

Andrew Morton – 2020 Kresge Artist Fellowship Application
Work Sample 3: Excerpt from *The Most [Blank] City in America*

Part VII - THE MOMENT OF ANGER

LAY-LAY

So I'm sitting here trying to listen to what everyone has to say, and I get it. We're tired of people calling our city names and saying whatever about us. But guess what? That *is* our city. This is- Flint *is* one of the most violent, miserable, desperate cities in America. Okay, sure, we don't want that to be the only thing that defines us, but we can't ignore it either. We have to *own* it.

But trying to just *be* here. To exist here? It's *exhausting*. Trying to be a part of something good, something bigger than you when everyone is just ready to take from you, or write you off as a lost cause-it's hard. So if you're lucky enough to leave, you leave. But if you're stuck here, well you better learn to make do with what you've got.

I want to be here. I *try* to stay engaged. I try to defy the stereotype of the "disaffected youth". I try to keep up with all the politics as best as I can, but lately I just keep thinking, how did it get *this* bad?

And I know there's a lot of people in this town-in this room even, who are trying to "save Flint." But "Flint" doesn't stop at 5th Avenue. There's a lot of people who are trying to make stuff happen here, to improve the city. And I consider myself part of that group too! But sometimes, I don't know... I meet people, and they're so *passionate* about this town. About this community. But then you ask them if they've ever stepped foot outside of downtown, and it gets quiet real quick. And I try to give people the benefit of the doubt, you know? I *try* to really listen to where they're coming from, even if I know I'm probably going to disagree with them. But I'm just tired.

I feel like it's really easy to complain about how "people don't know the real Flint" but you know what? Maybe you don't know it either? Maybe I don't. And sure, there's a lot of good stuff going on here and we should celebrate that. *Loudly*. We should talk about all the stuff going on downtown and the colleges and the cultural center, and all that.

But when *can* we talk about the violence? We can *try*, but if we do we're told we're just making Flint look bad to those who might want to move here and go to school, or open a business, or whatever.

Look. We can't ignore the fact that there are still plenty of people in this city who are *dying* for some of the dumbest reasons you can think of. Kids and their Grandmothers getting shot in their homes, and for what? And now we have a whole generation of kids whose lives are going to be ruined because our governor wanted to save some money? We already knew most people in this state didn't like us. But I didn't realize we were considered so *unnecessary*.

So now all eyes are on Flint and all over the world people are talking about us because of our crumbling infrastructure and our governments “failure to protect us.” I don’t know about you, but I’ve *never* felt like they were protecting us.

But now people from all over want to help us. They bring water. They tweet about us. And that’s cool! We need your help. We need clean water. *Please* bring some attention to this crisis. (*Beat*) And maybe it’s ungrateful for me to say this, but what the hell took so long?

Where was the attention and outrage when kids-my friends-were being killed in the street? Or having to walk home from school and pass a murder scene?

Where was it when our schools were closing?

Where was it when too many of our young were going straight from school to prison?

And what happens when all the reporters and the presidential candidates leave? What happens when, or if the pipes get fixed? When celebrities stop tweeting about us. What then?

We’ll still be closing schools and sending kids to jail. We’ll still be going to *too many* candlelight vigils for the young people we’ve lost. We’ll march outside City Hall and demand a stop to the violence. We can paint that stupid rock “RIP So and So.” And what will it achieve?

You know at my school, whenever another student is killed and the news spreads, my principal makes us all gather in the gym and we have a minute of silence to “remember the victim.” And we do it. But do you know what I really want to do during these moments? I want to *scream*.

I want to scream so loud that it hurts. So loud that my throat bleeds.

I want to scream now.

I want to scream for all of my friends who can’t scream for themselves.

I want to scream about the environmental racism inflicted upon this community.

I want to scream for my teacher who has seen 27 of her students killed before they could even graduate.

I want to scream about the broken promises, the crushed dreams, the lies that we’re told over and over and over again.

So let’s do it. Let’s scream. Let’s make a minute of noise.

Who’s going to scream with me?

She leads the ENSEMBLE in a moment of cathartic rage.