

*Walking into My Residency*

By

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“A writer's life and work are not a gift to mankind; they are its necessity.” – Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*

Over the last five years, I have watched literary giants and performers of a lifetime. I have asked myself who will write the next great literary works? Who will ever fill the void? Then a global pandemic occurred and we were all sitting, watching, and waiting. The onset of Covid and impact it has left on our communities is unbelievable. If that wasn't enough, there were the Black Lives Matter and racial justice movements that swept the nation. These colliding factors forced me to consider how I would express my thoughts and experiences as a Black woman surviving in America. I have always found the stage as a space to articulate my thoughts and help others reflect critically about the traumas we endure and have endured. After surviving Covid, literally, and watching so many people lose their lives while racism continues to rear its head in the midst of a global pandemic, I've never felt more compelled to write, produce, and create works that explore living through racism and sexism. I am compelled to use my art at this present moment and spark a new renaissance of works dedicated to racial realities in America.

I am writing here because my heart is heavy. I am carrying important messages that the last two years have forced me to express. Being Black in America...I am not sure I grasped the total weight of being Black in America until I watched Floyd take his last breath while reading “A Raisin in the Sun” with my 16 year old son. As a mother, an artist, a being trying to understand the world. In my apartment, through Covid, I was shut in on the 12th floor of a highrise looking over a poverty stricken city entering a new era with so much potential. When I got the call to come to the art park it was like the universe responding and saying “come here” and let those thoughts be heard, have a space to heal, think about the racial and gender traumas that are happening to the black and brown community in a new new way. Often times as an artist you're thinking about how to create in the midst of your life, and I think that being here and having the space to think about it is going to provide the opportunities to simply put those words on paper and not just put them on paper but share them with the world in a way that preserves, honors, and expands the purview of my future as an artist, the work that I produce, and the representation of Central New York as a space where artists of color can thrive. And I'm very excited by that; I'm humbled by that.

In the last recent months I've lost a dear friend that believed in arts, music, and the power of God's voice through music. The number of black artists that have passed who have spent their lives dedicated to representing the black experience on television or in theatre or on stages

around the world has left a void to fill. While pacing the floors of my apartment over the last year, as I still aimed to recover from Covid, I sought guidance from some established playwrights and performers. Kyle Bass, playwright and Artistic Director of Syracuse Stage, asked me, “How can you step into the existing void now and how do you prepare to do that with skill, confidence, and passion?” My time at SQHAP provides me the space to recognize and cultivate my craft. I’m grateful to have a space and a place to do so in my free time. My goal is to hone my craft as a creative writer and playwright. If all goes as planned, occasionally I will share my work with public performances. As a woman of color these days, I openly explore race and the racialized experiences of my ancestors. I think about how my work might be received. Because what type of reception will my work receive? Then I remember the work of an artist/dancer. According to Katherine Dunham, it's not my job to worry about your reception, it's my job to create and deliver my talent to the world. So I write, produce, and create with the aim of preserving and telling Black women's stories from across generations. A presentation of my ongoing works will be held in September.

*This is dedicated to ancestors who didn't have the space to live their dreams and to my mother and grandmothers who taught me valuable lessons about standing tall, using my voice, and giving back to my village.*