

I AM!
Black Women Healing From Generational Trauma

Script

By: Monique J. Fortuné
April 16, 2021

Opening Bumper/Slide 1

I AM!

Black Women Healing From Generational Trauma

Monique J. Fortuné, Auteur

(Opening Music - *I Am Light*,
India Irie)

Slide 2

Dedicated to -

The Warrior Women Ancestors - Eliza, Emil, Lamerci, Altima,
Joan Canton, Mildred, Emma, Riesa, Anita, Blanche, Ethel Louise,
Ms. Mary Wilson and Ms. Cicely Tyson

THE SISTAHS

Monique, Joan, Kimberley, Linda, Neonu, Vanessa, Bridget

SETTINGS

Fordham Hill Oval Park - James Chapel - My Sistahs' Houses
-Joan's Apartment

TIME

Here. Now.

Video 1 (Monique in Orange)

I am the daughter of Joan Altima. The granddaughter of Lamerici and Altima. The great granddaughter of Eliza and Emil. The godmother of Niara Mastimela and Lauren Elise.

Video 2 (Monique in Purple and Black in James Chapel)

The choreopoem divided into five distinct segments.

Movement 1 - The Time Before Time

(Libation and Dance Tribute to the Elders - Monique)

There was the sun, moon and stars when there was a time before time. There was dust to dust when there was a time before time.

There were African people standing in the glow of sun and shielded by the rays of the moon- celebrating their indigenous Yoruba, Fon, Mende, Dahomey, Zulu, Shona, Fulani selves.

Knowing fully. Living fully. Letting the elements of wind, earth, water and ether heal and bless. A time before time women honored as the griot, general, warrior, matriarch, healer, nurturer, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, niece, queen. A time before time that birthed all that was yet to be.

Movement 2 - Against Our Will

Wounds That Remain

What of the narratives of Africans who came to America against their will? My mother has always said you have running through your blood, running through your veins, someone, a people who survived the Middle Passage. Somehow, some way Africans were determined to bring their drums, their soul deep traditions and faith to a land that didn't know and didn't want to know their victories and defeats. Black men and women in the belly of ships stacked and chained chattel. Black men and women - living and dying against their will. Black women being invaded - body, mind and soul. Black men being stripped of all humanity. Wounds remain - centuries deep. Wounds that created spirituals, hymns and jazz. Wounds that brought forth hog maws, chitlins and hush puppies, lambi and bouillon, fungi and callaloo. Wounds that brought forth broken families and better day prayers for the generations to come. Wounds that brought forth Mammies and Martyrs. Wounds that brought forth code switching and revolution. Wounds that remain.

Wounds that are scars of death and life. Wounds hard won worn like badges of shame and honor. Wounds that remain. Wounds that remind us that we are more than our collective bruises. Wounds that have manifested into fibroids, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, auto-immune dysfunction, addiction, depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, relentless rage. Wounds of hurt and pain that have been with us, sepia souls for so long - we are numb. We are still, so many sistahs, womyn, girls are still taken, possessed, intruded - against our will. We are still on a quest to ease our diseases.

Movement 3 - What Runs Through Our Veins

From Negro to Black to African American: Our Past, Present, Future

From Negro to Black to African American.

From Negro to Black to African American.

From Negro to Black to African American.

Who are we.

Who we be.

Who we are.

From Negro to Black to African American.

WE are –

Cleopatra.

Ida B. Wells.
Nzingha.
Aretha.
Harriet and Hamer .
Kamala and Makeba.
Who are we.
Who we be.
Who we are.
Breonna and #BlackLivesMatter.
Marchers.
Protesters.
Lovers.
Grandmothers. Mothers. Sisters. Aunts. Nieces. Daughters.
Who are we.
Who we be.
Who we are.
We are –
US – US – US.
Still, still and always for always – US.

Life Dance

Funga Alafia, Asé, Asé. Funga Alafia, Asé, Asé. Funga Alafia, Asé, Asé. (Do Funga movements) We call the power of the Yoruba nation. Funga Alafia means Welcome, blessings. Asé means Let it be so, “Amen.”

Asé, a word I have said for decades, a word I have cried out when I performed the Yoruba Welcome Dance – *Funga Alafia*. I learned the Welcome Dance *when I attended* New York City’s Harlem School of

the Arts as a teenager. I remember my unapologetically tall, mahogany brown, elegant and demanding dance instructor Mr. Philip Stamps. I remember before we learned *Funga* he sat us down and explained the spiritual origins of the dance. Mr. Stamps showed us a world map - pointed to Nigeria, then to Cuba and then to the United States. Mr. Stamps would say - know the origins of a dance. Know your origins. You are not dancing just to dance. You are dancing for your ancestors. You are dancing for your elders. You are dancing for your people. Dance is one way that people stay alive for all generations. Mr. Stamps exclaimed when you say *Asé*, you are bringing God into the space. I shall never forget the dance and history lessons I learned from Mr. Stamps and other HSA dance instructors.

Ase is a word, when spoken conjures forth God, divine force, life force, power, grace, growth, blood earth - LIFE FORCE. On that day at Harlem School of the Arts, Mr. Stamps taught us that dancing is not just the accurate steps, blocking or stage presence - bring forth as you dance - an understanding of the history, the meaning, the soul of dance. Mr. Stamps taught us about the importance of sustaining the dance of our ancestors. Mr. Stamps instilled in us the power of *Asé* and to carry it with us wherever we go. *Asé* is a battlecry for living, not just surviving. *Asé* is a scream for justice.

Asé is the call to defy anyone who tries to interfere with an African people's, African womyn's right to thrive.

Slide 3 - (Insert Dance Video)

Sisters Growing in the Spirit
Dianne Adkins-Forte, Director and Choreographer
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
Nassau Alumnae Chapter Liturgical Dance Group

Movement 4 - Sistah Soul Conversations

A Love that Endures

"I am in love again." That's what I told five friends that responded to this declaration in five unique ways. Imani said, "Again, please, gurl!" Michelle said, "You deserve all the love your heart can hold." Aleah said, "Make sure that he has money and loves you more than you love him." Seneca said, "Is he good in bed?" Taylor said, "Love yourself enough to give love time to mature." I adore my friends. I appreciated all their responses. I am a woman who knows what she needs and wants. It is interesting to me that when I said to my friends that "I am in love again" they went straight to thinking about a relationship with a man.

I had to explain to my dear five friends over a Zoom call that I had to fall in love with myself again. I had to caress myself with "I love you, Monique," over and over again. I had to give myself grace and divine, lay hands over my own body. I had to give thanks for being alive and in my right mind. Life has brought many love teachers. I am grateful for them all.. My lessons are far from over. The chances to know love, make love, share love, question love, to recognize love, acknowledge love, be love, rest with me. I thank my Sistahs for their conversation, but, oh my, now, I trust myself enough in this grown, beautiful Black body to know one thing - love endures.

Movement 5 -The Sacred Is What Saves

Witnessing the Gardens

I, as a Black Woman, still stand in the garden of intersectionality - race, class and gender that has contributed to black women's oppression through the ages. The empire shows up in two expressions of surrogacy - coerced and voluntary.

There is a vicious hegemonic legacy that still overwhelms most black women. Black women still found themselves at the mercy of

abusive circumstances – health disparities, economic injustices and social and cultural disrespect.

Black women are still navigating through these surrogacy roles and resist against long standing stereotypes about black women. We are not mammies taking care of everyone else and neglecting ourselves. We are not the “strong, black woman” who denies her own hurt and pain. We are not the hypersexual woman who is available for anyone’s desire. We are black women who must tend to our gardens, (thank you, Alice Walker for the reminder) that with redemptive self-love, self-esteem and self-actualization we have an urgent obligation to keep tending to our gardens.

A Wade in the Water - Ocho Rios, Dunn River Falls, 1987

1987, The first time I went to Jamaica. I had the blessing of going to Jamaica for the first time in 1987 – the year Jamaica was celebrating its 25th anniversary. Ocho Rios – climbing Dunn River Falls. 600 foot long, 180 foot high amazing landmark. Our guide reminded us to wear sneakers so our feet would not be cut to shreds by the rough rocks. I was intrigued by the climb. I went with my friends Marta and Debbie. We were in our late twenties and excited to be in Jamaica. Excited to be young and enjoy all the pleasures of Jamaica. As I climbed I thought about being able to secure bragging rights

about how I reached the top of Dunn River Falls. I wanted to let my friends and family know that I did the "wet climb" - encountered the forces of water, swimming in the small pools on my way to Dunn River Falls summit. As Debbie, Marta and I reached the top - a smaller calmer pool changed my entire mood from excited to peaceful. As I dipped my body into the water, I hummed the spiritual *Wade in the Water*. I began to sing, "God's gonna trouble the water." The water was cool and soothing, calming my soul. No more ego. No more bragging rights. This pool of water was my salvation. I took in the green trees. The blue skies. God troubled the water. God paused me and said, "Take in my Creation. Refresh. Pause. This is the sacred that saves." I shall always be grateful for that 1987 trip to Jamaica. I learned that the sacred can be found anywhere. The sacred I now know is ME. All I have to do is pause and surrender. Surrender- no always a simple thing for a Black women to do. Surrender.

Creator, God, let us embrace the sacred that saves our lives and allows space for our righteous surrender. Ase. Amen. Ameen. Shalom. Namaste.

Slide 4

**The Sistahs - "I Am" - Gratitude for the
Union Theological Seminary's Black Women Caucus**

Insert the following videos:

1. Kimberley
2. Linda
3. Neonu
4. Bridget
5. Joan
6. Joan and Monique

Slide 5

Closing Bumper -Credits

**(Closing Music - *Surrender*,
Lizz Wright)**

Gratitude

Joan Tyson Fortuné

Gontran Fortuné, Jr., Videographer

Dianne Adkins-Forte, Choreographer

Kimberly Gordy, Editor

Hannah Lundberg, Lighting and Set Design

Sandra Montes, Dean, UTS Chapel

**Michael Orzechowski, Director of UTS Housing and Campus
Services
UTS Black Women Caucus**