I CAN’T BREATHE
JUSTICE FOR GEORGE FLOYD
This online initiative showcases creative expressions made by an array of Nashville artists in response to the historic events that occurred in 2020. Guest curator and North Nashville native Woke3 has collaborated with photographers, videographers, dancers, spoken word artists, and musicians in his community to reflect on the destruction of the March 3 tornado, the impact of COVID-19, the urgent calls for racial justice, and a contentious presidential election. Together, the components of N2020 offer insight into the artists’ experiences, both individually and collectively, and encourage viewers to recognize our commonalities and our differences.

Our community is at the forefront of this exhibition. We want people to “go within” introspectively, to acknowledge our commonalities and differences as areas of opportunity to build thriving and sustainable communities.

It is our goal to touch as many lives as possible by establishing common ground through artistic expression. We want more people to think inclusively as we cultivate ground for all to share how 2020 has affected them as community members, artists, business owners, etc., and to support people shouting “We Need Change” through their respective art forms. That is where we begin the work.

Woke3
#WithN2020
Where is your fire? Does it lie in your tongue, setting a blaze when you speak? Or is it trapped, wreaking havoc beneath your feet!
Where is your fire? Did you pass it on, keep it warm for the generations to come??

Within 2020 (video still)
Karimah
Running time: 14 minutes, 45 seconds.
© Karimah. For a full list of participating collaborators, please see film credits.
Melodic and captivating, fire a means of purification, could these flames be a sign of what Nashville soon will be facing.

Winds whistling, bringing a cool breeze
the swaying of trees, picking up speed.
The lull before the storm
Destruction on the horizon as Nashville slept in.
Paralyzing fear, sirens penetrating the ear, but the tornado already here
Touched down, ripping through what took decades to build
Soon the damage to be revealed
Devastation and Disappointment filled the air.
Kinda surreal, like a scene from a movie
as people walked the streets, in disbelief
A truth hard to bear

at a crossroads, a path that used to be clear
now filled with uncertainty and fear
Obstacles lay and wait
Heavy burden on the road that once paved the way.
Now awake the aftermath, more real
309 people injured and 25 killed
Mom and Pop shops destroyed
What they’ve worked a lifetime for.

Businesses no longer standing, some demolished
And North Nashville, barely being acknowledged
The news heavy out East and other parts of town
But over here, barely covered ground
Open wounds, leaving the community exposed
Disdain and bitterness continue to grow

Nowhere to go some refused to leave
their home shattered glass and the roof gone.
This was their life, their safe haven
and in one night all of that taken.
Surrounded by Darkness, 70,000 without power.

Outages for miles
NES said it would be a while, but little did they know, this community a beacon of HOPE. Illuminating in the darkest of places in this a newfound purpose.

Bruised but not broken spirit high.
Thankful, just to be alive.
Sometimes it takes things to fall apart to show how we can really help each other.
How strong you’d have to be, to shoulder this alone.
But collectively working we can build our home!
Leaving...
...little messages, a reminder you must believe
we can move mountains with the faith of a mustard seed
Sometimes the picture, bigger than us
Resting in the hand of whom we trust
And

In the midst of chaos, you must have a strong foundation
Holding on with determination
Still some hesitation
Speaking signs of no trespassing
Do not ENTER without asking

Now, more vulnerable than ever
being preyed on by the crafty and clever.
Guards up, discernment on alert,
who is here to help, who is here to hurt?
North Nashville already a target.
What was slow and steady, now officially put on the market.

Feelings of neglect, hopelessness and despair
The irony of the signs left
Almost as if our drive being put to the test
Your Perception, well that’s your reality
Sometimes one gains a clear perspective after a calamity

Searching for clarity, it’s clear that we will have to go to work
The resilience is what North Nashville is known for.
No time to sit and pity
Pulling up our bootstraps to save the city

No more time to come and spectate
We will let you know now you’re coming the WRONG way

We cleaned so much, we had to be stopped
So FEMA could assess the damage that had been done
The people working together as one

Now in darkness, that’s how we grow
You couldn’t recognize the light, if you’ve never seen it before
Soon as the power restored
Just one more thing to be thankful for. A small reminder that we got this
Lenses of transparency
Sowing seeds of humanity
Growing the tree of resiliency
It was the community who answered the call
Different organizations working for the body of it all.

Gideon sent an Army, with reinforcements
As donations poured in the people put that work in.
A long way to normal that’s for certain, but the outpour made one thing clear, this is our home and we ain’t leaving here.

The History, The Culture, The Love...
don’t sell out NORF smiling opportunist knocking on doors
Their tongue marinated with gentrification making offers with no real plans of implementation For the people by the people
It’s time we speak up, cause only WE can save us....
Picking up the pieces, a long process
Trying to go back to normalcy, in the process
What seemed to be a promising road, now hindered progress.
Because soon after the tornado, Nashville
got its first positive test.
COVID claiming jobs, essentially laying off half the population
No warning, no signs, not the slightest indication
A new normal, to be established
No gatherings, no large crowds
Businesses, Restaurants, Churches, Schools now all closed down.

No time to play
These grounds no longer safe

Stay at HOME and Shelter in place
hard to deal with
When one isn’t properly equipped
Some quite frankly just not used to it.

It seems panic and fear lead to desperation
Stores once fully stocked; shelves now vacant
Heavy precautions, extra sanitation
Hoarding for a few, now added stipulations
If we only took what we needed

Toilet paper, scarce, now a hot commodity
Taking more and more in larger quantities
COVID bring about a new reality
Most, everything now virtually.

Only essential businesses opened, hospitals and grocery stores
Now being revealed the essential heroes
Those on the front line, for pennies on a dime
No true protection from the virus
Showing up every day, to protect us.
The new normal, I suppose
Mask and gloves, now a permanent part of our wardrobe....
These symptoms synonymous with I can’t breathe another murder by the hands of the police. Confined to our home, forced to watch with no distractions. As the police kill another unarmed black man. His knee digging into the groove of his neck. The one who swore to serve and protect.

This feeling all too familiar, we have been here before! Say his name!! George Floyd!!!

It’s a new generation combating the same old racism. With conviction and passion. Nashville answered the call for action.

Joining cities across America, protesting. Hand and hand together. Bonded by the struggle, it’s clear all we have is each other.
DaShawn Lewis
6th Ave. N. and Deaderick St.,
June 4, 5:45 p.m.

Remembering 8:46, and he lay
protesters do the same, as they demonstrate
a real powerful display
When black and white begin to relate
Marching for Justice, kneeling for peace
To put an end to police brutality

DaShawn Lewis
June 4, 6:11 p.m.

An end to a system that was never created with blacks in mind
A system keeping us enslaved by design
Do you understand what it means to be Black in America!
Why we must tell you Black Lives Matter, why we have value!

DaShawn Lewis
August 22, 5:46 p.m.

Will you hear us now? Will you listen?
No longer are we asking for permission!
Young and Fearless,

Nashville Feel like Selma,
like Ferguson, like KING.

Lesa Dowdy
"I Will Breathe" Rally, May 30
 Teens 4 Equality’s, called for a protest, expected a small crowd and thousands showed up. No more time for silence, it’s time to speak up!

No Justice, No peace
Our voice, a deadly weapon
The only thing they can’t take from our possession. And yet they still try.

Too many names, to fill the page

Why are we the only people expected to just take it? Turn the other cheek, as another black man lays lifeless in the streets Mad as hell, aren’t you angry? Aren’t you tired?
Ask Yourself, When they see us
Do they really see us
Or what the media often portrays
Validation, to treat us this way. Why some may think we deserve it!

Our existence, our unity, a threat to their power Armed forces, in that they feel power Shielded, hidden by protection Force their only weapon

Now it’s a battle
Right Versus Wrong
The line has been drawn Which side are you on?
No longer will we stand by,

This system, insurmountable
Time to hold the police accountable
In the midst of this, Nashville lost a young teen Gustavo, only 16
A construction site he should have never been on.
He should have been protected, rest in power
You won’t be forgotten.

The American dream, the black man’s nightmare
Shackled to this idea of freedom, that is not there.

Until we are all free, we have work to do.
COVID numbers on the rise, mental health, and suicide.
Note to self:
sometimes you need a reminder to stay alive. No matter how unconventional the method
What matters is the message

This may not have been the year that you were hoping, but for this year, you were chosen
You can sit back, reflect but don’t run and hide
Remember to enjoy the ride.

Black votes on the rise. Your voice matters
The power of the battle
Fresh start or a sequel
The fate lies in the hands of the people
Nashville danced to the polls, record numbers
Turned out to make a difference
And a difference it made!
Surrounded by hypocrisy, it’s time we take a Stand. We too deserve a say of what happens in this land. We are the heroes of our own story. And soon we will see the glory.

DaShawn Lewis
October 22, 5:12 p.m.

With a little sun light, rain and cultivation
We begin to see the fruits of our preservation.

DaShawn Lewis
In Memory Of, June 15, 6:09 p.m.

Planted, remember to stay rooted
The moment, all that matters is what you do with it.

DaShawn Lewis
In Memory Of, June 15, 6:39 p.m.

Someone is counting on you, to fulfill your goal, your purpose. So when aiming for your goal do it with purpose, be intentional on purpose.

DaShawn Lewis
Just the day before we . . . , E. S. Rose Park, March 22, 5:49 p.m.
Christmas Day, a bomb exploded downtown  
Just as we let our guard down. 
So unexpected, a van left undetected 
Why? Why now? The irony in it all, the year starting with fire and ending the same.

The scene feeling like overseas, a third world country 
Rubble and debris, adorn the Nashville streets 
In this, a possible sign of what’s to come in 2021

Tornado, COVID, death unemployment, sickness, we survived it together, onward we must go, our work not yet finished

"Freedom is a journey, and on Feb 13 1960 here in Nashville we started that journey, and that journey cannot end, because freedom is not a destination it is strictly a place where you continue to push for the best in humanity.”

A revolutionary, a civil rights leader, a rider for freedom, an EXAMPLE. We lost a legend this year, though he wouldn’t want us to shed tears, he’d want us to LIVE. 
Continue the fight for freedom and Liberation. His legacy, our responsibility!!!
Don’t fear the fire, you must become it. Embrace the heat, don’t run from it.

2020, perfect vision, maybe not the year you had in mind
Could it be our vision, actually blind?
Forced to sit still, in this we found struggle, resistance
Everything that was supposed to break us, brought us close to who we really are,
This Road not easy, challenging and hard.
God leveled the playing field,
this year so many truths revealed
From the Genesis of your Revelation
This not our final destination.

So will you let the fire burn you or shine light within? Because after the purification comes strength!

WITHIN 2020

—Karimah

The Great Debate (video still)
Kyrstin Young, in collaboration with
Angel Adams, executive producer
Running time: 17 minutes, 59 seconds
© Kyrstin Young. For a full list of participating collaborators, please see film credits.
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