\textbf{Before and Now}

\textit{Text by Que’Nique Newbill, with Beulah Agbabiaka and Hanna St. Marie.}
\textit{Lyrics by Zhailon Levingston}
\textit{Music by Solomon Hoffman and Zhailon Levingston}
\textit{Conceived and Directed by Ben Wexler}

\textbf{Zhailon}: BEFORE AND NOW
I'M NOT QUITE TO AFTER
\textbf{Add Akron}: BEFORE AND NOW
I'M NOT QUITE TO AFTER

\textbf{Hanna}: My name is Hanna St. Marie. Before law school, I taught 6th grade English.

\textbf{Hanna + Que}: As a kid, I always thought I could time-travel.

\textbf{Que}: I would race around my grandmother's house and bed
Weaving, dipping and diving around her antique furniture. Tightly wrapping her
curtains around my waist showing my petite curvature.

\textbf{Hanna}: (She would always laugh).

\textbf{Que}: With every open door, each open room I would be a new character.
My \textit{20s flapper dress} was my grandmother’s sheets
I used flowers from her garden to be \textit{70s hippie-chic}
Darken my eyes with liner and shadow to channel my \textit{60s feminine mystique}.

\textbf{Que}: Okay.

\textbf{Hanna}: I'm happy to report that I have grown out of this habit.

\textbf{Zhailon}: Now, as I have grown older I've shared my little secret with my students.
Inspiring each of my sixth graders to take their own time-travel journeys through
literature. Flip through pages and jump between decades until there are no pages or at
least blank ones.

At the end of each story, I would tell this is yours to write now, a blank canvas worthy
only of your touch and stroke.

[Pause]

\textbf{Hanna}: But Tuesday, Nov 8th,

\textbf{Que + Hanna + Zhailon}: I felt that change.

\textbf{Que}: I felt myself running through my grandmother's home again, but each door
closing behind me, trapping me and my body in a time I do not recognize.

**Zhailon:** A machine set back to an era of hangers and hangings. Plans of parenthood banned, but no plans of bans on those in white hoods. I cannot tell my students what to think anymore, if their canvas will be painted red, black or ... Colors of camo that bespoke of war and conflict

**AKRON/ZHAILON:**
BEFORE AND NOW
I'M NOT QUITE TO AFTER
I ASK THE MORNING “HOW”? CAN THE DREAMS I DREAM IN ME FIND A PLACE TO SPROUT? THAT HOPE ON THE HORIZON IS IT FAADING NOW? OR DOES IT BURN FROM WITHIN ME?

**Que:**
I know why the caged bird sings
It. feels more safe in here than out there, (these days).
Out there. they dare you to fly.
But. how high can you fly before they shoot you down.
Nose-dive into ground. Clip[ped. wings from caged feathers were made for sport not speed.

**Akron:**
We will. say "we can't breathe."
(And) they will. say “you don't deserve this air.”
“Your. skin is not fair like mine.”

But they. forgot we don't need air to breathe. Our. stolen bodies and lungs were borne of the seas. We. have been the hanging fruit, the immigrant roots that anchor these trees.

**Zhailon:**
Let me rehash this.

As
Massive
Passion
Overtakes
The
Disaffected Masses
Left the
Pseudo-Liberal
Factions
Scratchin’
Their Heads.

We will.
Beg
For Action
Fasten
Our Safety Pins &
Badges
Forgettin’
We too cashed in
On this
Corrupt (Political) Trade.

We
View the rural parts of America
Through opera glasses,
Balcony apparatus
Wondering who put these classless actors
into electoral play, (well why don't you just ask them).

**Que:**
Our search for
satisfaction amidst
fascist presidential thrashes
at the door
Has us asking what fasces patterns
led to these tragic reactions

People of Color
will be askin
Whites
if their
compassion
is just another phase passing,
another
chance in the casket,
because somehow we can't no longer mask it.

**Akron:**
(So we. got to ask it or if they don't tell us, for us will history simply rehash it?)

We

**Que, Zhailon, Akron:** (people of color)

**Akron:** have already lived in centuries of inactions, or rather subtractions, need I
speak as 3/5 of a human fraction? or further contractions of myself? Need I be more
placid? should I be more placid? Is this piece gaining any traction?!!

Zhailon:
They’ll ask for us to politely put away political critiques of the elite
grit our teeth
only silently weep,
Even wipe our tears
But then tell us

Que, Zhailon, Akron:  Shh! DO NOT SPEAK

(music out)

Zhailon:
But where can I speak? Or more importantly where am I safe? Where is sanctuary?
And when will we find the (right) words necessary?

In this country where hate, seems genetic, almost hereditary, playing tributary to the
monetary unitary, (n)ever expecting nothing (r)evolutionary.

Que: Our only right seems to be,

Zhailon: to sing

Akron: like caged canaries.

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Beulah: Hi.

My name is Beulah.
Something about me: I love school.

Que: But I hate math.

Beulah: Legit!
I despise it.
Que: It started when I was young.

Middle school, high school I counted the faces around school. Strange to witness who was heavily disciplined under that "zero-tolerance" rule.

Beulah: Hint: they looked like me.

Akron: But never-mind that. What was more troubling was what I counted in classrooms. And it may not be what you assume.

35 students in the “regular” classes
A different ratio in honors and advanced
3 security guards but only 1 art teacher.
Guess who ended up where

And while this made me sad. It's the math at the highest levels that make me particularly mad.

Beulah: Believe it or not, the US has almost a quarter of the world's prison population.

Que: It seems we're more shackle, ask questions later, just hurry up and cuff, and we're less about "innocent before proven guilty" or living up to "in God we trust."

Beulah: Even if the numbers we adjust, these things don't add up.

Beulah + Que: Actually these numbers don't lie, they lynch.
Que: Statistical executions so flawless its mathematically beautiful.
And these statistics mean nothing less than suicide for those young jumpsuited boys and girls whose dreams have died. Wondering, counting, and computing their chances at a new hope and freedom.

Akron: People think Trump just means the end of criminal justice reform, well I'm afraid of what may succeed him.

What comes of the kids whose lives are bid on by for-profit prisons. I heard there's millions if not billions counting up the third grade colored faces playing on the playgrounds and jungle gyms of Richmond and building the beds

It's an urban algebra or some inner-city geometry, approximating that your race + your neighborhood equal your prison probability.

Beulah: It's a perpendicular life for me. and young people of color
All sharp turns, angles, no arcs but weekend collect calls from our brothers.

Akron+ Que+ Beulah: I hate math.
Akron: But my heart goes out to those Black and brown kids who have to learn their math backwards. Counting backwards from life sentences given at 16. No commuted sentences even if their grammar and manners are now pristine. I thought we’d made some progress here, but times are looking lean

Sadly, their rate is double the rate of those

Akron + Que + Beulah: "other folks,"

Akron: if you know what I mean.

Akron + Beulah: I cry for my people

Beulah: when their justice served is not equal but lesser
The fractions left of their lives never cease to surprise when compared with their counterparts.

I find this arithmetic is so arresting.
It has me wrestling with my soul constantly.

Que: And I’m bad at math because I am forever failing to solve for X. These equations don’t account for the inequities in our society. Y’all got me messed up. Y’all got me perplexed.[BA2]

And if it’s not clear, for-profit prisons treat us like commodities. With prison stocks forever risin’, the information is out there

Akron + Que: You don’t have to lie to me.

Que: It’s a new form of chattel (not some random anomaly), some antebellum revival that with this man as president that’s no longer playin’ hide and seek.

Akron + Que + Beulah: I’m only surviving because of the light in me.

Beulah: In crisis, my mama explained to me that I would keep marching just like she, my grandmother, and my great-grandmothers had been doing on this soil. I remember.

Que: I remember. My people whose feet sung through sharecropping

Beulah: My mothers before me marched through slavery, Jim Crow,

Beulah: Recessions
Que: Depression

Beulah: Civil rights movements
Que: Every Test
Beulah: The subsequent deindustrialization
Que: Every Test

Beulah: Whitelash
Que: Every Test

Beulah: Every Test
Que: Black Power

Beulah: Every Test
Que: Reaganomics

Beulah: Every Test
Que: The War on Drugs

Akron: And I refuse to let this sadistic math silence me.
I’m equipped and geared up with what my mother taught me.
She told me change starts with 1 plus 1 is two legs forward,
An infinite number of steps that comprise a pedestrian chorus,
Of change.

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Beulah: This day.

This day. Today.

Our march is loud.
And our unity is louder.
Our steps forward will sing, and this is our true power.

Que: Well Tuesday, November 8th I found my test.
I’ll do my best, but for y’all I have a small request.

Akron: Add your digits so we can all march towards equality
Elevate your brothers and sisters
At the expensive of your respective privilege
Zhailon: To help part this Red Sea

Hanna: Our sum total is freedom.

Beulah: My name is Beulah,

Que: Que.

Hanna: Hanna.

Akron: Akron.

Zhailon: Zhailon.

All: and that’s some math I can mess with.