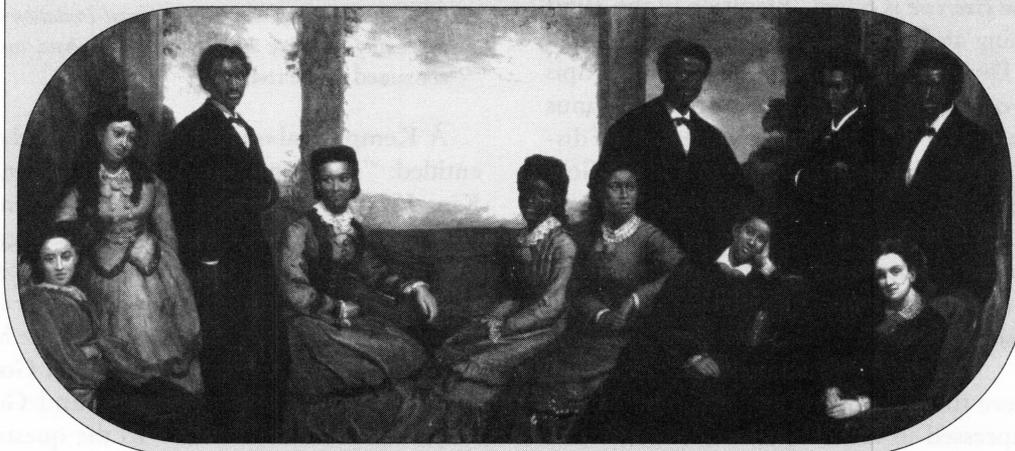


## *Celebrating Black History Month*



# Through The Years

## A Three-Act Drama and Musical

by Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson

As part of its celebration of Black History Month, the Schiller Institute staged a history-making performance of the 1936 musical drama *Through the Years* at the Chicago's Du Sable Museum Theatre on Sunday, Feb. 13 [SEE page 67, this issue]. Written by Civil Rights veteran Amelia Boynton Robinson, who today is the vice-chairman of the Institute, the play is a dramatic rendition of the birth of the African-American spiritual, told through the life of a slave. Mrs. Robinson conceived the play as a means to uplift the dignity and courage of those with whom she worked as a Department of Agriculture Extension Agent in rural Alabama in the 1930's, and to raise money to support the building of a community center for Blacks in then-rationally segregated Selma, Alabama.

*Through the Years* tells the story of Joshua Terrell, who, despite the harsh conditions of a slave's life, fights

with courage and determination to win freedom and gain leadership in the U.S. Congress. It is in part autobiographical, as Mrs. Robinson's family boasts at least one Reconstruction-era U.S. Congressman.

Mrs. Robinson recounts her writing of *Through The Years*: "When the Selma Community Center idea was born in the mind of my husband Samuel W. Boynton, I wondered what was the best means to raise money for it. The people in the rural area gave what they could to advance the idea, and raised what they could to finance the trips to Washington, D.C. and Atlanta to contact the Works Progress Administration, the Public Works Administration, and other funding sources. There was a large sum of money needed just to lay the groundwork for the much-needed community center.

"After efforts to raise money by having all communities participate in a sing-out were stopped by the

©1946, 1953, July 1960, July 1967, June 1975. Reprinted by permission of Mrs. Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson.

white citizens, we had to turn to other forms of fundraising. Those beautiful African-American spirituals taught to us by my mother, and the almost unequalled velvet voices of the county-wide choruses, came back to me like a vision one night. I woke my husband and we talked about a plan to make the spirituals into a play.

“At the beginning, I used a couple of songs and tried them out at our club meetings and during demonstration meetings. Several clubs took other parts of the play until,

in each part of the county, some club knew a part of the play. Later, in 1936, we used a church in the Bogue Chitto community to perform the play. We did very well, considering the small cash flow people had.

“The first time *Through The Years* was presented to a large group was by the Temple of the Elks at the Hudson High School in Selma. Later it was taken to Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, Germantown, Camden, and, more recently, to Selma, where it was performed at the Reformed Presbyterian Church.”

## Setting

*Through the Years* is a musical and drama of the birth of African-American spirituals, and a story of the hardship, courage, and triumph of a slave who, in spite of his simple birth, overcame all obstacles and made great contributions to American Democracy.

Any part of scenes may be cut to shorten time of play and use fewer characters. This drama is written to be used by church, school, or other large organized groups by purchasing of copies. Radio, screen, or television performance of this play may be used by special request.

The huts are made of brown paper shaped like huts and striped with black paint. They may be pinned or scotch-taped on background.

Blackout should be used to remove the auction block and all the outdoor living quarters (Act I, Scene 2).

If the stage is small, blackout is used (Act I, Scene 4) to enlarge cotton fields. The fields are made by using cotton stalks firmly attached to boards and bits of cotton thrown on them after they are placed on stage.

Only the tip end of master's house and garden need be shown (Act I, Scene 5).

Rearrange the trees, placing the small store in center of the forest, and undertaker's grass for Underground Railway. Various noises of owls, snakes, etc., may be used to frighten slaves as they pass through the woods (Act I, Scene 6).

Chorus may be arranged behind stage or at left. Balcony may be used.

All entrances from stage right; exits, left.

## Spirituals and Songs Performed in *Through the Years*

“Deep River”

“The Negro Mother's Lament”

“By And By I'm Gonna Lay Down  
This Heavy Load”

“Get You Ready, There's A Meeting  
Here Tonight”

“Steal Away”

“Gimme That Ole Time Religion”

“Cotton Needs Pickin' So Bad”

“Nobody Knows De Trouble I Seen”

“Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child”

“Let The Heavenly Light Shine On Me”

“Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?”

“Brother, How Did You Feel  
When You Came Out The Wilderness”

“Leaning On The Lord”

“Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)”

“Battle Hymn Of The Republic”

“Oh Freedom”

“I'm A-Rolling”

“It Is No Secret What God Can Do”

“The Lord's Prayer”

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”

## Cast of Characters

*Some actors may play more than one part.*

JOSHUA TERRELL, a former slave  
ELEANOR, Joshua's granddaughter  
RASTUS, Joshua's father  
MANDY, Joshua's mother  
JULIA, Mandy's daughter  
SOPHIA, Mandy's daughter  
LUCY, a neighbor  
PARSON JONES, a plantation preacher  
MISS PRISCILLA, a white Southern woman  
CURRY WADDER, Miss Priscilla's brother  
EZRA, a slave-auctioneer  
DAN, a slave-auctioneer  
MOODY, a slave-driver  
SONNY, a slave-driver  
MR. HANSON, a slave sympathizer and storekeeper  
PACK and MOSE, Joshua's companions

MISS MAE TERRELL, Joshua's daughter  
CLARK TODDLE, an abolitionist  
MISS GODFREY, an abolitionist  
MARY, a student  
SAMMIE, a student  
MR. SLEDGE, an adult student  
MR. DONALDSON, Mae Terrell's husband  
HENRY TERRELL, Joshua's great-grandson  
HAROLD TERRELL, Joshua's son  
ANTHONY TERRELL, Joshua's son  
BELLE, Joshua's daughter  
SUE, Joshua's daughter  
CLARA TERRELL  
JUDGE HALE  
A PHYSICIAN  
A lookout boy  
CHORUS (approximately 25 people)

## Notes on Characters and Costumes

**JOSHUA:** Two Joshuas may be used, one as an old man in the Prologue and Act III, and the other as Joshua progresses. In the Prologue and Act III, Joshua is an old, white-haired, thin-faced, fearless man nearing one hundred years old. Wears pajamas and is lying in a chaise lounge or very modern summer chair, in a half-sitting position, partly covered by a sheet. A younger man should play the part of Joshua in Act I, except as a baby. Joshua wears overalls with patches of bright colors, a plaid, faded and torn shirt, and is barefoot. As a soldier, Joshua wears the soldier's uniform. As a statesman, a black suit.

**ELEANOR:** A co-ed wearing sweater and circular skirt, low-heeled shoes, and socks.

**RASTUS, PACK, MOSE, SAMMIE, and MR. SLEDGE:** Wear overalls or trousers too large or small with numerous patches. Suspenders may be made of strings.

**LUCY, JULIA, and SOPHIA:** All barefoot, with dresses entirely too large.

**MANDY:** A very slender, fiery young woman, age approximately twenty-one, showing signs of hav-

ing had too many children, wears a large black dress with a string tied around her waist to fit dress more snugly. She is neat and clean, but feet bare.

**PARSON JONES:** Tall, heavy man with white hair, beard, and mustache. Wears a white shirt and tails, a relic from the master's house.

**MISS PRISCILLA:** Well-dressed character of the Gay Nineties.

**CURRY WADDER:** Well-dressed character of the Gay Nineties.

**DAN and EZRA:** Wear big hats, boots, solid loud shirts, washable pants, accompanied by dogs on leash, carry guns with blank shots.

**MR. HANSON:** Typical 1860's well-dressed gentleman.

**MISS MAE TERRELL, CLARA TERRELL, and MISS GODFREY:** Typical well-dressed, modern 1860's ladies.

**JUDGE HALE:** Large, well-built man wearing black gown and cap.

**THE PHYSICIAN, DR. DONALDSON, HENRY TERRELL, ANTHONY TERRELL, and HAROLD TERRELL:** All well-dressed businessmen.

## PROLOGUE

ELEANOR (*seated on a hassock, consoles her granddad who is nearing one hundred years of age, and sitting in a chaise longue in a comfortable modern living room of a house on a big plantation*): Father Joshua, you seem to be so much better than you have been and that makes me feel good. I suppose it is necessary to write another letter to your children and grandchildren, I call them the Clan, and tell them you are feeling so much better and there is no need of their coming. (*Goes to desk to write.*)

JOSHUA (*waving his hand and speaking rather slowly; she turns to listen*): No, no, my child, let them all come home. I have been looking forward to the day when I can see all of my children and their offspring together. If I should see them in this house and on this spot of land that I dedicated to God many, many years ago, I would then be ready to die.

ELEANOR: Oh, Father Joshua (*pats his hand*), don't talk like that; why, we will never be able to get along without you. You have meant everything to us. I feel sorry for the person who is not in any way connected with this family. (*Looks in his face.*) Know something? The reason I made all those A's in history through the years is because I have a human history who knows the answers to all questions. (*Stoops down and kisses his forehead.*) You are truly a great man; you'll always be tops in my heart. I wish I had lived in the days when you were a Congressman. Tell me all about it, Father Joshua. (*Takes a seat on the hassock at the feet of JOSHUA.*) Let's see through the years. (*Counting the progress on her fingers.*) You've been a slave, the main Underground Railway conductor (*smiles*), school teacher, statesman, Congressman, farmer, and best of all you are the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of some of the greatest leaders of the nation. (*Pauses, clasps her hands around her knees.*) I wish I had a telescope to look back through the years. (*Looks upward.*) Surely the words, "Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod felt in the days when hopes unborn had died," would make me realize that no obstacle is too great to conquer after what you've gone through. (*Looks at him with pride.*) But I am meditating unnecessarily. Tell me all about yourself. Some day I will write a book (*holds hands one above the other*) this thick, and I shall call it "Joshua's Clan."

JOSHUA (*looking as though he is equal to the task of talking and glad for the opportunity to rehearse his experiences*):

I can remember ever so far back, my child, perhaps farther than most people. I guess it was because I wanted to do something about my condition before I felt too keenly the pinch of slavery.

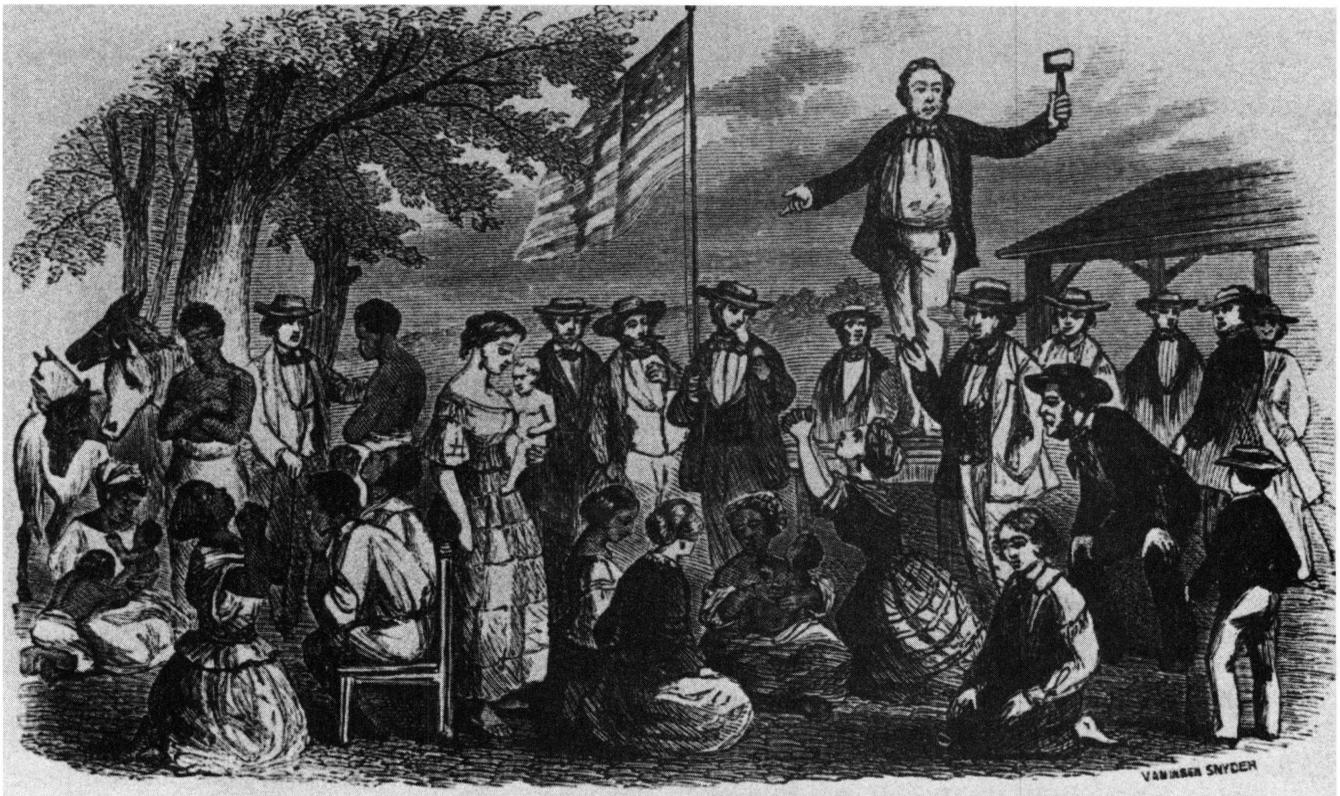
I was born in a log cabin on the same spot of ground this house now covers. There were nine of us living, eating, and sleeping in one room. When the weather was warm, Ma had to move outside to do her cooking (*pauses*), but I'm getting ahead of my story. I'll come back to that part.

Ma and Pa, that's what we called them in those days, wanted to keep the family of seven children together, but fate wasn't that kind to us. My parents loved each other and they adored their children. Ma never forgot Pa, though they were separated when I was merely a babe on the arm and he was sold to someone else. The other children were sold down in Mississippi and I alone was left with mother. (*Drops his head and sighs.*) I liked to hear Ma talk about Pa, the way he tried to please her; how he would kiss each of us at night, and how he would pray to God to always watch over us and keep us from danger. (*Pauses.*) Oh, he didn't seek to save himself from bodily harm. Said he thought he could stand anything, but for the children he prayed. He had many scars on his back where he was whipped for protecting his family.

Ma never did get over her loneliness for Pa and the other children. She would sometimes sit and cry for hours, and when I approached her and tried to wipe away her tears with my dirty little hands she would take me on her lap and cry all the more. She said, "Son, you could never understand. You are too young to know what it's all about, but promise me you will always be a good boy, and if you can ever get away from here, get away as fast as your feet will carry you. You jest ain't born to stay here and take what I is taking. The rivers is wide and the rivers is deep, but cross 'em even if you gotta swim. You got trials an' crosses down here, but when you gits to heaven all will be peace." (JOSHUA *smiles and strokes his head as he continues.*) Yes, she knew what she was talking about. (*Pauses.*) Then, after such lectures, it seems that she would be relieved. She'd begin to sing. It seems I can hear her singing now. (JOSHUA *keeps time with his finger as he hums and looks upward.*)

CHORUS (*in background*): "Deep River."

(*Curtain falls. Song continues while scenes are being shifted.*)



"Human Flesh at Auction," from "The Suppressed Book About Slavery," 1864.

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*In background, small huts, trees, lines of clothes, evidence of cleanliness in and around the ill-shaped quarters, in front of cabins occupied by the family; it is clean and neat. There is an old bunk in one corner, and a long table in the opposite corner with home-made benches. Near the center is an open fireplace, with two big pots near the fire. MANDY, with head tied and a clean Mother Hubbard dress and an apron. Two children, ages ten and six, playing the game "Pease Porridge Hot." A plantation woman sitting around while father of the family, RASTUS, stoops in a corner hewing a chair from the trunk of a tree. It is morning.*

MANDY (*walks from table to fireplace, and from fireplace to bunk, holding baby, occasionally turning him, bending over baby*): My seventh child. (*Takes long breath as she pulls the cover back and picks him up.*) He's born for good luck. (*Smiles at LUCY.*) Look at his ear and tiny fingers. (*Amazed, as she counts his fingers.*) Why, he's got six fingers on each hand. I know he's born for good luck.

LUCY (*looks puzzlingly at baby*): Dat he shor is.

MANDY: Him bigger dan most babies.

LUCY: He shor is, good luck bound to follow him.

MANDY (*kisses baby's neck and hugs him*): We'll call him  
(*pauses*) Joshua.

LUCY: Dat's a big name. (*LUCY grins and nods approval.*)

RASTUS: Shore he's born for good luck. (*Walks toward wife.*) He's the seventh child of de seventh son. I'm a seventh child, and don't you think I'm lucky? Ain't I lucky to have you as my wife, and look at dese fine chillun, (*pauses*) and my fine and good wife. I sho' love you hard and I'll do anything for my family. (*Walks toward table and sits down.*)

MANDY (*somewhat ashamed*): O Rastus, you kin say de nicest things I ever heard. (*Breathlessly*) I pray God we kin be together always.

*(Two short benches on each side of table; pans and other containers are having corn bread and greens placed on them from the pots which are near the fireplace. JULIA and SOPHIA and four other children sit together at the table as pans are placed on table with the meal on them.)*

MANDY (*in a soft voice as she speaks to her oldest daughter* JULIA): Julia, you know I done tol' you you ain't to eat wid both hands. (*Walks toward table; hands on hips.*) How is you ever gonna be trained to work in de big house? I ain't training you nor none o' my

chillun fo' to be no field hands. You got to do things right, my chile. You got your sisters and brothers to lead. Now put dat hand in your lap, and eat your bread wid dis hand. (JULIA obeys.) Sophia, fan dem flies, and don't let dem light on de table. (Turns toward fireplace and suddenly comes back to the table.) I ain't heard a sign of a blessing from none of you. Fold your hands. (MANDY leads by folding her hands and closing her eyes.) 'Peat after me, chillun. "Thank God for our daily bread. Amen." (Children begin to whisper to each other and look worried. MANDY is bending over the baby.)

JULIA (slowly walks toward her and begins to sing): Mother, is Massa going to sell us tomorrow?

CHORUS and FAMILY: "The Negro Mother's Lament."

MANDY (holding her baby closely toward her, fear on her face as she answers back in a chant): Yes, yes, yes.

## Scene 2

As the chant dies away, frightened slaves are seen hustling toward a stump used for an auction block, which is left of stage, and followed by SONNY and MOODY, who crack their whips, and occasionally squall at them to keep them together. The stage immediately becomes a slave market. Male and female slaves are exhibited on the auction block. The aristocracy of the South is assembled for the sales. (Six chorus members may be used as buyers.) Men are separated from their wives and children from their mothers. Under protest from MANDY, her husband is sold to one of the bidders, and her children to another. As the auctioneer takes her six-year-old child, she clings more closely to the baby JOSHUA, who is in her arms, almost crushing him savagely as the auctioneer catches her by the arm. MANDY makes an attempt to run away with the baby, while the other children are in the hands of the buyers. Several slaves are sold, including RASTUS.

CHILDREN (crying and saying at different times): Come back Ma. Don't leave us here. Ma don't let 'em take us away. I wanna go home wid you. Please git me Ma, please, please, please.

MANDY (caught up between fear and anger, she begins to fight as an attempt is made to take her baby away): I can't stand it no longer. I won't let you sell my baby from my breast. This is my child; God gave him to me. I'll kill him before I let ya take him away. (The firm sound of "shut up" is now heard, as the auctioneer tries to drag her to the auction block.) He's mine, mine, mine. I'll kill him before anybody dares to take him from me.

EZRA (chewing and spitting as he talks): Shut up woman,

ya stopping the sale.

MANDY: You can't make me shut up. This child is mine. (Braces up in the auctioneer's face.) No one would dare take him away or hurt one hair on his head. I'd first . . . (from sheer exhaustion she quiets down as she sobs quietly and cuddles JOSHUA to her bosom.) Goodbye, children. Remember, children, I always love you.

DAN (catching one hand and MOODY the other, pulls MANDY on block): Why, this little tiger is highly spirited. She is a good one. Look her over carefully. (Buyers assemble, feeling her muscles, etc.) You saw her brood. You know what she can do. She will increase the number of slaves each year. She ought to go for high stakes. (Chewing and spitting tobacco as he talks.) What'll you give me for this woman and baby? Do I hear \$100? Who'll raise it to \$200? Do I hear \$300? (Bid being gradually raised.)

(PRISCILLA WADDER calls her father and brother off from the auctioneer for a conference. After a few words, the brother, CURRY WADDER, rushes back to the block and begins to bid for the mother and baby. Bids carried out as auctioneer usually sells cattle.)

HENRY WADDER: \$1,300 . . . \$1,400 . . . \$1,500.

DAN: Fifteen hundred dollars once, fifteen hundred dollars twice, fifteen hundred three times—and sold! to the Wadder Estate.

MANDY (as tears begin to flow from her eyes, she still clings savagely to her baby and sings, with background music): "By and By I'm Gonna Lay Down This Heavy Load."

## Scene 3

Dark, except for flashlight.

CHORUS: "Get You Ready, There's A Meeting Here Tonight."

(In front of the slave quarters at night. All lights are out. A prayer has been arranged in the woods. The slaves must steal out to avoid the ever-vigilant patrols. SONNY moves quietly to awake the quarter's occupants.)

SONNY (slightly knocking as he looks around him): Mr. Hodges, it's time for de meetin' in de woods.

(He leaves that house and goes to another and another until he has reached every house in the quarter. As he poses as a Paul Revere, he slips through the quarters making his way to the meeting place, still looking in all directions to prevent the meeting being discovered.)

CHORUS (as members gather around the minister): "Steal Away." (The meeting place is in the woods. Slaves are



"A Negro Camp-Meeting in the South," *Harper's Weekly*, 1872.

*seen approaching, bearing no light, speaking no word, only a slight gesture of recognition. They come from different directions and gather on the ground around the plantation preacher, PARSON JONES. MANDY and her twelve-year-old son JOSHUA are among them. Crouching on the ground around the parson, the slaves listen to precious words uttered by the only parson who can read and write. The song "Steal Away" dies down. The parson slowly draws the hidden Bible from his bosom and begins to stammer through Exodus 8:1-2 and expresses its meaning in his own words.)*

PARSON: Chillun, we is gathered here together in one common interest. Dat is to stick together and believe in God. (*Congregation says "Amen" at intervals.*) With God above us and our hand in his, chillun, do you remember Moses?

CROWD (*softly*): Yes, Jesus, yes, Jesus.

PARSON: O yes, he prayed to God and he took them by his hand, and led them out of a cussed land. Now all of you listen while I read this out of the Holy Bible. (*Fumbling for chapter, he repeatedly says*) Yes, King Jesus. (*Pauses again as he searches, saying*) Pray chillun, pray. O yes, here is what God says, listen while I read it to you. (*He reads Exodus 8:1-2.*) "And the Lord spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and

say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me." Now you see dears, that God freed all of the chillun of Egypt and he will free us. Now let me read another scripture. (*He turns to Exodus 12:29-31, while preaching and praising God for permitting them to meet in the woods.*) "And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said." (*He prays a fervent prayer. Forgetting the danger, he begins to preach. Not mindful of their bodily weariness, they all burst into a fervent song. The sisters and brothers shout and cry, praising God in song that only the Father could know.*)

CHORUS: "Gimme That Ole Time Religion."

*(In the midst of this scene, the alarm is given by SONNY and is whispered around as the song dies away.)*

A SLAVE: Scatter, scatter, here comes the pad-rols. Dis away, dat away (*pointing in various directions. When they have gone, SONNY leaves last, and then two overseers with lanterns and guns come to the spot where the meeting was held.*)

EZRA: I can't tell for the love of me where them slaves gone to. I was sure I heard them right here.

DAN: I thought so too. You reckon they done went through the ground? I don't see hide nor hair of 'em. I know what I kin do. I'll shoot in this direction. Maybe that will scare um up a while. (*Shoots blanks as they leave stage left.*)

#### Scene 4

*Cotton field. JOSHUA is now a young man. Slave men, women, and children are at work picking cotton. As they labor under the horrible condition of slavery, they sing, as African-Americans have never ceased to do under oppression.*

COTTON PICKERS and CHORUS: **"Cotton Needs Pickin' So Bad."**

*(The overseer sees MANDY, through sheer exhaustion, slowing up. She puts her hand to her head as if to wipe away the pain.)*

EZRA (*jumping over the cotton rows, cowhide whip in hitting position*): Whada ya think this is? A barn dance? Get dat sack on your back and get to picking cotton. (*He strikes her a blow.*)

MANDY (*hesitantly*): I-I-I am sick. I just can't. (*She falls to the ground.*)

EZRA (*unmercifully striking her several blows*): To heck you can, and I'll show you by beating the blood out of ya. Makes no difference if ya is sick. I ain't gonna let it rain on dis cotton. Git ya sef up. (*As the cowhide whip is heard when it strikes MANDY, JOSHUA, who is nearing the end of the cotton row, suddenly looks up to see his mother being whipped, jumps across the rows, balls one fist up, and catches EZRA by the collar, and makes an attempt to strike him, but is held in check by his fellow workers.*)

JOSHUA: If you hit her again, whitefolks, I swear I'll kill you; I don't mind dying. (*Fellow slaves hold JOSHUA as he attempts to strike EZRA.*) If she die, I'll git even wid you. I tell you, I'll git even wid you. (*Tussles until he gets away from his fellow slaves.*)

EZRA (*backs away, frightened by JOSHUA's words*): I'll beat you black as a coal tomorrow. Just you wait.

JOSHUA (*bending over the lifeless body of his mother and pleading with her*): O, Ma, please speak to me. Please don't leave me. I'll take you away from dis place if

you will only live. (*Sobs, picks up his mother in his arms and walks slowly out of the field as the workers and chorus express their feeling in song.*)

CHORUS: **"Nobody Knows De Trouble I Seen."**

JOSHUA (*a few minutes later, as song dies away, comes back to the field, crying aloud and with vengeance on his face; cotton pickers cry with him*): She's dead, and I swear by all gods that I will never stick another hoe in dis field. I'm against killing people, but my Ma is dead, dead, dead (*each word louder*). I know she's gone to Heaven. (*Hangs his head, places his hands behind his back, cotton pickers begin to sing as he joins them.*)

CHORUS: **"Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child."**

#### Scene 5

*Lawn in front of big white house. Garden to right of lawn, trees in garden in bloom. MISS PRISCILLA, now a middle-aged lady, well-groomed, sits in a rocker on the lawn. JOSHUA is sitting on the ground beside her, looking anxiously in her face and then in a book, as she points out letters to him and has him repeat after her.*

MISS PRISCILLA: Repeat after me, Joshua, and don't be in such a hurry to learn. This is only the fourth lesson you have had and you have done remarkably well. (*JOSHUA repeats after her.*) This is a-n-d, that spells AND. See how you can put letters together and make words from them?

JOSHUA: Yessum, Miss Priscilla. I believe you want ta help me. You is so kind to me, I believe you is my friend. I'm gonna try and prove to you how much I thank you. My Ma made me promise her before she died to try to help my poor slaved people and I'm gonna try my best to do it.

MISS PRISCILLA: Joshua, I believe in you. (*Takes him by the shoulder.*) I don't believe you are going to let me down. I am taking the time to teach you because I believe you can help your people. They need your help. (*Pauses and looks into empty space.*) I don't think slavery is right for any human being. But, but, if I should fight it, I would be disinherited by my family and friends. I am a slave, too. Just as other good, white Christians are. We cannot speak the truth that is in our hearts against mistreatment. If I should do that, I would suffer something worse than slavery. (*Face saddens.*) I would suffer a mental torture. My own people would not as much as speak to me in my own household. (*Pats her face with her handkerchief and suddenly says*) Let's get back to our lessons, Joshua. Let's go over it. Try and say the alphabet all alone. (*She points to the letters as he says them.*) That is exceptionally good, Joshua. Now, let's try putting

more words together. M-a-k-e, *make*; s-i-d-e, *side*. (She has him repeat after her each time she pronounces a letter or a word.)

Now, Joshua, all of the talking you or anyone else does is made up of all the letters you have been saying. Take this slate (*hands him a slate*) and write the letters and some words for me. (As he finishes, she comments and praises him for his perfect and neat work.) Joshua, you are a smart young man, and I am going to help you all I can. You *must* not go back to the fields. I shall keep you here to work around the house for me. You will not be beaten and your tasks will not be too hard. Your lesson is over for today, and you must spend all of the time you can studying your lessons, but you must hide your books from the others.

JOSHUA: Miss Priscilla (*scratches his head and hesitates*), I, I got a secret to tell you. I believe I can tell you, but please don't breathe it to a living soul. I got to tell it to somebody and I believe in you and think you will help me.

MISS PRISCILLA: Joshua, I promise I will never speak of it. You can depend on me. (*Anxiously*.) What is it Joshua? What is it?

JOSHUA (*hangs his head and fumbles with the book*): Well, well, you've been real good to me on dis plantation. And, and I like it, but, b—b—but I know you'll understand. I like it here alright. I, I like you and Mars Curry and, and all de nice people, but, but I'm going to, to run away. (*Silence*.) I promise my people I would help dem go North by de Underground Railway. Two other fellows is goin' wid me. (*Miss Priscilla looks amazed and puzzled*.) We got it all planned out.

MISS PRISCILLA (*moved deeply but pleadingly*): Why Joshua, I, I just don't now what to say. I can hardly believe it. (*Pauses*.) Not that I disapprove of your plans, but I just don't know how I will get along without you. You can depend upon me. I shall breathe this to no one. I shall also do all that I can to help you. (*Puts her finger to her mouth and thinks deeply*.) Listen Joshua, come to the house tonight before you leave. I have some money and perhaps other articles I will give you that you may be able to use. And—and please be careful, Joshua.

JOSHUA (*thanks MISS PRISCILLA and bows graciously*): Miss Priscilla, you are so good to me. I can never forgit you. I think you is da nicest white lady in da world. (*He leaves to hoe the garden only a few feet from the chair. MISS PRISCILLA smiles with satisfaction picks up her knitting and returns to the house*.)

JOSHUA (*hides the book under the tree. He runs from hoeing to book, opens book, stumbles aloud over letters and*

*finally makes words. Runs back to his hoeing, remembering the letters. This is done at least three times*): W-o-r-d — —wo— —wor— —WORD. (*Goes back to hoeing*.) W-o-r-d, WORD. l-a-l-a (*Goes back to book*.) L-i-g-h-t, LIGHT. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. (*Amazed that he had made the first sentence, though he fumbles through it, he smiles and tries again with greater success*.) Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. (*Amazed, he repeats as his face lights up. As in a dream, clasping the book to his breast, head lifted high, he begins to sing*.)

JOSHUA with CHORUS: **“Let The Heavenly Light Shine On Me.”**

## Scene 6

*Underground Railway.*

*Across the stage, sections of a forest. Commissary in center of forest. To the left of stage, lights rather dim, as if there were a city in the distance. Three tired, ragged, and half-clad slaves enter from stage right. They are JOSHUA, PACK, and MOSE. They walk in zig-zag formation, showing signs of fatigue and fear. Snakes, rats, and other reptiles may be tied on black thread and pulled across the stage, frightening the slaves. The noise of hooting owls and birds may also attract their attention, adding to their misery. They almost fall in the door of the commissary of MR. HANSON, a white abolitionist, who shakes their hands.*

HANSON: Well men, you have made it at last. I have been looking for you for three days. What kept you so long?

JOSHUA: Kind Master, only God helped us dis far. We was chased by bloodhounds and we only lost dem when us put a reed in our mouths and got under de water in Bombay Creek. De dogs lost us and turned around.

PACK (*While he is talking, MR. HANSON goes behind the counter and brings each man a large hunk of bread and hands to each one as they thank him*): Shore did. I was scared to death. God knows I don' wanna go back to Mars Jenkins's place. He'd kill me for sure.

MOSE (*still trembling*): He shore will. De very woods is better than dat place.

MR. HANSON (*bringing out maps and placing them on the counter and tracing the places with a pencil as he talks*): Now boys, your danger is not yet over. You will have to avoid traveling in the day and be very careful at night. You will have to cross Maryland and Delaware. There will be a group to receive you when you reach Philadelphia. Follow my instructions care-



"The Bloodhound Business," from "The Suppressed Book About Slavery," 1864.

fully. (*The men look from the map to him as he speaks.*) You will follow the North Star from this point in the woods. (*Continues to point to the map.*) After a few miles from here, you will come to a river. It is wide but not deep. Wade through it at this point, and go to the east of the big road as you cross the river, to avoid those going on the ferry. Keep east until you reach Delaware, where the signs are nailed to trees on the right-hand side. Looking northward you will see trees with white paint smeared on them. Keep in the pathway and don't speak above a whisper to each other. Run as fast as you can if you hear the hounds.

JOSHUA (*looking at MR. HANSON with great appreciation*): Mr. Hanson, I swear to you, we'll reach dat land of de free. And when I git dere, I will give my service to God and my people. Thank you for being so nice to us.

OTHERS: Thank you. We will help Joshua. Much oblige.

MR. HANSON: That's all we ask of you. We have helped over 5,000 of your people to escape. (*Hands each a bag.*) Here is enough food for the journey. Good luck, and may God bless you.

JOSHUA, PACK, and MOSE: Thank you, thank you.

MR. HANSON: Again, I say, be very careful and don't talk to any whites. The punishment for us is greater than that for you or any slave. They will throw us in chains and in the prison and let us stay there

until we die.

ALL: We promise dey will never catch us. Good-bye.

(*Slaves walk away slowly, headed toward stage left.*)

JOSHUA: Whatever happens, we must go on. (*Slaves walk in zig-zag formation, making the distance on the stage seem long.*) If we make it, we will be able to help other slaves escape. I wish we could help everybody.

(*As they plod along, their feet become weary, their steps falter, and they begin to wander.*)

PACK: I wonder if we will ever make it. (*Lags behind the others.*) I'm getting so weary.

JOSHUA (*looks back and sees PACK*): We can't turn around now, Pack. We must keep going. (*MOSE and JOSHUA turn around, put their arms around PACK and walk a few steps.*) Here, drink dis water from de bladder.

(*JOSHUA pulls off a cow's bladder with water that is carried on a stick with all their worldly goods on it. The three sit on a stump. JOSHUA puts his chin in his hand and begins to sing as the choir in background picks it up.*)

JOSHUA and CHORUS: "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?"

(*As the song dies away, the three get up and try to run, as*

they hear bloodhounds and men's voices in the distance at stage right. They try to run but are too weary. They push along in faith. They soon see a light of a distant city at stage left. Bleeding and torn from briars and thorns, broken in everything but spirit, they stumble and one slave falls exhausted at the feet of two abolitionists. They receive them with tender care and succor, as the abolitionists ask, in song, "Brother, How Did You Feel When You Come Out the Wilderness?"

JOSHUA, COMPANIONS, and CHORUS: "Leaning on the Lord."

(Curtain falls.)

## ACT II THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

### Scene 1

CHORUS (before curtain rises): "Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)."

JOSHUA (now a member of the regiment, calls his men together to give orders. A group of six sit around the table in a hall or room to discuss the issues of war. Arising from table, hands thrust deep in pockets): Soldiers, we have been lucky to reach the North by way of the Underground Railroad. Many of us promised our loved ones we would come back and free them. We now have families, are taxpayers, and most of us are homeowners. We paid dearly for our freedom and so have hundreds of others. They have yet to have the shackles of slavery removed from them. I promised to do something about it, and God be my helper, if you stick with me, I will help win this war.

MOSE (immediately swings around in his chair, snapping his finger as if he has just remembered something): Have you read the bulletin in the camp?

PACK: No, what's new?

MOSE: Wait a minute. (Pulls a newspaper out of his pocket.) I have one here. I got it from the commanding officer. (Begins to read.) It says, "Military men whose opinion is worth having will please report to the Captain's office. We have established a system of examination of all men regardless of color. (Clears his throat.) We need men who are not afraid to die to save the Union at once."

JOSHUA (in a deep study as he listens and strokes his chin): We, the colored people, are in this country to stay. We are more than four and one-half million strong. They cannot get rid of us. We own property, have families, and have contributed the best in us to make America what it is. Crispus Attucks was the first to

die in Boston to liberate America from the bondage of England. This is a later day and I am willing to fight. (Pauses, strokes his beard again.) Yes, I am willing to fight for human rights. Our people are enslaved and many whites are enslaved, too, for they dare not speak the truth that is in their hearts. Human suffering is plaguing the country. The Southern white man is fighting against his better judgment and his God. (Looks heavenward.) That is, if he has ever known God, to please his associates and hold on to his money-making machine, the Negro. Yes, yes, I will go to the Captain's office to offer advice I think might help. (Exit left.)

PACK: Well, soldiers, there is truly a Moses for us. I, for one, am willing to follow him to the end.

MOSE (walks over to box on the floor and picks up several leaflets and begins to read): Say, fellows, here is what Sojourner Truth wrote for our colored soldiers. (Gives each a leaflet from the box; they begin to read aloud, fumbling after each word.)

SOLDIERS: We are the valiant soldiers  
who have 'listed for the war,  
We are fighting for the Union,  
we are fighting for the law.  
We can shoot a rebel farther  
than a white man ever saw,  
As we go marching on.

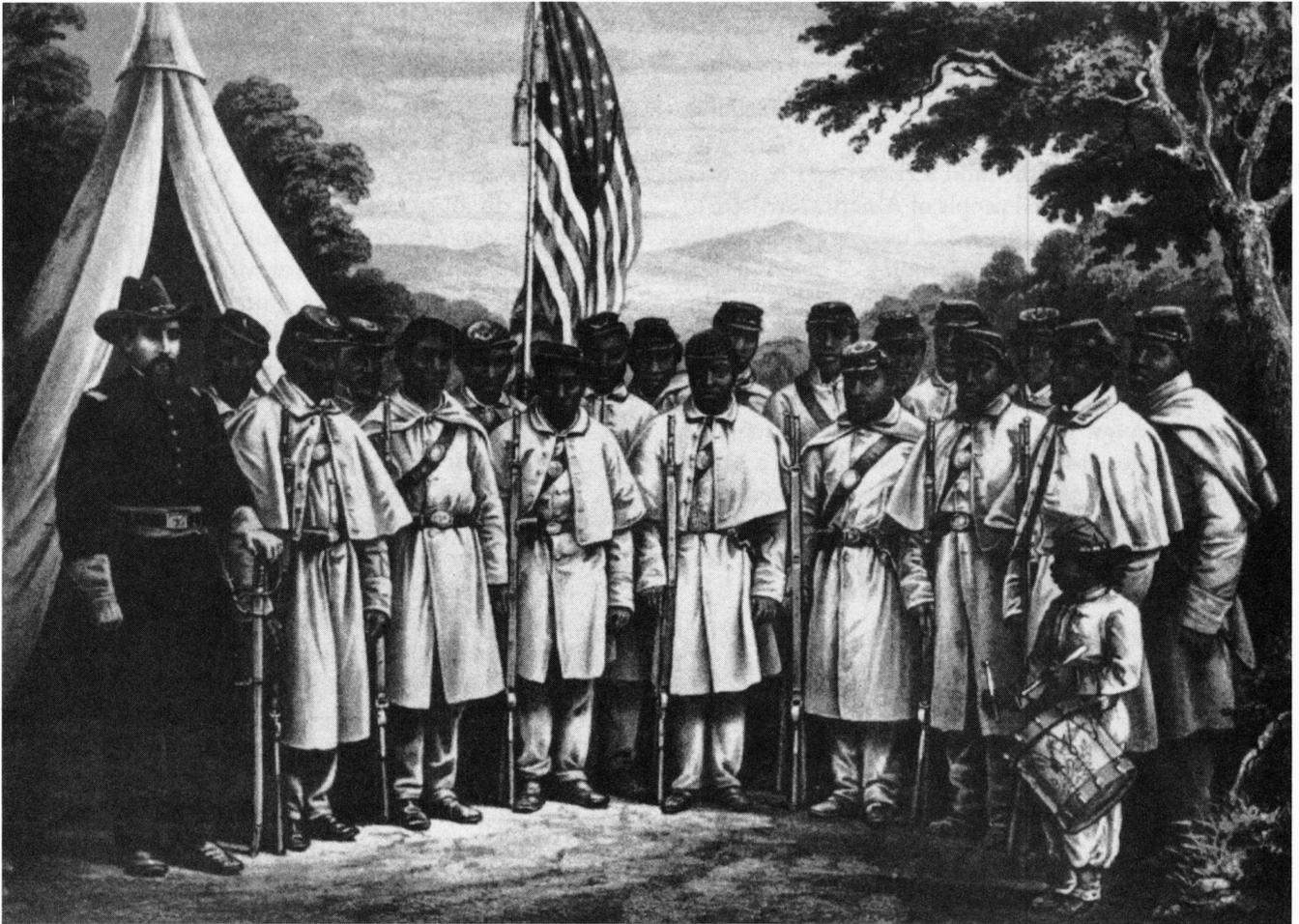
CHORUS: Glory, glory, hallelujah,  
Glory, glory hallelujah,  
Glory, glory, hallelujah,  
As we go marching on.

MOSE: That's good fellows, let's take the second verse. (All together in a stronger voice.)

SOLDIERS: Look there above the center  
where the flag is flying bright,  
We are going out of slavery,  
we are bound for freedom's fight,  
We mean to show Jeff Davis  
how the colored men can fight,  
As we go marching on.

CHORUS: Glory, glory, hallelujah,  
Glory, glory hallelujah,  
Glory, glory, hallelujah,  
As we go marching on.

PACK: O boy, what a great song! It really lifts my spirit. I am ready to measure arms with any man in this war. To think of our own noble Sojourner Truth writing this song. Just give our women a chance and they will rise high as anyone else. I read only the other day that Harriet Tubman has been called the Moses of her people, because she has made nineteen trips through the Underground Railroad, and has helped more than 300 people escape the chains of slavery.



*"Come and Join Us Brothers!" published by the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments, Philadelphia.*

*(Stands, shakes hand in air.)* The day will come when colored people will be first-class citizens, winning distinction in every walk of life. We are self-made men who have faced hell and damnation to get our freedom. With the opportunity of getting an education, what will our children and their children accomplish? One can never imagine. These are worth fighting for.

MOSE: Come, come, let's not get sentimental now. Let's sing as Aunt Sojourner Truth would like for us to sing this song she has written for us.

*(All begin to sing in harmony the last verse of "The Battle Hymn Of The Republic.")*

JOSHUA *(enters and joins the men singing with great delight. As the song ends)*: Men, I have talked with Major General Hunter and he asked many questions. He asked how long had I been in uniform. I told him since I had been in Philadelphia, which is over five years. *(Shrugs shoulders.)* He said he'd contact me sometime.

*(SOLDIERS begin to hum "Go Down Moses" and*

*CHORUS joins into harmonious music. Just as the music dies away a knock is heard on the door. MESSENGER enters.)*

MESSENGER: Paging Mr. Joshua Terrell.

*(JOSHUA walks toward door and is handed a scroll. He tips the boy and closes the door behind him, hesitates as he opens it, and rushes over to the table where others are just looking anxiously toward the door.)*

JOSHUA: This is it, gentlemen. *(pauses)* Let me read it to you. "Boston, Massachusetts. Dear Sir: I am organizing the first regiment of volunteers with every prospect for success. Your name has been mentioned in connection with the command of the regiment by some friends in whose judgment I have confidence. I take great pleasure in offering you the position of Colonel and hope that you may be induced to accept. Should you accept, I enclose a pass for Port Royal, of which I trust you will avail yourself at once. I am, with sincere regards, R. Saxton, Brig. General." That seems to be it. *(Men look amazed at each other, rushing up to congratulate JOSHUA.)*

MOSE: By all means, you must accept this position. You have our support.

PACK: I congratulate you, Colonel. (*Stands at attention and salutes JOSHUA.*) All Americans of color will follow you to the bitter end.

JOSHUA: Soldiers, this is the most serious step I have ever taken. We, the colored people of America, are here to stay. America cannot get rid of us. We are definitely Americans. From the first shedding of blood for liberty, one of ours flowed and mingled with the whites. That was Crispus Attucks of Boston, Massachusetts, who led a band of colored and white soldiers against the British for the independence of America. A few years ago, John A. Cleveland said, "I am dying for freedom; I could not die for a better cause." (*Drops his head in reverence and meditates; pauses, lifts head and shoulders high.*) Attention, soldiers. (*All stand at attention.*) You will meet me here in this building at 7:30 tomorrow morning.

(*SOLDIERS salute, exit at stage left. JOSHUA re-seats himself at the desk.*)

(*Curtain falls.*)

## ACT III

### Scene 1

CHORUS *sings while scene is being adjusted. School room, crude. Teacher is JOSHUA'S daughter. MISS TERRELL stands beside a crude desk.*

CHORUS: "Oh Freedom."

MISS TERRELL: Children, before we begin learning the three R's, there are other lessons just as important at the present time. (*Picks up toothbrush.*) Have you ever seen one of these? (*No answer.*) This is a toothbrush. Our teeth are very important, because they are a part of us. They should be kept clean and free from food after each meal. (*Picks up comb and brush.*) We should comb and brush our hair every morning before coming to school. (*Calls to student.*) Mary, what did I say about cleanliness yesterday?

MARY: You, you said we must wash our clothes and our bodies often. You, you said we must wash our faces and hands and take a bath in a tub full of water with soap and rag. (*Other hands go up.*)

MISS TERRELL: That is good. Sammy, tell me something else.

SAMMY (*a small neat fellow, who stands erect as he talks*): Yes, ma'am. You said people respect us if we respect ourselves. There is no difference in human beings

except the color of their skins. God made only two people, Adam and Eve, and everybody came from them. There is only one race and that is the human race.

MISS TERRELL: Very good, Sammy, very good, children. (*Picks up speller as she talks.*) Yes, very good. You must do all of the things you learn in this school. Please don't forget to tell your parents that we are having school tonight for all of them. (*Turns to spelling lesson.*) We are going to have a spelling match. All girls stand on one side of the room and the boys on the other. (*Students get in line and MISS TERRELL conducts an old-time spelling match. All are spelled down except SAMMY. He walks proudly to his seat as he is being watched by two abolitionists, who appear about the middle of the contest. They are MISS TERRELL'S sister and a white lady. MISS TERRELL speaks a few words to them in a low tone and turns to the class.*) Students, these ladies are from Philadelphia. They have played a very important part in the fight for freedom. The boxes of clothes and other articles we give you are sent down from organizations through these people. They are interested in each of you. This lady (*steps toward her and places her arm around her waist*) is my own dear sister, Clara, the daughter of Colonel Joshua Terrell, and this lady (*takes her by her gloved hand*) is Miss Godfrey, a special worker of Boston. (*Faces the visitors.*) Will either of you have something to say?

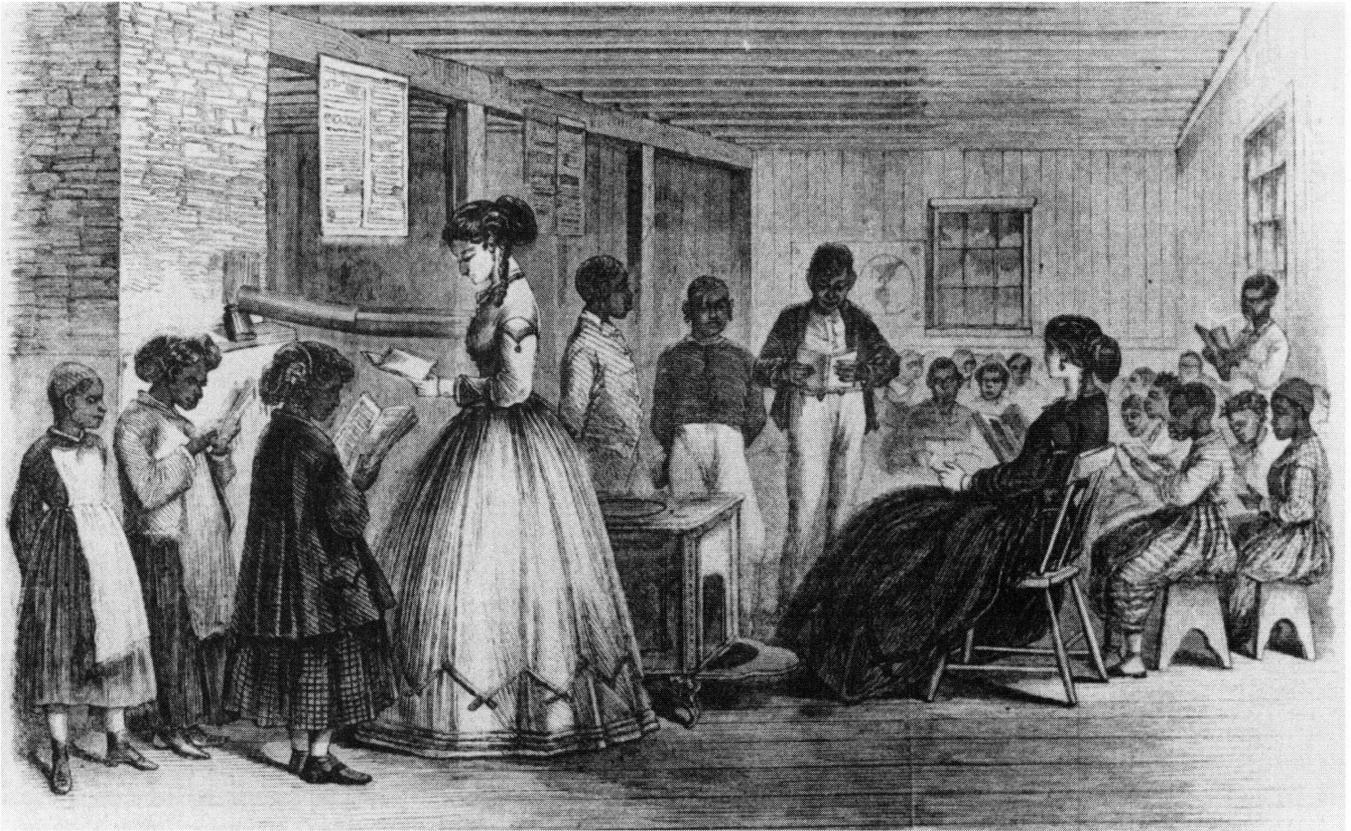
MISS GODFREY: Children, I have been greatly touched by your success and interest in your classes. Within a few years, you have made a great improvement, and it is because you really want to learn. You must continue to be smart and learn all you can, for you will have need of it. (*Pauses.*) I would like to take a message back to the Board when I return to Boston. What shall I tell those people when I return?

SAMMY (*fearless and bold, hands at side with head erect*): Just tell them we are rising.

(*The entire class joins the abolitionists in applauding. MISS TERRELL and visitors exit left. Students talk in low tones among themselves. As MISS TERRELL returns, they are silent.*)

### Scene 2

MISS TERRELL (*sits at desk as adult students come in, each bringing grits, eggs, etc. She thanks each one of them*): I am very proud of you all for your contribution. My father, Colonel Joshua Terrell, told you that you would soon see a boarding school on this spot for your children, and if you wanted one, you could make it known by giving money or what have you.



"The Misses Cooke's Schoolroom, Freedman's Bureau, Richmond, Virginia," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1866.

We are going to sell these farm products (*points at packages*) for money. This money will be used to buy the things we do not have. Most of the men in the community are going to help make the bricks and we women can bring the water from the spring, cook for the men and do whatever our hands find to do.

MR. SLEDGE (*addressing MISS TERRELL by a wave of the hand in the air*): Miss Terrell, what we want to know, who is going to show us how to make these bricks? You've been teaching us a lot of things, but you never told me how to make bricks.

MISS TERRELL: You are perfectly right, Mr. Sledge. The only reason I have not taught you is because I don't know how myself. My brother, Harold, who will graduate next month from Hampton Institute in Virginia, will be your teacher. He knows how to make bricks and build buildings. He is to leave for England during the spring of next year, but he wants you to have completed at least one building before he leaves. (*The men show their approval by nodding their heads and muttering.*) It is our sincere desire that every girl and boy, man and woman, have a chance to learn to read and write and cook meals for your families and get the best living from the soil, if you are to stay on the farm. Before we get too far away

from our lesson, let's take our Bibles and turn to the 37th chapter of Psalms and the first verse. The scripture reads thus: "Fret not thyself because of evil doers, etc." (*Explains the verses, closes the Bible, picks up a magazine.*)

Here is an article that my father wrote. This article was written for the *Boston Daily News*. Let me read it to you. "You understand that all races at one time or another have been slaves. Many people have enslaved their own race. This country's first ship of settlers had white men of Europe who were placed in slave chains, thrown in dungeons, with only bread and water and whipped unmercifully for the least crimes. They were given their choice to die in chains in Europe or come to America and die of hunger and exposure. Your being slaves was different. You did no crime in Africa, you violated no law, your parents were not brought over because they were sick or diseased and a good riddance for Africa. The most select of the African tribes were brought to America. You did not know anything about immorality, stealing, lying, cheating or hating your neighbor. If such traits are picked up by the black man, you may rest assured it is because of their association with people of such background.

"Count the achievements of the colored race.



"The Colored National Convention Held at Nashville."

Think of some of the lessons we have read and the wonderful places we have filled in the Bible, which are definitely true. Do you remember reading that Ham, Shem, and Japheth were brothers? Ham is the source of the Negro. A great city and one of culture was built by his tribe. Solomon said, 'I am black but comely.' He could be no other than a Negro, yet he was the wisest man God had ever made.

"Christ has no particular race. He was a descendant of peoples of all races, and all nations could claim him as their Saviour. The one Negro feature that was so outstanding about him is given in the scripture of the old Bible that reads, 'His hair was as Lamb's wool.' Cleopatra, the most beautiful woman in the world, was colored." (*Folds magazine.*)

So you can see, my dear people, that we have a lot to be proud of as Negroes. You should lift up your heads and put the past behind you. The future is bright and, as you make your contributions toward success, by living and leading a decent life, you should think of the generations to follow you. Grasp every opportunity possible, stick together, no matter what happens. Give your children a chance to improve in all good things. They will certainly accomplish great things. (*Pauses as she arranges articles on desk.*) Before dismissal, let us repeat the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States

of America.

ALL (*standing at attention and repeating together*): I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States, etc. (*When finished, and while still standing, all join in singing.*)

CHORUS: "I'm A-Rolling."

### Scene 3

*Congress is in session. Congressmen from all over the country are talking in small groups. JUDGE calls the session to order.*

JUDGE HALE (*raps on desk*): Gentlemen, let us come to order. (*Men file to their seats quietly. A silence falls over the group.*)

JOSHUA (*standing*): Your Honor, fellow citizens and colleagues: The question before us is a very important one. It involves every person in the United States of America. Not only those who are living, but those who are coming after us. The war is over and the South has joined the Union. It is impossible to save and keep a part of it ignorant. If you should keep Negroes down and not allow them to read and write, the entire South will remain ignorant, for no people can rise by holding another down. (*Moving and clearing of throats are heard among the others.*) The people of the South, both white and black, are confused, maladjusted, skeptical and fearful. (*Clears throat.*)

The Negro, though a slave, not owning the clothes on his back, gladly went to the call of the colors for humanity's sake. Some died for freedom, others were sick, diseased, and wounded, still others came back from the war with more determination than ever to fight for fairness and justice—that which they have been deprived of. (*Again listeners move uncomfortably in their seats.*) He is hungry for training and education, in order that he may make a living for himself and his family. (*Takes a step forward as he speaks.*) Yes, the Negro rallied to the call. They fought, bled, and died on this (*points around him*), the American soil. He did not ask to leave his native home, but when he got here, he expected to receive at least human kindness. That he has never received—not even from his owners.

As a Congressman for the people of the State of Kentucky, gentlemen, I here and now recommend the abolishing of the "Fugitive Slave Bill." (*Pauses, drops his head, and suddenly raises it as a brave soldier would do.*) Fellow citizens, if the bill continues to be a part of the law of our state, it will surely abolish Christianity. When Christianity is done away with, and we forget the "Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man," we will destroy the very human decency of mankind. Slavery is the most damnable weapon to any country; this weapon is dangerous to our country, yet, to our enemies it is a sweet revenge. To see us fighting among ourselves and keeping ourselves down by keeping the less fortunate down, makes our surrounding countries know the secret of our weakness. A house or a country divided against itself cannot stand. We have grown rich and powerful, but we have not outgrown prejudice and injustice, which rot the very foundation of our civilization. We owe it to ourselves and the country for which we Americans have fought, bled and died, to rid the entire Union of any such law, that will give special privileges to any race, to ride to glory on the backs of those Americans who have not had the opportunity to develop their ability and make their mental contribution to this great country.

When the Slave Bill is completely wiped off our constitutional record and man is considered a man, regardless of creed or color; when the Negro is given his rights in the courts, having the right to vote throughout the nation; then, and not until then, will America be looked upon as the leading nation of the world. (*Men hang their heads down with a saddened look.*) Fellow Congressmen, gentlemen, for the sake of our country, I move that the Slave Bill be entirely stricken from our Constitution.

(*Several applaud, groups begin to put their heads together again as curtain falls.*)

## Scene 4

*Same setting as Prologue.*

JOSHUA (*is in same position as in Prologue. ELEANOR, dazed by the revealing of his story, forgets to answer the door as it rings a second time*): Answer the door, child.

ELEANOR (*admits JOSHUA'S daughter, MAE DONALDSON, and her husband, DR. DONALDSON, a professor of science*): Dear Aunt Mae (*embraces her*) I would have known you anywhere. How are you, Uncle? (*They embrace each other and walk toward JOSHUA'S lounge.*)

MAE (*kneels beside her father*): My own dear father. It is so good seeing you again. (*Hugs him and places her hand on his head.*)

DR. DONALDSON (*places his coat and bag on chair; walks toward JOSHUA; ELEANOR in background*): So the old soldier decided to take it easy! How are you, Father? (*Holds his hand.*)

JOSHUA (*voice slightly weak but distinct*): Son, I am so glad to see you. I thought you children would never get here. I'm getting much better.

ELEANOR (*doorbell rings again and she goes to the door*): And here are Uncle Harold and, and (*hesitates*) you are one on me. I'm not sure of your name. (*Embraces each as they all go toward JOSHUA.*)

HENRY: I'm just ole' plain Henry, still attending Yale and dabbling in politics. (*Takes hold of ELEANOR'S hand as he moves toward JOSHUA.*)

ELEANOR: Gee, I'm glad you are here. I have never had the opportunity to meet so many of my relatives before. Granddaddy, this is one great-grandson you don't know. This is Henry, still at Yale studying law.

JOSHUA: Son (*holds out hand*), I should have lived in your day. As a young man I would have tried to prepare to be the President of the United States. You must do more than I have done.

HENRY (*in an eloquent voice*): I shall try very hard to follow you, Grandfather. I am anxious to complete my course. I have a position waiting for me in the Pentagon as soon as I receive my degree in law. This is to be my first stepping stone to a most successful career.

JOSHUA (*holding Henry's hand*): I know I can depend on you. There is always room at the top. Don't aim for anything lower.

(*JOSHUA'S daughter, BELLE, enters from the right side of the stage carrying a package. She is elderly, slightly stooped, but well-dressed. She drops package as she rushes to greet her sister and others.*)

BELLE: Mae, Henry, Doc. (*Tries to hug all at once.*) If I had only known that you were coming today, I wouldn't have gone to the committee meeting. This is really a treat for me as well as Papa. He wanted to see all of you and he made us promise to call or write you to come to Fostoria, Kentucky once more. (*Takes off hat and coat as she talks. Goes to HENRY and places her hand on his shoulders.*) Henry, my boy, you are certainly like my father. Isn't he like you, Papa? We are all proud of you. Keep the good work up, my boy.

(*Doorbell rings. ELEANOR answers and JOSHUA'S baby son ANTHONY, HAROLD, and daughter SUE enter as ELEANOR opens the door.*)

ELEANOR: And here is the last part of Joshua's tribe. (*Greets them all with hugs and kisses and handshakes. They move toward JOSHUA'S bed.*)

ANTHONY (*stoops to greet his father*): It's wonderful to see you, Papa. Old man, you are looking great! How have you been?

JOSHUA: Son, I have been living for this day, when I would see my children and their children once more. I feel like I am ready to begin living again. (*Rises to sitting position as MAE places pillows behind his back; he begins to talk more strongly.*) Why, I feel as I have never felt. Within a few days, I will be ready to walk around this plantation once more. Yes, this very plantation was owned by my master and I vowed that I would one day own it. The hut that I was born in was directly under this room. (*Smiles and meditates.*) Yes, yes, yes. (*Shakes head.*) I wanted to buy this plantation and I bought it. One can do anything he wants to do, if he wants to do it hard enough. I suppose I must not do all of the talking. Let me hear from you children. Tell me, Mae, what are you and your children doing?

MAE: Well, Papa, it isn't much to tell. As you know, I have retired from teaching after fifty years of it. I thought I would let the young ones carry on.

DR. DONALDSON: It was time for her to retire. We didn't necessarily need her income, as my research work pays a handsome amount.

HAROLD: Well, Papa, I'm still an engineer. The biggest job I have had is the bridge across the Pelt River. I wish you could see it. Everyone seeing it thinks it's the world's best.

HENRY: Well, I'm plugging away in school, hoping to do a good job in the field of law and make all of you proud of me. (*Gestures with his hand.*)

BELLE: Let us hear from the rest of you. Of course, I think I have made the best contribution of all. I have

kept the grandest man in the world happy and contented and that is our own dear father. (*Stoops and kisses his cheeks.*)

ANTHONY: As your youngest son, Father, I have tried to give food to the many hungry souls. My church, the Metropolitan, boasts of 3,000 active members. We have a large daily nursery, where we have registered nurses to keep the members' children while they work; a factory in the basement makes robes and capes for choirs; and an employment office gives work to all members who are well and unemployed. We try to do other than our duty to readjust the lives of our people.

JOSHUA (*hands under jaw as elbow rests on bed*): Wonderful, my child. Wonderful.

SUE: Well, Granddad, I suppose the greatest contribution I have made is to give to the world four lovely and progressive children. Flo, my oldest daughter, sings with the Metropolitan Opera. Dick and Jimmy are serving their country in the Army and Air Force. And Bill is the recorder of deeds in Philadelphia. They were unable to come and see you, but they all wish you will hurry and get well.

ELEANOR (*doorbell rings again. She goes to the door and receives a package, returns, opens it, and reads aloud*): "Dear Grandfather," oh, this is for you, Granddad. "Dear Grandfather: It is unfortunate that I can't be with you at this time. I have made and dedicated this record to you. Please play it as soon as you receive it. Love, Rose." I shall put it on the combination at once. (*Moves toward it. Record, "It Is No Secret What God Can Do," is played. All stand in silence. JOSHUA opens mouth as if to sing and tries to keep time with the music. CHORUS hums.*)

JOSHUA (*taking a definite turn for the worse*): That song is wonderful! (*Begins to cough.*) Will someone pray? I think it is very much in keeping with the song. (*SUE sings "The Lord's Prayer." The cast begins to move about the stage as the song dies away.*)

(*Doorbell rings, doctor enters. ANTHONY steps nearer to bed. JOSHUA moves about as if in pain. Doctor goes immediately to bed, takes out instruments.*)

ANTHONY: He's a sick man, Doctor. Isn't there something you can do to relieve the misery?

DOCTOR: He's sinking fast. (*Pauses.*) He was such a great character. (*Stands erect and shakes head.*)

CHORUS (*in background*): "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

(*JOSHUA falls back on bed and dies, as second verse is sung.*)

(*Curtain falls.*)