me the way. I am ready to meet my maker. I hope the bastard is ready to meet Emmy Straight. *(She comedically gets out of coffin.)*

(Video: EMMY STRAIGHT doing visual shtick as stand-up at a small club.)

Q5 - With
Piano
Q6 -
Applause

Q7 - Emmy
pop out of
Coffin

Q8 - Emmy X
away from
coffin

MALCOLM X: Wait. Wait a minute, Sister. "Where is God?" (*Laughs.*) Nobody asks, "Where is God?"

BILLIE: Yeah, hush, now, Sister. Hush now.

YUSUF: Yo, chill, Sister. Chill.

EMMY: (*Disregarding them completely*) Where... the hell... is God? Who is he? I've got all day, I figure, and we are gonna be here until I get my answer.

MALCOLM X: Who in the name of Allah do you think you are talking about, may I be so bold as to inquire?

BILLIE: Say! You know where you are? It ain't right what you sayin', sister. I mean I know you probably had a rough week... and that box gets a little stuffy... I remember... but still, young Sister, you can't talk like that.

EMMY: I don't give a good goddamn about your holier-than-thou ways. I ain't never played heaven before. I just need to know. Where's God? Where's the damn manager around here?

MALCOLM X: Hey... listen up and learn! You're out of line, my sister.

EMMY: What the fuck is your problem? Why don't you just stop your damn speechin' and tell me where he is?

(All speaking at once.)

YUSUF: Shit! Who is this... chick?

MALCOLM X: What you're doing, it's not done here. I mean downstairs they make out like they're talking to God. But... it's not done up here, ya see.

BILLIE: Yeah, listen to the brother. Just relax, baby... hold up, honey.

EMMY: (*Even more exasperated*) Listen, what's the story? Tell me where God is. I demand to know. I demand to know. (*Waits stubbornly.*) I have my civil rights. (*Raises fist in the air comedically*)

(EMMY on video, doing stand up act.)

YUSUF: This is some deep shit, now.

MALCOLM X: Ummm, yes. We all know about that civil rights stuff. As I have often pointed out (*speechifying*) you'd be better off talking about human rights Sister, but...

BILLIE: Who in the hell IS this?

EMMY: For the last goddamned time WHERE-IS-GOD? Where-is-God?

MALCOLM X: OK. Just a minute now. Calm down. Just calm down. Let me ask you something, my sister. What happened to you? (*Pause.*) I mean, how'd you die?

EMMY: Oh sure, now y'all trying to distract me. You ain't God. I dunno who in the hell you are. But I know y'ain't God. Listen up... I ain't sayin' nothin till I get what I came here for... can y'all dig that?

Q9

BILLIE: Heh, darlin'... take it slow and easy and... c'mon tell us who y'are. Tell us what happened to ya?

(Video: YUSUF/youth/rapping.)

YUSUF: *(Flirting)*

I

Yeah, Chill, spill!
No sweat, my pet
your tale shall be
the book of the month.

II

Yeah, Chill, spill!
No sweat, my pet.
We need a new voice
and you're the choice.

III

Yeah, Chill, spill!
No sweat, my pet.
Don't like your balk,
let's hear your talk.

IV

Yeah, Chill, spill!
No sweat, my pet
your tale shall be
the book of the month.

MALCOLM X: What happened to you? How did you die? Did someone kill ya? Seriously, Sister, tell us how it happened.

EMMY: Well... ya' see... Well... OK. I'm Emmy Straight... stand up comedienne par excellence. Been in the business about 15 years now. O.K. I travel around, alot, you know, city to city, club to club — sometimes I work a campus — never a dull moment... (always a dull moment) It's work, ya know. It's Wichita, Phoenix, Spokane, you know, the circuit, Kalamazoo, Akron. *(Pause.)* So I'm doin' Cleveland last Tuesday. And I gotta admit I'm havin' a good night. I'm loose and the audience — small audience — but they're laughin' pretty good. Little club downtown Cleveland, right on Euclid, near where Western Reserve meets the Hough... maybe 15 people in there and, like I said, they're having a good time... I mean I'm pretty good and this night... I'm loose. It's an O.K. crowd. Anyway there's this thing I almost always do at the end of my act particularly when it's nice and loose. I go out into the crowd at the end and I play a little game of guessing who people are. An I do little one-liners... like — funny guesses. Like

Q10

Q10.5 I'll say to a young Sister sittin' with this older guy — "Where'd you find this dude, Sister, in a pawn shop?" Well, last Tuesday night, I'm at the Lido, in Cleveland, and I'm sort of going around the room doin' these one-liners, and there's this guy in there, sitting in the back... in the corner. Real cracker type, white as bleach, black leather jacket hangin' on the chair, boots, tattoo on each arm, crew cut, shades. But I mean, he's there in the club, maybe a medical student, so what the hell. I mean sure he looks tough... but... hey I'm tough... So I go right up to this dude, and I say to him (*she acts it out*) "Let me see, let me see, let me see... I know, YOU'RE the local FASCIST." (*Slight pause.*) And he whips out a .45 and blows my fuckin' head off.

Q11

(The three are in shock. Another overwhelming story of murder. Silence.)

EMMY: Yeah, so that's what happened, this son of a bitch just calmly pulls out a .45 — (*pause*) — And then BOOM! Off goes my head. Bang, zoom! That's the whole story, that's it. Next thing I know I'm in this box. My head's back on. I hear this real nice singin'. We didn't have no singer at the Lido. Sooo, I figure I'm in heaven or hell or whatever... I know it ain't Cleveland. (*Pause.*) So here I am. That's my story. My mama always said that one day I'd tell a real bad joke and I'd get hurt. (*Pause.*) Now, where's God? (*Pause.*) Anyway. Who in the hell are you folks? I ain't doin' any guessin' no more... if you know what I mean.

Q12

Q13

MALCOLM X: (*Laughs*) That's good thinking Sister. My name is Malcolm X. It's nice to meet you Sister Emmy Straight.

EMMY: Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, (*in a whisper*) Jesus Christ, man. You're Malcolm X? I mean the real Malcolm X? Holy shit. You ain't fuckin' with me? You're really Malcolm X?

BILLIE: My name's Billie, Sister, Billie Holiday. That's some story you got there. Yeah. Welcome Sister... welcome.

YUSUF: Yo, and I'm Yusuf Hawkins, you ever heard of me?

EMMY: Billie Holiday? Billie Holiday? Holy shit. How'd I wind up in this part of town. I don't play no big clubs. Billie Holiday! (*Turning to YUSUF*) Oh, yeah... yeah, I heard of you, you got blown away by some racists in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn a few years ago. Damn! DAMN! Malcolm X, Billie Holiday. Those are class acts. Heh, you're heroes, kinda icons to Black people. (*Opens up jacket and is wearing Malcolm X T-shirt.*) I mean, check out this shirt... even you, young man, you've gotten to be pretty big in the last four or five years. I mean, what in the hell am I doing here? I mean, I'm just Emmy Straight, i-tin-er-ant stand-up Black comedienne, par excellence... but, really, you know... I'm just a workin' stiff (*laughs at her own joke*)... a hack... you folks are class. Jesus Christ. What am I doin' here? Hey, I gotta speak with God. I've come to the wrong part of town.

MALCOLM X: Just settle down, Sister Straight, it's good to have you here... you're pretty funny, Sister, pretty funny.

YUSUF: Yeah. Brother Malcolm's right on time. It's good to have you here.

BILLIE: Emmy Straight... Hmm. Sister Straight... a pleasure. Always nice to have another sister in the 'hood.

MALCOLM X: So, Straight, what...

EMMY: *(Interrupts)* One second, Brother Malcolm... I'm sorry about this, but my name is Emmy Straight. Hey... look I'm real honored to meet you all. I mean no disrespect. But, Brother Malcolm... I don't like being called Straight 'cause... *(Pause.)* Well... I'm gay. *(Pause.)* You with it brother? I'm gay.

YUSUF: You're Emmy Straight, but you're gay? *(Macho laugh.)*

BILLIE: Yeah, young Yusuf, Emmy Straight is gay. She just told ya. Jest be cool, young brother.

YUSUF: Emmy Straight is gay? This some kinda dumb joke?

MALCOLM X: Listen up, young Yusuf. Her name is Straight but she's gay. That's cool.

YUSUF: That's unnatural, number one... and it ain't so funny, number two.

EMMY: *(Angrily)* It ain't meant to be funny, brother. I'm Emmy Straight... and I'm gay.

MALCOLM X: *(In an uncharacteristic attempt at reconciliation... and humor)* You gotta admit Sister Straight, it does sound a little bit like Abbott & Costello or somethin'. *(MALCOLM laughs a little at his own joke.)*

YUSUF: Now wait a minute... wait a goddamn minute. There ain't no lesbo's, no queers in this part of Black heaven. So Straight, "who's gay," is outta here... or I'm outta here!

MALCOLM X: Whoa! Who're you tellin' who's outta here? Since when you began makin' these decisions?

BILLIE: Yeah, Brother Yusuf, be cool, child. I remember when you "arrived" I said to myself "Whatta we doin' with chilren up here." But you know... you here for a reason. Well, Sister Straight must be here for a reason too.

EMMY: Look here, I'm Black, I'm gay AND I'm Emmy Straight AND I am here reason or not, AND I want to know... where is God... AND what am I doin' with y'all? With you, and you *(addressing BILLIE and MALCOLM)*. Even you *(to YUSUF; less angry; more in control)* my straight-assed young brother. Shit... I don't even know if you're old enough to know what you are!

YUSUF: *(Walks angrily to his pedestal; macho posing — halfway there he turns back toward EMMY)*
Emmy Straight, who is a lesbo, you are ridiculous.

EMMY: Ridiculous? Ridiculous? Well, to paraphrase another monument: Let me say at the risk of sounding revolutionary that the truly ridiculous person is guided by great feelings of love. Ridiculous? Yeah. I'll show you ridiculous. *(Goes into vaudeville song.)*

Q14

I'm Black, I'm Straight and I'm Gay

Well, I'm Black, I'm Straight and I'm gay,
I wouldn't have it any other way.
It may come from my genes
or some weirdo teen age scenes
But I'm as Black as anybody in the 'hood...

And I'm proud to be Black and to be Gay,
Hey, I'm hangin' out with Malcolm X
and Lady Day

(To YUSUF)

Don't tell me it's unnatural
it couldn't be more factual
So Brother Yusuf... come on back and join this play.

Oh, yes, I'm Black, I'm Straight and I'm Gay
(Like I said)
I wouldn't have it any other way
Don't criticize my preference,
Cause I won't show no deference
To anyone who does that macho sway

I'm Straight, I'm gay and I'm Black,
I ain't no prince or princess
Just a plain old workin' hack,
But no one makes a joke of me,
in Cleveland or in Galilee
And if they do I'm gonna pay'em back.

Maybe we gotta all rejoin that good ole human race.
Before that New World Order puts a boot heel in your face
Us Black folks Straight and Gay
Gotta lead 'em all the way
To make that spinnin' ball a better place...

I'm Black, I'm Gay and I'm Straight, ya see
it's time we got together,
And wiped out White Supremacy
'Cause fightin' 'mongst each other
Hey, I'm your sister, you're my brother
There's something here on which we all agree

Well I'm Black, I'm Straight and I'm Gay,
I wouldn't have it, any other way.

(Music becomes rap rhythm/boom box.)

Q15

Q16 - All
Sing

YUSUF: (*Rapping*)

Apology Rap

You're Emmy Straight
all right... that's great
You do it your way,
Say, hey, that's cool
I was a fool,
Just a second ago,
... A fool to say
you ain't cool
I had that funny song you sing, (*laughs*)
I dig
You're straight AND
Say, hey, that's cool
We each co
'Cause Black
So you be S
and you be gay,
That's g
I'm str
Yusuf my name
made m to fame
I like yours Straight, well,
Now we share a common fate
That ain't too great
But you rate my respect
Straight sister
I'll call you gay
You call me mister.
'Cause see I ain't no monument
You cleared my mind
Miss Straight,
ain't bent no more,
for sure, say why,
you're an ordinary gay
and me an ordinary guy.

(*After YUSUF rap, YUSUF and EMMY give hi 5's and low 5's and then embrace.*)

YUSUF: Y'know Sister Emmy Straight... who's gay. (*Laughs.*) I'm kinda like you. I mean what am I doing in this heavenly neighborhood, man? I don't belong on no pedestal. I ain't no monument. Like, check it, maybe I got off at the wrong stop, again. (*He turns and moves back to sit on his platform.*) I was just a sixteen-year-old kid, in high school. And I was minding my own business, went off to buy a car for my friends and then BAM! I got blown away by a bunch 'a white racists... just like that asshole who blew your head off in Cleveland. Sister Emmy Straight... who's gay. I mean, check it out — I never did nothin' heroic. I never won nobody's heart like Sister Billie over there. I never gave a speech or

Q17 -
Restore At
end of song

Q18 - Video
Q19 -
Restore
from video

Q20 moved anyone to do things, like Brother Malcolm X. I'm just a kid! *(The others have moved to their platforms, EMMY stays by her coffin.)* And come to think of it, since I been here, I ain't met no dude named God, either. So where is this God? And, yeah, what are Sister

Q21 Emmy Straight... who's gay, and me, Brother Yusuf... who's young, what are we doin' here? Sister Billie, Brother Malcolm, you been here the longest... you're the oldest and wisest and you are... well, no offense, but you are the real monuments... the big shots, the honchos, the class acts... whatever. What's the deal?

BILLIE: Well, I maybe touched some hearts. I sang, people fell in love, but no one ain't never really loved Billie... y'see I was always starring in someone else's play... the sultry torch song beauty, the bearer of dreams for those cool white jazz buffs up in Harlem. But hey, I ain't no monument, Yusuf. I'm talking here about deep slow pain. It's mighty ordinary, son. Ain't nobody really understood what it meant to be loved by millions, and never really held by no one, to be scorned and beaten by the Black man for playing to the white folks. Y'know it's OK for the Black man to play to the white folks. But not the Black woman. No, not the Black woman. When she plays for the white folks she's a ... castratin' bitch and nobody loves no castratin' bitch so nobody would have me, really have me... not the white man or the Black man. Young Brother Yusuf I was no monument. I was just a whore, a prostitute on a pedestal. No man loved Billie. No man loves a whore... no man really loved me. *(She sings a song, "Lover Man.")*

Q22 MALCOLM X: *(Comes over to comfort BILLIE; shows her a picture)* You remember when you and me

Q23 took this picture downtown at the Onyx. *(To EMMY and YUSUF)* Last time I seen Lady Day alive. Dope and heartbreak stopped that heart as big as a barn and that sound and style that no one successfully copies. Lady Day sang with the soul of Black folks from the centuries of sorrow and oppression. What a shame this proud, fine Black woman never lived where the true greatness of our race was appreciated. *(Puts arm around BILLIE HOLIDAY.)*

Q24 BILLIE: So, long before I got here I lived in a cloud... a white cloud... had to kill the pain, worse, always worse... and then, well, you know, I died. This is where I been since then. Ain't no one told me what I'm doin' here either.

(EMMY STRAIGHT walks over to BILLIE. They sit together on the edge of BILLIE's monument, touching.)

EMMY: So, Bro Malcolm, I guess that leaves you. Whatcha got to say for yourself? What's the real deal around here? Is this Monument City or what?

MALCOLM X: *(Walks back to his stage, pensively.)* I... became a threat.

EMMY: You fuckin' A brother. I read your autobiography, man.

Q25 MALCOLM X: No, Sister Emmy. You don't understand what a threat I was to our people — to Black people. You don't understand at all. Young brother Yusuf here was killed by white racists; vermin from Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. That's a tragedy. But he wasn't killed by his own people. You, Sister Emmy, were killed by a crazy white fascist from Cleveland. It's a sad story you tell. But you weren't killed by your own people. But I was killed by our people; by Black people, because I was a threat to some of our people — to Black people. You know why I was a threat? I'll tell you, Sister Emmy Straight. Because centuries of white supremacy have destroyed our people. When I was a young minister

in Boston, I would talk about the ugly reality of slavery like it really was. (*Goes up on podium.*) "Not even in the Bible is there such a crime! God in His wrath struck down with fire the perpetrators of lesser crimes. One hundred million of us black people! Your grandparents! Mine! Murdered by this white man. To get fifteen million of us here to make us his slaves, on the way he murdered one hundred million! I wish it was possible for me to show you the sea bottom in those days — the Black bodies, the blood, the bones broken by boots and clubs! The pregnant Black women who were thrown overboard if they got too sick! Thrown overboard to the sharks that had learned that following these slave ships was the way to grow fat! Why, the white man's raping of the black race's woman began right on those slave ships! The blue-eyed devil could not even wait until he got them here! Why, brothers and sisters, civilized mankind has never known such an **orgy of greed and lust and murder...** " That's what I told the brothers and sisters back in the 1950s. (*Gets down from podium.*) Slavery and white supremacy have **destroyed our people**, Sister Emmy and Brother Yusuf and Sister Billie. It has made us into liars: it has made us into cheats and pimps, always vulnerable to being used. I knew the lyin', thievin' life... I lived it. I lived it on the prison of the streets of the ghetto and I lived it in the prison of the man like we all live it in the prison of America. And I escaped from those prisons by trying to speak the truth to our people, Sister Emmy. And because of that I was loved by our people and hated by the white man. But I did not become a threat to our people until I realized that I was still in prison — that the scams and the lies of the streets become even bigger and uglier and more destructive of our people when they are turned by phony smooth talkin' Black folks into THE TRUTH and slickly and hypocritically passed along to our people by self-appointed phony SPEAKERS OF THE TRUTH; by the HYPOCRITES. And I was used by these hypocrites. Because I had been destroyed by those streets and I was vulnerable. And I spoke loudly of this, I threatened not the masses of our people, not the ordinary folks, who loved me then and love me still, but those amongst our people who pimp off of the degradation and destruction of our people; who opportunize off of the needs and weaknesses of our people; who do the white man's job by keeping our people liars and pimps (even though they preach against lying and pimping) because they themselves are models of successful liars and pimps. And when I refused to stay imprisoned, those who had the most to lose from my close ties to the masses of our people — the white pigs always looking after their racist, white **supremacist system** — the FBI, the CIA — and the rich Black pimps got together and murdered me that cold February day at the Audubon.

(*BILLIE, YUSUF and EMMY are spellbound and shocked. Pause.*)

YUSUF: **Brother Malcolm...** almost sounds like you sayin' I was sort of lucky to be killed by the white man? I mean, I love you brother... now more than ever. You are truly our Shining Black Prince. But I felt so humiliated bein' done in by those white motherfuckers in Bensonhurst. The pain of those bats and bullets wasn't even as bad as the shame I felt by lettin' those white honky mothers have the thrill of killin' a young Black man. You know what I'm sayin', Brother Malcolm?

MALCOLM X: I know young Brother Yusuf. I hear ya. Our people have been killed by the white man by the hundreds of millions and we all have to suffer not only that unbelievable cruelty but the sickening grin of the white man as he does it. For the privilege of the white murderer is not only his criminality; not only his capacity to benefit from his murder and rape and plunder of Black folks; but his ability and willingness to laughingly turn his rape and murder into self-righteous truth and morality. Yes, brother, you died tragically as hundreds of millions of our people died — with the white man laughing at you. No, brother Yusuf, I can never deny that tragedy... your tragedy... my tragedy. Still the Black man who would benefit and pump off of our pain... who would prefer we remain enslaved if he may live off of our destitution; the mercenary who would murder his own people for a price and the hypocrite who would justify this pimping with self-righteous rhetoric — he must be strung up along side the white supremacist murderers for he is no different than they are.

EMMY: Brother Malcolm... they are still pimpin' off of you. Lotsa Black folks makin' money offa your name, each one sayin' that they know best who you really were. This one makin' a movie, that one complainin' about it — ya know what I'm sayin'? I don't needa mention no names — but you know what I mean?

MALCOLM X: I know, Sister Emmy. I know. (*Laughs.*) But how could they know for sure who I was when I never knew for sure. I kept on changin'... I'm still changin, I ain't no monument. I'm still growin', I'm still tryin' to tell a little truth, Sister Emmy. Jest like you. Jest like Brother Yusuf and Lady over here. When I returned from my pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964 I shocked the world by saying: "In the past I have permitted myself to be used to make sweeping indictments of all white people... " We must never let ourselves be used as monuments or as anything else. I have always tried to face facts and to accept the reality of life as new experiences and knowledge unfold it.

BILLIE: You makin' me wanna sing, brother. You know that? (*Laughs, just a little.*) It's so good to hear you talkin' again. It's just fine. (*Sings "Fine & Mellow" to MALCOLM X.*)

YUSUF: That's good Sister Billie. That's real good.

BILLIE: You know people always said that nobody sang the words "hunger" or "love" like I do. All I've learned is wrapped up in those two words. You've gotta have something to eat and a little love in your life before you can hold still for any damn body's sermon on how to behave, Brother Malcolm. Ain't that right? You know my dream? It's always been to have a big place out in the country where I could take care of stray dogs and orphans; kids that didn't ask to be born; kids that didn't ask to be black, blue or green or something in between.

YUSUF: You're a fine sister, Miss Holiday. And you too, Miss Straight... who is gay. (*Laughs warmly*) So, Brother Malcolm. You sayin' there ain't no monuments here at all. That the monuments are bein' made by the fat cat monument builders downstairs who are makin' some quick bucks offa you and sister Billie and Dr. King... say, hey, where is Dr. King, anyway?

BILLIE: I think he's still down there doin' his thing. Old Dr. King somehow found him a way to speak on through a young preacher who's grown up to be a fine civil rights leader in his own right. I never can remember his name... but he sings real good and has a fine lookin' head of hair.

(All smile, TV shows King and Sharpton.)

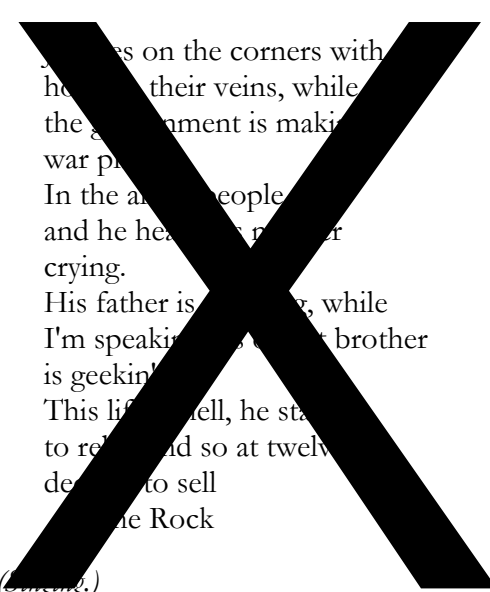
YUSUF: So, Brother Malcolm, do I have it straight? *(To EMMY)* No offense, my gay comrade... The monument makers like the temple builders are grabbin' the bucks while our people are dyin'. Yeah. I believe it, Brother Malcolm. I believe it. I seen it myself. I seen some bad shit in the ghetto.

The Ghetto (nothin' but a hellhole)

Let me tell you bout a brother
I knew, he is no different than
you.

Growin up in a family of ten,
his family strugglin tryin
to meet the ends.

Everyday life in the Ghetto,
his role models pimps, pushers,
and hoes.



... on the corners with
he... their veins, while
the government is makin'
war p...
In the... people
and he he...
crying.
His father is... while
I'm speakin'... brother
is geekin'
This life... well, he sta...
to re... and so at twelve
de... to sell
... the Rock

(Sings.)

The Ghetto is nothing but
a hellhole

As time goes on he finds a job
cause when he sold he got
robbed.

Took for everything he struggled
for cause he kept tryin to
get more and more.

Tryin to have what he never
had cause of his Dad (know

what I'm sayin')
Anyway he's workin fast food,
and the management is treatin
him real rude. Making him
run and bust his hide, and
he's only making \$3.85
Down on his knees his fingers
are sore cause with a toothbrush
he's scrubbin the floor.

How can brothers take it working so
hard and being so degraded
I don't know but you know this
is what's happening in...

(Singing)

The ghetto is nothin but a hellhole
The dream here is insane, quit
the job no one's doin the
same thing.

But now he's s... people up.
If you're short you straight
out of luck

He drink the forty and
every... he sells and
his... deep fragrance of
real... smells

...gs are different he's running
with the crew now and everybody's
gettin busted and he's wondering
how

Everyone but him lights getting
dim. No not him and his boys
named him slim Jim.

He's smokin his own supply.
Sometimes he cries, in the big
city where every night
someone dies in

(Singing.)

The Ghetto is nothing but a hellhole
Man on this roller coaster ride, he
feels all his pain on the inside.
Life, death, death and life, he

knows the streets he runs them at night.

One day he goes home up to his room, downstairs he hears the door open. He feels this can't go on, his dad is downstairs treating one of them no more of his life he wants to take he runs to his closet and grabs a gun.

Takes the gun and goes to his head and puts the bullet in.

(Pause.)

TEEN SUICIDE

(Singing)

The ghetto is nothing but a hole

(Fades out.)

MALCOLM X: You've got it young brother.

EMMY: Hey, this is good. Yeah, real good. I'll tell you, Brother Malcolm, with all due respects, I always wondered what I got or my family got or just plain ordinary folks got off of the Malcolm Monument. Like Sister Billie said, folks need something to eat and some love... and I would add, they gotta laugh a little. I mean, I'm just a simple joke-teller, Brother Malcolm, but I never bought in on a whole lot of bullshit.

MALCOLM X: Sister Emmy...

YUSUF: Who's gay... *(They all laugh.)*

MALCOLM X: You're a genuine truth teller.

EMMY: OK, — OK — Brother Malcolm. That's good, that's good...but, what about God? Where in the hell is he?

MALCOLM X: I dunno. I ain't never seen him either. Been here over thirty years now... ain't heard a word, As a Muslim it don't exactly surprise me... but that's the deal.

(Suddenly, sound comes from the TV for the first time. It's a news broadcast on ... WGOD. Newscaster speaks. Some kind of opening...)

NEWSCASTER: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. WGOD brings you the evening news. *(Pause.)* This gruesome story just in the Midwest. Last Tuesday evening Miss Emmy Straight, a Black woman stand-up comedienne was shot and killed at the Club Lido in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. *(Pictures of EMMY on screen.)* Miss Straight was just finishing her routine when a young white medical student from Case-Western Reserve, disconsolate over failing grades, fired seven shots into her head and chest. Miss Straight, who hailed from Irishtown, New Jersey, began her career in the late 1960s appearing in anti-war theatre while a student at Antioch College in Yellow Springs. Her one-woman

Q33

show "What in the hell did Malcolm X Ever Do For Me" won her an award as Black woman feminist comedienne of the year in 1976. But in recent years Straight had fallen on harder times... Meanwhile, in Anchorage Alaska, two dermatologists have... (*Fade of sound only.*)

MALCOLM X: Well, Sister Emmy... "What in the Hell Did Malcolm X Ever Do For Me?"

EMMY: (*Pulls trophy from casket*) Here's the award. You want it? My apologies.

YUSUF: (*Very excited*) Chill out you two. How come that TV is talkin? You all ever heard it make a sound before?

BILLIE: I ain't never heard it before.

MALCOLM X: Me neither. Never heard no news up here before. (*Pause.*) Who in the hell are you Emmy Straight? Who in the hell are you?

EMMY: Look here, Brother Malcolm, I told you who I am. I mean I didn't mention that feminist stuff 'cause I... ya know... I've seen the light. Shit, Brother Malcolm... I ain't been to Mecca but I've done a little growin' too.

BILLIE: (*Comforts EMMY*) That's alright, Sister Emmy. Brother Malcolm... don't you be unkind to Sister Emmy here.

YUSUF: Yeah, Brother Malcolm... be cool with our gay sister.

MALCOLM X: Hell, I hear you. I agree. Sister Emmy is real cool; real fine. But ever since she's been here strange things have been happening. Good things, I think. But I just wanna know who she is.

EMMY: But Brother Malcolm, I've told you who I am, remember? (*Singing slightly*) I'm Black, I'm Straight and I'm Gay... .

BILLIE and YUSUF: (*Together, stopping EMMY from continuing the song*) Yes, yes, sister Emmy, we... we, uh, all remember.

(TV sound comes up again: four home video scenes in working-class Black homes; workplace; school; beauty parlor, etc. Three or four scenes; about 1.5 minutes each; reaction to EMMY and YUSUF killings; ordinary people pissed off about these obviously fascist murders of Black folks. Statements like "I ain't never marched or nothin' but this shit is goin' too far. I mean nobody's doin' nothin' about it"... TV goes to Yusuf Hawkins Peace March with Moses Stewart speaking — freeze.)

YUSUF: Say, hey, that's my dad up there speakin! Look at all those folks! What you think about that, Brother Malcolm? That's my dad. Goddamn.

MALCOLM X: (*Very reflective*) I'm thinking that those folks maybe don't need no monuments... that monuments kill — kill people; kill movements. I'm thinking that I'd love to be there with those folks. Some people said that my problem was that I couldn't resist a platform. Well, maybe I don't need a platform any more.

Q34 EMMY: And maybe Lady doesn't need a stage. Doesn't need to be no prostitute on a pedestal. (To BILLIE HOLIDAY) Lady, you can just straight out sing the blues, sister, like no one else can. Q35
Q41 - Restore (BILLIE begins to sing, "Lady Sings The Blues" without accompaniment; after a few bars piano comes in. BILLIE moves about the audience singing; avoids any pedestals or stages. On TV, Doug E. Fresh rap on street from Let's Get Busy.) Q36
Q37
Q38
Q39
Q40

YUSUF: (Over movie scene) Hey, that's Doug E. Fresh, my main man. Doug E., hey, Doug E. Let's Get Busy!, man, Let's Get Busy!

MALCOLM X: Allah be praised, Sister Emmy, now I got it. Now I know where God is! We are the gods! We are the idols; the false idols. And that is how we are kept dead, Sister Emmy. You see, I don't think we have to be dead. Wise old Dr. King must have known this for a while now. I always had a little trouble listenin' to him. We don't have to be dead. We don't have to be here.

BILLIE: Brother Malcolm... has you gone crazy or somethin'? How we gonna get outa here?

YUSUF: Yeah, Brother Malcolm, you hear a little sound on that TV and you ready to try and leave heaven? I dunno, brother, I dunno. It's hard enough gettin' out of the ghetto. I dunno if we can slip this place, bro.

EMMY: Now wait a damn minute. I think brother Malcolm is right on. I mean there's a door over there (points to production room door) — I believe we can just walk the hell out of it. I believe it... I do believe it... (etc. — goes into comic preacher rap, jumps on platform... "I do believe"; MALCOLM X, BILLIE, YUSUF all stare at her and then physically, gently, bring her down from platform and get her to stop.) Sorry about that... This monument shit is heavy... heavy... I'll tell ya.

Q42 - Who Made all the Lies Fit

Q43 - Restore MALCOLM X: But Sister Emmy is right. We can walk out of here. Right through that door.

Q44 - "door" warp sound

BILLIE: I'll try anything once, you know.

YUSUF: Sister Emmy... you lead the way, okay.

EMMY: If we make it the first thing I'm doin' is to pick up my check from 'The Lido...

MALCOLM X: Sister Emmy, lead us all to Cleveland!

(The four of them now band together like in a grade B "escape" movie; walking stealthily, tip-toeing across the theatre space towards the door; strobe lighting effect; mysterious music begins to play; real hokey stuff... TV news show reappears as they are about halfway to production door.)

Q50

NEWSCASTER: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Across the country, from Crown Heights to California, millions have taken to the streets to protest the almost unbelievable epidemic of violent killings of African Americans, Latino Americans and other people of color. Some identify the beginnings of this protest with the shocking, racist murder of 16-year-old Yusuf Hawkins in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn almost five years ago. Since then the number of killings has increased at an alarming rate. In the last six months over 7,000 people of color have been victims of homicide. But the immediate catalyst for today's

spontaneous demonstrations appears to have been the bizarre murder of the Black comedienne Emmy Straight last week in Cleveland, Ohio. Miss Straight, you recall, was shot to death while performing at the Club Lido, a small stand-up comedy club in the Hough district. While many leaders of the Black and Latino community are amongst the protesters, there is no apparent ideological or organization center. President Quayle has returned to the White House from his vacation in St. Petersburg and has declared a national emergency. Just one hour ago he addressed the nation on TV saying, "This is a mass strike; its un-American, it's illegal, if you don't like it here go back to Africa or Cuba or wherever the hell you came from." The protest, however, appears to be growing geometrically even as we speak. The National Guard and military units from all six domestic Army districts, as well as the Marines and the various state and city police forces are out in the streets but, with few exceptions, are refusing to fire into the crowd. In an effort to introduce some clarity and coherency into this most extraordinary and frightening situation, WGOD's remote unit has travelled to heaven to interview some of the people's gods.

*(Remote TV crew rushes into theatre space from open theatre door. Looks for and finds **EMMY STRAIGHT**, **MALCOLM X**, **YUSUF HAWKINS** and **BILLIE HOLIDAY** sneaking towards production door. On TV the scene in the theatre is what's now showing. Audience sees the scene and the live video of the scene.)*

Q52 - Jack Enter

NEWSCASTER: Jack, are you there in heaven?

Q53 - Pink Panther

JACK: Yes, Sandy, we're looking for some gods right now. I think I see a grouping. I'm not sure yet who they are. Wait a minute, that's Malcolm X. Malcolm, Malcolm X, can I have a moment of your time? Who are these gods with you? My God... pardon me... its Billie Holiday and... yes, am I right... it's Yusuf Hawkins. And this other sister... are you a domestic worker up here? Oh, no, now I know who you are, incredible Sandy, it's Emmy Straight. What a collection of gods! Unbelievable. Soooo... Malcolm, Billie, Yusuf, Emmy Straight — what do you think of these "riots" in America. C'mon, tell us what they're all about.

(Silent stares, no response.)

JACK: Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Straight, many say you two started this whole thing. This might just be that revolution that Malcolm X here always talked about. And you two did it... you did it. Tell us what in the hell... oops, pardon me... it's all about.

*(**EMMY** and **YUSUF** step forward smiling as if they're about to talk. But **MALCOLM X** grabs **YUSUF HAWKINS** and covers his mouth and **BILLIE HOLIDAY** does the same to **EMMY STRAIGHT**. They continue towards the production door.)*

JACK: *(Hysterically)* Wait a minute, you four. You can't go out that door. This whole thing could get out of control. What in the hell do you think you're doing?

NEWSCASTER: Jack, Jack, what's happening up there? What in God's name is happening?

Q54 - B/O on Jack

(As JACK screams over and over again "Come back... come back... come back" the four edge towards the door, open it and leave, closing the door behind them. The TV screen goes silent and the words "In the beginning..." appear. Then the working people from earlier home video scenes grab "In The Beginning..." sign [fancily written] and tear it up rowdily though not nastily. Lights out. On TV, handwritten sign, "The End. Thank you for Coming... and, well, maybe the Beginning [crossed out] the Start of Somthin".)

The End

Q55 - Bows

Q56 - Walk Out