

*brea(d)th*

Music by Carlos Simon | Libretto by Marc Bamuthi Joseph

**I. PROLOGUE**

**CHORUS**

Give us this day our daily bread

**NARRATOR**

We  
Pledge co-llegiance  
To the facts  
That the United States of America  
Is racially healing in public  
So you could understand  
How some in this nation  
Wonder, God  
Could dignity be afforded to  
All?

**CHORUS**

Give us this day our daily bread

**NARRATOR**

The breadth of the task  
The asking for bread  
The expiring breath  
The black odor of dread

Give us this day

Respect for the breadth of the ask  
With an expiring breath he called  
for a dead woman several years  
past

Give us this day

Respect for the ghosts  
And the murmurs of a man with a  
speck of bread  
Singed like the lord's prayer  
singing in his chokeheld throat  
sitting flat like a scar  
sustaining like bread  
a grown man ticking like a  
trumpeter's fingers playing valves  
that only exist in his head  
the breadth of the loss and the  
bitter and the lonely  
the breath of a winded man whose  
allies have left to struggle alone

gone homey

go on

give us this day the breadth of  
repair  
the breadth of the labor  
the held breath of the witness  
watching life progress to death

I too, am a witness...

Shook my head  
Tried to make some sense

This miracle of political bread  
The manna that is the folklore of  
American promise

And the breadth of our common  
belief in the premise of justice  
for all

The falling breath of a man who's  
heart is failing  
The rising blood of a people with  
scotch tape and ancestral will  
keeping their American Hearts  
from breaking

Breaking the breath  
Fasting with water and incessant  
prayer for bread

Give us this day

The breadth of what's due

What would you kneel for  
Assume the posture of casual  
prayer  
A genuflection while levitating  
buoyed by the neck of a man you  
are actively robbing of air  
Armed robbery of breath  
Over some bread and  
the wide genocidal breadth of  
our country's racial timeline  
our country's daily bread  
our injurious history written in  
lightning  
the animating factors that  
authorize violence

give us this day  
a shot at peace  
a day when you don't have to  
function knowing the night  
before a young woman was state  
sanctioned murdered in her sleep

lord

the breadth of the task

give us this day...one more  
breath...  
lord solemnly hear the underlying  
desperation of the ask  
give us this day  
our bread  
enough to feed our ancestors when  
we pay them respect  
give us this day  
the breadth of our american stake  
restore the debt of stolen breath...

**CHORUS**

Give us this day our daily bread

**II. BREATH**

**NARRATOR**

A soul to keep  
Breathe in relief  
The night is fruit  
The moon is sweet  
Take a piece  
Swallow the satellite  
Beyond your reach  
The night is dream  
But I'm not asleep  
Not woke  
Just awake  
I breathe in what I see  
I breathe in the night  
It smells strangely of fruit to me

Breathe in the chemical shift  
When I walk by the police  
The smell of all the probabilities  
played out on all of the screens  
Breathe in the scenes  
Breathe in the night and imagine  
the time you felt most free...  
When  
In your life  
Have you felt most free?...  
I sing america's longest notes  
I sometimes forget to breathe  
When I do  
My cultural differences haven't  
been tucked into the skirts of the  
queen  
I am free to access an  
infrastructure of hope  
Breathe in the night  
The moon is ripe with juice  
It smells like autonomy  
Smells like fruit beginning to  
bruise and rot  
Breathe in  
It's a lot  
Breathe out  
Let it go  
Imagine yourself living  
Knowing you only have one breath  
left before your soul let's go  
Breathe in mortality  
It is an inevitability  
And as such  
Shouldn't one's last breath be  
made with dignity  
Breathe in the idea  
That death is a lie  
That energy, not a human shell is  
the actual tell of a life  
Life is death  
as a vision  
as a lived permission  
Inception of an intuition of what to  
cosmically expect

Life is a just a set of lips to whisper  
Born to kiss our names back to the  
wind so our spirit might hear it  
And vibrate  
A mitzvah  
Incarnate

And back again  
Reciprocal energy  
Spirit and flesh  
These words rolling off my tongue  
The first breath of afterdeath in  
my lungs  
After life I just go back to where I  
came from  
Breath is drum  
Breathe in Light and smoke  
Breath is drum  
Breathe in the midnight sun where  
life never sets  
Breath is drum  
Ancestors know no death  
Breath becomes  
The way Ancestors pay at the gates  
In heaven breath is bread

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**III. ELEGY**

*Instrumental movement.*

**IV. BREAD**

**CHORUS**

What does the night say to you  
Before you lay your head down  
Does the night confide it's prideful  
truth  
Before the night falls does the  
pride fall too  
Or does the pride of the night rise  
like a hand in salute

What does the night say to you  
Before you lay your head down  
Does the night confide it's prideful  
truth  
Before the night falls does the  
pride fall too  
Or does the pride of the night rise  
like a hand in salute

**NARRATOR**

Before it was a corner  
It was a boundless plain that never  
considered the square edges of  
man's myopia  
Over time  
The edges encroached  
And brought with them  
Paper and value



Before it was a constitution  
It was a hand written note  
Presented to a native woman  
As legal tender  
she held it to the light  
Squinted twice  
And laughed at the myopic man  
who tried to  
pass a counterfeit bill

before the sun rose that day  
the corner knew...

pride comes before the fall  
American avarice too

American pride consumes  
Like a starving cub hungry for food

If not Justice for all America  
Then how do you choose  
Who wins America  
Does somebody invariably lose

Before the sun rose that day  
The corner already knew

The corner had seen it before  
The block knows before the news

The block knows who  
America is likely to choose  
Before the sun rises  
The night tells America's truth

What does the night say to you  
Before you lay your head down  
Does the night confide it's prideful  
truth

Before the night falls does the  
pride fall too  
Or does the pride of the night rise  
like a hand in salute

What does the night say to you  
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Before there was a cost  
There was bread

Before there was socially  
determined health  
We collectively cared for the sick  
and honored the dead

Before there was qualified  
immunity  
The laws and loyalty to community  
provided enough force to protect  
the peace

Before the man  
Was taken for some bread  
He had access to memory  
Of sharecropping in North Carolina  
Of making music in church  
Of 13 sisters and brothers  
Of challenges with sobriety  
Of a life before the fall

Before the fall  
There was bread

Before the sun rose that day  
The corner was already cursed and  
blessed

Weight of the body  
Wait for true equity  
Wavering feet  
Equally bruised legs

Of course there is before  
Much has happened to us  
But we, the people are more  
Than ill will be done  
Our kingdom once was and shall  
come

Give us this day  
Our bread

Before the fall  
Came a duty to keep our ancestors  
fed  
What is the equity owed to the  
people before American bread  
The people for whom the  
parchment of American purchase  
is counterfeit

God bless American bread and the  
hands that have prepared it...  
May the bounty be baked into  
24 demands  
Seasoned by 2,000 seasons  
True to our native land

Before the sun rise tomorrow  
May we feast on the bread that  
bought us one more day to try to  
get it right...

#### CHORUS

May we feast on the bread  
That bought us one more day  
To try to get it right...

May we feast on the bread  
That bought us one more day  
To try to get it right...

May we feast on the bread  
That bought us one more day  
To try to get it right...

#### V. BREADTH

#### CHORUS

So much work has been done  
Who does the work that's still left?

#### NARRATOR

The breadth of the task...

In 1619, Jamestown, enshrined a  
color-based American caste  
It took 244 years before Black  
people were enshrined a voting  
place in the franchise  
1868 the 14th amendment was  
ratified

Jamestown-citizenship  
244 years in between  
244 years from 1868 will be the  
second decade of the NEXT  
century  
By the time there is a parity of  
Black enslavement and Black  
political agency,  
NO one in this room will be alive.  
And THAT is the breadth of the  
task  
To create the EQUAL positive effect  
Of THAT historical debt  
The debt of 12 generations of  
humans who were not permitted  
to be who they could have been  
THAT is the breadth of the sin

Caste is the infrastructure of our  
divisions  
It is our country's pre-existing  
condition  
If a person has high blood  
pressure, it's not a surprise if they  
suffer a heart attack  
Why are WE surprised by the way  
law enforcement disregards the  
dignity of Blacks

The breadth of the task  
Is to make a future that remembers  
the breath of the stolen  
To think of joy as an economy  
To consider its theft with interest

Consider the breadth of a man at  
the very end of a life  
He breaks no law that requires the  
death penalty  
But that is what he receives  
Consider at the time of his death  
There is a viral disease  
That literally sees no color  
Sees us for what we actually are  
As the same  
As an interconnected species  
It took a blind organism to make  
the planet stop  
And notice  
The breadth  
And depth  
And late spring carelessness by  
which American law  
Presides over black death

The breadth of a life

The breadth of the lives of folks on  
the block who didn't have activist  
intentions  
And the breadth of the local  
activists who supported them  
with intention

The breadth of our intention to  
learn the cost of the debt  
our intention to earn back what  
was lost with his breath  
the breadth of the people who ain't  
out here for bread  
who are healing the city  
who the city often forgets

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learn the cost of the debt  
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out here for bread  
who are healing the city  
who the city often neglects

#### CHORUS

So much work has been done  
Who does the work that's still left?

#### NARRATOR

Do you remember 2020?  
Do you remember its breadth  
Standing on the steps of the  
Supreme Court after Justice  
Ginsburg passed,  
or standing in Black Lives Matter  
Plaza, near the white house, days  
after protesters were tear-gassed

Do you remember 2020?  
Do you remember its breadth  
I found myself transported to the  
root of the American experiment.  
Beyond anger, or grief, what led  
so many of us to gather in those  
moments?  
What are the ties that bind us  
together?  
The breadth of common hope that  
we could be \*better\* than this...  
that with clear eyed understanding  
of our social pathologies,  
there existed a pervasive doe eyed  
idealism underneath.

There was a 'reason' why we  
demanded better of our country...  
because we collectively knew we  
were 'capable' of better...that like  
a teacher's most gifted student  
after failing several critical tests,  
we collectively knew that we  
could be more accurately defined  
by our promise than by our  
failures.

The promise of what's possible  
That's the breadth of the task

To make possible  
The breadth of the promise...

#### CHORUS

So much work has been done  
Who does the work that's still left?

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