

**BLACK BLIP: a monologue of double consciousness**

A poetic spoken monologue in verse.

To be performed by two near-identical,  
near-substitute, near-same, near-double  
black girls.

## PRE-SHOW ANNOUNCEMENT

Welcome to the production of **BLACK BLIP**: a monologue of double consciousness. For those who are blissfully unaware—yes, that’s you, sir, in the Patagonia and, uh, your friend in plaid beside you. And, ma’am, is that an artisanal jacket from a recently gentrified pocket of Midtown Detroit? Very cute. Definitely you too. In fact, raise your hand if you saw *La La Land* and didn’t, at least, question Ryan Gosling’s apparent need to save jazz from extinction, or the way in which jazz was represented as a whole.

Good. Pay attention:

“Double consciousness” is a term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois describing the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society. You know, like this one, right here. The term originally referred to the psychological challenge of "always looking at one's self through the eyes" of a racist white society, and "measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt." The term has since been applied to numerous situations of social inequality, notably women living in patriarchal societies.

If this discomforts you, for the wellbeing of your detrimentally perpetuated comfort, please exit through the door from whence you entered. Thank you!

**ACT I, SCENE I: you don't know no better**

Nevadan Private School: Elegant,  
flower-adorned courtyard,  
size mandating students walk outside  
when moving  
from one class to another.  
Red polos, dark khakis and/or skørts,  
school emblem over the heart.

*Snuggles the class-bunny learns addition  
alongside students*

in her cage.  
Blistering heat, but it's dry.  
No one's suffocating.  
Everything is Okay.

you are ten, bouncing  
on your toes.  
rainbow-colored hair bobbles bind  
your coily twists  
ambush  
those baby-fat cheeks  
stinging.

you are ten.  
everyday in elementary school  
on every blistering morning,  
you pledge allegiance  
to a flag you know  
nothing about  
with kids who know  
as little as you.  
you are ten,  
and you are the only black blip  
in this school.

(digression one:  
that is, until, a black blip named "dream" appears.  
even though you don't see her until her third week in,  
you know of her existence the day of her appearance because  
several students kindly inform you that  
your sister [not "sis"  
as in the often-affectionate term from one black woman to another,  
now widely appropriated.

*sister*

as in: bound by blood because you are bound by skin]

is, quote, weird.

digression two:

as you have experienced, the school has an unspoken history  
of holding black blip transfers back  
because they fear black blips, quote,  
adjust poorly.  
end digression).

*you are ten, doodling dolphins on your hands,  
when the teacher tells the class to play dress-up for a grade.*

kelsey.

are you listening?

look up.

**YOUR TASK:**

pick one historical black female.  
make a poster detailing what they've done  
for this country,  
embody them.  
recite the facts of their life,  
for any one child, adult that stands before you.  
you must stay still,  
until they do  
stand.

**ACT I, SCENE II: you don't know no better, know better**

you are limited  
by race, gender,  
and a finite knowledge of Historic Black Women,  
whomst wilt thou becometh?:

- (a) *harriet tubman. slave. liberated  
african americans from white rule.*
- (b) *rosa parks. systematic slave. liberated  
african americans from white rules.*
- (c) Somethin' Truth. probably a slave. liberated  
african americans from white something  
at some point. probably.
- (d) make up a name. call her a slave. tell them  
who she liberated, see if they give a shit.

so what, baby blip,  
your grandma led a labor union.  
but no, baby blip,  
she don't count.  
nor your daddy,  
your mommy,  
your daddy's mommy, mommy's mommy,  
daddy's daddy mommy's daddy  
daddy's daddy's daddy mommy's daddy's daddy  
daddy's daddy's mommy mommy's daddy's mommy  
daddy's mommy's daddy mommy's mommy's daddy's  
daddy's mommy's mommy mommy's mommy mommy

**ACT I, SCENE III: you don't know no better, know better, now better**

you are standing in front of your poster board of  
the underground railroad  
written  
in gold sharpie and framed  
by silver glitter.

you are dressed in “slavery-chic”  
scarves [donated by grandmother],  
performing the life of harriet tubman  
for white families looking  
for their own historical children.  
can you blame them? did you see  
George Washington?

*(you are  
a painting whose eyes follow, straining  
to see him  
without breaking your stillness, please  
ignore the tickle on your nose.)*

endowed, you are, with honor,  
black blip—  
spoon-fed.  
this, they imply, is as historically significant  
as the historical black woman herself.

**ACT II, SCENE I: knowin's never free**

Detroit Public School: Juvenile detention  
minus the bars,  
with blues, greys, grayer greys,  
greys that grey all who look at it.  
Cafeteria overpopulated  
with big-headed children whose skin  
catch spit flicked from teachers' mouths.  
Classroom walls barren.  
The two windows necessary  
to satisfy fire safety laws.  
Depression, regret, and shame  
swarming.

you are fourteen,  
lunar mares beneath your eyes.

you are fourteen,  
and your only wish is for black  
hoodies to become  
black holes  
to get you away from this desk engraved  
with hearts and names of black blips from years past.

you are fourteen, and not once since elementary  
have you mindlessly recited  
the pledge  
for a place wherein  
brown skinned kids are inducted into vigilantism upon birth.

you are fourteen,  
and you are one of eight-hundred  
black blips  
in this ruinous black blip school.

despite being numbered,  
despite the exhaustion  
despite the shame inflaming halls,  
at least there is familiarity here.

you are fourteen when you realize  
this familiarity runs deep.

**ACT II, SCENE II: baby blip blips**

you are all dressed up in your pilots' jumpsuit  
from the army store down the way,  
complete with  
an aviator hat and some goggles  
that leave dents on your face.  
aren't you lookin' like a real Bessie Coleman,  
black blip.

*KELSEY/BESSIE COLEMAN: I decided blacks should not have to experience  
the difficulties I had faced,  
so I decided to open  
a flying school  
and teach other black women to fly.*

you rehearse in front of  
a heavy-eyed class  
and the history teacher  
with a knack for patronization.

*i feel like  
a trucker's bathroom.  
a space to use,  
unrecoverable.*

the teacher's a stoic one,  
but she almost seems  
delighted  
in the way her eyes shine,  
never leaving you.

*please teach me  
how to be instead of  
how to become  
another.  
let me  
rewrite or add  
to chapter's past.*

being leaves you unseen  
until you blip into  
threat or spectacle.

*please*

you are surprised  
when she slides  
her feedback on your desk,  
but if you recall:

you all but embodied Bessie  
'cept in body. see,  
you had one hand on your hip,  
leg popped, tone dead, eyes  
not wanting but wondering:  
how the fuck are you stuck doing this shit again?

ADVICE:  
leave yourself behind.

*KELSEY/HARRIET TUBMAN: every great dream begins  
with a dreamer. always remember,  
you have within you  
the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach  
for the stars  
to change  
the world.*

END SCENE.

*No. Not end scene.  
A Proclamation!  
That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord  
one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three,  
all persons held as slaves within any State  
or designated part of a State,  
the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against  
the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever  
free.  
That on the first day of January,  
in the year of our Lord, one thousand  
eight hundred and sixty-three,  
all persons held as slaves  
in the United States,  
shall be then,  
thenceforward, and forever  
free. That, in this year  
all persons  
within any State  
the people whereof shall then  
be held, shall be then,*

*thenceforward, and forever  
free. That in this year  
all persons  
shall then be held in warm embrace  
and shall be then the United States,  
and shall be, thenceforward, and forever.*

*now,  
End Scene.*

**ACT III, SCENE I: black blip ain't blippin' no more**

*still.*

*still.*

*still.*

*be still.*

*breathe not.*

*think not.*

*just be.*

*breathe,*

but only when leering adults drop  
tickets in your box.  
then act, as if  
you are shaking the dust of centuries  
off your body, not just  
the dust of unkempt library books.  
smile, as if you want to  
be here. as if you want to embody  
her. as if you want

*smile,*

and gloss over  
how Coleman was thrown  
from a plane  
and plummeted  
two thousand feet to her death.  
smile, and ignore  
how your board makes mention of  
her death's suspected sabotage  
with shiny, sea blue  
construction paper  
as a frame to match the aesthetic of  
the sky.  
smile, and ignore the chatter  
of a hundred other children doing the same.

smile, as heat swells  
in a room with bookshelves  
smushed against walls  
so that rows and rows  
of glittery display boards and children  
with heavy costumes can be held in captivity  
hours after school.

BOTH: [no one could turn on the damn air?]

smile, when your speech is done.  
when you've said and given them all you are allowed  
to say and give,  
return to stillness and wait  
for the next white man  
to bring you back to life.

*smile, and wait  
until you can go  
home, where you can drop the mask  
and be.*