

IF I COULD, IN MY HOOD, I WOULD...

by David L. White and the State Street Project
(Passage Theatre, Trenton NJ)

**PLEASE NOTE: A PLASTIC GUN THAT IS INOPERABLE AND CAN NOT FIRE
IS BEING USED AS A PROP IN THIS PLAY**

(Enter HISTORIAN)

HISTORIAN

Good Evening! And welcome to Greenville Tonight! The show where we explore, with great depth, and a little bit of humor, everything that makes this CITY great! As everyone knows, Greenville is the largest city in the upstate of SC. The first settler, Richard Pearis, established his plantation here shortly after 1770. Originally part of the Cherokee Nation, Greenville County officially began in 1786. Because of its location in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Greenville County became a popular summer retreat for lowcountry planters. Encouraged by abundant streams and rivers, textile manufacturers began operating in the area as early as the 1820s, and after the Civil War Greenville County became a textile center.

FANDOR

Extra! Extra! MURDER IN BROAD DAYLIGHT! GANG CRISIS
ROCKS GREENVILLE! WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR
CHILDREN?!

HISTORIAN

Excuse me, sir. But I'm trying to tell the good people here a few nice things about our CITY and you are...well...you're in the way. Why can't you talk about Greenville's great history?

FANDOR

Freedom of the press, lady!

HISTORIAN

We're trying to get people to see that Greenville is a nice place to live.
Good restaurants, interesting historical sites and a really nice bridge.

FANDOR

We've also had nine murders in three months. Don't you want to talk
about it?

(Enter POET 2)

POET 2

Talk about it? Yeah. But you ain't talking about it. You're screaming it
about it. You wanna talk about it? Let's talk about it. I am the fly on the
wall that is my neighborhood. This is what I see. I see gang violence. I
see children dying every day. I see hurt. I see struggle. I see the people
in my neighborhood strive for survival so they won't die a stupid,
horrible death. The neighborhood is getting smaller each day until that
certain day comes for destruction. Day by day, gangs overpower the
neighborhood. All the people are scared to stand up to them because
they might get hurt.

MARGE

Howard, I'm uncomfortable here. Very uncomfortable.

HOWARD

I am too, Marge. I'm very uncomfortable.

MARGE

When I heard the play was about gangs, I thought it would be like that
West Side Story.

HOWARD

I don't see anyone dancing, Marge.

MARGE

Maybe we should leave at intermission.

HOWARD

(Handing her the program) There is no intermission, Marge.

MARGE

(Reading program) Jerks!

BEATRICE

Every day you walk out the door, you take your chances. You walk out the door, it's a roll of the dice. (she takes out a single die and rolls it) I walk through the doors of my school (rolls dice) and BANG! One in six chance that Tyisha Morgan is gonna ask to copy my homework before I even get to my locker. Another role. (rolls dice) One in six chance that the Friday afternoon meatloaf is gonna back up on me during Science class. Again, (rolls dice again) and BANG! One in six says that creepy Antony Lewis is gonna stare at me while I'm walking to my locker.

Doesn't that kid ever blink?

URSULA

Hey, check it. It's the new girl. The one with the dice.

MARGARET

Always playing with that dice.

BEATRICE

Don't need to roll the dice for this one. 100% chance that these two are gonna give me a hard time for being the new girl in school. Been here a whole semester and I'm still the new girl.

URSULA

You must really like dice.

BEATRICE

You got a problem with that?

MARGARET

Chick got an attitude.

URSULA

Not us that's got the problem. The school's got the problem.

(Enter THREE STUDENTS)

STUDENT 1

I can't believe we don't get recess!

STUDENT 2

I don't like Mr. Schumer's attitude!

STUDENT 3

I don't like what we get to eat for lunch! Except when it's Dominos.

STUDENT 2

I think we should get to pick our own subjects!

STUDENT 1

I want to change the suspension rule!

STUDENT 3

Put better looking girls in the classrooms!

STUDENT 1

No, put better looking boys in the classrooms!

STUDENT 2

I want to be able to go into the teacher's lounge! What's in there anyway?

STUDENT 3

What I think is wrong is people are bringing weapons to school!

STUDENT 1

We need metal detectors!

STUDENT 2

I want to be able to use my cell phone!

STUDENT 3

More girls!

STUDENT 2

Man, shut-up about the girls!.

STUDENT 1

Fix the chairs!

STUDENT 2

Fix the doors!

STUDENT 3

Fix the girls!

STUDENT 2

And please...PLEASE...teach the boys a little more respect!

(The THREE STUDENTS exit arguing.)

MARGARET

So, Dice girl.

BEATRICE

My name's Beatrice.

MARGARET

I'm Margaret. This is Ursula.

URSULA

So, are you a Shepard or a Wolf?

BEATRICE

Say what?

URSULA

Either you're a Shepard or a Wolf.

BEATRICE

I'm Presbyterian.

MARGARET

No, I mean either you're down with the Shepards or you're down with the Wolves.

URSULA

They're gangs. Haven't you heard of them?

BEATRICE

Yeah, I have. And I'm not down with either one of them.

MARGARET

Look. (She walks over and picks up BEATRICE's dice) Say you're walking down the street.

URSULA

The wrong street...

MARGARET

Between 53rd and 60th on Main.

URSULA

That's Wolf territory.

MARGARET

(rolls dice)

Bang! One in six chance you're gonna get jumped.

BEATRICE

Jumped? But why?

URSULA

'Cause they the Wolves, that's why.

MARGARET

That's what they do. You don't have to be doing nothing to get jumped by a Wolf.

URSULA

Say you're one of us, though. Say you're a Shepard.

MARGARET

In that case, you got protection. We got your back. (rolls dice again)
Better chances all around.

URSULA

Things was fine until the Wolves came around. They just started jumping everybody for no reason. Called everyone that wasn't a Wolf, a sheep.

MARGARET

That's why the Shepards got founded. The Shepards protect the sheep.

URSULA

You want to be protected don't you?

BEATRICE

I guess so. I'm not down with the violence, though.

MARGARET

We don't start nothing. But if the Wolves start something, we got to defend ourselves, right?

BEATRICE

I guess.

(School bell rings)

BEATRICE

I gotta go to class.

MARGARET

Find us at lunch.

URSULA

You can sit at our table.

BEATRICE

I can?

MARGARET

Why not? Bring your dice.

(MARGARET and URSULA exit, giggling)

(The Playground. BORACHIO and CURTIS are hanging out.)

CURTIS

You going to the monthly Wolf meeting?

BORACHIO

I don't have my monthly dues together yet.

CURTIS

What are you gonna do?

BORACHIO

I got a couple of people I think will come through for me. Got to meet up with them this afternoon.

(BIRON enters)

BORACHIO

Yo! You know who that guy is?

CURTIS

Who?

BORACHIO

Biron. He's a freshman, this year. His dad's one of the HGs.

CURTIS

So he's a Wolf? How come I haven't seen him around?

BORACHIO

Just moved down here with his mom.

CURTIS

Where's his dad?

BORACHIO

Locked up.

CURTIS

Yo, neph! You Biron?

BIRON

Who wants to know?

BORACHIO

We're Wolves, man.

BIRON

Sorry, I'm not down with that.

BORACHIO

What are you talking about? Your dad was HG!

BIRON

My dad got locked up for being HG.

CURTIS

You don't want to be a Wolf?

BIRON

My mom'll kick my butt.

BORACHIO

Man, you know how hard it is to get what you got? You're the son of an HG! You're bulletproof!

CURTIS

You know what? He's gotta meet King Navarre!

BORACHIO

Oh, man! You have to meet King Navarre!

BIRON

Who's King Navarre?

BORACHIO

King Navarre's the man.

CURTIS

King Navarre's got a stereo set up you wouldn't believe! Every
Playstation game you can think of!

BORACHIO

Owens his own house!

CURTIS

You gotta meet King Navarre!

BIRON

Okay, Okay! I'll meet him. He's a Wolf?

BORACHIO

Man, don't think of him as a Wolf.

CURTIS

He's just...King Navarre!

BIRON

So, I'll go with you. We'll hang out with King Navarre. But I'm not a
Wolf.

CURTIS

Oh, naw, man.

BORACHIO

We respect that.

BIRON

When are we going?

CURTIS

Tonight.

INSPECTOR JUVE

All right, everybody! Listen up. My name is Inspector Juve . I'm gonna cover a lot of information in the next five minutes so pay close attention! In this city we got the Wolves and Shepards. Rival gangs. Wolves started out in a Chicago jail by the High Gangster, or H.G. By the time the gang spread out of the Chicago area and toward the East Coast, the Shepards were on the rise. They tried to get all the minors to join their gang, saying they'd protect them from the Big Bad Wolves. Every kid in the local middle-school is under pressure from their peers to either be a Wolf or a Shepard. To join the gangs, every kid has to memorize these (holds up a book) These are the manifestos of the Wolves and the Shepards.

(ENTER MARGARET, URSULA and HIGH SHEPARD.
HS takes the manifesto from Juve and makes Margaret and Ursula put their hands on it)

GANGSTER SHEPARD

I, state your name...

MARGARET AND URSULA

I, state your name...

GANGSTER SHEPARD

Do solemnly swear...

MARGARET AND URSULA

Do solemnly swear

GANGSTER SHEPARD

To uphold the laws of the Shepards.

MARGARET AND URSULA

To uphold the laws of the Shepards.

GANGSTER SHEPARD

Including peace, brotherhood...

MARGARET AND URSULA
Including peace, brotherhood...

GANGSTER SHEPARD
And breaking the law and lying about it.

MARGARET AND URSULA
And breaking the law and lying about it.

GANGSTER SHEPARD
Not taking responsibility for my actions.

MARGARET AND URSULA
Not taking responsibility for my actions.

GANGSTER SHEPARD
Hating rival gang members for no good reason.

MARGARET AND URSULA
Hating rival gang members for no good reason.

GANGSTER SHEPARD
And winding up dead or in jail before I'm twenty.

MARGARET
Hey!

URSULA
Hold up!

GANGSTER SHEPARD
Hey, do you want to be Shepards or don't you?

URSULA AND MARGARET
(reluctantly)

And winding up dead or in jail before I'm twenty.

JUVE

Gang members are encouraged to get jobs, make money and pay dues.
But the people in charge, make most of their money selling drugs.

HOWARD

I'm sorry, but could we skip ahead to the next bit. This really doesn't
have anything to do with me.

JUVE

I think you two need a lesson in "Gangenomics."

MARGE

I'm sorry. Gang-e-whatics?

JUVE

Gangenomics. Trickle-down money funds trickle-down violence. I'll
show you. Say Jennifer, from the suburbs, wants to get high.

JENNIFER

I'm Jennifer. I'm from the suburbs. I want to get high.

JUVE

She hears she can get some from her friend that works at Burger Barn.

JENNIFER

One cheeseburger please.

TONI

Would you like fries with that?

JENNIFER

No, but I hear you can get me some pot.

TONI

Some what?

JENNIFER

Ganja, weed, doobie, mary jane...

TONI

Oh! Okay, give me your money and I'll get you some.

JENNIFER

Sure!

(JENNIFER hands TONI the money)

TONI

Meet me here tomorrow!

JUVE

So Jennifer never even has to set foot in the city. She stays put in the suburbs, while the Burger Barn girl, heads into the city and meets up with a dealer.

KING NAVARRE

I got smack, rock, coke, meth, ice, crack and whoppers.

TONI

Just some weed, please.

(TONI hands NAVARRE the money)

KING NAVARRE

Thanks!

JUVE

And what do you think the dealer buys with that money?

KID 1

Ipods!

KID 2

Nintendo!

KID 3

Shoes!

KID 4

A stereo system!

KING NAVARRE

I'll buy some of that stuff. But I got a business to run. I'll use the money to buy more drugs so I can sell them at a higher price! It's capitalism!

JUVE

Jennifer's money kept the dealer in business. That way, the dealer was able to sell more drugs to Maria.

KING NAVARRE

Hey, Maria.

MARIA

Hey, Curtis

JUVE

Maria was strung out on all sorts of drugs.

(MARIA hands NAVARRE some money)

KING NAVARRE

Here you go. Don't snort it all in one place.

JUVE

Unfortunately, Maria was a junkie, and did snort it all in one place.

(MARIA falls to the ground)

MARGE

She died?

JUVE

Overdose.

(The other kids come on and carry off
Maria's body)

JUVE

And what do you think he bought with the rest of the money?

KID 1

Ipod!

KID 2

Nintendo!

KID 3

Shoes!

KID 4

A stereo system!

JUVE

Not quite.

NAVARRE

(Holding up a gun)

Isn't that just about the most beautiful gun you've ever seen?

(Pause, while NAVARRE puts gun in pocket and exits)

HOWARD

Wait a minute! You're trying to make us believe that Jennifer is responsible for all the problems that go on in the city! You can't blame her because that girl overdosed and that guy bought a gun! They had free will! It was their choice!

JUVE

Of course it was. Everyone that puts a dollar in the hand of a drug dealer is giving money to criminals. Everyone is responsible. Those of us in the city deal with the consequences every day. The rest of the world can just read about it in the papers. I'm not saying one person is responsible. I'm saying everyone is responsible. That's Gangonomics.

(Lunchroom, with MARGARET, URSULA and BEATRICE)

MARGARET

We talked to the G.S. about you.

BEATRICE

Who's the G.S?

URSULA

"Gangsta Shepard."

MARGARET

He says he likes you, but now you have to do initiation.

BEATRICE

And once I'm in...Am I gonna have to sell drugs?

MARGARET

Naw. There's no drugs.

URSULA

Nope. No drugs.

MARGARET

Not one single drug.

URSULA

We don't do drugs.

(pause)

MARGARET

Awright, there's a little bit of drugs.

URSULA

Some. Just a little. You can barely see the drugs.

MARGARET

Okay, one time I saw drugs. But I've never sold drugs.

URSULA

I sold drugs one time. But it was just one time.

MARGARET

Besides that, there's no drugs. None, whatsoever.

URSULA

Unless you want them.

MARGARET

Then it's no problem getting them for you.

BEATRICE

No, that's okay. I don't want any.

URSULA

For real? Cause I got some right here in my book bag.

BEATRICE

No, I'm straight. What about violence?

MARGARET

Listen. The Shepards are a peaceful gang.

URSULA

We don't do nothing unless the Wolves try to start something.

MARGARET

But it's their fault, not ours.

BEATRICE

So what do I have to do to be... initiated.

URSULA

Well, you can be prayed in, beat in, or loved in.

BEATRICE

What's prayed in?

MARGARET

Well, you can't get prayed in because the GS hasn't known you long enough.

BEATRICE

What's beat in?

URSULA

That's where all the other Shepards beat you up for thirty seconds.

BEATRICE

I think I'll pass.

MARGARET

In that case...you gotta get loved in!

BEATRICE

What's...loved in?

MARGARET

You'll like this one. Because first, you have to roll the dice.

URSULA

And then whatever number you get, that's the number of guys you have to...be with.

BEATRICE

WHAT?

MARGARET

It's okay. They're really nice guys. Well... most of them.

URSULA

Some of them. Not all of them.

MARGARET

A couple of them are nice.

BEATRICE

I don't know...

MARGARET

You want to be a Shepard, don't you? Who's gonna protect you from the Wolves?

Come on. Take the dice. Don't be scared. You'll be fine. You just roll the dice, and eventually it'll all be over. You never have to do it again, and no one ever has to know.

(URSULA and MARGARET exit)

(KING NAVARRE'S house. CURTIS, BORACHIO and BIRON arrive)

CURTIS

Drum roll, please!

BORACHIO

Here he is! The man of the hour! The magnificent...KING NAVARRE!

CURTIS

Can I get a "hey?"

BORACHIO

Hey!

KING NAVARRE

Sit your crazy butt down.

CURTIS

King Navarre, this is Biron.

KING NAVARRE

What's up, Biron?

BIRON

Heard a lot about you, man.

KING NAVARRE

Don't listen to a word these jerks say.

CURTIS

Look at this house! Didn't I tell you this house was the bomb?

BIRON

It's a nice house, all right.

KING NAVARRE

I just put in a Jacuzzi.

BORACHIO

Where is it?

KING NAVARRE

I know you're not gonna drop your butt in MY Jacuzzi..

CURTIS

You know who Biron's dad was, don't you?

KING NAVARRE

Do I know? I spent time with him. Mother took me for a couple hundred in a poker game.

BIRON

You know my dad?

KING NAVARRE

Kid, I did time with your dad.

BIRON

What's he like? I never hardly seen him but a couple of times. Been in lock up since I was a kid. Don't remember much about him.

KING NAVARRE

Kid, people will say all kinds of stuff about a man in jail, but sometimes you just can't believe them. Your dad was all about keeping the peace.

One time – now here’s a story that illustrates your dad perfectly – one time we were out at the Summer Festival. This was years ago, before your dad was in lock up. We were out there, you know, laid back, trying to get some funnel cake and whatnot. These rent-a-cops tell us we can’t wear our colors on the inside. Got the streets all blocked off like they own the streets, or something. Your dad doesn’t say a word, just takes off his shirt and puts on a plain white one, like he’s not gonna cause any trouble, right? But then they let us in and he takes out his handkerchief, right? Not all the way, out. Just lets it hang out of his pocket.

BORACHIO

Let’s everyone know the Wolves are on the inside.

CURTIS

Trouble is, the Shepards are also on the inside.

BORACHIO

Something you gotta know. The Wolves aren’t down with violence. But the Shepards – they’re always trying to start something.

KING NAVARRE

Hey, who’s story is this anyhow?

BORACHIO

Sorry King..

KING NAVARRE

So the Shepards, they see your dad, but he doesn’t care. Walks right over 53rd onto 54th.

CURTIS

Shepard street.

KING NAVARRE

Couple of Shepards kinda do this – make the Wolf sign, but pointed down.

BORACHIO

Means “Down with Wolves.”

CURTIS

Disrespect!

KING NAVARRE

Your dad pulls out of his other pocket this gun

(KING NAVARRE shows them a small gun)

BIRON

He shoots them?

KING NAVARRE

No, man. Just shows it to them. Suddenly, he’s got respect. We owned that street after that. Your dad only fired that gun once, and that was to keep the peace. The Shepards tried to start something and your dad put a stop to it.

CURTIS

Violence is only necessary when you gotta keep the peace.

HOWARD

See! It’s people like this that are making it nearly impossible for me to defend my NRA membership!

MARGE

What do you mean, Howard?

HOWARD

Kids flashing guns around like their toys!

MARGE

Guns don't kill people, Howard. People with guns kill people.

HOWARD

(thinks about this) I don't think you said that right, Marge.

(ENTER FASHION ANNOUNCERS)

CLIVE

Hello Dudley!

DUDLEY

Hello Clive!

CLIVE

We're here today to present the latest in high fashion! The Gangster look is in, and now you too can get the respect you deserve by maintaining the right look!

DUDLEY

That's right, Clive! Let's take a look at some of the latest fashions that are becoming "hip" and "cool" with all the young people!

CLIVE

I'm "down with that" Dudley!

DUDLEY

"Groovy", Clive!

(MODEL comes down the runway while dance music plays. He poses to show off his gangster attire)

CLIVE

Let's start from the bottom up, Dudley. Take a look at that footwear!

DUDLEY

The best, most expensive sneakers money can buy! Sure to get you instant respect.

CLIVE

Not to mention attention from the ladies!

DUDLEY

That's right, Clive! Plus, when you squeeze the side of the shoes, they light up!

CLIVE

Why is that Dudley?

DUDLEY

I have no idea, Clive.

CLIVE

Let's take a look at that gold around his neck!

DUDLEY

That's called "Bling", Clive. And it shows up just how much money our model has!

CLIVE

How did he earn that money, Dudley?

DUDLEY

He's not telling, Clive. But I'll bet the numbers on that beautiful jersey will give us a clue!

CLIVE

Ah, he's a Wolf!

DUDLEY

That's right, Clive! And when he wears these clothes, he gets respect wherever he goes!

(Back in KING NAVARRE'S house, weeks later
BORACHIO, CURTIS, KING NAVARRE and BIRON)

KING NAVARRE
'Sup, Biron? Welcome to the Wolves.

BORACHIO
Biron, you were born a Wolf!

KING NAVARRE
But now we got another problem to talk about.

CURTIS
The Shepards?

KING NAVARRE
They're starting something. And we gotta keep the peace.

BORACHIO
Everything'd be okay if they'd stick to their own!

KING NAVARRE
We gotta Shepard. He come over and wanted to be a Wolf.

BIRON
Why?

CURTIS
Wanted to date a girl who was down with the Wolves.

BORACHIO
My sister! No Shepard is gonna date my sister!

KING NAVARRE

Now the Shepards all riled up. Started jumping Wolves on 33rd.

CURTIS

Wolf territory.

KING NAVARRE

Selling drugs too.

BORACHIO

On our corner!

KING NAVARRE

We gotta keep the peace, Biron.

BIRON

I don't know, man. I'm not down with violence.

KING NAVARRE

It's like the old west, Biron. When the law didn't know what to do, you had to take it into your own hands to keep the peace.

BORACHIO

Yeah! It's like that movie I saw once! Cowboy rides into town, and his gang just takes over the whole town! So the other gang, they gotta take it back!

KING NAVARRE

It's just like that, Biron. It's just like a movie.

(The stage suddenly becomes a movie set.)

KING NAVARRE

All right, everybody! Quiet on the set! Quiet on the set! We gotta a lot of work to do today. You the new kid?

BIRON

Uh... I guess so

KING NAVARRE

Somebody get this kid into wardrobe! Let's go, let's go, let's go!

(Costume people come on and begin dressing BIRON up as a cowboy)

BIRON

Uh... What exactly am I supposed to do? I don't quite understand.

KING NAVARRE

Listen, kid. You wanna be famous?

BIRON

Well, yeah but...

KING NAVARRE

This picture's gonna be big, my boy! Really big! And you – YOU – are gonna be the star.

So here's the set-up. You're a new member of the Wolf Gang. And the head of the Wolf Gang has offered to make you his number one man, if you just do one little job for him. You have to have a shoot out with the number one man in the Shepard Gang.

BIRON

A shoot out? No way!

KING NAVARRE

Look, there's nothing to worry about. It's just a movie. Besides, you want to keep the peace, don't ya?

BIRON

Of course.

KING NAVARRE

Now you've got your motivation, here's your script.

(Hands him a script)

KING NAVARRE

All right! Bring out Shepard Gang guy!

(Two people bring on the Shepard Gang Guy with his hands tied behind his back, and begin dressing him in cowboy outfits)

KING NAVARRE

Okay. It's high noon. You're meeting in the middle of town. You're gonna say your lines, then on the count of three...DRAW! Can we get some guns over here?

(Assistants rush in and give them large, oversized, toy guns)

KING NAVARRE

All right! Ready...and...ACTION!!!

BIRON

Uh...look here, Shepard. You done time with my woman fer the last time.

SHEPARD

(yawning)

Don't do it, Wolf. Don't shoot me down in cold blood.

KING NAVARRE

CUT!!!! Okay. Where's the passion? Where's the menace? This is serious stuff here!

BIRON

Really? Because it's just about a guy dating a girl. I don't see that it's that serious.

SHEPARD

Yeah, I mean I know I done a bad thing and all, but why you gotta shoot me for it?

KING NAVARRE

Look, when you two joined the gangs, you knew there were rules. And if you break the rules, there are consequences.

BIRON

But I don't want to shoot him.

KING NAVARRE

Don't be so scared kid. It's all a game. Just a game. Get into your character. Ask yourself what your father would have done. You want to be just like your dad, don't you? Every kid wants to be like his dad.

Now, read the lines again. Once more, with feeling! ACTION!

BIRON

LOOK HERE, SHEPARD!!!! YOU DONE TIME WITH MY WOMAN
FER THE LAST TIME!!!

SHEPARD

DON'T DO IT, WOLF! DON'T SHOOT ME DOWN IN COLD
BLOOD!

(pause)

KING NAVARRE

What are you waiting for, kid? Shoot him! He's part of the Shepard Gang and you're part of the Wolf gang! You're natural enemies! He doesn't deserve to live! You have to shoot him!

(They freeze, while MOM enters)

MOM

Biron, if you make the wrong choice, you can't take it back.

BIRON

I don't care, mom! You don't understand! You don't know how important this is! I want respect. I want love. I want a family. I want strength. I want pride. Can you give me those things?

MOM

I can try. All I can do is try my best. Ultimately, what you do is your choice.

BIRON

That's right. It's my choice.

(MOM leaves. Everyone "unfreezes")

NAVARRE

You have to shoot him!

(BIRON fires the gun.)

ENSEMBLE

BANG!

(SHEPARD falls over, dead)

KING NAVARRE

All right, everyone! That's a wrap!

BIRON

Wait a minute! Don't I get a second take?

KING NAVARRE

Nope. The guy's dead. No chance for a second take. Move it on out, everybody!

(The film crew leaves.)

BIRON

But... but...

(POET enters)

POET

Breathless...there are no words.

Heartless...there are no reasons.

Shoulders there are not enough supporting arms
to prepare for something like this.

Permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Death doesn't solve conflict
it just exacerbates violence.

R.I.P., B.I.P, C.I.P., K.I.P.

no matter the letters used to signify
which street soldier has died
the fact is that a mother's child
has died before their time.

Urban cowboys quickly become urban legends
yet leave no true legacy 'cuz
neighborhoods just rejoice for one less person around
to be terrorized by,

young mothers are left to raise fatherless children
and the womb that bore you stands at the pine box with red eyes,
traumatized asking, "My baby, why?"

At the same time, another mom looks at her child from behind bars.
He'll be wearing an orange suit for the rest of his days,
one bullet destroyed two families that rainy day.

As a money order is placed in his commissary,
the family across town takes a trip to the cemetery
leaving both moms with red eyes, traumatized, asking,

“My baby, why?”

There is an old saying that if a tree falls in a forest
and there is no one around to hear it
does it make a sound.

So what happens when two trees fall simultaneously –
answer, the whole forest grieves.

FANDOR

Okay, boys! Gather ‘round! We got a hot one!

OLSEN

What is it, chief?

FANDOR

Another murder!

WEEGEE

You don’t say!

OLSEN

Gee!

FANDOR

Yep! Gang related. My favorite kind!

WEEGEE

Hot dog!

FANDOR

This is gonna be a big one, boys! I mean really big! I wanna see it in
headlines! GANG MURDERS ROCK CITY!

OLSEN

Don’t you think “Shock” would be better than “Rock?”

FANDOR

Don't tell me my business, kid.

OLSEN
Sorry chief.

FANDOR
GANG MURDERS SHOCK CITY! I wanna see it in big, bold letters!
Screaming at me from every newspaper stand on every corner in the
CITY!

WEEGEE
Does this mean we're pushing the little league team off the front page?

FANDOR
What did you say?

WEEGEE
I mean no disrespect, chief, but the little league team is doing really
well, this year. Maybe we should give them some coverage.

FANDOR
And you think that's more important than a gang killing?

WEEGEE
No, but I'm just saying...

FANDOR
You gotta rose-colored lens on that camera? Everything all hunky-dory
in your little world? Hey, kid! Bring me a stool!

OLSEN
Right, chief!

(OLSEN brings FANDOR a stool. FANDOR stands on it, and begins knocking on WEEGEE'S head.)

FANDOR

Hello? Hello? Anybody in there? Looking for a news photographer. Anyone seen one just kinda hanging out in there?

WEEGEE

Okay, chief. I get the point. Gee...

FANDOR

Bump the little league story to the back page. Put in between the used car ads in a six point font. Now you two – get out there and get that story!

OLSEN

Right, chief!

WEEGEE

You got it, chief!

HOWARD

Well, that scene was hardly fair! The press have a job to do! They can't go around ignoring problems.

MARGE

But I see the point, Howard. It makes people think that Greenville is just all violence and shooting and liquor stores.

PARENT 1

All I know, is that as a parent of a teenager in this CITY, I'm afraid to let my kids go out at night! I don't care what my house is worth. What about the worth of my child?

PARENT 2

It's all the school board's fault! If we had music programs, this kind of nonsense wouldn't happen!

PARENT 3

Music programs? Give me a break! What we need are cops on every corner and in every hallway and in every parking lot! And if some kid gets out of line, BANG! End of problem. I don't believe in "three strikes, you're out." I believe in "One strike, you're out!"

(Enter MRS. SOOTHING)

MRS. SOOTHING

Okay, everybody. Can I have your attention? Perhaps we could all take a seat.

(Everyone onstage sits down)

MRS. SOOTHING

Hello, everyone. I'm an Anger Management Specialist, and my name is Mrs. Soothing.

EVERYONE

Hello Mrs. Soothing.

MRS. SOOTHING

Hello, everyone. Now what I want to talk about, is "anger." We all get angry from time to time. Whether it's the bully threatening you on the playground or that stupid driver who won't put on his turn signal or Brittany Spears when she just dumps K-Fed and shaves her head like some freak! When we get angry like that, what we need to do is breathe. Everyone try it with me. Just...breathe... Because when you breathe, you can listen. And maybe if you listen without anger, you can hear. We all have our point of no return. The line that nobody can cross with us. We all have our trigger line.

(Enter POET 1 and POET 2)

POET 1

What sets off my trigger line? When someone messes with me and I didn't say a word to them!

POET 2

I just go ballistic! When people annoy me so much just keep annoying me! Especially when I ask them nicely to leave me alone and be quiet but they don't! So then I have to tell them to shut-up and then I finally go up in their ears and yell...SHUT UP!

POET 1

I get mad about black on black crime!

POET 2

Yeah! And I hate it when people dis my hood!

POET 1

Man, you back up!
You ain't nobody.
Always getting' in my face.
You can't even beat me.
Makin' all types of talk.
Sayin' all types of stuff.
Trick, please.
See, I was going to be nice but when you said
That I did this and I was that...
Now you really going to make me pull my trigger.
Pow! Pow! Smack!
Yeah, I did it. Now, what?
You can't do nothing.
You on the ground.

(They all begin to breathe deeply, relaxing, listening...)

MRS. SOOTHING

Good. That's it, everyone. Just keep...breathing.

POET 2

The sun is shining as days go by
It gets badder
Sometimes worser.
It seems so bad it makes you mad.
Sometimes you want to throw things to let anger out.
Stay happy.
Not angry.
It's better.

Why can't we treat each other with more respect? Life is precious and should be treated as a priceless jewel, not a dollar store notepad.

BIRON

Hey.

BEATRICE

Hi.

BIRON

Anybody sitting here?

BEATRICE

Uh...no. I guess not.

BIRON

I seen you around.

BEATRICE

Yeah?

BIRON

Yeah. You hang with Ursula and Margaret, right?

BEATRICE

Yeah, I guess I do. Sometimes.

BIRON

Right...right...

(pause)

BEATRICE

You hang out with Borachio and Curtis, right?

BIRON

Yeah, I guess I do. Sometimes.

BEATRICE

Right...right...

(pause)

BIRON

Not so much anymore, though.

BEATRICE

Really?

BIRON

Yeah.

BEATRICE

How come?

BIRON

Something happened. They made me...do...something...

BEATRICE

What?

BIRON

I can't really talk about it.

BEATRICE

That's cool.

(pause)

BIRON

So what classes do you take?

BEATRICE

Um...well, I have American History.

BIRON

American History is cool.

BEATRICE

Yeah. And...um...English Literature.

BIRON

With Mr. Schumer?

BEATRICE

Yeah!

BIRON

I had him! He's so weird!

BEATRICE

Yeah! Like he always leaves the class just to blow his nose!

BIRON

Yeah! It's like just blow your nose! Who cares?

BEATRICE
He's so corny!

BIRON
I know!

(Pause)

BEATRICE
I'm gonna be a singer.

BIRON
Yeah?

BEATRICE
In Florida. My grandmom lives there.

BIRON
Cool. I've got a Playstation 2. You can watch movies on it and I play
Grand Turismo 4.

BEATRICE
That's cool.

BIRON
It's so cool.

BEATRICE
Cool.

BIRON
Yeah, it's really cool.

(pause lunch bell rings)

BEATRICE
Okay, see ya!

BIRON
Bye!

(BEATRICE steps to the edge of the stage and picks up a telephone.)

BEATRICE
Margaret?

MARGARET
Hi, Beatrice

BEATRICE
Listen, you didn't tell anybody about...about the dice, did you?

MARGARET
I didn't tell, but a lot of people know about it.

BEATRICE
I wish I hadn't done it. I met a guy.

MARGARET
Who is it?

BEATRICE
Biron.

MARGARET
Biron? He's a Wolf.

BEATRICE
But he's a nice guy. Plus he said he wasn't down with the Wolves no more.

MARGARET

Why not?

BEATRICE

I don't know. He said they made him do something. But look, don't tell him about the dice.

MARGARET

I won't tell nobody.

(BEATRICE hangs up, MARGARET dials the phone)

URSULA

Yo.

MARGARET

Ursula?

URSULA

'Sup, Margaret?

MARGARET

Beatrice likes Biron.

URSULA

Beatrice likes Biron?

MARGARET

You heard me. Said he wasn't a Wolf no more. Said they made him do something.

(MARGARET hangs up, then calls CURTIS)

MARGARET

Curtis?

CURTIS
Hi, Margaret.

MARGARET
I think Biron's trying to get out of the Wolves and run away with Beatrice!

CURTIS
Really?

(MARGARET hangs up, CURTIS dials)

BORACHIO
Hello?

CURTIS
Hi, Borachio.

BORACHIO
What's up, Curtis?

CURTIS
I think Biron told someone in the Shepards everything we did. And now he's trying to leave.

BORACHIO
Trying to leave? When?

CURTIS
I don't know. Right away, I bet.

(BORACHIO and CURTIS hang up.)

(BIRON comes home to his MOM)

MOM

We need to talk.

BIRON

I gotta go back out.

MOM

What about your homework?

BIRON

I'll do it later, mom! I don't have time right now!

MOM

You never have time. What's going on BIRON? Why are you always out so late?

BIRON

It's none of your business!

MOM

I'm your mother. Of course it's my business. I'm worried about you.

BIRON

Leave me alone.

MOM

Have you done something, Biron? Are you in trouble?

BIRON

What do you care? You have no respect for me You have no respect for dad!

MOM

Your father is a criminal!

BIRON

He was just trying to keep the peace!

MOM

You've done something, haven't you? What have you done, Biron?

(BIRON'S room. BIRON is lying on his bed
reading. There's a knock on the door)

BIRON

It's open.

(BORACHIO, CURTIS and KING NAVARRE enter)

BIRON

How did you...

KING NAVARRE

It was open.

BIRON

What's up guys?

KING NAVARRE

You know, your dad had more respect for his brothers.

BIRON

Huh?

BORACHIO

I can't believe you, man.

BIRON

Believe what? I don't understand.

CURTIS

Did you tell a Shepard what you did?

BIRON
What? No!

BORACHIO
Curtis heard different. Says you told Beatrice what happened.

BIRON
I talked to Beatrice.

KING NAVARRE
You know she was a Shepard?

BIRON
Yeah, I knew but... I didn't think it mattered.

BORACHIO
It's against the rules.

CURTIS
How much did you tell her?

BIRON
Nothing!

BORACHIO
That's not what my cousin said.

KING NAVARRE
You understand, Biron. We can't let this get out of hand.

CURTIS
You talk too much, the cops could come down on all the Wolves.

KING NAVARRE

Gotta find some way to keep the peace.

BIRON

What do you mean?

(KING NAVARRE pulls out a gun)

KING NAVARRE

Get down on your knees.

BIRON

What?

CURTIS

We thought you were a good man.

BORACHIO

Thought you had respect.

KING NAVARRE

On your knees.

BIRON

What are you going to do?

KING NAVARRE

Turn around.

BIRON

You're not going to kill me, are you?

KING NAVARRE

Gotta keep the peace.

BIRON

Wait a minute! I don't want to die!

BORACHIO

We gotta do it, Biron.

BIRON

I didn't mean it! I take it all back!

CURTIS

You can't ever take anything back, Biron. You know that.

BIRON

I don't want to die!

KING NAVARRE

(aiming gun)

Gotta keep the peace.

HOWARD

Wait just one second!

MARGE

Howard, you're interrupting the play! Again!

HOWARD

I don't give two toots! Are they telling me that I'm supposed to feel sorry for this kid? He's a killer! A murderer!

MARGE

I blame the schools! If all these kids had good educations, nothing like this would happen!

(TEACHER enters)

TEACHER

Oh, it's so easy to blame the schools! Well, I'm a teacher and I can tell you that I do everything I can for these kids, but there's nothing we can do without the help from the parents! I come to work every day, work overtime and barely make enough to support my own family!

(PARENT enters)

PARENT

Oh, so now it's the parent's fault, is it? How am I supposed to watch my kids 24 hours a day, when I have to work two jobs just to put food on the table?

HOWARD

Well maybe you shouldn't be having kids if you can't afford to take care of them!

MARGE

Howard, we barely had any money when I had our first child. Remember?

HOWARD

That was different!

MARGE

How was it different?

HOWARD

We lived in the suburbs! The police wouldn't allow this kind of thing to happen!

(INSPECTOR JUVE enters)

INSPECTOR JUVE

So now it's the fault of the police, huh? The people that patrol the streets all day and all night? Risking their lives day in and day out? I blame the media!

(Enter FANDOR)

FANDOR

Now hold on just one minute! Now it's my fault?

INSPECTOR JUVE

You have those big headlines with the pictures of the gang members with their expensive clothes! You glamorize it! These kids see those pictures and they all want to be in a gang!

FANDOR

So when a murder is committed, the newspapers should just ignore it. Is that it?

(Other people begin entering and shouting at one another. They continue arguing, until MRS. SOOTHING enters and house lights come up)

MRS. SOOTHING

Okay. Everybody, can I have your attention? Hello? Hello? SHUT-UP!

(Everybody quiets down)

MRS. SOOTHING

Just breathe, everybody. Just...breathe...

(BIRON steps forward and gives the first line of "If I Could, in my Hood, I would..." The others gradually join in, adding lines, until they are standing in a line on the edge of the stage holding hands.)

EVERYONE

If I could, in my hood, I would disrupt the corners, shake up the streets until they, everyone began to listen to me speak, not of anger or of violence, but of tolerance and forgiveness.

I would change my streets so shooting will not go on. I would tell the police to take care of my neighborhood and keep an eye out for my family.

I would tell young ladies that they don't have to do everything to get a boyfriend. I would show these so called men the real meaning of respect.

If I could, in my hood, I would try my best to keep the violence out and the peace within.

I would teach everyone to respect and love themselves.

It would be clear to everyone that in this hood you can get along and know how to run your own diplomatic matters.

I would take away the guns.

I would add sincerity to people's lives and let people know you don't need drugs and guns to survive in the hood.

Can we come together for survival?

If I could in my hood I would stop all the gang bangers from killing our children.

I would tell the police anything I see going on such as drug dealing and other stuff that is against the law.

I would tell the haters to stop hating

The cheaters to stop cheating

The players to stop playing

I would tell the haters, the cheaters and the players to leave our kids
alone!

I would make sure young men treat young women with respect and not
selfishness.

I would get people to take pride in their homes. Let them know we are
all responsible for the beauty.

I would teach everyone the meaning of love and respect.

Teach them the real meaning of the word, not what we have confused
it to be.

Respect is a compliment we show to one another. Something that is
earned not deserved.

If I could, in my hood, I would let everyone know that pointing their
fingers, and screaming and blaming other people won't change anything.
This is everyone's city, everyone's community, everyone's problem. We
have to own it. All of us. Together.

(Everyone takes hands and begins breathing deeply.
Slowly, relaxing, listening...)