

CHANT

By Bria Walker

(Sonji. Black woman. Mid 20s – mid 30s. She holds an imaginary BLACK LIVES MATTER sign high above her head. Sonji does a call and response with the audience. In an audition, she must call and respond with herself.)

SONJI: No justice! No peace! No justice! No peace! Hands up! Don't shoot! Hands up! Don't shoot!

(She feels the intense heat and then speaks directly to the audience.) It is hot! I mean, hot! Like, oppressively hot. And I'm holdin' a sign high above my head. I'm tall and my arms are long. *(triumphantly)* No one can ignore me. The sun's rays are beatin' down on me but my sign is doin' double duty. It's shielding me from the rays *and* it shields me from the taunts. *(proudly)* I'm tall and my arms are long. But my arms are gettin' tired. So I lower them. My soul's been gettin' tired but I'm fighting not to lower it. Not to lower it into depths of deep despair. Anotha brotha was shot. They shot anotha brotha. They shot him and my soul crept deeper into despair. I turned on a screen. I watched them shoot anotha brotha. I watched and I cried. I covered my mouth and cried for anotha brotha that was shot. I cried a eulogy of tears for a man I didn't know. I didn't know what to do. So, I cried. I couldn't stop. My soul sank deep. And I cried. Something inside me broke. What do I do? How do I get my soul back? How do I get my heart to start beatin' regular again? What do I do? *(beat)* Between the deluge of tears and the sinking of my soul, I turned on a screen and I searched. And I found a protest. I found a place for my voice to be heard... so that my soul wouldn't delve any deeper into despair. So that maybe I could figure out a way to get my heart to beat regular again. So that maybe I could fix this thing inside me that broke. *(beat)* So here I am. Holding a sign high above my head. I gotta keep it up. It's hot and my soul is heavy. I gotta lift it up. Society is refusing to let my people live and I can't understand why. So I gotta lift us up. And with each chant, with each lifting of my voice, I can feel my heart start to beat regular again. I can feel my soul try to fix that thing that's broke inside of me. So I chant. Harder. And I lift my voice. Louder. And I keep my hands up. Higher. *(The holding of the imaginary sign morphs into a "hands up" gesture.)*