

# Hands Up: 6 Playwrights, 6 Testaments

PUBLICITY PHOTO



Dennis Allen



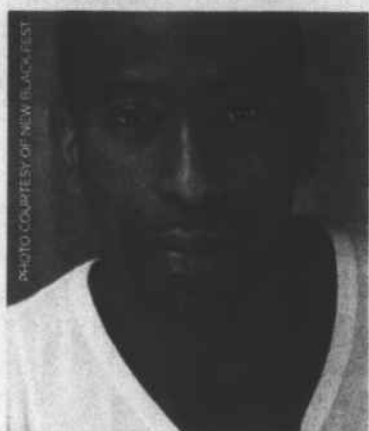
Idris Goodwin



Glenn Gordon



Eric Holmes



Nathan James



Nathan Yungerberg

Perhaps no play is as timely and relevant as "Hands Up: 6 Playwrights, 6 Testaments" from New York's Dr. Barbara Ann Teer's National Black Theatre.

"Hands Up," of course, became a cry and call for social justice last summer after unarmed African-American teenager Michael Brown was shot to death by a white Ferguson, Mo. police officer while his hands were reportedly in the air. (Some recent evidence questions the notion that Brown's hands were up, but several witnesses maintain that they were indeed up in the air.) Brooklyn's New Black Fest responded to Brown's death (and the spate of other unarmed African-Americans killed by cops) by commissioning six talented young black male playwrights to each pen a 10-to-15-minute-long monologue about their experiences in a country where those like them are often viewed as dangerous and disposable. Six equally talented black actors bring the testimonies to life on stage, exuding all of the emotions the writers released on paper.

Playwrights Nathan James, Nathan Yungerberg, Idris Goodwin, Glenn Gordon, Eric Holmes and Dennis A. Allen II have a lot to say, and they do so quite eloquently. In "Abortion," Gordon's contribution, he writes to his unborn son, expressing his reluctance to bring him into a world that is so hostile to those with black or brown skin. Goodwin's spoken-word piece, "They Shootin! Or I Ain't Neva Scared," imagines a world free of racial hangups. Holmes tackles his mixed-race background in "Walking Next to Michael Brown (Confessions of a Light-Skinned Half-Breed)." In "Holes in My Identity," Yungerberg (who was adopted by a white couple as a child) also deals with his racial identity, as he explores what is considered black enough.

Allen's "How I Feel" points out the absurdity of those who refuse to see racism as an issue in the 21st century. In his "Superiority Fantasy," James details his own run-ins with cops in Philadelphia.

The National Black Theatre and the New Black Fest – which was created five years ago to nurture black playwrights – jointly staged "Hands Up" in February for a benefit for the nonprofit Unlocking Futures. The featured actors were Joshua Boone, Kamal Angelo Bolden, Jahi Kears, Jevon McFerrin, Glenn N. Sangou and Chinaza Uche. Jonathan McCrory directs. The Obie winner is no stranger to the NBTF. In 2011, he directed (and conceived) "Hope Speaks," a unique storytelling piece that centers around President Obama's historic victory. The Washington, D.C. native is the director of Theatre Arts Program at Dr. Barbara Ann Teer's National Black Theatre. ■



Jonathan McCrory

