

Black Women's Blueprint *Presents*



Saturday, February 8, 2014, 2:00PM Matinee

The Brooklyn Museum

The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Auditorium

200 Eastern Parkway (corner of Washington Ave) Brooklyn, New York 11238

6:00PM "This Is Legacy" Reception

The Palm House

At Washington Ave/Adjacent To the Brooklyn Museum

Mother Tongue

*Monologues for Truth Bearing Women, for
Emerging Sons and Other Keepers of the Flame*

Conceived by Farah Tanis

Co-Founder, Executive Director, Black Women's Blueprint | Founder, Museum of Women's Resistance

Directors

Pope Jackson, Actuator Inc. and Lorraine LaPrade, Center for Anti-Violence Education

HONOREES

This is Legacy:
Celebrating the Told
& Untold Stories of
Black Feminism



Barbara Smith
Author, Historian; Council
Member, Albany, NY;
Combahee River Collective;
Kitchen Table: Women of Color
Press



Melissa Harris-Perry
Author, Educator,
Political Scientist,
Television Host and
Liberal Political
Commentator, MSNBC

FEATURING
BLACK MEN
IN THE
MOVEMENT
FOR
GENDER
JUSTICE



Akeel St. Vil
Black Women's Blueprint



Haki Madhubuti
Third World Press



Darnell Moore
Brothers Writing To Live



Quentin Walcott
CONNECT, NYC



Tony Porter
A Call To Men



Oliver Williams
IDVAAC

A Benefit Performance to Support Collaboration and Prevention Programs on Sexual Assault In Communities Of African Descendants. www.movertonguemonologues.org



PRESS RELEASE

for MOTHER TONGUE

*Monologues for Truth Bearing Women, for Emerging Sons
and Other Keepers of the Flame*

Wednesday, December 18, 2013

We, **Black Women's Blueprint**, invite you to our **Fourth Annual performance of *Mother Tongue Monologues*** on Saturday, February 8, 2014. The Matinee program will begin at 2:00pm at the Brooklyn Museum, Iris and B. Cantor Auditorium, 200 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, New York. The program will culminate in a post-performance reception **honoring Melissa Harris-Perry and Barbara Smith** entitled *This Is Legacy* and will take place at the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens in the Palm House adjacent to the Museum.

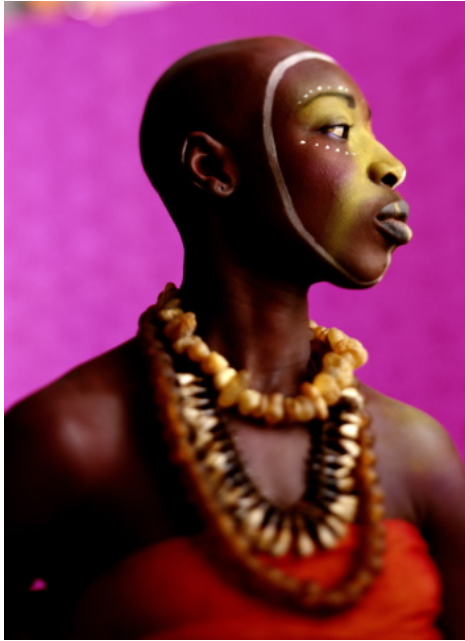
An experience unlike any other, *Mother Tongue* features poets, drummers, dancers and actors dramatizing and imitating how Black communities react to sexual assault. They will speak of the devastating silences and insidious allowances that impact sexual and racial dynamics and that remain intensely controversial in Black communities. This year's performance entitled, *Mother Tongue: Monologues for Truth Bearing Women, for Emerging Sons and Other Keepers of the Flame*, will lay the groundwork for justice, intra-racial healing and reconciliation and will intentionally engage its audience in deeper conversation about one of the most contentious subjects in Black sexual politics—the violence of Black men toward Black women.

The particular experiences of Black women are a testament to the ways in which gendered forms of racial discrimination have impaired the full enjoyment of equality and fundamental human rights both in their private and public lives. As a result, black men and women are chairing and hosting the event. Additionally, Black male allies including **Darnell Moore, Akeel St. Vil, Quentin Walcott, Oliver Williams, Tony Porter and Haki Madhubuti** have stepped up to share the stage as powerful responders to rape/sexual assault survivors, challenging us as witnesses to take imaginative leaps from present states of institutionalized violence to futures where we possess the language and tools to dismantle rape culture at every stage and across generations.

Mother Tongue performances in the past have been successful each year, with over 350 people in attendance at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in 2013, and over 320 people in attendance in 2012 at the National Black Theater of Harlem. This year, we bring the performance to Brooklyn and anticipate 415 individuals will fill the Museum's available seats in addition to hundreds of people who will tune in via livestream across the nation.

Black Women's Blueprint works to make gender matter in the discourse surrounding Black political and social equity. We hope that you can take part in our production. *Mother Tongue Monologues* is not only a culmination of our progressive research, human rights documentation and grassroots feminist movement, but it is also a vehicle to make sexual assault prevention based on collaboration and community-based initiatives possible across the African Diaspora in the United States.

Black Women's Blueprint | Museum of Women's Resistance | 279 Empire Boulevard | Brooklyn, N.Y. 11225
347-533-9102 P | 347-750-1652 F | www.blackwomensblueprint.org | www.mothersongmonologues.org



**Mother Tongue:
Monologues for Truth Bearing Women, for Emerging
Sons and Other Keepers of the Flame**

Saturday, February 8, 2014
2:00 PM Program | 6:00 PM Reception
The Brooklyn Museum | The Palm House

**Witness:
A Site of Consciousness
A Three-Part Multimedia Exhibit**

Sunday, February 9, 2014
12:00 PM
The Museum of Women's Resistance (MoWRe)
279 Empire Blvd, Brooklyn, NY 11225

Special Honorees

Melissa Harris-Perry, African American Author and Political Scientist, Television Host and Commentator, MSNBC

Barbara Smith, Author, Historian, City Councilmember, Albany, NY; Founder Combahee River Collective

Event Co-Chairs

Beth Elaine Richie, The Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy and the University of Illinois

Aishah Shahidah Simmons, Black Lesbian Feminist Filmmaker and Anti-rape Activist

Tony Porter, A Call To Men

Melinda Weekes, Applied Research Center, Colorlines

Lisa Anderson, Auburn Theological Seminary

Moderator

Reverend Dr. Traci C. West, Author, Professor of Ethics and African American Studies at Drew University Theological School

Host Committee

Dr. Mayowa Alero Obasaju, Ph.D. Barnard College, Columbia University

Silvia Dutchevici, Queens Pride House

Sade Adeeyo, The Urban Institute (Washington D.C.)

Sekiya Dorsett, Oxygen Television

Krista DeSouza, The New Life Healing Center

Christina Jaus, Sauti Yetu, Center for African Women

Program Convener, Black Women's Blueprint

Program Partners and Parallel Sites

Spelman College

School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, SUNY

About Mother Tongue Monologues

Conceived by Farah Tanis, Executive Director of Black Women's Blueprint, Mother Tongue Monologues is a multimedia production and performance which brings together actors, artists and activists who take the audience through journeys, moments, incidents and historical narratives giving new life to the struggles of our foremothers and women of African descent today. Such centering of Black women in the midst of their own history and culture as people who contribute to the shaping of communities and to the building of nations, gives relevance to our full experience as an African Diaspora. Mother Tongue Monologues presents Black women as concrete cultural beings in the context of a definite cultural community. More and more, Mother Tongue Monologues is being heralded as a vehicle for addressing Black sexual politics in African American communities and for communicating Black feminist thought at the grassroots level. Visit www.movertonguemonologues.org to see archival footage and photos from past performances.

In 2013, Mother Tongue Monologues for Lesbian Ancestral Wives and Revolutionary Women Speaking the Unspeakable built on previous debates regarding the construction of Black female sexuality and drew its audience into conversations about one of the most taboo subjects in Black sexual politics—homosexuality and gender nonconformity. With beautiful imagery, evocative music and bold choreography, poets, drummers, dancers and actors dramatizing and performing community spoke of lesbian and gay identities of people in Black communities that remain even today, hidden, intensely controversial, and/or dismissed as an insignificant aspect of their lives. The performance focused on the Black lesbian in particular, whose identity remains a dangerous site saturated with the belief that female sexual energy deserves punishment. The multilayered texture of Black women's lives were central as we positioned the debate on the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people squarely within the context of the broader civil rights and human rights concerns of Black communities in the U.S.

In 2012, Mother Tongue Monologues for Black Girls and Stolen Women Reclaiming Our Bodies, Our Selves, Our Lives propelled the issue of Black women's sexuality to center stage. In 2012 there needed to be an outcry against racism, against the erasure of our histories and contributions, against patriarchy and misogyny and against the killing of our bodies, our desires and our sense of joy. The title as well as performance pieces were intentionally selected to provide a space for protest sexual violence on our terms as Black women. The show itself was promoted as being specifically for the purpose of education about sexual assault and was indeed partially in response to the challenges presented by the SlutWalk, a mainstream anti-rape protest, where many Black women found no space.

In 2011, Mother Tongue Monologues from the Middle Passage to Today's Justice Movements was a call and response and focused on inspiring Black women to reclaim their activist selves by presenting the historical and contemporary lives of black women revolutionaries, Black feminists and womanists with *Monologues from the middle passage today's social justice movements*. It featured essays, poems, statements and stories by Harriet Jacobs, Ida B. Wells, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Claudia Jones, Michele Wallace, Beth E. Richie and Kimberle Crenshaw, among others.

Black Women's Blueprint (BWB) is a national Black feminist organization using civil and human rights approaches to organize and develop a culture where women of African descent are fully empowered and where gender, race and other disparities are erased. We engage in progressive research, historical documentation and policy advocacy as well as organize on social justice issues steeped in the struggles of Black women within their communities and within dominant culture. We are the convener of the first Truth Commission ever to focus on Black women in the U.S. and their historical and contemporary experiences with rape/sexual assault.

- 2008** — ***Black Women's Blueprint* is founded** when a group of Black women who identify as African, Afro-Latina, Caribbean and African-American began a discussion in 2008. These discussions in sister-circles, living rooms, backyards and kitchen tables centered on the 2008 Democratic Primaries where a Black man (Barack Obama) and a White woman (Hillary Clinton) spoke on behalf of race and sex, respectively. These women highlighted society's tendency to erase Black women's experiences and they discussed the need for Black women to offer their own voice or "blueprint" in the public discourse. As a result, Black Women's Blueprint was formed to address the ever-present history and legacy of slavery, sexual and reproductive exploitation and subsequent periods of holocaust.
- 2009** — BWB launches its ***Solidarity Economy Initiative*** by moving into Commons Brooklyn, a Solidarity Economy space with a farmer's market, a small vegetable garden on the roof, and a hive for beekeeping. With a goal to utilize the space, which hosts grassroots arts and social justice initiatives, create avenues of agency and self-sustenance for marginalized groups.
- 2010** — BWB launches its **first outreach campaign** to Black communities via *Dance Africa's Bazaar* and other public places. Over 2,500 received informational postcards and were engaged in conversation about the community's role in ending sexual assault.
- BWB launches its grassroots ***Gender Justice Fund*** initiative and shares resources with other non-profits and groups by hosting its first event with the *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center*. The GJF evoked conversation on relationships between Black & white women during the Civil Rights Movement by screening the film *Wednesdays in Mississippi* about the Wednesdays Women who worked together in the Jim Crow South to end racialized violence.
- 2011** — BWB supports ***Sex Crimes Against Black Girls***, a multimedia exhibition portraying sexual exploitation and oppression experienced by young girls throughout the African Diaspora at the *Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation Center* with notable artists including Shantrelle P. Lewis as curator, Numa Perrier, Kimberly M. Becoat, Delphine Fawundu Buford and Alexandria Smith.
- **BWB moves into a two-story brownstone** in the heart of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. From there, it provides an open space for members to convene and organize BWB initiatives, utilize office supplies, build fellowship with one another during BWB events, and meet with staff members for counseling and other healing services.
- BWB launches a **radio program** with its first conversation entitled *No Hierarchy of Oppression: Born Black and A Woman*. The program's highest-rated show, on the subject of marital rape, garnered over 14,000 listeners.
- BWB joins the ***Campaign to Stop Police Brutality*** by centering women's voices on police reform, accountability and community control. Members facilitate workshops on power structures and bystander intervention, testify to their horrific experiences with *Stop and Frisk* at City Hall, on local television news stations and by producing a short film, *Under Siege: The Policing of Women and Girls*. They support lobbying efforts alongside various organizations for the passage of the *Community Safety Act*, the *End Discriminatory Profiling Act* and the *NYPD Oversight Act*.
- BWB writes ***An Open Letter from Black Women to the SlutWalk*** which addressed the failure of *SlutWalk* organizers to acknowledge the history and sexual oppression of Black women and other women of color in their anti-rape movement. BWB's letter garnered a significant amount of media attention, with references in online publications like *ColorLines*, *Clutch Magazine*, *Feministing*, *Ms. Magazine*, *the Nation*, *the Crunk Feminist Collective* as well as a re-blog in the *Huffington Post's Black Voices* section.
- BWB launches **healing programs** including crisis counseling for victims of rape in communities of African descent, sister-circles and healing circles with funding from the United States Department of Justice.

2011

- BWB launches *Critical Participatory Action Research* using a survey developed and led by survivors of rape/sexual assault to gauge the incidences of sexual assault against Black women in their own communities. The survey found that 60% of Black Women in the U.S. reported experiencing sexual assault, and many before the age of 18 according to initial findings from a survey *still ongoing* by BWB. Further, we found that Black communities have a host of innovative ideas for supporting survivors, for primary prevention and for grassroots accountability measures.
- BWB hosts the first *Mother Tongue Monologues* performance entitled, *Mother Tongue Monologues: From the Middle Passage to Today's Justice Movements* at the *Brecht Forum* in Downtown Manhattan. The monologues focused on Black women's historical consciousness as females and as members of the Black community from slavery to the present day.
- BWB launches its work with **Historically Black Colleges and Universities**, providing anti-violence training and technical assistance in collaboration with the *United States Office on Violence Against Women* and the *National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA)*.

2012

- BWB organizes, along with Hunter College, V-Day and others, *Sex, Power and Speaking Truth: Anita Hill 20 Years Later*. It brought together 2,000 scholars, students and organizations, with special guest Anita Hill, to discuss intersections of race, gender, class, politics and the law when analyzing women's credibility, Black masculinity and contemporary cases of sexual harassment.
- BWB opens *The Museum of Women's Resistance (MoWRe)* as a part of its *Black HerStory Archives* and hosts its first exhibits, *Gifts to a Freedom Fighter* and *Hypersexualized: A Photographic Timeline of Stereotypes and Women's Resistance Against Rape Culture*. MoWRe's early exhibits gave the museum its foundation in unearthing knowledge about the unsung Black heroines of the Civil Rights Movement and about the various avenues of political resistance against sexual violence explored by feminists of color from around the world.
- BWB hosts the second *Mother Tongue Monologues* entitled, *Mother Tongue: Monologues for Black Girls and Stolen Women Reclaiming Our Bodies, Our Selves, Our Lives*, at the *National Black Theater*. In an effort to expand the dialogue sparked by the organization's earlier response to *Slutwalk*, individuals spoke out against racism and patriarchy's negative effects on the bodies, desires and happiness of Black women.

2013

- BWB's Flagship project, the **Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (BWTRC)**, is endorsed by the *International Center for Transitional Justice* which has provided technical assistance and oversight over every Truth and Reconciliation Commission that has occurred anywhere in the world since 1980.
- **Dr. Beverly Guy Sheftall**, the Founding Director of the *Women's Research and Resource Center* and the *Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women's Studies at Spelman College* joins the advisory board of the BWTRC.
- BWB hosts the third annual *Mother Tongue Monologues* performance entitled, *Mother Tongue: Monologues for Lesbian Ancestral Wives and Revolutionary Women Speaking the Unspeakable*. The performance honored Aishah Shahidah Simmons, documentarian and Black Lesbian feminist and Staceyann Chin, Jamaican author and spoken word poet. As a step to recognize the issues of queer and gender nonconforming members of the Black feminist community, the 2013 *Mother Tongue* performance featured monologues speaking out against violence, the hypersexualization and ridicule of LGBTQ people as well as intimate-partner violence in same sex relationships.
- BWB *MoWRe* becomes a **Site of Consciousness**, an honorary title bestowed to institutions paying tribute to histories of oppressed peoples by using spaces to advocate for their civil and human rights. The title is given by the *International Coalition of Sites of Consciousness* which is made up of nine prestigious historic sites, memory initiatives and museums around the world including the *Lower East Side Tenement Museum*, the *National Civil Rights Museum* and the *Women's Rights National Historical Park*.
- The Brooklyn Museum offers its Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Auditorium as the home for the 2014 production of *Mother Tongue: Monologues for Truth Bearing Women, for Emerging Sons and Other Keepers of the Flame*, the first public deliberation facilitated by organizers as part of its Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to attain justice for survivors testifying about their experiences of rape/sexual assault.
- BWB launches its *Training Institute* which offers a series of workshops educating participants on bystander intervention, violence against the LGBTQ community, terminology for various sexual orientations and gender nonconforming groups, constitutional rights in interacting with law enforcement, the connection between different forms of sexual violence and finally the manifestation and impact of Black sexual politics in contemporary America.