

“The National New Play Network rolling world premiere of...”

PANTHER WOMEN

An Army for the Liberation



PT x PROP TITR

WRITTEN BY INDIA NICOLE BURTON

DIRECTED BY MYESHA-TIARA

CROSSROADS FUND

OCASE
Office of Cultural, Ethnic, and Special Events

YLF
YOUNG LEADERS FUND
AN INITIATIVE of

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
nearts.gov

NNPN
National New Play Network

www.PerceptionsTheatre.org



Panther Women: An Army for the Liberation follows one woman's journey to self-discovery through the stories of three prominent women who were members of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Movement. This high-energy movement piece with poetry, monologues, dance, and song explores the dilemmas, obstacles, and joy of African American Women, chronicling the lifelong pursuit of justice by some of the founding women of the Civil Rights Movement. A choreopoem built upon extensive research and collaboration with a cohort of Black artists, Panther Women: An Army for the Liberation, touches on the core of the human condition and celebrates Black women. Panther Women is produced by Prop Thtr and Perceptions Theatre as part of a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere. Other Partner Theaters are Cleveland Public Theatre in Ohio and Phoenix Theatre in Indianapolis.

Meet The Playwright



India Nicole Burton is an actress, director, playwright, and producer. She is a native of Akron, OH and graduated from The University of Akron in 2011 with a BA in Theatre Arts with an emphasis on performance. Upon graduating, India founded Ma'Sue Productions, an African American theatre company located in Akron, Ohio. She has directed, produced, and performed in several of Ma'Sue's plays and was

co-artistic director until 2015.

Some of India's acting credits include "Julius Caesar" (Portia), "Bootycandy" (Actor One), "An Octoroon" (Dido), and "Orlando" (Orlando). India just recently ended a Virtual National Tour of "American Dreams" by Leila Buck in 2020. Where she played the role of Biana Coffman.

India's directing credits include "for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf" (Heads Up Productions), "The Laramie Project" (Heads Up Productions), "Daybreak's Children" (Ma'Sue Productions), "A Happening on Imperial" (Ma'Sue Productions), "O Patria Mia" (Ma'Sue Productions), "Little Women" (Hathaway Brown Theatre Institute), "Fire on the Water" (Cleveland Public Theatre, co-directed with Raymond Bobgan), "Panther Women: An Army for the Liberation" (in development at Cleveland Public Theatre),

“inside out” by Francisca Da Silveira (Company One, as part of their C1: Inauguration project) and three short plays produced at Cleveland Public Theatre’s Station Hope: “What we could have,” “Maya: The Poet,” and “We Call you George.” India’s assistant directing credits include the 2014 production of “The Color Purple” at Karamu House, “A brownsville song” (b-side for tray) at Dobama Theatre, Cleveland Public Theatre’s “Barbecue and Good at Heart”, featured in BorderLight International Theatre + Fringe Festival.

India is a board member for New World Performance Lab and a two-year recipient of NNPN Producer in Residence program for Cleveland Public Theatre. She is currently receiving her MFA in writing from The University of Nebraska’s Creative writing program.

(Biography collected from Playwright’s Center at pwcenter.org)

Panther Women Director & Perceptions Theatre Artistic Director



Myesha-Tiara (she/her) hails from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After attending the prestigious Baton Rouge Magnet High School, she decided to dedicate herself to her craft and enrolled in Northwestern State University, where in her sophomore year she was featured in the Oscar winning film "12 Years a Slave". Myesha received her Bachelor of Science in Theatre Arts with a concentration in Performance and Directing. After college she performed for regional and touring theatres until she

decided to make the big move to the Windy City. At the end of 2019 she also opened her own 501 c3 non-profit theatre company, Perceptions Theatre, on the Southside of Chicago. Chicago directing credits include: Black Magic (Director/Perceptions Theatre); Invisible (Assistant Director/Her Story Theatre); The Little Foxes (Associate Director / Citadel Theatre Company). Some of her Chicago acting credits include For Colored Girls... as Lady In Brown and Lady In Blue u/s (Court Theatre/ Jeff Winner); Swamp Baby as Swamp Baby/Iriana (MPAACT). Steel Magnolias as Annelle (Theatre at the Center); The Wedding Band (The Artistic Home/ Jeff Recommended) and Hamlet as Gertrude and

Ophelia/Osric u/s (The Gift Theatre). She is represented by Shirley Hamilton Talent Inc.

(myesha-tiara.com, IG: myeshatiara, TikTok: myesha_tiara)

Meet Our Choreographer!



Deja Hood is a multidisciplinary artist based in Chicago, Illinois. With a blended love for dance, photography, and storytelling, Deja creates works molded from individuality, authenticity, and the question “why?” As an African-American woman, Deja is heavily influenced by her culture and personal experiences.

It is through these influences that she has shaped her creative process of experience

first, question second, process third, and conversation last.

In 2018, Deja participated in RAW Detroit and choreographed her first piece ResilienSHE which paid homage to the strength and resilience of Black women. In 2020, Deja choreographed two full length works, Praise and 64,000 Plus One, as a part of her Senior Projects at Eastern Michigan University. A year later, Deja released her first dance film STYLES giving appreciation to specific genres of dance that do not receive enough recognition in the Western society. In 2021, Deja also began her YouTube channel DejWorks and released her two series Creative Connections and Dej Talks. She also choreographed and performed in George Ellzey’s film titled SWITCHIN’. In 2022, Deja

performed in Chicago Dancemakers Forum's ELEVATE showcase and released her second film Nov. 16.

It is through her past and present works of artistry, Deja continues to remain true to her mission of challenging perceptions, awakening audiences to new ideals, and sparking conversations. She is a passionate and dedicated artist who is steadily evolving and honing in on her craft.

The Play's History

Though Panther Women takes place in modern day Chicago (2023), many of the spirits being invoked in the play are those of activists who lived in America during the 1960 to 1990s. Among the numerous Civil Right and Human Rights movements that happened during this time period, the one most relating to our production would be the rise and fall of “The Black Panther Party” (BPP).

About the Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party (1966 to 1982), founded in Oakland, CA, and was a revolutionary organization with an ideology of Black nationalism, socialism, and armed self-defense, particularly against police brutality. Black Panther Party members and supporters were people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement (1954 to 1968). However, the more Black oriented politics of the Black Panthers led them to splinter away from the non-violent tactics and integrationism. The BPP name was inspired by the use of the black panther as a symbol that had recently been used by the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, an independent Black political party in Alabama.

The BPP's philosophy was influenced by the speeches of Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam, the teachings of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung of the Communist Party of China, and the anti-colonialist book *The Wretched of the Earth* (Les Damnés de la Terre, 1961) by the Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. The BPP's practice of armed self-defense was influenced by African American activist Robert Williams, who advocated this practice

against anti-black aggression by the Ku Klux Klan in his book “Negroes with Guns” (1962). Newton and Seale canvassed their community asking residents about issues of concern. They compiled the responses and created the Ten Point Platform and Program that served as the foundation of the Black Panther Party.

Black Panther Party, 10 Point Program

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the Capitalists of our Black Community.
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.
6. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.
8. We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
9. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

The BPP also created the Free breakfast for schoolchildren program which was set up in Berkeley, California, in 1968 by

Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton. It was the first significant community program organized by the Panthers, and perhaps the most well known. By the end of 1969, free breakfast was served in 19 cities, under the sponsorship of the national headquarters and 23 local affiliates. More than 20,000 children received a full free breakfast (bread, bacon, eggs, grits) before going to their elementary or junior high school.

Because of its practice of armed self-defense against police, as well as its Communist and revolutionary elements, the BPP was frequently targeted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's COINTELPRO program as well as by state and local law enforcement groups.

Sources

- Editors of <https://www.archives.gov/> (no date) *The Black Panther Party*, <https://www.archives.gov/>. Available at: <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power/black-panthers#:~:text=The%20Black%20Panther%20Party%20for,at%20Merritt%20College%20in%20Oakland> and (Accessed: April 19, 2023).
- Chiles, Nick. "8 Black Panther Party Programs That Were More Empowering than Federal Government Programs." *Atlanta Black Star*, 16 Feb. 2019, <https://atlantablackstar.com/2015/03/26/8-black-panther-party-programs-that-were-more-empowering-than-federal-government-programs/4/>.

Land Acknowledgement

Perceptions Theatre views it as critical to acknowledge the indigenous tribes that originally inhabited the land that our show is taking place on.

In the 1500s, the Chicagoland area was filled with marshes and interconnecting rivers. The Algonquin tribe dubbed the land after its plantlife, “shikaakwa.” This translates to “onion,” “onion field,” or “striped skunk.”

Chicago’s rivers connected and nurtured many Indigenous North American tribes, including, but not limited to: the Council of the Three Fires (The Odawa Tribe, the Ojibwe tribe, and the Potawatomi Nations); the Miami tribe, the Ho-Chunk tribe, the Menominee tribe, the Sac tribe, and the Fox tribe.

As the centuries passed, Western colonization and trade in the Americas had increased. This led Jean Baptiste Point du Sable to, in 1780, found the trading area that would eventually be annexed as Chicago by the United States in 1837.

In modern times, Chicago is home to the sixth-largest Urban American Indigenous community in North America.

Cast and Tech Members



Lead Cast

JOURNEY.....	Maya T.W. Jones
ANGELA DAVIS/WOMAN 1.....	Alexis Dupree
ASSATA SHAKUR/WOMAN 2.....	Jerluane "Jae" Jenkins
ELAINE BROWN/WOMAN 3.....	Taylor Elie Talhamé
WOMAN 4.....	Nia Vines
WOMAN 5.....	A'Keisha Lee
WOMAN 6.....	kendra renee

Understudy Cast

- Tyra Grove as:
 - ELAINE BROWN, WOMAN 3, and WOMAN 6
 - Whitney Pipes as:
 - ASSATA SHAKUR, WOMAN 2, and WOMAN 5
 - Raesheyana Gardner as:
 - ANGELA DAVIS, WOMAN 1, and WOMAN 4
-

Setting

Chicago, Illinois, 2023

Crew Members

Playwright.....India Nicole Burton
Director.....Myesha-Tiara
Producer.....Olivia Lilley
Choreographer.....Deja Hood
Graphic Designer.....Iris Joswn
Set & Costume Designer.....Mari DeOle
Box Office Manager.....Tamaraus Garvell
Resident Videographer.....Jabari Kahlik
Resident Graphic Designer.....Antwon Funches
Social Media Manager.....Antwon Funches
Stage Manager.....Lauren Littlejohn

Community and Advisory Board

President of the Board.....Myesha-Tiara
Treasurer of the Board of Directors.....Leeshey Wade
Board of Directors Member.....Jasmine Uguru
Creative Director of B-Side Studios.....Maurice Proffit
Advisor, Actress and Writer.....Brandi Brown
Advisor, Actress, Director.....Kwame David Lilly
Advisor, Real Estate Agent.....Annie Smith
Advisor, Actress.....Joslyn Jones
Advisor, Actor, Writer.....Lisa McConell
Advisor, Actor, Writer.....alfonzo khalil
Actor, Dancer.....A'Keisha Lee

Actor Bios



Maya TW Jones
(She/They)
as
JOURNEY

Maya TW Jones is an actor, director, writer, and teaching artist from Cleveland, Ohio. Her work focuses on healing self and community via truth and reconciliation. She has worked in many capacities on and offstage. She has appeared in notable productions across Northeast Ohio including Ensemble Theatre, Karamu House, Dobama Theatre, and Convergence Continuum.

She joined her first national tour with Cleveland Public Theater in 2018.

Maya is honored for Panther Women to be her first production since moving to Chicago!



Jerluane "Jae" Jenkins
(She/Her)
as
ASSATA SHAKUR/
WOMAN 2

Jerluane "Jae" Jenkins (she/her) is a Chicago-based actress, director, writer, and dramaturg with a BA in Theatre and Performance from UIC. She is also the Executive Director of Perceptions Theatre. A vibrant and acute performer. Jerluane has recently performed in (Un)Seen by CJ Chapman at the Buena Theatre and in the film Genesis: 2020 by Jabari Khaliq. Her screenplay "Black Magic" was also produced by Perceptions Theatre. Jerluane has directed Colorblind Casting by Antwon Funches at The Artistic Home and at the Runaways Lab Theatre. She now brings her artistic prowess to the Perception Theatre production of "Coronary Artery."



A'Keisha Lee
(She/Her)
as
WOMAN 5

A'Keisha Lee (she/her) is a performer currently based in Chicago's historic Bronzeville. Before moving to Chicago, A'Keisha studied public health in Saint Louis and became a passionate advocate for ending racial health disparities. A'Keisha currently organizes for Black Liberation with Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation, also known as SOUL. A'Keisha is committed to organizing people directly impacted by systematic community divestment and helping them imagine and work toward a world where their communities have everything they need to thrive.



Nia Vines
(She/Her)
as
WOMAN 4

Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. Nia moved to Chicago to attend Columbia College Chicago, where she expanded her artistic wings both on and off the stage. Performing in many productions such as: Two chairs and Light Bulb, The 90's Show, and Paint it Black, Panther Women. Indie Films like Black Magic, Skin Deep, Honcho, Restoration & Spark. Nia has taken on new ventures Directing for the production "Red Carnation" at the Chicago Actor's Studio and Perceptions Theatre's 1st & 2nd annual BIPOC Playwright Festival. Nia's goal is to continue to move people with her art & storytelling.



Alexis Dupree
(She/Her)
as
ANGELA DAVIS
WOMAN 1

Alexis L. Dupree has appeared in an assortment of theatre, indie film, and commercial productions. She's rendered Lady in Yellow in Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow Is Enuf*; Ruby in August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*; Mavis in *Smokin' Hot Homicide*; and verbally stomped through scenes in play festivals *Along the Line* and *Every 28 Hours* at The Fishtank Theatre. She looks forward to her Chicago theatre debut with *Perceptions* Theatre as Angela Davis/Woman 1 .



Taylor Talhame (She/Her)
as
ELAINE BROWN/
WOMAN 3

Taylor Talhame was classically trained at the Chicago high school for the Arts and then went on to go to the British American Drama Academy her senior year of college to further her theater studies. Some of her favorite productions she did were *Country Wife*, *Hamlet*, *People's Temple*, and *Speech and Debate*. Most recently Taylor did a reading with Chicago Pride Films and Plays on Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Marcus or the Secrets of the Sweet*. She is looking forward to diving deep into *Panther Women* as Elaine Brown!



kendra renee
(She/Her)
as
WOMAN 6

With spoken word as her foundation, Kendra Renee (she/her) is a Chicago based writer and actress. She has received training from: Josie Harris; Brian Taylor; and from the Black Box Theatre for Meisner technique. Kendra Renee uses her training and natural inclination to connect with her characters. With experience in television, film, web and stage, she doesn't shy away from the opportunity to depict someone's truth. From action to cut, curtains open to close, Kendra Renee seeks to always lead with authenticity, vulnerability and without judgment She brings this refinement and vulnerability to Perception Theatre's Coronary Artery.



Raesheyana Gardner (She/Her)
UNDERSTUDY FOR

- ANGELA DAVIS,
- WOMAN 1
- WOMAN 4

Raesheyana Gardner was born in the Chicagoland area and raised in Oshkosh, WI. She started modeling at the age of 5 years old. Sparking her interest to pursue acting. Throughout her career, she has worked on a number of local projects in Chicago. Completing projects that has gained her local recognition and attention. Bringing each character to life and giving her absolute all. The range of emotions she is able to convey is truly remarkable.



Whitney Pipes
(She/Her) UNDERSTUDY
FOR

- ASSATA SHAKUR,
- WOMAN 2
- WOMAN 5

Whitney Pipes is a Chicago Actress and native. She is very excited to be working with Perceptions Theatre for the second time. The Panther Women: An Army for the Liberation is an importantly vital play that needs to be told. The Black Panther Women are extraordinary individuals that made necessary changes in America. This play has taught me about my African American history, and also about the brilliance of the African-American woman. I am honored to be a part of this amazing production.



Tyra Grove
(She/Her)
UNDERSTUDY FOR

- ELAINE BROWN/
- WOMAN 3
- WOMAN 6

Tyra Grove is a Chicago based actress and director that is currently signed with Stewart Talent Agency. Tyra moved from Charlotte, North Carolina to attend DePaul University for a BFA in Acting. After graduating, she began directing and writing the autobiographical documentary, My Name is Tyra, about the challenges of autoimmune disease and chronic pain. Tyra plans to continue acting, writing, and directing in Chicago and is thrilled to be a part of this empowering production.

About Perceptions Theatre



Perceptions Theatre works to change the way people, perceive the world around them one show at a time by shining light on underserved communities with theatre that: eliminates prejudice and discrimination by showing cultures in their natural settings and educating on said cultures, lessens neighborhood tensions and that defends human and civil rights, to name a few, while also providing entertainment and being an educational and literary training ground to the Chicagoland area, specifically the South Shore region. We help our consumers start their career from headshots, to making a resume, actor and technical training services, self-taping services, to workshops and casting for our own shows and working with the underserved communities around Chicago by bringing our services to them i.e. schools and other organizations.

Perception's Artistic Director



Jerluane "Jae" Jenkins (she/her) is a Chicago-based actress, director, writer, and dramaturg with a BA in Theatre and Performance from UIC. She is also the Executive Director of Perceptions Theatre. A vibrant and acute performer. Jerluane has recently performed in (Un)Seen by CJ Chapman at the Buena Theatre and in the film

Genesis: 2020 by Jabari Khaliq. Her screenplay "Black Magic" was also produced by Perceptions Theatre. Jerluane has directed Colorblind Casting by Antwon Funches at The Artistic Home and at the Runaways Lab Theatre. She now brings her artistic prowess to the Perception Theatre production of "Coronary Artery."

About Prop Theatre



Olivia Lilley, Artistic Director of Prop Theatre



Prop Thtr creates and presents live and online experiences at the intersection of laboratory, education, and community building. We believe that theater and theater education are not luxuries but tools for living. We attempt to open up our resources for others to use these tools. Prop Thtr is focused on the development of new work, supporting theatre artists of all backgrounds and experience levels as well as Chicago theatre companies. Prop Thtr is invested in Chicago stories told by Chicago communities with the support of our resources, knowledge, and talent.