

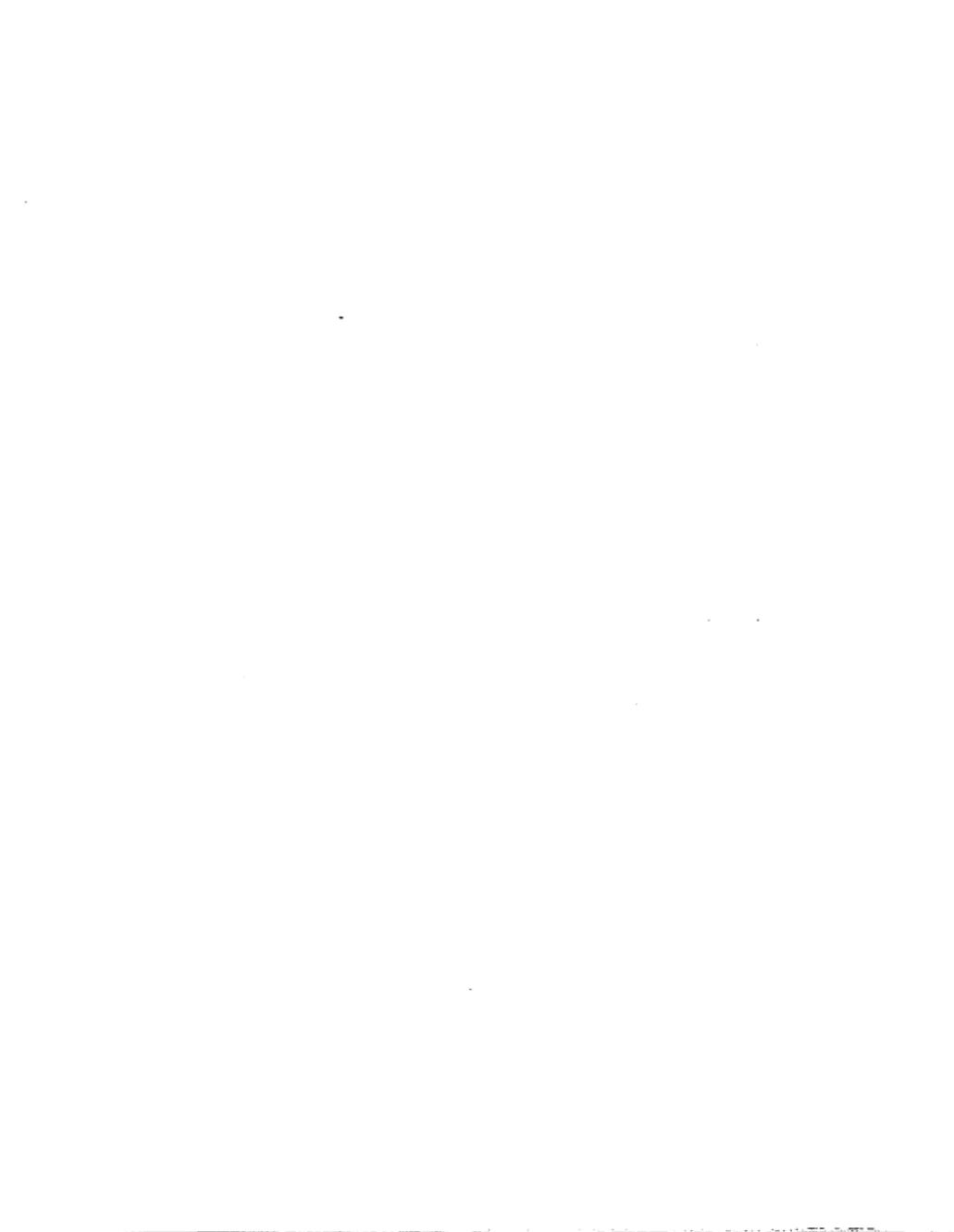
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Free Southern Theater: There is always a message

Tripp, Ellen Louise, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1986

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FREE SOUTHERN THEATER:
THERE IS ALWAYS A MESSAGE

by

Ellen L. Tripp

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy

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Approved by



Robert O. Stephens
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APPROVAL PAGE

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The Free Southern Theater (FST) was one of the first Black people's theatres of the 1960s. It was founded by John O'Neal and Gilbert Moses in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1963 but soon moved to New Orleans where it headquartered for the better part of two decades. Its avowed purpose was to carry theatre with a message to its audiences. First it was a Civil Rights message, then a Black Liberation message, and finally a Marxist-oriented political message.

During its existence FST produced works from the standard repertory plus a number of original plays. The major purpose in this paper was an examination of these scripts to determine if they have continuing interest or if they were simply products of their time and place with no lasting artistic appeal.

Many of these plays exist in typescript in the FST archives at Amistad Research Center in New Orleans. A few have been published and a few others are in the personal files of John O'Neal. These scripts were the basis of the research. Also examined were archival materials relating to the history and philosophy of the theater. Key people in the group's founding and development were interviewed: O'Neal, Tom Dent, Richard Schechner, and Kalamu ya Salaam. In addition published material relevant to the Theater and the general movement was consulted.

Chapter I reviews briefly the histories of Black and people's theatres in the United States in order to place the FST in context. Chapter II traces the Theater's own history and Chapter III looks at applicable esthetic theories. The next three chapters discuss the plays and the final chapter, essentially a summary, concludes that Free Southern Theater did leave a legacy of worth. Some of the plays are still being performed; others are still timely. More than that, the inspiration the Theater provided to similar groups that are functioning today was considerable. Appendices include several original scripts and poetry performed by the group.

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Of course this entire project would not have been possible without the help of John O'Neal, a founder of the Free Southern Theater, the primary source for my research, and now a valued friend. Tom Dent and Kalamu ya Salaam also generously cooperated and supplied information and scripts that I otherwise could not have located.

One final group of helpers also earn my thanks: my colleagues at Forsyth Technical College in the computer department--Dr. B. J. Sineath, Bob Clary and Stan Grady--who made available to me their knowledge and their equipment.

To my committee, to my FST friends and to my FTC cohorts: thank you!

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"The building shall bear the following inscription on its facade: PEOPLE'S THEATRE."

--The Committee of Public Safety, 1794

CHAPTER I

LOOKING BACK: CYCLES OF COMMITMENT

People's theatre...protest theatre...poor theatre...
workers' theatre...propagandist theatre...political
theatre...revolutionary theatre: the names are numerous. ¹

The theories vary, in title at least, with the theorist: Robert Brustein speaks of the theatre of commitment and the theatre of (Romantic) revolt; C. W. E. Bigsby talks about the theatre of commitment and the theatre of confrontation (of reality), differentiating finely between them; Romain Rolland (quoting the above) recalls early mentions of people's theatre in Revolutionary France and draws up a codicil for a modern version.

Despite the different designations, the essence of each can be summarized as "theatre with a purpose"--a purpose beyond entertainment, beyond art for art's sake, beyond fame and fortune--or, in Richard Schechner's words: "A theatre engaged. Engaged for and against. Committed to a network of struggles: political, social, aesthetic, environmental" (19).

Whatever its name, politically oriented theatre has been with us in the Western world at least as long as the theatre of Aristophanes in the fifth century B.C. And chances are that there were antecedents to this Old Comedy of Greece--as there certainly had to be forerunners more developed than Dionysian rites to the sophisticated drama of the Greek tragedians that seems to have sprung up full grown half a century earlier.²

But, intriguing as it may be, the history of drama--even the general history of protest drama--is not the issue. The subject is the Free Southern Theater (FST), its role in the people's theatre movement of the 1960s, and the quality of its plays.

FST was born in the '60s, a decade that saw a boom in the birthrate of political theatres, both experimental (in form) and/or propagandist (in content). We generally accept that art reflects in some way, directly or indirectly, the society which propagates it, and so it was in the '60s: the theatrical revolt was a reflection of our society's impulse toward reform. Sired by the Civil Rights Movement, the progeny included the pacifist protests, the feminist furor, the awakening awareness of Native and Asian-Americans and Chicanos; for many the mother was Marxism with the emphasis now on Mao rather than on Marx himself. As many (relatively speaking) young adults (joined by a few conscientious over-30s) turned from complacency to commitment, they took to the

streets and the rural roads to call for Black rights and women's rights, for workers' rights and gay rights, for cessation of war in Vietnam--for a repledged allegiance to the unrealized ideals of America. And they took theatre with them.

Theatre broke its remaining bonds to Broadway, and off-Broadway, to present its messages on street corners, in parks and fields, in churches, union halls and warehouses-- wherever it could find a place and people. To many--participants and observers--the '60s, following the post-war retrenchment and McCarthyism of the '50s, seemed to introduce a new awareness to America and a new importance for the theatre. The time boundaries are of course arbitrary: the Living Theatre began its work in 1951 and its production of Jack Gelber's The Connection (considered by many critics a landmark in the new American drama) came in 1959. That was also the year Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun conquered Broadway and the San Francisco Mime Troupe was born. The FST, gestated in 1963, struggled through into the '80s. It wasn't until 1972 that Hanay Geiogamah organized NATE (Native American Theater Ensemble--originally called the American Indian Theater Ensemble), and it was the '70s that nurtured grassroots theatre. Schechner in fact assigns this wave of experimentation and protest to the period "from the '50s to around 1975" and hopes that the grassroots and disarmament movements herald a new wave (18).

Even though the theatre of the '60s really began in the '50s and even though it survives, somewhat shakily, in the mid-'80s, it was the decade of the '60s that promised, as Bigsby says, "a genuine renaissance in American drama" and "a corresponding renewal of social commitment" (Confrontation . . . xv, xx). If, looking back from the mid-'70s, critic Richard Kostelanetz saw "little difference between the sixties and the seventies," fellow critic Stanley Kauffman recognized in the latter decade a diminution in "politically revolutionary content of experimental work" and Michael Feingold credited the earlier decade with radically altering "the nature of our theatre institutions" and spurring "the growth of a national resident theatre movement" ("American Experimental Theatre . . ." 14+).³ For now the consensus is that the '60s was the important theatrical decade of our time, producing new performing groups, new performance approaches, new audiences, and new messages.

It is impossible to go into detail about--or even to enumerate--all the contemporaries of FST. It should, however, help to put FST into context and to evaluate the group's work if we consider a representative sampling of the more important companies and/or types of theatres of the era.

As mentioned above, a number of avant-garde theatres experimented with forms in attempts to break down the barriers between performer and spectator, to break through to

the essence of the situation. Starting with the Becks' Living Theatre, which evolved radically from its rather conventional 1951 beginning, theatre people probed their psyches for new channels of expression and, hopefully, communication. Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre, founded in 1961, Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre, born in 1963, Schechner's Performance Group, started in 1967 and named in 1968, and Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theatre, begun in 1968, exemplify the radical ensemble productions of the '60s and '70s. Some drew from Oriental mysticism, others stripped away both words and apparel to put actors and audience in close communion, some played surrealistically with language, others hid behind mammoth masks. Traditional staging, traditional texts, traditional techniques gave way before an outpouring of experimentation.

But here again, as with time boundaries, there is no clear dividing line: The Living Theatre has become and the Bread and Puppet Theatre has always been highly political whereas avowedly propagandist theatres with minimal interest in art have experimented with new or new applications of old theatrical elements. The San Francisco Mime Troupe, for instance, has drawn from commedia dell'arte, minstrelsy and melodrama, the comics, and the Federal Theatre's The Living Newspaper in concocting their distinctive works. Black and Chicano theatres have resurrected and reinterpreted ancient rituals, incorporating them into their passionate protests.

Because FST is the focus here and because Black theatre is primarily protest rather than experimental theatre, only a few of its clear counterparts will be considered: the San Francisco Mime Troupe, El Teatro Campesino, a trio of grass-roots theatres, and some other Black companies. These are people's theatres, theatres in which the message is the reason for performance. And they are also, for the most part, theatres with a direct relationship to FST. John O'Neal, one of the founders of FST noted "a corollary of concern between the Mime Troupe, the Free Southern Theater, the [sic] Teatro Campesino"; not only did they emerge in the same era but they had parallel interests--free speech, farm workers, civil rights. They, and their successors, were all "expressions of the social climate and the social forces at work and . . . the differences between various groups were mainly . . . [differences between] aspects of the various movements" (Personal interview 1983). Doug Paterson, founder in 1977 of one of these groups (Dakota Theatre Caravan), says that "the most distinctive characteristics of people's theatres are: (1) a social and political consciousness that is progressive, i.e. democratic, egalitarian, forward-looking; (2) a focus on a particular audience, or sometimes a particular political struggle; and (3) a desire to align with the audience, not attack, insult, accuse, or condescend to them, or profit off of them" ("Some Theoretical Questions. . ." 6).

San Francisco Mime Troupe

Founded in 1959, the Mime Troupe is one of the rare survivors of the original wave although it has in the past two years changed direction somewhat: it has an indoor theatre, it has accepted federal (NEA) grant money, it is hiring only professional actors, it is moving from being a loosely structured performance unit to a controlled director-in-charge company and from concentration on words (message) to concern for the visual (aesthetic). It is, in sum, finally compromising with the commercial. But, promises Joan Holden, a company member since 1967 and its chief writer and spokesperson since 1978, the group will not compromise its essential Marxist message. Although she says that the old Marxist models are no longer viable and Americans are going to have to make their own revolution, "I still know who the enemy is, who is poisoning and starving Africa, who is getting ready to blow up the world . . . !" (Kleb 49-52)

The group's work was political from its inception. Founder Ronnie Davis was perhaps more interested in form for itself--the form of the commedia, of Chaplin, of the circus--than were his successors but the message has always been there. Davis insists that the Troupe was never a guerrilla theatre, distinguishing between such a theatre and street agitprop theatre this way:

[guerilla troupes] "surprise people in the midst of their daily routines by creating a theatrical situation

where performers and audience are mixed. Often the skit happens so rapidly that the audience doesn't know it has been hit until the piece is over. The people, mildly duped, are supposed to become conscious of their responsibility and guilt. . . .

"[The Mime Troupe] didn't try to insult or assault people; we decided to teach something useful. We began by teaching general city-folk how to stuff parking meters with tab-tops. . . .

"Agitational propaganda is not revolutionary art. It supports rather than examines, explains rather than analyzes" (Sain 64-65).

Whether one draws such a nice distinction between agit-prop (the very term dates to the Russian Revolution) and revolutionary theatre, the company members did discern distinctions among their ideologies and goals, so in 1970 Davis and some members at the opposite end of the spectrum (the more militant Marxists) left and the company became a collective. Since then the Troupe has addressed a number of local, national and international problems in its plays and actos.⁴ Whatever the particular topic, as Peter Solomon points out in his introduction to the San Francisco Mime Troupe's collection of plays, "the plays have a strong central similarity: they are political plays. . . . plays of protest. . . . They usually end hopefully, but only hopefully. . . . And they make us laugh, in the belief that laughter gives us the distance to understand, and understanding brings the desire to work for change" (4-5).

The same could be said about many of the plays produced by FST (and other Black theatres); interestingly, FST writers also developed what they called "sets" which resemble the actos.

The Mime Troupe began, by happenstance rather than plan, as all-white but since 1974 it has been a determinedly interracial, interethnic company. Among the topics it has addressed since the earlier more tentative days are racism and imperialism, the building of an Arts Center in San Francisco, women's roles, the Moral Majority, Reagan, Central America, and--permeating most of their works--the perniciousness of the capitalist system with its industrial-⁵ military hegemony.

Because the Mime Troupe has determinedly taken its performances to the people, playing every summer since 1962 in San Francisco's parks, it has succeeded in reaching non-traditional audiences, a major aim of people's theatres. Still, as Theodore Shank notes, its subjects in earlier years came "more from the intellectual Left than from the working class" since the troupe members and their core audiences were educated middle-class intellectuals (65). This is a problem faced by most of the people's theatres (including FST): the founders and workers are college-trained and usually have philosophical interests that go far beyond the daily bread-and-rent problems of their intended audiences. In 1971 the Mime Troupe began concentrating on working class issues but some of their more recent works seem to be moving back up the intellectual scale: the Factperson and Factwino trilogy, particularly the two Factwino plays which feature a very intellectual superhero and which

have now been transformed into an opera, are likely to appeal more to players of Trivial Pursuit than to the semi-literate laborer or secondlanguage English speaker. The basic message in these plays is that we all need knowledge in order to combat the hydra-headed militarist-industrialist powerholder, but mixed in are sub-warnings about friendship, the evils of booze, breaking trust and so forth. The comic book trappings and suspenseful action undoubtedly give Factwino popular appeal but the approach is essentially intellectual and in operatic form is probably even higher above some spectators' heads.

The Mime Troupe's NEA grant takes it to 1990 by which time it will likely have evolved into an entirely different theatre from the ones of 1959 and 1970--and even 1985. It is likely to find itself moving farther from the people, as did FST after its first years. Because the Troupe's aims and problems parallel in several significant ways those of FST, and because it has survived, it serves as one standard of comparison.

El Teatro Campesino

The Farmworkers Theatre was founded by Luis Valdez in 1965, the year after his graduation with a drama degree from San Jose College and the same year he worked for a time with the Mime Troupe. Valdez organized his theatre with the express purpose of aiding Cesar Chavez's strike against the grape growers. From a flatbed truck or a union hall plat-

form the performers would dramatize a problem involving the workers--confrontations with scabs, conflict between themselves and the grower/boss, living conditions. This was agitprop theatre in the mode of the Mime Troupe, using satire and exaggeration to make the point and to inspire the audience to overt social action.

If El Teatro Campesino had, however, done no more than act as a mouthpiece for and reinforcer of the National Farm Workers Association, it would not have survived. The group did move on, as did most of the Black theatres, to examine group values, to explore in depth the Chicano situation--not simply to agitate for change in the repressive American system. In their examination of group values, theatre members (under the guidance of writer Valdez) attempted, as did Black dramatists, to reinforce the Chicano sense of identity, of pride in heritage. Whereas the Mime Troupe, despite its avowed intention of addressing the working person, plays to ethnically and racially diverse viewers, El Teatro (and its Black counterparts) did--at least in the beginning--aim at a much more cohesive audience.

After two years' devotion to the farmworkers' movement, Valdez moved on to the exploration of identity mentioned above and in so doing created the mitos--the myths--drawing heavily from Mayan philosophy and practices (as many of the Black dramatists of the period turned to Africa for inspiration). During this time of search and experimentation the

company did not abandon the actos: as late as 1970 they did Vietnam Campesino which addressed the problem of pesticides in the fields, the draft, the grape boycott, and the parallel between the Vietnamese peasants and the Chicano laborers.

Teatro members in 1971 moved to San Juan Bautista where they lived communally and farmed the way their ancient ancestors did (or as they perceived the Mayans did). And their goal changed:

No longer was the aim of their theatre work to rally the Chicano community against those who were seen as oppressors but to harmonize the individual with mankind and with the cosmos (Shank 79).

The most elaborate of the mitos was created for the 1974 Chicano and Latin American Theatre Festival in Mexico:

El Baile de los Gigantes was presented at noon on 24 June at the pyramids of Teotihuacan It seemed to us [the audience members] that the performance succeeded in harmonizing the spectators with each other, with mankind, and with the cosmos (Shank 82).

Many members of the audience joined the performers in the final ritual (82). This turned out to be not only the most elaborate but the final mito although later works have continued to incorporate Mayan influences.

By now Valdez was out of the Chicano-Latino mainstream which was becoming more Marxist as he was becoming more mystic. As has typically been the case with the Black movement, the Chicano-Latino movement had fragmented and Valdez seemed to be on a path by himself. But, Dieter Herms argues, those who have criticized the Teatro for its apparent abandonment of politics and social action simply do not

recognize that "in the long run, Valdez' new cultural nationalism is probably more radical and revolutionary than [was] . . . his campesino agitprop art" (261). Valdez himself has said that the Teatro's new role is to present to intercultural audiences the history of his people and their part in the history of California and the United States (Shank 89; Herms 277).

To do this, Valdez has turned to history (again, as have many Black dramatists), incorporating into his historias elements of the mitos and of the corridos (folk ballads which he has translated into narratives within the plays). Perhaps the most widely publicized of the historias is Zoot Suit (written incidentally with a Rockefeller Foundation grant). The play, after a successful run at the Mark Taper Theatre in Los Angeles, moved to Broadway where it lasted less than two months. Zoot Suit dramatizes a 1942 murder case in which 17 Chicano youths were wrongfully convicted of murder.

The Broadway experience was part of Valdez' plan: he has deliberately moved into the realm of professional theatre, seeing commercial success as necessary for survival and as inspiring for his workers and viewers. Perhaps, however, his most significant legacy (at least to date) is the approximately 80 Chicano-Latino theatres which have followed El Teatro Campesino (Shank 90).

The Grassroots Theatres

The Dakota Theatre Caravan, Roadside Theatre and Eco-theatre are typical of the grassroots theatres which have been at the fore of the people's theatre scene in the last decade. Roadside was one of the theatres that agreed to perform for the Free Southern Theatre Project (FST's "grand funeral") in November 1985. In his introduction to The Drama Review (TDR) issue devoted to "Grassroots Theatre" (Summer 1983), journal editor Michael Kirby defines the basic characteristic of grassroots theatre as the fact that "it is rural, non-urban" as distinct from the "international cosmopolitan theatre" of the cities.

[It] derives its content, its subject matter, its message, its "nourishment" . . . from its own area. It is "about" things that are of special--and perhaps unique concern to the people of its region (2).

Kirby also points out the diversity among the groups, some working in the experimental modes of the '60s, some broaching commercial theatre, some supported by government and foundation grants (as have been, at one time or another, most of the people's theatres that have achieved any continuity and/or conspicuousness).

Doug Paterson founded the South Dakota Caravan in 1977

[as] a professional rural theatre that creates plays about life in the great plains based on interviews with and our living with rural people, and then tours almost exclusively to small towns, average population 2500 ("Some Theoretical Questions . . ." 5).

In this respect, the Caravan (as do others of its ilk) parallels FST which was formed to take theatre into small

rural Black communities of the deep South. Also like FST, the Dakota group sought grant money from its earliest days and started with its headquarters in a regional college. But the Caravan started its first tour fully funded, albeit not at a professional level. Parallels with the fledgling FST continue: performances were given in any available space--often outdoors--and publicity was generated on the spot by the troupe itself with leafleting, posters, pre-performance shows, etc. And after the shows audience members were urged to share responses and material (for incorporation into later shows).

The Caravan's first tour of 20 towns was so successful that it became Equity the next year which saw an eight-week season (two of rehearsals, six of tour) again sponsored by the South Dakota Arts Council. In the spring of 1979 additional support from the Council came through and four of the six Caravan members quit their full-time jobs to make the theatre a full-time project. (One replacement for the two who did not come along was hired, reducing the performance company to five members plus a manager. Along with the new status came the final name change to Dakota Theatre Caravan.) The group's commitments also expanded: this first full-time season, for example, they spent a month in one town, working in the schools and the adult community and helping the town develop an historical play for its centennial; they toured to Oregon and appeared in Minneapolis,

Los Angeles and San Francisco; they worked for two weeks on an Indian reservation.

And they ran into another problem ubiquitous with this type of theatre (certainly with FST): lack of management skill and time. As Paterson reports in the TDR article, by the time they realized what straits they were in, survival had become problematic. The group did its fall 1980 tour and then reverted to a summer-only existence (10).

Both Roadside Theatre and Ecotheatre are based in Appalachia, the first in Kentucky and the other in West Virginia. Founded in 1974 by Don Baker, who came back to his native Kentucky from an arts counselor job in Washington, Roadside was an outgrowth of the Appalachian Actors' Workshop. But whereas the Workshop did traditional plays, Roadside began immediately to draw its material from the "collective memories of the community" (Hatfield 45). Its first show was a potpourri of stories titled appropriately Mountain Tales; the company has continued to put together such collections for presentation in area schools.

The second show was a full-length script based on the saga of "Doc" Taylor, known as "Red Fox," a complex man who was both doctor and preacher, U.S. marshal and convicted murderer. Red Fox/Second Hangin' is still being presented: in the fall of 1984 it was scheduled at the company's home theatre in Whitesburg and as part of their Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia, and Pennsylvania tours. The same is true for

Brother Jack, Roadside's third major production, and South of the Mountain, its fourth. Brother Jack has material written by actor Ron Short but also draws heavily on tales adapted from local material collected by the WPA Writers' Project. South of the Mountain premiered at the 1982 ROOTS Festival in Atlanta; a musical, it is based on author Short's family history. It too is still in the repertoire; it is the show that was performed at the FST funeral.

The company now has its own theatre in the new Appalshop Center in Whitesburg.⁷ But it remains essentially a touring company and, although today it tours far outside its native habitat (as did FST), its purpose remains "to encourage people to work from their own resources" (Hatfield 45).

Ecotheatre is an interracial company that in a way provides a link between grassroots and Black theatre: Maryat Lee, its founder, came to West Virginia to organize her mountain theatre in 1975--10 years after she had founded the Soul and Latin Theatre (SALT) in East Harlem. SALT presented urban street theatre from a haywagon; Ecotheatre presents rural theatre from a farm wagon. Lee's experience with people's theatre, however, goes back even further than SALT to 1951 when, on a wooden platform erected in a vacant Harlem lot, she staged Dope! for street people of the area. (Performed by street people, it anticipated Gelber's The Connection by some eight years.)

Ecotheatre also goes to its people for script material. But, unlike the other two grassroots companies discussed, Ecotheatre has not gone to the foundations or big government agencies for grants; its actors are unpaid and, thus, part-time; it is truly a theatre for those who do not know or typically go to theatre. The actors are from the area; the scripts are worked out by Lee in rehearsal, with the performers adapting the roles to their tastes and abilities. More agitprop oriented than the Caravan or Roadside, Ecotheatre uses the post-play discussion to call its audience "to social action and to individual change" (French 33).

Black Theatres

The United States has had Black theatre companies since the first quarter of the nineteenth century; from the 1920s on they have been profuse and influential although many have lived very briefly. Starting in about 1967 (Errol Hill marks this as the significant year [1: 213; 2: 156]) and continuing to the present, Black community theatre groups have resurfaced across the country; there has been a surge also in the number of professional and semiprofessional groups. In the early '70s Woodie King estimated that there were some 70 Black theatres in the U.S., not counting college groups (35); in 1977 Winona Fletcher counted over 180 active Black theatres (141).⁸

Most commentators credit LeRoi Jones (today known as Amiri Baraka, the name used henceforth) with instigating the

Black theatre movement of the '60s; others, more accurately, draw finer lines of distinction, crediting Jones as the dominant voice of the Black revolutionary drama that took center stage in the mid-'60s while recognizing the concurrent work of other groups and/or such immediate antecedents as Raisin in the Sun and The Blacks, both produced in 1959. (Genet's The Blacks, albeit written by a white Frenchman, is generally seen as an important event heralding the new Black theatre of the '60s.) Ted Shank acknowledges FST as "the first of the black theatres of the 1960s" (51) and Bigsby gives the correct date (1963) for the theatre's founding but fails to credit it as the first major group of the decade (3: 393).⁹ Suffice it to say, without worrying dates to death, that among the people's theatres of the '60s Black groups were prominent.

They thrived from coast to coast and from north to south. Again it is impossible, and unnecessary, to review them thoroughly. I have chosen to look at three of FST's most important contemporaries, all in New York and all well known. The New York location is apt because, although based in the South, FST for years had a New York office, garnered wide support from New York's theatrical community and drew scripts from writers for two of these theatres--the New Lafayette Theatre and the Negro Ensemble Company (NEC). In fact, at one point, FST and the New Lafayette tried "to build a collaborative relationship," trading people so that

members of the FST company could have easier access to the New York theatre scene and members of the New Lafayette could better "understand what the context of the struggle is." A couple of members from each company did make the switch but the plan never came to full fruition because of economic problems at both ends and because of increasing philosophic differences (O'Neal 1983). The third group considered is the National Black Theatre (NBT), a group that impressed O'Neal and other FST members who made a tour to study other Black theatres in the early '70s.

The New Lafayette was formed in 1966 by director Robert Macbeth as a Harlem theatre for a Black audience. The following year Macbeth was joined by Ed Bullins who, in order to get his plays produced, had already organized a Black theatre on the West Coast; the New Lafayette throughout its existence (until 1974) staged plays by a number of writers and at one time (1972) had four playwrights-in-residence (Bullins, Martie Charles, Sonny Jim and Richard Wesley) but Bullins was its most active and best known writer.

In 1967 the theatre began productions with Ron Milner's Who's Got His Own, continuing the season with Athol Fugard's The Blood Knot.¹⁰ In the spring, having been burned out of their Harlem home, the New Lafayette did a quartet of Bullins' plays downtown at the American Place Theatre. They inaugurated their new Harlem theatre in December 1968 with another Bullins play, In the Wine Time.

Macbeth and Bullins were dedicated to showing "Black people who they are, where they are and what condition they are in" (Macbeth). In line with this dedication to the Black community, the New Lafayette was aggressively pro-Black; no whites were ever physically kicked out of the theatre but "they did actively discourage white reviews and with a theatre situated smack dab in the middle of the ghetto they didn't really have to worry about a bombardment of whites"; however by 1972 they were talking to the white media and moderating their exclusive attitude somewhat. By then Bullins was talking about the theatre as "a meeting place" where "many people can recognize many things in it and have a collective experience"; he went on to say that "the initial sloganeering has been done and there's no sense in repeating it" (Gant 55-56).

From the beginning some critics and colleagues (including John O'Neal of FST) have thought that Bullins' work lacks political punch despite the author's involvement with the Black Panthers. As Bigsby says, "Bullins tends to be absolute in his statements but equivocal in his art" (3: 408). Bullins obviously disagrees and Peter Bruck agrees with him (133). Many of the plays, as Bullins himself classifies them, are plays of Black experience but some of his earlier ones approach agitprop: The Gentleman Caller for instance, reminiscent of Ionesco and Genet, carries a clear political message and it is a militant one. Its directors

certainly considered the New Lafayette a revolutionary theatre even if some of its offerings were quite traditional in form and feeling.

Like FST, the group was ambitious in its plans for the Black community: it established workshops for writers and amateur (neighborhood) actors but abandoned them after a couple of years; it set up a theatrical agency to handle scripts for the company's writers; it produced the unfortunately short-lived Black Theatre Magazine (six issues); and it tried film making. But, as have so many others, the New Lafayette finally gave up, finding that life without substantial foundation aid was impossible if community support and self-sufficiency were not forthcoming. In a sense the New Lafayette tried to do for the Harlem community what FST attempted to do for its rural and New Orleans communities. Both eventually succumbed to the exigencies of economics and, perhaps even more directly, to the paroxysms of politics, both internal and external.

The NEC on the other hand, despite some very tentative years and drastic cutbacks in its outreach and production programs, has survived and is today considered the leading Black company in the country. ¹¹ The company, with actor/playwright/director Douglas Turner Ward at its helm, was established at New York's St. Mark's Playhouse in 1967. (Today it is on West 46th Street.) Turner, while calling for a "permanent Negro repertory company," did not design

the NEC as a community theatre; if he had, it would have had "to locate in the midst of that community--Harlem or Bedford-Stuyvesant." Rather, it "was designed for the entire metropolitan area. Therefore we wanted a central location that would be easy to reach from all the outlying Black communities" (Bigsby 3: 392-3). It is this breadth of view that accounts, according to Ellen Foreman, for NEC's survival (Hill 2: 73).

Interestingly, O'Neal sees a closer political relationship between FST and NEC than he does between FST and other Black companies; this relationship he attributes to the involvement of the FST founders in the Civil Rights Movement of the early '60s and the involvement of Ward in the union movement of the '40s.

But because the theatre was downtown (off-off-Broadway), not in Harlem, because it used the word "negro" in its name, because it courted white as well as Black audiences, because in the beginning it produced plays by white writers--because, in short, it was more theatrically than politically oriented, NEC was received with less than wholehearted admiration by some of its companions and in discussions of Black theatre is frequently ignored.

Yet the company has offered a rich and diverse fare of Black drama over the years and more than any other company has produced, despite its financial problems, full-scale major productions encompassing a remarkable variety of

dramatic modes. Today it appears stronger than ever although, as for any theatre in the United States, existence is always precarious.

One of the most, if not the most, experimental Black companies of any era was Barbara Teer's NBT. Founded in 1968 in Harlem, this group was committed to reeducating the Black community and restoring its cultural traditions. The company's home base was a room three flights up in a building on East 125th Street but it presented its message "on the streets, in bars, in churches, . . . anywhere Black people are" (O'Neal & Oduneye 3).

O'Neal and Oduneye continue their report:

The National Black Theater [sic], as the name suggests, started out to be a theater but . . . they have concluded that there are several things which come before the expressive form--namely that which seeks for expression. When you find that message, when it finds you, you will find the form.

The message the NBT found was the essence of Blackness. They presented not plays but rituals, or revivals, incorporating music and dance as integral elements--except that they called dance "evolutionary/re-evolutionary movement" and they called the parts of their presentations "spaces" and their performers "liberators." "Intermissions were the one concession to traditional theatre practice" but during these the "liberators" mingled and talked with audience members (Haskins 149-50).

Whatever the form, the presentation must:

- "1) Raise the level of consciousness through liberating the spirits and strengthening the minds of its people.
- "2) Be political, i.e., must deal in a positive manner with the conditions of oppression.
- "3) In some ways educate . . . 'to bring out that which is already within.' Give knowledge and truth.
- "4) Clarify issues
- "5) Lastly, . . . entertain" (Harris 39).

Although Teer and her troupe professed to be more interested in the message than the medium and although they were probably more politically focused, NBT was exploring along some of the same lines as the Open Theatre and the Performance Group except that the focus and inspiration were Black. Their work with ritual pioneered to a large degree forms that became popular with other Black theatres. Today (1986) Teer is director of the National Black Institute of Communicative and Theater Arts, the NBT's successor, and talks about the need for Black artists to develop business acumen. "For too long," she says, "Black artists have concentrated on the artistic end and not on the business end" ("Black Theater . . . Comeback" 61).

Did the people's theatres of the '60s--Black, Chicano, labor--leap onto the scene out of nowhere? No, of course not. The theatre of the '60s was simply another particularly potent manifestation of the reform cycle the U.S. was in at the time. However, some of these "young zealots" of the

'60s, as Randolph Edmonds remarked, seemed to have forgotten their predecessors (412). Edmonds was speaking of the makers of the new Black theatre but his remark applies also to the other "new" people's theatres.

Some historians see American history as a series of reform eras interrupted by periods of retrenchment and reaction. (Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. is one of the chief spokespersons for this school.) The altruists of the 1960s could have traced their impulse to reform back to pre-Revolutionary days, to the very colonizing of the country. The Revolution itself, especially the framing of the Constitution, was a manifestation of this impulse; then, after a breathing space for consolidation and expansion, came a melange of ante-bellum reform movements: the Utopian experiments, pacifism, prison reform, women's rights, temperance, and the dominant movement which culminated in the Civil War--abolition. In fact, David Brion Davis, in his introduction to Ante-Bellum Reform, points this out:

The 1960s have hauntingly echoed the ante-bellum ideal of non-resistance, the 'come-outer' spirit of disengagement from a sinful society, and the reliance on individual conscience as opposed to all forms of corporate and bureaucratic power (2).

Although limited to the South, Radical Reconstruction was another attempt at reform--a failed attempt, giving way to a period of virulent reaction. The next major nationwide reform movement, Progressivism, was brought to a premature close by World War I. Then came of course the New Deal of

the '30s, stretching through World War II into the '40s. For a while it seemed to some of us that the United States was finally about to live up to expectations. But, as always before, a cycle of reaction set in: McCarthy ranted, ruining lives in the process, but many Americans turned their backs as they built their dream homes, produced dream kids and financed their dream cars.

John F. Kennedy voiced the reawakened conscience of the United States as once again reform moved to the forefront. But the '70s saw the start of a reaction that deepened as we moved into the '80s. Only now in the mid-'80s does there seem to be a glimmer of the next reform impetus: the anti-nuke movement, never moribund, is bringing together diverse elements and gaining renewed strength; Central America and Africa are refocusing our attentions to life outside our ids; Americans are again awakening to inequities within our own society as, for many, economic prosperity turns into financial fear.

Theatrical developments have paralleled these general historical trends. Of course no one would maintain that these cycles--historical or theatrical--can be neatly delineated by fixed starting and ending dates. In the essentially devil-may-care post-war 1920s, for instance, American theatre came into its own with plays that probed American problems, and Black theatre sank its modern roots. Conversely, the reform-marked '30s were marred by a resurgence

of the Klan, by Father Coughlin and his Jew-baiting, by the didactic Dies committee that anticipated McCarthy in making "Communist" synonymous with "traitor" and that killed the Federal Theatre Project because of its supposed Communist infiltration. It was in the quiet '50s (1954) that the Supreme Court spurred the Civil Rights Movement with its momentous Brown decision and that the protest theatre of the '60s actually began to emerge. And throughout the '70s, with their burlesque politics and resultant egocentric cynicism, some Americans--and some American theatres--remained dedicated to the ideals of the '60s.

Despite this American impulse to reform that is evident from the days of the settlers, we were slow in producing a native people's theatre. Whereas Rolland can trace rudimentary concepts of a People's Theatre to the eighteenth century and whereas as early as 1919 Yeats was claiming to have created the first "'true "people's theatre,"" Eric Bentley credits Hallie Flanagan, impresario of the Federal Theatre, with having created our first people's theatre (1976: 458-70, 331). Certainly in 1925 Montrose Moses was complaining about American theatre:

We have never seriously [in our drama] dealt with history, we have never dealt with politics, we have never honestly faced our business problems The social fervor of our playwrights has been tenuous, intermittent. Not any of it has changed to the slightest degree a wrong condition . . . (13).

Moses may have been a little hard on our native dramatists: it is usually difficult to pin down exact effects of

protest drama on ensuing reforms and it seems sure that some anti-slavery plays contributed to the abolitionist movement. But to a large degree Bentley and Moses are right: in its early centuries the United States was too concerned with colonization and survival to produce indigenous drama so, with few exceptions, our drama remained borrowed directly from or frankly imitative of British drama. By the nineteenth century there were a number of theatres in the United States but since that century was not, until its close, dramatically innovative in England, it follows that American theatre was also wanting in masterworks.

Our few native writers did adapt peculiarly American themes to English forms--American society, the Revolutionary experience, the Indians--and very early in our dramatic history succeeded in creating (with the help of their British brethren) American stereotypes--the noble Indian, the ruthless tycoon, the honest Yankee, the comic Negro. Still, throughout the nineteenth century, theatre devotees such as part-time playwrights M. M. Noah and William Dean Howells lamented the lack of an American drama (Moody 123-24, 614-15). The only truly native theatre before our century was the minstrel show and its end-of-the-century offspring, the American musical comedy. It is somewhat ironic in light of the rejection until recently of most Blacks and Black works in commercial theatre that this genre had its roots in Africa and was developed into its modern

form by such Black stars as Bob Cole and Billy Johnson (A Trip to Coontown in 1898) and Bert Williams and George Walker (The Sons of Ham in 1900 and In Dahomey in 1903).

There are of course exceptions to the general lack of concern with social and political issues. The earliest, as far as we know, American-written dramatic pieces were dialogues performed by college students. Among these are two pieces by a John Smith which were presented at Dartmouth in 1779 (Moody 7-8). The second is a slight comedic piece titled "A Little Teatable Chitchat" but the first, "A Dialogue between an Englishman and an Indian," may be our first native theatrical offering and it is polemical. In it the Indian (portrayed at Dartmouth by a "'real Aboriginal" student) argues with the Englishman about the true merits and character of Indians with the Indian eloquently carrying the day. The piece is pure propaganda aimed at presenting the Indian in a favorable light and counteracting the view of him as an uneducable savage.

Somewhat of a phenomenon among message plays is The Drunkard, or The Fallen Saved, by W. H. Smith, which opened in Boston in 1844 as an adjunct to the temperance movement. One hundred years later it was still attracting audiences--¹³ albeit not for the same reasons! In its own time the play enjoyed "the first uninterrupted run of one hundred performances in American theatre" when it played New York's Barnum Museum; it had already reached 100 performances in

Boston but they were not consecutive (Moody 277). This was not the first temperance play nor was it the last but it was the most frequently performed. In fact, as ancestors of the committed theatres of the 1960s, we have in the 1840s "theatrical companies devoted exclusively to the temperance drama" Typical was a troupe that crossed the country under the direction of a Dr. and Mrs. Robinson. Starting in New Hampshire in 1843, they reached San Francisco nine years later:

Robinson boasted that of the two hundred thousand persons who had patronized them "more than 10,000 had taken the Abstinence Pledge, out of which number more than 12,000 [sic] were drunkards" (Moody 280).

The most important frankly propagandist plays to be presented in America during the nineteenth century were those to do with abolition. Uncle Tom's Cabin was produced in a variety of adaptations, none by Harriet Beecher Stowe; the major version was George Aiken's. This was however neither the first nor the final of the anti-slavery plays. Other "Tom" shows, also white-written, included The Captured Slave and The Branded Hand, both predating the Aiken play by seven years. Lofton Mitchell claims that no proof exists that these two plays were ever produced (Black Drama 32) but Edward Smith credits them, among others, with having helped trigger the Civil War (40). And Robert Montgomery Bird's 1831 play The Gladiator was an unmistakable analogy to Southern slavery despite its Roman setting. We know of only one Black playwright, William Wells Brown, who contributed

works to the abolitionist movement. An escaped slave and a popular lecturer on the abolitionist circuit, Brown wrote at least two plays: Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom and Experience; or, How to Give a Northern Man a Backbone. Apparently neither was ever staged and only the first script exists today. Brown did give readings of this play which were very well received. (He must have been quite a performer--there are many characters, of both sexes and races, speaking a divergence of dialects and on occasion breaking into lengthy songs!)

So there were a few essays at propagandist theatre during the first century-plus of our nationhood but it was not until the 1920s that theatre in the United States really came into its own. It is then that we meet the grandparents of our theatres of the '60s: experimental theatre and organized polemical theatre--though the family resemblance is rather slight. As with their progeny, at times the two were happily married and at other instances they took separate ways; the latter is our main concern but because it did sometimes cohabit with the former, we must consider both.

Any new approach to theatre is at its inception "experimental" but not always consciously so. Twentieth-century experimental theatre has had the expressed aim of theatrical innovation. From surrealism and expressionism through the absurd and post-modernism, forms and techniques have been designed to break the strictures of realism, to

remove all walls--not just the fourth; in some manifestations the script, if not scrapped completely, has been made incomprehensible.

Europe, particularly France, originated these modern movements: Jarry's pre-absurdist Ubu Roi in 1896 was followed by Dadaism, Surrealism, Existentialism with its political overtones, the very influential Theatre of Cruelty of Artaud and, in a sense, modern Absurdism since Ionesco and Beckett settled there and write in French. From Germany we took Expressionism and the overtly political theatre of Piscador and Brecht. Agitprop was honed in post-revolutionary Russia. American theatre, until the 60s, was much less innovative. What seemed to our audiences daring in the work of Eugene O'Neill and his Provincetown associates was in truth tame and tardy compared to what was happening on the stages of Europe.

But what the Provincetown, the Theatre Guild and the burgeoning little theatres of the teens and '20s did provide¹⁴ was theatre away from Broadway. From this time on, there was to be a steady stream of off-Broadway theatres willing--committed in fact--to take a chance on new playwrights, serious topics, innovative methods.

O'Neill is generally regarded as the first major native playwright. From the stylized symbolism of The Great God Brown to the expressionism of The Hairy Ape to the extended realism of The Iceman Cometh, he covered a range of styles

and subjects, including the dilemma of the American Black (The Emperor Jones and All God's Chillun Got Wings). Along with Paul Green, Ridgely Torrence, Marc Connolly and a very few others, O'Neill wrote plays that starred Black actors and came somewhat closer to presenting the American Black as a complex human than had most white playwrights previously. (How well they succeeded is still being debated.)

O'Neill was undoubtedly the most important playwright of his era (perhaps the most important of any American era to date) but he did not institute this new American theatre: it had gotten a healthy start in the middle-teens. The little theatre movement was inspired by Maurice Brown's establishment of the Chicago Little Theatre in 1912. That same year saw the organization of the New York Stage Company and the Neighborhood Playhouse at the Henry Street Settlement. Not long after, the Liberal Club in Greenwich Village formed its own theatre group and in 1914 this group, which was to evolve into the Washington Square Players and later into the Theatre Guild, gave its first play. And in 1915 George Cook and Susan Gaspell began the Provincetown Players. Of these theatres perhaps the closest to the people's theatres of the '60s and '70s was the Neighborhood Playhouse which was concerned with serving a specific--in this case, immigrant--community (Biggsby 1: 9). The Provincetown, on the other hand, in its objectives and methods anticipated the modern experimental theatres with

their emphases on group work and on destroying the barriers between spectator and performer.

O'Neill himself provided a bridge from these fledgling theatres to the socially committed theatre of the '30s, but despite his early socialist leanings, he was always more concerned with universal humanity than with political actions. A number of writers who were more politically committed worked with the Theatre Guild and/or with the Group Theatre, one of the Guild's offspring. Among the activists involved with the Group were Elmer Rice, William Saroyan, Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, Lillian Hellman and the major voice of 1930s political theatre, Clifford Odets.

Influential as Odets and the Group were, they were still restricted by the exigencies of commercial theatre. Meanwhile openly propagandist people's theatres were struggling off-Broadway. Inspired by European and Russian theatres, John Dos Passos, John Howard Lawson and Michael Gold were among those who attempted to build political theatres. In the late '20s their New Playwrights' Theatre (NPT), also an offshoot of the Guild, and the Workers' Drama League were the United States' first attempts at true people's theatres. In a 1927 New Masses article Dos Passos explained that a revolutionary theatre

"must draw its life and ideas from the conscious section of the industrial and white-collar working classes which are out to get control of the great flabby mass of capitalist society and mould [sic] it to their own purpose" (Bigsby 1: 194).

Facing many of the same problems as their successors of the '60s--lack of administrative organization, gaps between the perceived and the actual audience and between the performers' world and the workers' world--neither of these groups survived long. During its two years of existence, however, NPT did attempt works comparable to what was being done in Europe. One of the problems of course, as Bigsby points out, is that the American political picture was vastly different from the European, a fact that NPT failed to consider carefully but, again to quote Dos Passos--this time from a 1929 New Masses article, "'the fact that it [NPT] existed makes the next attempt in the same direction that much easier'" (Bigsby 1: 198-99).

Other groups did follow, boosted in their predictions of the collapse of capitalism by the stock market crash. In fact the early '30s "saw an explosion of protest theatre in New York" with the emphasis on workers' theatres which dealt with such moral issues as war, racism, statist oppression, the role of the working class and the inequities of the government. It was not long before Broadway absorbed these themes. "For this if for no other reason, the workers' theatre proved a tremendous break-through in the redefinition of what is useful in American playmaking" (Mordden 122).

Not only did these theatres introduce new themes which were to be echoed by the protest theatres of the '60s, but

they relied on new techniques that also were to be adapted to the newer theatre. Modern dance, chanting, improvisation, involvement of the audience--these were used to dramatize the message. And the message was often presented in the form of a sketch (an acto, a "set")--the short piece that is a mainstay of agitprop theatre. Again like their descendants, these workers' theatres tended to rely heavily on single authorship. Finally, these groups priced their shows for their audiences: 30 cents to \$1.50 bought a ticket to radical theatre and brought in a new theatre audience (Mordden 127).

One of the more professional of these workers' theatres was the Workers' Laboratory Theatre founded in 1930 as an agitprop theatre committed to the class struggle; renamed the Theatre of Action in 1934, it attempted to broaden its audience appeal by moving from agitprop outdoor pieces to professional plays of social realism and by including non-Party advisors and workers. Even with these Popular Front efforts it and its branch, the Theatre Collective (which began in 1932) managed to last only until 1936. There were other workers' theatres, some of which in 1932 banded into the New Theatre League (originally called the League of Workers' Theatres). The League struggled on until 1941, the high point of its existence being Odets' Waiting for Lefty, undoubtedly America's best known agitprop play, which it first sponsored in January of 1935.

Some of the most significant of the protest plays were presented by the Theatre Union, founded in 1932 as a broader based workers' theatre than those with Party links. Its second show, Stevedore, attacked racism, preached worker unity and elicited praise from Broadway reviewers as well as radical critics.

But the most influential of the people's theatres of the '30s was ironically that sponsored by the United States government, the Federal Theatre. Hallie Flanagan, the Vassar professor recruited by Harry Hopkins to head the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), took as her model European polemical theatre and set out to build a people's theatre based on politics. She believed that "a truly creative theatre was one which responded socially and artistically to a changing world" and that propaganda was not necessarily negative but a designation for any work containing "ideas, social content, and controversial issues calling for action" (Buttitta and Witham 20-21). During its four short years the FTP through its Living Newspapers, its nationwide Negro and children's units, its staging of new works and classic left its deep imprint on the theatrical world and on the United States: with as many as 185 producing units, it played to combined weekly audiences of 500,000 in 28 states; altogether almost 1000 FTP productions were seen by some 25 million people (Buttitta & Witham 230-31).

The FTP archives at George Mason University contain material (full scripts or scenarios) for some 23 Living Newspapers; of these only seven were produced by the FTP; one (the first--Ethiopia) aroused State Department anxiety and fell victim to censorship even before it opened so there was a press preview only; one (Medicine Show) was produced post-FTP. Yet these dramatic documentaries have provided models for today's protest theatres.

Assigned to interpret issues of the day, the Living Newspaper staff was modeled on that of a daily newspaper and each subject was seriously researched; most of the scripts, however, ended up credited to a particular playwright. Barred from tackling international issues after the Ethiopia fiasco, Flanagan turned to domestic subjects. Triple-A Plowed Under deals with the plight of the farmer. It was called Communistic and unpatriotic and, perhaps potentially more damning, undramatic (and this by some of the cast members). In spite of, or perhaps because of, the names it was called, Triple-A was a success: opening night allayed the fears of the cast and turned out to be the first of many nights with performances in Chicago, San Francisco, Cleveland and Los Angeles as well as New York. Power brought the TVA issue to the stage, coming down on the side of the government enterprise; it was accused of toadying to the government. Spirochete, which came from the Chicago

unit, tells the story of the fight against syphilis; it surely must have been called immoral by someone!

In defending the Living Newspaper, Flanagan argued that one role of the Federal Theatre was "to experiment with new forms, particularly because we wished to supplement and stimulate, rather than to compete with commercial Broadway productions" (Federal Theatre Plays ix). She admits that the form borrows with fine impartiality from many sources:

from Aristophanes, from the Commedia dell'Arte, from Shakespearean soliloquy, from the pantomime of Mei Lan Fan. . . . Although it has occasional reference to the Volksbuehne and the Blue Blouses, to Bragaglia and Meierhold and Eisenstein, it is as American as Walt Disney, the March of Time and the Congressional Record to all of which . . . it is indebted. . . (xi).

In its concern with current topics and its production techniques--episodic scenes, use of music and projections, for example--the Living Newspaper is directly tied to its grandchildren of the '60s, the docudramas of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the chronicles of the Black theatres, the immediacy of the guerrilla theatres.

The Living Newspaper, as indicated above, was only one small part of the FTP's output, an output that on the whole was anything but radical. Flanagan herself put the radical work at 10 percent of the total; it may well have been less than that (Mordden 182). And in the long run these radical works were probably not as important as some of the other contributions such as the writing, technical and managerial training that it afforded Blacks. There were a number of

Negro units (16 says Brown [National Conference. . .], 22 says Ross [Hill 2: 37]). Clustered in the Northeast and then scattered around the country, they offered a wide range of productions--classics, contemporary drama, some new plays by Black playwrights, African dance, historical plays. The "voodoo" Macbeth directed by Orson Welles and the "swing" Mikado may have attracted the most attention at the time but they are footnotes only in the history of Afro-American drama. So too are those FTP plays written by whites and selected by whites to be performed by the Blacks. The important materials are those dramas written by Blacks (sometimes with a white collaborator) for the Black audiences. Although many of these ended up unproduced (at least by the FTP), the project gave writers the experience and guidance that they had lacked before.¹⁶

One of the almost immediate outcomes of the FTP was the American Negro Theatre (ANT) founded in 1940 by Abram Hill and Fred O'Neal. This group, although integrated from start to end, saw itself providing a Harlem theatre for Blacks. In its first nine years ANT produced 19 plays, 12 of which were original scripts and 4 of which went on to Broadway. One of these--Anna Lucasta, ANT's major success--ironically triggered its decline, for after the play became a Broadway hit, ANT became a showcase--a stepping stone to Broadway--rather than an experimental training theatre. ANT's program as it developed foreshadows the grandiose plans of some of

its successors including the New Lafayette, NEC and FST: it opened a full school of drama (ANT Studio Theatre) offering courses in acting, stagecraft, playwriting and broadcasting and producing its own shows. ANT also presented a regular series of radio dramas and operas (with its name mentioned only at the end of the program). ANT thus spread itself too thin and, also like its followers, the slide to the end accelerated when it lost its Rockefeller grant. By the early '50s, its last years, ANT was doing only variety shows.

Other Black theatres of the late '30s and early '40s included the short-lived Negro Playwrights Company, Langston Hughes' Harlem Suitcase Theatre, his New Negro Theater in Los Angeles and his Skyloft Players in Chicago. (The only one of the three that lasted more than a few years, Skyloft continued into the '60s.) The Suitcase Theatre was actually the cultural branch of an International Workers' Order local though it received no monetary support from the union. From the start, Hughes' work had mirrored his strong social concerns, but after his trip to Russia he began to distance himself from his close ties to radical socialism. Then in 1937 his work in Spain as a journalist with the anti-Fascist forces reinforced his radical principles.

Earlier Hughes had been involved with the John Reed Club, a project in radical drama; now he was working in Harlem attempting to radicalize Black theatre rather than working with white radicals. The vehicle Hughes chose to do

this was Don't You Want to Be Free? (used also to launch his other theatres). Over a period of more than a year, there were some 125 weekend performances of the show in the Harlem theatre; by the end of the first season about 3500 people--approximately 75 percent of them Black--had seen the show. Free set the stage for Black performances to come, using minimal lighting, no sets or props, and including music and dance: it was Black theatre with a radical socialist message. Over the next 25 years Hughes updated the play at least six times, softening the original Communist ending. Don't You Want to Be Free? was "a major event in Black protest drama even stripped of its radical socialist point"; in it "protest and art were completely mixed, completely Black" (Rampersad).

Black theatre obviously did not start with the FTP nor, as we know, did it end with these contemporaries. As with American protest theatre in general, it goes back to earlier times. Although Carole Singleton traces Black protest, including drama, back to the seventeenth century, it is generally accepted that organized Black drama in this country started with Mr. Brown's African Company which functioned from about 1820 to about 1823.¹⁷ No scripts survive from Brown's company but we know that in addition to the regular fare of classics and popular melodramas he staged at least two original pieces, one of which we can identify safely as protest drama and the other which we can guess

about. The first was only a sketch added, as was the custom, to Pierce Egan's melodrama Tom & Jerry; Brown's added scene was titled "On the Slave Market" and involved slaves (the company) and an auctioneer (Mr. Smith). Since Brown's company played primarily to Blacks and since this was 1823, we can guess that this slave scene might have been, in today's terms, akin to agitprop theatre. Mitchell, however, assumes it was a song-and-dance bit (Black Drama 26). Two weeks later Brown presented a play he had written, The Drama of King Shotaway. An historical figure, Shotaway was a hero of the revolt by the Caribs against the British on St. Vincent (Brown's native land according to Hay). Hay theorizes that in the play Brown advocated a Black American revolt, but Errol Hill is content with assuming that it was "a vivid anti-slavery statement 30 years before Uncle Tom's Cabin made its appearance" (National Conference . . .).

Although some Black theatre continued to exist in New York even after the African Company folded and although at least one Black (and a respectable number of whites) produced anti-slavery pieces in the '40s and '50s, the nineteenth century produced nothing significant in the way of Black protest drama (or any other American drama for that matter). Blacks did get involved again in minstrelsy and evolved the musical comedy, but that is another story.

Although the early twentieth century history of Black theatre is fascinating, it has been documented thoroughly

so, once again, coverage must be cursory. The teens of this century saw the tentative beginnings of modern Black drama with a rapid rise in the number of Black community theatres and an increased output by Black writers. Still there was not much to pick from and even by 1927 when Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory selected their Plays of Negro Life, only 9 of the 20 were by Black writers. (All the plays in the anthology are technically one-acts--even The Emperor Jones; the collection would have been impossible if three-act plays had been considered.) In his introduction to the book, Locke anticipated the day when there would be a "national Negro Theatre" that would "interpret the soul of [its] people in a way to win the attention and admiration of the world" while at the same time he cautioned against the tendency of both white and Black dramatists to succumb to "sordid realism" and tainted sentimentality in writing about Black life. He regretted the prevalence of the problem play, for "it is not the primary function of drama to reform us"; he saw the folk play as "the more promising path for the sound development of Negro drama" (n. pag.).

One of the earliest and strongest calls for a Black theatre came from William E. B. Du Bois--who thought that the prime purpose of art is to propagandize. In 1913 he wrote The Star of Ethiopia, an historical pageant using 1000 actors, for the NAACP's 50th anniversary celebration of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. More important,

Du Bois stimulated Black playwrights through a contest sponsored by the NAACP's magazine The Crisis. He organized the Krigwa Players in Harlem and helped establish the Washington NAACP Drama Committee which was midwife to the Howard Players. Du Bois, anticipating the position of the Black Nationalists of the '60s, called for a Black theatre--a theatre by, about and for Blacks.

As mentioned, there was a surge in the number of Black little theatres. Although many did not last long (some for only one show), over a dozen--from Boston to New Orleans, from Atlantic City to Dallas--did thrive (Edmonds 417-18). The Karamu Theatre, established in 1916 in Cleveland as the Gilpin Players, is still going strong. Today an interracial company housed in a million dollar complex, it is now directed by Don Evans. Karamu is credited with over the years having produced "almost every play concerned with Negro life by a white or Negro author . . ." (Hughes and Meltzer 189); thus Karamu stands out as an exception in the history of Black theatres. Chicago's Ethiopian Art Players, established in 1923 by both Black and white sponsors as a Black art theatre, brought Salome and Willis Richardson's The Chip Woman's Fortune first to Harlem and then to Broadway in 1923; the latter was the first serious play by a Black to reach Broadway and it is a slight one-act comedy. (It has been said that to write of Black life in America is to write protest drama, but in some of these early plays it is hard

to find that hard kernel!) In addition to Black little theatres and other community groups, Black colleges turned to drama: in the '20s groups were established at Howard, Atlanta University, Shaw, and Tougaloo (first home of FST).

But with all this flurry of activity in the Black communities, the major plays dealing with the injustices faced by American Blacks were still being written by whites:

From 1917 to 1930 . . . no less than fifteen white playwrights . . . presented works on the Broadway stage dealing with Negro themes and characters, while only five plays on Negro life by black playwrights managed Broadway production (Oliver & Sills 15).

And some of these certainly don't qualify as problem plays
¹⁹
 much less protest drama!

Interestingly, Black women writers, who did not make it to Broadway at all until Lorraine Hansberry in 1959, were writing protest plays as early as 1916: Angelina Grimke's Rachel, for example, was produced by the NAACP in New York, Washington and Cambridge with the aim of garnering support for anti-lynching legislation.

It has obviously been off-Broadway--downtown and uptown and out-of-town--that Black theatre, by both men and women, then and now, has made its mark.

The '20s are important because the decade gave birth to serious Black drama. The '20s led into the '30s when, really for the first time, professional Black dramatists raised their voices in protest. The '30s in turn led through the quiet '40s into the bubbling '50s which merged

with the '60s and Black Theatre's "eruption" (as Errol Hill dubbed it [National Conference . . .]).

Part of that eruption was the Free Southern Theatre.

Notes

1

As we trace briefly the evolution in the United States of this theatre with a message, I'll use several of these names except that "revolutionary" will be reserved for a special type of Black theatre which will be explained fully in chapter 3.

2

Honor Moore reminds us in her introduction to feminist drama that Dionysian rites stemmed from those honoring Demeter (xxxvi); Lofton Mitchell has assigned the start of drama as we know it to the Ethiopians and put the age, with some disregard for historical data, at 500 years prior to the Greek dates. (National Conference); at another time he put its beginnings in Egypt more than 6000 years ago when the Egyptians were Black (Black Drama 13); E. T. Kirby theorizes that the birth of drama cannot be assigned to any one culture but should be seen as worldwide outgrowths of various shamanistic rituals.

3

The number of non-profit theatres remains remarkably high: Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization of non-profit theatres, had some 220 members in 1984. Although most are regional establishment theatres such as the Goodman in Chicago, the Arena in D.C., the Guthrie in Minneapolis, and the New York Shakespeare Festival, such people's theatres as El Teatro Campesino, Reper-

torio Espanol, the Roadside Theater of Kentucky, and At the Foot of the Mountain, a feminist theatre in Minneapolis, are also members. And TCG's roster does not include a number of such groups, many of which were represented at the 1981 Gathering of people's theatres; in 1982 Schechner guessed that alternative theatres in America today number "in the many hundreds, maybe thousands" (74). In this numerical sense then, the impetus of the '60s has not faded.

⁴ Actos are short dramatic pieces, more developed than skits, shorter and less complex than one-acts. Used primarily by the Chicano companies, they are, as Luis Valdez explains, intended to help the audience understand "'specific points about social problems'"; these agitprop pieces rely heavily on satire to make their points (Brokaw 249).

⁵ Ironically, as of the summer of 1985, the Troupe was in conflict with labor: what appears to be simply a misunderstanding with Equity over a guest artist contract mushroomed into a boycott of the Troupe by the San Francisco Labor Council. The company at that time was seeking Equity membership but, because it is a collective and Equity defines everything in terms of actors versus management, agreement had not been reached. Negotiations were continuing, and the company's two guest artists did receive Equity scale ("Trends . . ." 39-40).

6

I find no proof that FST was a model for the Caravan but, at least after the fact, Paterson did know of FST and its work. (See "Some Theoretical Questions . . ." 6.)

7

Appalshop was set up by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1969 to train people of the area for media careers; it was later funded by NEA and foundation grants.

8

The Triad is home currently to three companies: North Carolina Black Repertory Theatre, A & T University's Harrison Players, and the Flonnie Anderson Theatrical Association (FATA). Founded in 1979 by Larry Leon Hamlin, Black Rep in 1985 became the first funded Black member of the Winston-Salem Arts Council. The group has garnered wide support in the Black community in the form of Guild memberships but less support in terms of attendance. It is finally attracting some whites though not nearly enough in light of its consistently excellent productions. Hamlin provides training and experience for local talent but regularly imports his leads from New York or Los Angeles. Black Rep aims for a place in the community's mainstream and frequently draws its plays from the Black repertory of 20 years ago and from Athol Fugard's oeuvre; they are socially significant plays of Black experience but lack the revolutionary fervor that marked many of the '60s works.

Anderson, a local teacher, was instrumental in forming the Community Players Guild which worked in the Black commu-

nity from 1951 until 1959. In 1981 she organized FATA in order to develop and showcase Black talent. Much of her work is tailored for young people. Like Hamlin and Anderson, H. D. Flowers, director of A&T's group, is not militant in his approach to theatre (Amidon). Errol Hill's contention that militant Black drama is gone from the scene (National Conference . . .) seems to be borne out by the work of these local groups and by reports of what is happening nationally. For instance, Kuumba, in Chicago, has moved from the rituals of the '60s to "a more traditional dramatic approach" ("Black Theater . . . Comeback" 58).

9

He also erroneously lists Richard Schechner as a founder and makes New Orleans its home base from the start (3: 393).

10

South African Fugard, although white, writes with rare understanding about Blacks--about their relationships with each other and with whites--and his works are frequently performed by Black theatres.

11

If the success in the Triad of its 1984 production of Charles Fuller's Pulitzer Prize-winning A Soldier's Play is any indication of the response it received nationwide, NEC should finally be secure in its success.

12

It is amusing to note that in 1983 Doug Paterson was already grouping these theatres of the '60s and early '70s with the experimental groups of the '20s and '30s as the avant-garde to which the new people's theatres owe gratitude ("Some Theoretical Questions . . ." 6). How quickly the vanguard becomes the Old Guard!

13

According to Richard Moody the play concluded a 20-year run in Los Angeles in the early 1950s (277). However, I believe Moody has his locales mixed: a friend (Arnold Spencer) who was involved in this long-running production places it in San Diego.

14

Broadway actually is more of a symbol for American commercial theatre than an absolute fact; it was a long time before New York theatre arrived as far uptown as Broadway, and there have always been theatres off-Broadway and out of New York City.

15

The Group Theatre, which had actually presented the play, mounted its own production the following spring. Within weeks of its opening, Lefty was being performed (at reduced or zero royalties) by amateur and semiprofessional groups across the country, and on Broadway it had a total of 138 performances. In Harold Clurman's words, Waiting for Lefty was "the birth cry of the thirties" (Seward and Barbour 48).

16

If the FTP as a whole was subject to governmental scrutiny and censorship, the Negro units got a double dose-- from government agencies and from Project administrators. Ted Ward's Big White Fog, for example, aroused the Chicago censors' fears; they showed up at the final rehearsal ready to delete subversive items: "They removed one 'damn' and one reference to a 'yellow dog'" (Brown). But after only 37 performances the show was transferred from the main theatre to a South Side school where it closed after 4 performances. Abram Hill's Liberty Deferred, the only Black Living Newspaper, was rejected by Emmet Lavery, the WPA administrator responsible for play selection, although he at least once commented on the lack of material by Black writers (Craig 64). Ted Brown's adaptation of Lysistrata was closed by the censors after one performance.

Not all the problems originated with white administrators or politicians. Some Blacks objected to Big White Fog-- not because it was supposedly incendiary but because it frankly dealt with, among other issues, the discrimination by light-skinned Blacks against those of darker hue. And Richard Wright reported his tribulations with the Chicago unit: after engineering the removal of the "skinny white woman" director who revamped ordinary plays into "'Negro style,' with jungle scenes, spirituals, and all," Wright also engineered the hiring of his friend Charles DeSheim (a white) as a replacement. They prepared to offer plays that

dealt in a meaningful manner with Black life. On the first bill of one-acts was Paul Green's Hymn to the Rising Sun. Cast members rebelled against doing such an "indecent" play that moreover falsified conditions in the South! DeSheim and Wright soon parted company with the cast--and with the Negro branch of the FTP (113-16). But basically Black scholars and theatre people regard the FTP experience as a very positive one.

17

Dates are not the only vague things about the company. Some sources attribute its founding to the actor James Hewlett but the very few original sources that are available indicate that Brown was the impresario and Hewlett the star. We do not even know Mr. Brown's first name which might have been James or Henry or William. Sam Hay of Morgan State is in the midst of a determined study and promises to shed light on the question.

18

Du Bois wanted through this spectacular to interest the Blacks in their own history and heritage and to reveal Blacks to the white world as thinking humans. In some of his correspondence he talked of it as "one of those unforgettable moments of the race" without any explication. David Levering Lewis attempted to track down people who might remember the 1916 pageant and be able to tell him what its message really was. He was elated to find a woman who had danced in the Washington performance and who said she

could of course tell him about the show. She did--"much more than I really wanted to know" about who had performed. But when it came to content, she said, "'Oh, dear, 1916--well, we were so busy with our choreography that we didn't pay much attention to the message'" (National Conference . . .).

19

The record hasn't been much better in succeeding years: through 1965 only 15 Black playwrights had been produced on Broadway--and 4 of these had white collaborators.

If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.

--African Proverb

CHAPTER II

FREE SOUTHERN THEATER: BIRTH AND REBIRTHS

In November 1985, some 22 years after its difficult birth, some 5 years after its actual demise, and some 2 years after its legal death and planned wake, the FST was finally laid to rest with appropriate fanfare. The "Second-Line Funeral for the Free Southern Theater," held in New Orleans' Louis Armstrong Park on Saturday morning, November 23, culminated three days of symposia on the history and legacy of the South's pioneer Black people's theatre. (The accompanying performance festival opened Wednesday night with a performance by BLAC of Oklahoma City of FST's Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? and continued through a Sunday performance of Volume 2 of O'Neal's Junebug Jabbo Jones [JJJ].)¹

In a sense, the history of the funeral (the Free Southern Theater Project) is a microcosm of the Theater's history--grand plans, delays, retrenchment, disorganization. Originally set for 1983 by O'Neal, the project was postponed until 1984 and again until 1985 when funding was finally obtained.² Then the funeral was planned and publicized on a grand scale--with the same sort of optimism that marked

FST throughout its history. But, also typical of FST, sessions were cancelled and no money was reserved for editing the reels and reels of video tape that were used to record every moment of the event.

The long history of FST can be briefly summarized: born in 1963 at Tougaloo College in Mississippi, moved to New Orleans in 1964, became all-Black by 1968-69, reorganized after a severe illness (not its first) in 1971, became a one-man canopy for O'Neal's JJJ in 1980, declared legally dead by 1983, buried in 1985. But these bare dates do not begin to tell the story of the struggles--theoretical, artistic, political, personal--that kept FST in chaos during most of its existence.

FST grew out of "the Movement," the civil rights surge that brought freedom workers by the thousands to the Deep South during the early '60s. One of these was John O'Neal, then a recent graduate of Southern Illinois University with a double major in English and Philosophy and a university-produced play to his credit; he was in Jackson, Mississippi, on the staff of SNCC. Gil Moses, who had gone to Oberlin College and the Sorbonne and who had already appeared at Karamu Playhouse and off-Broadway in The Good Soldier Schweik, was in Jackson as editor of the Mississippi Free Press. The two met and clicked. And in the fall of 1963 they started FST's progenitor, the Tougaloo Drama Workshop at Tougaloo College. Also involved was Doris

Derby, an artist and another SNCC worker; she faded out of the picture quite early and disappeared completely when O'Neal and Moses moved to New Orleans in 1964.⁴

Throughout the summer and fall of '63 the founding trio were crystallizing plans for a "free" theatre that would bring, as an adjunct to the Movement, theatre to the rural areas of the Deep South. O'Neal once said that he and Moses viewed themselves "as playwrights and actors without a theater (Antioch [program notes or speech] 1965)."⁵ But they were also committed to the civil rights struggle. How could they reconcile these apparently conflicting priorities--pursuance of a professional career and active political participation? They found, they thought, their answer in theatre: "We soon came to the obvious conclusion--if theater means anything anywhere it means something in the South--The Free Southern Theater was born." They developed a basic prospectus and spent that fall and winter trying to raise money. This first prospectus read in part:

We propose to establish a legitimate theater in the deep South with its base in Jackson, Mississippi.

Our fundamental objective is to stimulate creative and reflective thought among Negroes in Mississippi and other Southern states by the establishment of a legitimate theater, thereby providing opportunity for involvement in the theater and the associated art forms.

We theorize that within the Southern situation a theatrical form and style can be developed that is as unique to the Negro people as the origin of blues and jazz.

A combination of art and social awareness can evolve into plays written for a Negro audience, which relate to the problems within the Negro himself, and within the Negro community.

Through theater, we think to open a new area of protest. One that permits the development of playwrights and actors, one that permits the growth and self-knowledge of a Negro audience, one that supplements the present struggle for freedom (Free Southern Theater [FST] 3-4).⁶

In early winter of 1964, the founding trio changed the course of FST's history when they contacted Richard Schechner who was at that time in the drama department at Tulane University.⁷ Schechner was to bring valuable theatrical friends to FST, but he was also to bring major dissents.

Schechner offered his services as consultant and director of one of the plays. He also suggested that they organize a group of local men and women to work for the summer, find professional directors (such as himself), and tour the selected plays.

From here, the time frame blurs. Dates and memories are contradictory but sometime that spring he agreed to become the third producing director for the embryonic FST and almost immediately began instigating a move to New Orleans. In the meantime, plans for a first summer of touring were made, a fund-raising brochure was drawn up and a New York agent was hired. On April 21 in a New York Herald Tribune story, Stuart Little announced the establishment of the FST "on a nationwide basis to extend the live theater into the deep South, beginning with a pilot project in Jackson, Mississippi." The article credited Schechner and Moses with the idea for the theatre and announced the backing of "leading Negro and white playwrights,

performers and producers" as well as the first summer's season: a 10-week Jackson run with a schedule of seven plays. "A permanent stock and repertory company will be established in Jackson with mobile units to tour surrounding areas."

Despite later protestations that the Theater in its infancy was seen as a project rather than as a permanent institution, copy for another early brochure presented this plan:

The Free Southern Theater in Jackson, Mississippi, is to be the first traveling repertory theater established in the deep South. In order to achieve consistently high standards, professional actors, directors and will join and assist students and members of the local community. The company is to be a permanent institution which will perform in Jackson and tour Mississippi [emphasis added] (ts).

This prospectus also set out the overall program for the FST:

1. a seasonal summer stock traveling repertory theater.
2. a permanent traveling repertory theater during the academic year.
3. a theater workshop for college students and the community.
4. an apprenticeship training program.
5. a community theater in Jackson by September, 1965.
6. sponsorship of artists and performing troupes in the Jackson community.
7. the establishment of other Free Southern Theaters.

By July fund-raising efforts were in full swing: a release from Philip Rose Productions reported on these:

Leading figures of the Broadway stage are now actively supporting the FREE SOUTHERN THEATER, which is soon to begin in Jackson, Mississippi, presenting plays with integrated casts to integrated audiences (ts).

The opening of the Theater, according to this release, had been delayed until September to allow more fund-raising and to assure full protection "from harassment by Mississippi authorities." Production was to begin following a 20-week training program; the plays were to deal "principally with the problems of race and freedom. . . ." Anticipation continued that satellite theaters "to be partially supported by the local community" would be established in other southern cities.

A letter on FST letterhead dated July 2, 1964, from Paul Newman confirms that a name-laden national board of sponsors was already in place and that active fund-raising was underway: "My wife, Joanne Woodward, Diana Sands and I were delighted that so many friends could join us at the cocktail party at Patrick O'Neal's new restaurant to help found the Free Southern Theater." Also in July Lucille Lortel presented two benefit performances of Athol Fugard's Blood Knot for FST.

But, although publicity and fun's were being generated in New York, nothing was happening in Jackson, and Moses and O'Neal were chafing. Actress Madeline Sherwood was one of the volunteers who came to Jackson to help FST get its official start. She encouraged the two to go ahead and mount a production and they finally did just that, presenting the decision to Schechner as a fait accompli. On July 30, Little announced that FST was opening in Jackson the

following night with In White America and would tour the production in 15 Mississippi towns and wind up in New Orleans. Little explained that the group was still in the formative stage and that there were headquarters in New York, Jackson and New Orleans. The goal was "an integrated acting company to begin performing plays in New Orleans and Jackson in December and thereafter to tour . . ." ("South to See . . .").⁸ Thus began the first period in FST's turbulent life--years of mainstream idealism when integration was the goal and, with FST, the reality.

On the Road: FST's First Incarnation

The company played (as it was to continue to do for the next few years) in community centers and churches, in parks and fields, to rural Blacks, Movement workers and, occasionally, non-involved whites. The tours of the Black Belt were this theatre's raison d'être and its shaping force.

What frustrated O'Neal the most was the lack of time in each town and the inability to build real community relationships or to run theatre workshops. Thus the plan was formulated to provide a two-pronged program: a professional touring company supplemented by a community program. It was anticipated that the touring company would spend a week or more in one place, putting on plays and running workshops, while those not touring would settle temporarily in other communities to involve local people in play production. This never happened.

Meanwhile Schechner was insisting upon a move to New Orleans if O'Neal and Moses wanted him to remain an integral part of the organization. Correspondence of that summer implies already growing friction but, despite instinctive reluctance to take their theatre away from the center of the Movement, the founders agreed to the move. The typescript of a revised prospectus projects FST as "an integrated professional ensemble company with its administrative and rehearsal center in New Orleans":

[Such plays as] Antigone, Blues for Mr. Charlie, Romeo and Juliet, The Miser, and In White America [will] serve the double purpose of confronting the audience with experiences relevant to their own and [provide] 'good theater' in the finest sense of the phrase.

While dedication to the Freedom Movement is iterated, the shift of emphasis from tours of rural Mississippi to performances in urban settings is noticeable.

The problem of the Theater's identity and purpose was never really resolved. At a company meeting that fall, two members complained about the lack of defined goals. One, James Cromwell, argued that all the terms in the name--free, Southern and theater--were misnomers for what the group was doing: begging for funds, operating out of New York for all financial purposes, and participating in a "revolution" rather than creating a theater (FST 50).

Further indications of problems to come had surfaced at the first New Orleans board meeting in October when one of the new board members admitted to being "vague on the pur-

poses of the theater." Schechner explained that these were trifold: "to create a theater"; to arouse audiences' consciousness "of their human condition"; and to "seek out audiences that have not seen or had a theater." O'Neal tactfully countered these assertions by admitting to a continuing "dialectic between the producing directors" regarding purposes; the present situation, he explained, was being defined by "external things" (i.e., funds; at the time the theatre had some \$3,000 out of a total of about \$11,000 raised to date, mainly from personal contributions plus an \$800 donation from Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater).

Schechner evidently tried to arrange sponsorship of, or at least cooperation with, FST by Tulane: a letter from Monroe Lippman, chair of the university's Department of Theatre and Speech, voiced severe reservations about "an arrangement between the department and such a theatre." Lippman spelled out some of these reservations: unrealistic hope of attracting top-rated directors for \$150 per week; a questioning of the claim that the theatre would be of "immense benefit to the community, the department and the University"; doubts that "the three producing directors [were] fully qualified to undertake both the artistic and business direction" and a flat rejection of their claim to be truly familiar with the deep South.

A small integrated company of about eight finally did establish itself in New Orleans in the fall of 1964 and pre-

9

pared for the first true FST tour. The company, recruited for the most part in New York, toured from November until February 1965 with Purlie Victorious and Waiting for Godot. The New York Times, the Tribune, and the Post covered the opening in New Orleans, a performance of Purlie that played to an SRO audience, but the New Orleans press seems to have ignored the group, as it continued for the most part to do for the next decade. On this tour approximately two dozen towns in Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia and Louisiana were visited; after a break at Christmas, the tour ended in New York City with benefit performances of Godot at the New School and of Purlie at American Place Theater.¹⁰

Despite the confusion and the conflicts, the first season was successful. FST had received a lot of publicity including appearances on NBC's Today Show and ABC's local New York, New York program. Optimism remained high even though after the tour half of the company left, ostensibly for better jobs or for a return to college.

In fact it was so high that the directors increased the company for the 1965 season. (Reports of company size vary from 13 to 23!) According to an FST progress report of the following summer, the company was now "almost entirely professional and Equity." Yet in his diary Robert Costley (Big Daddy, or Big D) commented that 90 percent of the

actors were amateurs (FST 75). Certainly they received even less than amateur pay: \$35 weekly.

Among those who became active with FST this second season were Tom Dent, who started as a volunteer and went on to head the company for several years, Costley, and Roscoe Orman, who was later to join the New Lafayette as a key member.
11

As suggested above, monetary problems had plagued the company from the beginning; there was still no funding in sight as the enlarged troupe prepared its tour. Fund-raising efforts continued outside of New Orleans, mainly in New York. An afternoon benefit in December, for instance, at the Village Gate featured Leon Bibb, Dick Gregory, Viveca Lindsfors, Josh White, Jr. and members of the Cambridge Circus Company. And volunteers showed up from all around the country to help out. Still funds dwindled even as new programs were instituted.

Joanne Forman came from Apple House Gallery in California to join the company as community theatre director. In May she announced that FST would sponsor a non-credit workshop in creative dramatics at Tulane during the summer; in June she was inviting local students to participate in the FST-sponsored Orleans Players which were "currently rehearsing 'Don Juan in Hell' and a bill of one-acts, and [were] casting for the world premiere of 'Day of Absence' by the young New York playwright Douglas Turner

Ward."¹² By this time she had also organized several children's theatre workshops, two of which were "to be conducted through CORE Freedom Schools." In August Beauty and the Beast, a fable for children, was presented.

At the same time, however, that Forman's letters indicated activity and a positive outlook, other material from the files gives a gloomier picture. Throughout the spring, to add to personal conflicts and the pervasive poverty, the integrated company suffered from police harassment in New Orleans. And in a May 27th report to the board Schechner complained about the "lousy" community relations engendered by company members and suggested "conscious politeness when dealing with the community," along with "improved standards of dress and address" and an effort "to understand our communities. . . ." He also discussed dissent within the company. Next Schechner tackled the repertory which had, he claimed, been criticized by board members for its seriousness and militancy. Why, he wondered, had the company rejected plays like these:

The Lesson, The Miser, Lysistrata, Man is Man [sic], etc. Plays with a good deal of comic emphasis--a balance to our repertory which, this year at least, seems heavily concerned with armed rebellion.

After three months of rehearsals, In White America and Rifles opened in July at the Tulane University Playhouse.

13

A handwritten press release claims:

an overflow crowd of almost 200 people saw the tense wartime drama of the Spanish Civil War. . . . For the many who had to be turned away, F.S.T. will preview the

drama two times this week. . . . These previews are really public rehearsals. . . . and everyone is invited.

Even before the tour started in early August, Denise Nicholas reported that the company was "in a panic about money to continue" (Letter fragment); in the middle of the tour, money did run out and the season was terminated. Operations were suspended at the end of August and the company reduced radically, to approximately half its starting size. This nucleus planned to continue workshops in speech and movement to enhance their acting skills and to concentrate on raising funds.

What had gone wrong? In reply to a missive from the Schechners that he wrote in mid-August while at Antioch College starring in Purlie, O'Neal tried to analyze the problem. Schechner had apparently said that the theater was "on the verge of disintegration"; O'Neal, although admitting that severe problems existed, refused to accept that verdict. One problem, according to him, was that the group had grown too big, too quickly:

[W]e have pulled together more people than we can have participate in the ensemble-of-the-free idea that is essential to the notion of the fst [sic]. In so doing I think that we have denied ourselves the opportunity to develop our own thinking and premises that must of necessity remain at the core of the Theater if it is [to] develop coherently and with meaning.

He went on to say that the second major error had been in their estimation of "earning" potential:

Our thinking has been, at my instigation, let's figure out what we need and not worry about how much it costs.

We'll get the money. I still [think] that's the appropriate way to proceed; we just need to be more rigorous in our description of what we need and in our estimations regarding when we must have the money in order to proceed with a meaningful development of the program. . . .

He suggested looking at ways to cut the payroll without reducing the projected program; that is, he asked, could a way be found to finish the tour? The tour was not salvaged. But the Theater did not die.

In addition to the actors' workshops, community workshops in karate, acting and writing were offered plus occasional performances of a poetry show. In September three of the company members went to New York on a fund-raising mission. (A story in the Tribune during this visit rather grandiosely described the Theater as being "comprised of young professional actors, designers, directors and technicians, assisted by apprentices from the South and other regions" [Molleson 18].)¹⁴

Also in September a letter went out to colleges announcing that "in order to raise funds for its admission[-] free performances in the deep south," the Theater was "accepting contracts from colleges between October 15 and December 15, 1965" for a program "consisting of . . . Brecht's The Rifles of Senora Carrar and an original show of our own, The Negro Revolt in Song and Scene." The latter is based on "experiences in Bogalusa, Jonesboro, Jackson and many other places. . . ." There is, however, no indication that any such performances took place.

Again publicity reflected half-truths: in his November 15th "The Theatre" column in the World-Telegram and Sun, Norman Nadel described the company as "neither a civil rights group nor a political body but a theater with very high standards" and a goal of becoming "one of the best repertory theaters in America." Obviously based on outdated information, the column reported that the 23-member company (all of whom had left much higher paying jobs to join FST) had a repertoire including Godot, Purlie, White America, Senora Carrar, the O'Casey work, and Beauty and the Beast. FST members, according to Nadel, were leaving New York that week to return to New Orleans for rehearsals of a new play by Gilbert Moses, tentatively called The Leader. He concluded that, despite harassment, the company was bringing "honest drama on challenging themes to audiences who have never known theater. They are an unparalleled force of cultural awakening in America."

FST was making its mark, inspiring other theatre people to attempt similar projects. Maro Riofrancos, editor of Streets: Art & Criticism from the New Left, in a letter to Joanne Forman said that a group in New York was in the process of trying to establish a "popular permanent repertory company" modeled on FST. And in October the New England Theater Conference presented a Special Achievement Award to the group.

But what was actually happening in New Orleans was far different than what was being reported nationally. The lull before the 1966 season lasted five months. During this time major changes occurred. In October O'Neal had stood trial as a conscientious objector and was forced to move to New York to do alternate service; Moses left the company that spring to study acting; Schechner was replaced as board chair by Tom Dent who later took charge of FST; the company officially reverted to "a workable" 8-member crew, and a 7-month seasonal program (from March 1 through September 30) was instituted.

During this hiatus, the next major crisis took form: the question as to whether the company should continue as an integrated unit or should become Black. The debate evolved even before the departure from active roles of O'Neal, Moses and Schechner. In a letter to O'Neal in November, Moses had argued that FST had gotten completely off-track--that charging no admission was patronizing, that the plays were poor choices and that the Theater, along with the rest of Afro-America, must separate itself from the white power structure:

I think we should change our name to The Third World Theater. I think we should use whatever actors we have and any from the community and play in the ghettos of New Orleans, and travel perhaps on weekends [the position to be adopted by Dent]. We should charge admission: \$1.00 for adults and \$.50 for children in the cities and a somewhat lesser price in rural communities I think we should do Frank Greenwood's play If We Must Live and Doug Turner's Day of Absence, and possibly William Branch's Medal for Willie, and

possibly a play of mine if it is good enough. In other words, I think we should start over (FST 94-95).

Holding out against Moses, Dent and Schechner, who agreed with the all-Black concept, was O'Neal. He went so far as to say that if it came down to a choice between a Black theatre and no theatre, he would propose liquidating the debts and assets of FST, turning over any remaining funds to the Moseses and Orman and letting them build a new theatre with the condition that his name not be used (FST 100).

O'Neal, however, is essentially a compromiser (in the better sense, a resolver of conflicts) and he was in New York; FST did eventually become all-Black and he did not separate himself from it. And Moses later softened his stand, arguing that his basic disagreement with Schechner was over the question of professional vs. Black community theatre and that he did not want necessarily to exclude whites completely but to make their presence temporary and subservient to the priorities of a Black theatre.

If FST had not disintegrated, it had become a different theatre. And it was becoming obvious that one of the core problems was that the key people had different goals: Moses had professional ambitions, O'Neal held to the vision of a political theatre (that would also nurture his personal dreams), Schechner was interested in experimental theatre. Whatever the other reasons for the problems, Schechner was probably right when he wrote to O'Neal that cataclysmic

spring complaining that the Theater had been hoodwinked by its own publicity:

We have endless slogans, and a few workshops; a theater full of writers who write very little; actors who do not act much; a theater without performers. And community contact? It took Roscoe to start a workshop-- and he never theorizes in public (FST 106).

Despite the debates some decisions were reached and actions taken: the company rented an old supermarket in the Desire section and converted it to a 125-seat theatre; workshops in writing and acting were resuscitated; a small Afro-American Information Center was set up at the new theatre; and, most important, the 1966 season was set to open in May with Moses' one-act play Roots and a program of poetry developed in the writing workshop. The company then planned to put into rehearsal Alice Childress' play The Haitian Vendor; later Fugard's The Blood Knot was added to the schedule. The latter two plays were never produced but Brecht's Does Man Help Man? and William Plomer's mime play I Speak of Africa were added and the company went on tour again, playing in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. The summer included week-long stays at five predominantly Black colleges in conjunction with the pre-college program of the Office of Economic Opportunity. However, Tom Dent was now man-in-charge and his prime aim was to build a New Orleans-based theatre with touring de-emphasized. Dent never opposed the idea of touring but felt it should be secondary to building a New Orleans theatre and

should be undertaken only when and where there was enough money. He is proud of FST for inspiring the creation of other theatre groups in Southern communities.¹⁵ Too, he believes that touring was important for the company members as well as for the places visited; many of them did not know the South outside of New Orleans and these excursions broadened their horizon--a necessity if they were to create a southern theatre (Dent, Phone interview).¹⁶

The 1966 season was sweetened by a small grant (\$14,840) from the Rockefeller Foundation and an anonymous gift of \$10,000. The company continued to attract national attention and support. A July 26 letter from Eric Bentley "To Whom It May Concern" praised FST as more than a civil rights theatre and more than a regional theatre; it was part of a movement towards a "national and popular" theatre. In an August 11 letter to Stanley Taylor, Joseph Papp rated "the Free Southern Theater [as] one of the most significant in the United States today." Steven Rubin of Louisiana State University, also asked to evaluate the merit of FST, responded that "artistically . . . the F.S.T. has been doing first-rate work" but even more significant is its

most meaningful contribution to the deep South
I know of no way to measure [its] impact, but having
been a member of your audience . . . , I've not the
slightest hesitation in saying that this impact is
enormous and inspirational (Letter, 11 August).

On its Look Up and Live program on August 7, CBS aired a special about FST ("Ghetto of Desire"); Life (Prideaux)

covered the summer tour; the New York Times on July 31 ran a three-quarter page feature; Playbill that spring had a six-page story; and local TV stations aired short features.

It looked as if FST was once again on the move although its aims were being presented somewhat differently. A fund-raising appeal called for support of an attempted "break-through toward cultural development of untouched audiences" and of an effort to bring "some clarity to social and cultural issues." The third goal also echoed previous goals:

to provide a forum in which the Negro playwright can deal honestly with his own experience, express himself in what may prove to be a new idiom, a new genre, a theatrical form and style unique as blues, jazz and gospel.

In addition the Theater also aimed to establish "self-knowledge and creativity [as] the foundations of human dignity"; to stimulate through workshops "a method for development of playwrights and actors; to acquaint audiences with the rich history of Negro America" and "to emphasize the universality of the problems of the Negro people." The piece went on to proclaim that the Theater "is unique among American theater ventures." For one thing "few theaters have existed as long as FST with a free admissions policy. It has existed because of stubborn pride, determination, and the belief of hundreds of people in an idea" (ts).

Certainly there was determination. And the financial outlook improved, at least temporarily: in early 1967 the Theater received a three-year grant from the Rockefeller

Foundation for a total of \$62,500. And in April FST's fifth season finally got underway when the group went to Sunflower, Mississippi, to present a special preview--an improvised poetry show--in conjunction with local elections.

However, in a letter to Nicholas and Orman dated May 9, 1967, Dent lamented that he "was actually ashamed to tell people I was with FST." Previous performances, even when ragged, "were trying to say something [whereas this show] came out to me like a mish-mash of watered down Strasberg and Amateur Night at the Apollo."

Once again, the company was facing organizational problems with people assuming duties by default and the focus of the group becoming hazier. Walter Lott, a newcomer to the company, for instance had assumed all the directorial duties and frustrated the other company members (at least Dent) with a regimen of Actors' Studio type workshops, and the friction among company members was palpable; in fact, Lott left the troupe before the season officially opened.

For the regular season which, after several postponements and preview performances in New Orleans, opened at LeMoyné College in Memphis on June 13, three shows had finally been settled on: Ward's Happy Ending, Uncle Tom's Second Line Funeral (an Afro-American poetry show) and Ionesco's The Lesson.¹⁷ But of the three shows, Dent reported, "only Happy Ending was halfway ready" (FST 145). The group was scheduled to perform that summer in New

Orleans and at colleges in Tennessee, Texas, Alabama and Georgia; unlike other seasons, this was not to be primarily a "community" tour. After the LeMoynes opening, Dent was so discouraged that he told the company he was going to recommend to the Theater's board that the tour be cancelled and that the rest of the summer be spent in New Orleans doing community workshops.

A good rehearsal changed his mind and the Memphis stint continued. On the 15th they did a rehearsal performance of The Lesson and the poetry. And on the 16th they repeated Happy Ending, the eleventh performance and the best to date; Dent was now convinced that, after a brief respite in New Orleans, they should go on with the Texas tour (FST 147-52).

They played at Prairie View A & M and at Texas Southern University and also at two sites in Houston's Black community. In July the company performed at Xavier University in New Orleans, at Tuskegee Institute and at Albany, Georgia, before returning to New Orleans for a final month.

By this summer of 1967 Dent was also having doubts about the role of FST. In early June he had urged the board of directors to "adopt a program geared to teenagers in the community dealing with 'racial reality.'" Training Black youngsters in the techniques of theatre seemed to him of little value although he agreed that if that was what was necessary to get foundation money, that is what FST would do. But, he argued:

[The] value of the FST as I see it has to do with psychology, with an attack on the racist psychology of the United States, whether crass or genteel, and an attack on the self-denigrating psychology of the Black communities, and especially, . . . on the self-denigrating psychology of the Black youth. This attack can be philosophical through the shows, but it can also be through simple exposure to racial reality through history, discussion, and the availability of materials like books which are not now and never have been available to Black youth (Memo 4 June 1967).

That same month, however, FST submitted a "Creative Arts Proposal" asking for \$220,180.68 to make up the deficit in a \$240,310 budget. The funds were targeted for both workshops and tours: \$55,200 was earmarked for workshop salaries (directors, writers and actors in residence and program participants); \$107,200 was budgeted for the acting company and \$22,100 for the administrative staff. The rest was allocated among equipment and operating and transportation expenses. Individual expenditures were modest enough but overall the budget again was unrealistically grandiose. The proposal explained FST's role:

The FST is more, however, than an itinerant theater scampering through the Southland. . . . The Free Southern Theater views its presentations and workshops as steps towards the appreciation and development of Negro culture in America, with emphasis on the essential concerns of Negro people: justice, full equality, re-education, self-analysis, strength (ts).

The proposal went on to recount some of the Theater's successes: a 1966 poetry night that "resulted for the first time in public discussions on the deplorable living conditions" in the Desire Housing Project; the performance of Roots; the workshops which enabled New Orleans youngsters

"to begin to seriously undertake the study of theater arts." The prospective funders were assured that the FST "plans to develop a year-round program, with workshops and professional tours continuing throughout the year." The workshops, for young people, would be run by "established actors, actresses, writers, poets, and photographers. . . ."

In a letter to Dent, O'Neal questioned the validity of the proposal:

[FST is] a theater, not a creative arts program. Its mission is nothing less than to participate in the historic struggle for change that is occurring [sic] in the quality of life that our people are leading . . . and at the same time . . . we in the FST have the opportunity . . . to revivify the western theater. . . . To show the Theater how to find a new and more meaningful relationship to the people.

This was to be accomplished through the performance group which had to be kept distinct from the community workshop which was of secondary importance. Yet a press release from that same summer announced:

FST has committed itself to become a community theater in New Orleans with equal emphasis [emphasis added] on performances and workshops. . . .

The FST is and must continue to be an instrument for the training and development of Black artists

The FST is and must be a political theater. Not political in the sense of topical or prosaic limitations, but political as theater which looks always outward upon racial oppression in America as an evil which the Black artist must play a prime role in attacking. FST does not believe in art divorced from essential concerns of Black people (ts).

That summer too the Rockefeller Foundation funded an evaluation by David W. Payne of the Theater's operation. He noted that the group was plagued with both chronic and

acute problems but that the former must be resolved if the theater was to continue. Payne agreed with O'Neal that the FST "could and should be a revolutionary force in American Theatre--but it is not that now." He argued that contrary to the Rockefeller Foundation's "patronising" summation of the theatre's goal as presenting "theatre in culturally deprived areas," the FST had a much more positive role:

to hold up a clear and brilliant mirror to these people, wherein they would see themselves, wherein they might discover their humanity and beauty. . . . In theatrical translation, it means to accomplish a revolution in theatre, to return to the most ancient purposes of theatre: the presentation of a religious, ritualistic celebration of the human situation.

This goal was attainable, Payne continued, but not if the FST kept operating as it had. Cherishing a mistaken notion about the uniqueness of their theatre, members of the FST had used this myth "as an excuse to avoid dealing with theatrical problems in a theatrical way." The myth had also enabled them to escape facing up to the reality that they really knew "very little about the operation of a theatre."

A theatre, explained Payne, must operate for the benefit of its audiences whereas the FST, despite its protestations, had been operating "for the benefit of its members"; from its inception anarchy, not democracy, had been the governing (or non-governing) principle with the result "that FST operates on a crisis basis . . . never solving the basic problems, not developing a program, not developing a style, not developing so much as a schedule."

Payne saw workshops as a necessity and noted that some had been started:

[but] with absolutely no consideration or discussion of how the "program" would operate, what the workshops should be designed to do, who would be on the staff, or how much the "program" would cost.

Grant monies were spent haphazardly; further funding could not be expected unless a program was established. Also needed was a functioning board of directors to set policy and to hire an artistic/executive director with sole power and responsibility for developing and implementing such a program.

Payne seems to have pinpointed emphatically the weakness of FST--the lack of leadership stemming from a distaste for authority and from ignorance of management skills. It is not that the people in charge did not recognize their shortcomings. They, at least sporadically, acknowledged them and made stabs at correcting the situation. But the problem was never solved and it was aggravated by conflicting personal goals and philosophies.

Minutes from board meetings that summer are revealing: on July 27, Dent announced that the company would be playing on weekends in New Orleans through August 26; Carmel Collins, in charge of the workshops, gave an optimistic report on the start-up of the workshops at the end of July; Richard Aronson, then serving as general manager, reported on potential grants and fund raising in New York. But less than three weeks later, at the August 18th meeting, Dent

informed the board that "the previous Friday night, the company had voted to end the performing season."

The dissolution of this company marked the ending of FST's first phase. For the next few years, under Dent's leadership, FST was to be primarily a New Orleans operation with emphasis on workshop productions. It was also to be an all-Black group heavily influenced by the Black Power movement and rhetoric.

At Home with Black Power: FST's Second Persona

The workshops in writing and acting, however, continued with sporadic performances of poetry and plays by student writers and minor touring by the Black Mink Jockeys (some of the adult workshop writers). Dent and Kalamu ya Salaam (Val Ferdinand) also established Blkartsouth as an arm of the FST and printed the first issue of Nkombo (then titled Gumbo) which featured work produced in the workshops. Thus FST had, at least for the time, become a New Orleans community undertaking.

But, typically, the way was not easy. A fragment of a report from early 1968 notes that despite steadily increasing participation and awareness by New Orleans people, the program was in financial trouble; this meant eliminating the paid-apprenticeship program and not paying the directors "during the current crisis."

By February 1968 workshop participants had increased to "50 to 75" and a number of activities, if not productions,

were going on. But the following September the writing and drama workshops were combined because of an overlap in memberships and because of lagging participation in both. At the end of the year the combined group began rehearsing Salaam's one-act play Mama for a February presentation in New Orleans. And the FST-affiliated Golden Agers prepared their first production, The Doctor and His Patients, a one-act comedy by O. R. Henry.

While the workshop program was struggling (or thriving, depending upon whom one talks to or what report one reads) in New Orleans, fund raising was going on in New York. In November a benefit showing of The Lion in Winter at Lincoln Art Center was followed by a champagne party at L'Etoile. But the most spectacular fund raiser was to come in the spring: on May 11, 1969, a Soul Food Dinner (chaired by Ava Gardner and Bill Cosby, hosted by Brock Peters and starring such luminaries as Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, Jack Lemmon, and Liza Minnelli) was held at the Waldorf-Astoria and attracted 850 people.

More important, 1969 heralded the return of O'Neal as producing director and, briefly, Moses as artistic director and the beginning of a conflict that was to split FST and Blkartsouth. The National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities had given FST a \$10,000 grant, and a grant was expected from the General Convention Special Program of the Episcopal Church. ¹⁸ The Rockefeller Family Fund had also

granted the theater \$25,000 for the year and \$68,000 had been raised toward fulfilling a \$100,000 matching requirement of the Ford Foundation. Altogether the finance committee projected a budget of \$45,600 for the workshops and a budget of just under \$206,000 for the ensemble and administration. Although at the end of January only \$105,000 was on hand, there was enough money--and optimism--to announce an ambitious touring season and to hire a professional cast. The season was to open on April 13 in New Orleans and to then tour some "50 southern locations."

The ensemble began rehearsals in New York and moved to New Orleans in February. Some of the workshop apprentices were to tour with the ensemble. The season did open as scheduled on April 13 with a benefit premiere of Walker's East of Jordan at New Orleans' Civic Theatre.

The projected tour was to take the company through Mississippi and Louisiana and then to Texas, Alabama and Georgia. The actual tour covered more like 21 towns than 43 and ended in August rather than extending into November as scheduled. During the tour, four members of the original ensemble resigned "because of problems in adjusting to the Southern environment and to unorthodox performance locations" and a new technical director from Louisiana, who had begun the season as an apprentice, joined the crew. (These incidents contributed to the decision to try "to build [the] entire company" from southern recruits the next season.)

Reportedly the Theater was received as enthusiastically as it had been in previous years with audiences totalling "an estimated 30,000 people" (Undated report fragment).

One indisputable outcome of the 1969 tour was the final break of Gil Moses from the FST into the New York (and Hollywood) professional theatre: witnessed by Woodie King, the FST production of Slave Ship laid the basis for the highly successful Chelsea Theater Center production which was directed by Moses.

A draft of an October fund-raising letter signed by Brock Peters (then chair of the FST board) boasted that "for the first time . . . , the F.S.T. has been able to operate simultaneously three different, but complimentary [sic] aspects of its program": the touring ensemble; Blkartsouth, now a group of 15-18 Black writers working "to create new material for the F.S.T. Ensemble and the many budding black theaters across the country"; and the community workshop program "which opens channels of expression to many other people, primarily in New Orleans." ¹⁹ By the first of the year, the Theater hoped to add to the community program "a black studies program for children and a coffeehouse to highlight F.S.T. and other local talent, and perhaps some film." While the Theater wanted to continue free performances in primarily Black communities, it also "looks forward to developing a bookstore, a print shop, special performances, and other projects" which will help support it.

The minutes from the annual November meeting of the board note that the 1970 ensemble was to be built with people from the South; to train prospective company members, drama workshops were underway in New Orleans and were being directed by LeRoy Giles while Gilbert Moses was in New York directing Slave Ship. Plans were to open in mid-December with "several productions."²⁰

Once again plans were unrealized. The following October an 11-page letter from Dent to the board of directors summarized the traumatic year of 1970:

By Dec., 1969, the theater was able to maintain workshop productions . . . due to a loan of \$6,000 from IFCO, a grant of \$25,000 from the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation & smaller grants from the New York Foundation and the National Endowment of the Arts. Most of this money was used, however, to pay overdue 1969 payroll taxes (a large portion of this bill is still unpaid) and other outstanding bills.

It was obvious, Dent continued, that a 1970 tour "was out of the question" unless further foundation help was forthcoming. There was optimism, however, about the workshop productions of plays by FST writers that were being scheduled regularly on weekends:

Attendance at the performances was always good, and brought us to the forefront as an originator of theater for black people in New Orleans. The work of the monthly PLAIN TRUTH newspaper was also important in that it dealt with controversial . . . issues in a forthright manner. . . .

In March, with no funds forthcoming, salaries were suspended as were activities of the New York office (except for planning a spring fund-raiser). Workshop activities continued

on a volunteer basis through the spring although two key staff members left in March. O'Neal was on leave of absence and had gone to Africa, so once again Dent took over as acting director. Dent continued his recap of the year:

During March and April we continued with workshop productions, including a trip to Little Rock (our first) for a performance of Val Ferdinand's Mama and a reading by the BLKARTS poets. . . . In early May the poets did six performances at various towns in Mississippi. . . . Meanwhile, it seemed as if plans to have a Spring affair were falling apart in New York, and nothing was going to be immediately forthcoming from Rockefeller. . . .

An emergency meeting in New York in May left this impression that the New York organization "had disintegrated, that many of the people . . . had lost touch with what we were doing in New Orleans and/or had lost interest in supporting the theater." At this point, Brock Peters resigned as chair, adding to the breakdown.

A June benefit in New Orleans featuring Denise Nicholas "brought little if any profit and it was our last program effort." O'Neal returned and in June the board approved his reappointment as director contingent on receiving the grant.

The picture was, however, so gloomy that O'Neal brought up the possibility of bankruptcy. Rockefeller Foundation did come through, this time with a three-year grant totaling \$110,000. Of that, \$50,000 was allocated for the 1970-71 fiscal year to be used toward salaries for workshops, touring and administration. However, a thorough review of

the books revealed debts of approximately \$35,000 and the recommendation was made to close.

A decision "to kill the FST" was made at the end of October. The IRS debt was to be paid from the Rockefeller money; the foundation was to be notified of this decision; and an offer was to be made to return the rest of the grant. The Foundation, however, recommended that the closing be reconsidered and that a management consultant be hired. In November the consultant came to New Orleans, showed O'Neal how to make a budget, do a cash flow analysis, and helped with the program format.²¹ So by the beginning of 1971 a new start was being made and FST was entering its third and final period.

By then the split between the FST and Blkartsouth was final and acrimonious. There were basic disagreements between O'Neal and Dent about goals and methods. The former clung to his idea of a touring company. The latter held on to his dream of a New Orleans rooted community theatre: "I argued that there was tremendous talent in the South . . . and that our job should be to nurture and develop that talent and to build our material from the South." The Theater also needed suitable plays; finding material had been a problem from the start. Baraka's works, for instance, are northern urban and don't speak to the southern Black experience. And, Dent continued, he felt that southern youth needed nurturing; they shouldn't have to

leave the South as he had because of lack of opportunities (Phone interview).

In any case, it was money, not ideology, that was the immediate cause of the break. The argument had begun the previous year when FST had auditioned professionals to bring south (even flying them in from the West Coast) and then paid them \$135 a week while the Blkartsouth people were still struggling in New Orleans. Then when the Rockefeller grant came through, Dent argued, understandably, that those who had been working and keeping the Theater alive should receive some recompense. O'Neal, on the theory that they would lose their New York support unless they had a touring company, disagreed and decided to reorganize, using none of the Blkartsouth people. At this point, the dispute became irreconcilable; the disagreement over methods and aims had become personal. It was several years before the two re-established a speaking relationship and, eventually, a working friendship.

22

On the Move toward Marxism: FST's Last Life

In August O'Neal had submitted "for discussion only" a massive analysis of the FST and its future. Apparent is his embrace of Marxism and its methods. Concern with indoctrination and ideology and, more damaging, the accompanying organizational paraphernalia were for the next few years to interfere with production. He saw the Theater's immediate needs as follows:

We must find ways of getting double and triple service from each resource unit, human, fiscal and informational. The method or process we develop must at the same time serve the objectives of our over all [sic] struggle as Black people. For example if we see capitalism as one of the basic instruments of our oppression can we reasonably expect to forward the struggle for liberation by reiterating the essential objectives of capitalism in our own structures? At the same time it is ridiculous [sic] for us to speak of independence self determination while our financial program reiterates our dependency and confirms our dependence on white folk in particular. . . . We must . . . think in terms of building a cultural institution . . . which will be able to relate continuously to the problem of Black mind development.

Effective Black leadership is dangerous. Known Black leaders die young. . . . [I]t is necessary that we find a method of distributing responsibility and authority . . . that will make it impossible for the absence of one or two individuals to stop the progress of the institution (" . . . Future Development . . ." ts, O'Neal files).

Getting down to specific long-range objectives and plans, O'Neal proposed that Theater members study the Black condition; that the group "develop a means for creating many writers capable of giving form and expression to the priorities we discover through work and study"; and that actors receive training in voice, dramatic style, and improvisation. Extended tours using professional imported actors would have to be eliminated and "series of short concentrated out of town dates" arranged instead. If these suggestions were warmed-over ideas, the following was a major departure from previous policy:

[FST should] continue to work through established community organizations with basically correct political positions but add either a straight out fee or work for a percentage of the gate receipts.

They should play more schools, also for fee; performances on white campuses should be sponsored by a Black student group.

The community workshop program should become a "community communications project" with its central thrust being the identification of "areas in the Black community with critical gaps in communication" and the development of "necessary data, process and other resources as required to solve the problems." Programs which complemented each other and which had the capability of being self-sustaining should receive priority. The newspaper, for instance, "satisfies a clear and pressing need for communications" and can support itself through sales and advertising. On the other hand, the Golden Agers program "has a limited capacity to influence Black mind development. . . . Neither does such a program have the capacity to support itself." Possible new programs that match these criteria could include "a bookstore and Liberty-House type boutique, a school for Black Children and the coffee-house concept."

The group should work to become dependent not on outside resources but "on those whose interests [it] is designed to serve." While the idea of a free theatre had some

validity in the beginning, we can see now that it is erroneous to permit the people to think we do not need their financial support. . . . By continuing to do so . . . we simply reiterate the welfare dependency syndrome and place ourselves in a category with the white aristocratic elite whose money does in fact support our operation at the present time.

Still the theatre would have to continue trying to get grants and other funds.

However, the New York fund raisers should not be board members but assigned to ad hoc committees, and a membership campaign should be started promptly. Staff members should have most of the decision-making power including keeping a check on the producing director who "would hold final approval and the only 'constitutional' veto [at] the program level."

O'Neal also proposed new programs as the new year and new era began, acknowledging that in the past "we at FST have regarded New Orleans simply as a base without giving what now seems the proper credit to the fact that it is home"; thus regularly scheduled performances in New Orleans plus a touring program to high schools and colleges during the fall and winter and to outlying communities during the spring and summer were envisioned. As for plays, material should reflect Black history and culture in the United States, past and present African reality and should include original scripts by "young, Black, Southern writers almost without regard to subject matter. . . ."

As a final note to 1970, total receipts for the year were over \$142,000, yet as it started 1971 FST's future was as problematic as it had been at the beginning of the year. No summer production season was planned, only workshop activity, and it was not until May that the FST Black Theater

Workshop was started with African actor/director Bayo Oduneye as artist-in-residence.

A release that month in the Washington Post reported that the Theater's purpose was "to influence the way black southerners perceive themselves and how they approach the task of solving their common problems." Presenting as a fact what was simply a plan, the piece went on:

To fulfill their teaching role the touring players . . . present dramas about middle-class American blacks, African kings of the past century, or first performed dramas written by young negroes about southern life today (Mearns H12).

Three classes were started--in May, June and July--with a capacity enrollment of 25 in each. Only 20 students completed the program, enough, however, to cast Milner's The Warning--A Theme for Linda which opened in October.

A New York office was reopened and a major fund-raising project was started: Arthur Ashe and Julian Bond agreed to co-chair the Theater's sponsoring committee (which replaced the old New York board) and were planning "a large benefit" in New York for the following May. I find no evidence that this materialized; Ashe did organize a tennis exhibition for the benefit of FST but it was held in New Orleans.

In November O'Neal presented another working draft to the FST staff to clarify philosophy and objectives. By now he had coined the slogan "Help Strong Black Hands to Break the Shackles of the Mind." The position paper iterates the

conflict between African and European peoples and the argument that theatre does not work in a vacuum:

In the real world politics bumps into sex, economics into education, all into all others. In the theater . . . we should be as fully aware of developments in other areas as possible yet cognizant of the limits of the discipline that we have chosen to follow.

Our mission is to help in the task of stimulating and challenging Black peoples [sic] thought about what has happened, what is happening now and what should happen. What they do as a result of the experience we offer will be depending on how effective other institutions are in their efforts to carry out other missions ("FST Philosophy and Objectives . . ." ts, O'Neal files).

Continuing, O'Neal warns that the Theater cannot succeed "on a 'project' basis" but must strive to become rooted in the community we seek to serve. Our central goal this year, therefore, must be keyed to making . . . a stable base from which it can grow into an important independent cultural institution.

Because the workshop program was the base on which the new FST would be built, O'Neal stressed the need for finding "an effective method" for training these volunteers and doing plays "under the same basic conditions" that would be met on tour.

O'Neal had not lost his commitment to touring although he recognized the need to modify the touring organization:

The thing that distinguishes Black Theater in general and the FST in particular is the audience--a Black audience--and in our case, a southern audience. . . . The most important thing about our relationship to that audience is the fact that we go to where the audience is rather than simply wait for them to come to us. The reason we have a 'theater' (building) is that it is important to have a home base. But as home serves children as a place to grow and develop in, then to leave from, so does the home base serve the FST.

In addition to strong support in New Orleans FST needed strong bases in Texas, rural Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia: "We must develop reliable relations with at least four organizations in each state."

O'Neal noted that "95% of our money is [still] white and 95% of the audience is Black. . . ." A long-range approach was needed to get the theater to the point where it would be Black-supported. In the meanwhile, the 1972 objective was simply "to break even." The goals had not really changed.

And, despite the rhetoric, in December the staff found itself "caught without adequate plans for the [workshop] kids." A production of one-acts was put together that ran for about five weeks.

A Christmas day fire that destroyed FST costumes, props, scenery and personal belongings was another blow but on December 28, FST presented "A Black Festival for Blk People." The publicity proclaimed "popcorn, games, food, entertainment, black poetry, a band, a children's play"--all free and all to be presented between 2 and 10 p.m. at the new FST theater.

The festival can be viewed as a precursor to the FST Coffee House, the name given to a "series of cultural and educational programs focusing on local talent." The first series, which began on Sunday, February 20, 1972, included a poetry, music and dance program by FST Workshop students; an

exhibit and lecture by local artist Fred O'Neil; a play "and several other interesting activities" presented by St. Mary's Academy; and a performance of Salaam's The Quest by students from Gateway School. Later coffee houses included presentations on Red China and a series of discussions on South African culture.

In February a new workshop class began with carefully selected students, and the company formed the previous fall from 1971 "graduates" went into rehearsal for a program of two plays presented under the umbrella title of The Black Bourgeoisie...or It Hurts Doesn't It: Rosalee Pritchett by Carlton and Barbara Molette of Spelman College and Edifying Further Elaborations on the Mentality of a Chore by Sharon Stockard Martin.

Cast members each received a stipend of \$5 per week and the fee asked for a college performance was only \$650 which included travel expenses for 20 people. Yet average weekly costs were running around \$3500. Obviously FST was again in the midst of a financial crisis. On hand toward the end of March was \$9972; anticipated income was \$25,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation and \$5000 from the National Endowment for the Arts. Management figured they could now eke out the budget through June. Their "needs at this point [were] \$55,000 to complete the workshop program year, \$26,000 for the fund raising program and \$45,000 to open up a performing group in September."

Two days after the above gloomy report to the board, Oduneye, Costley, Joe Stevens, Ben Spillman and O'Neal met and decided to hold such a meeting monthly with one of the members presenting "a research paper on the subject of his choice for the consideration and criticism of the staff." They also agreed that each director would henceforth be responsible for drawing up and submitting to the staff "a written description of his concept and plan" for any play going into rehearsal. Tentative assignments were made for Stevens to direct Ward's Happy Ending and for Spillman to direct a play titled Contributions (possibly his own script) for performances at the end of April; neither of these, according to performance records, was produced nor was the full-length play to be directed by Oduneye, Trials of Brother Jero or the Vow. Rather, performances of Black Bourgeoisie continued through the spring in New Orleans and on tour. ²³ And in May A Black Experience was offered (see chapter 6). Salaam's Black Love Song #1 was also presented that spring along with Daddy Gander Raps, an imported one-man show by Arnold Inniss. The Black Arts Lab, FST's successor to Dent's Blkartsouth, was begun in New Orleans and there were several short tours in May and June.

On May 10 O'Neal welcomed new members to a board meeting and told them that "after nine years of struggle, the FST is just coming to the point that it should have been when we started" (Minutes ts). Despite continuing adminis-

trative problems, the future seemed promising. By July the optimism had tempered: money, as always, remained a problem.

Concentration that summer was on rehearsing Raisin in the Sun for a run in the fall as a fund raiser as well as a major production.²⁴ In addition the Black Arts Lab had booked performances throughout July in New Orleans and was scheduled to go to San Francisco in September to perform Black Fragments at the Black Expo's Drama Festival.²⁵

At a three-day meeting in August the staff decided that Black Arts Lab, which had been designed to bring together "people with a variety of artistic interests" but which had ended as only a writers' workshop, would write material for the workshop students who would tour on "a trimester basis"; these works were also to be student-directed. (The first tour on this basis was of We Are the Suns, another song-dance-poetry program.)²⁶

During this meeting, Costley wondered how the new logo and slogan "Strong Black Hands to Break the Shackles of the Mind" squared with the original motto "Theater for those who have no theater." O'Neal explained that FST originally had

a kind of missionary purpose and also seemed to carry a kind of eliteness [sic] point of view. . . . FST was also considered a theater formed only to set up other community theaters. . . . Our new motto . . . defines something that is definite and permanent.

The current ideology is aimed at defining how the Theater can "influence the world situation. . . . of transforming the consciousness and value of Black thinking into positive

patterns relating to our Blackness." Another staff member objected that FST wasn't reaching the people it needed to, that its audience was people who were already changing their perceptions; he went on to say that the motto should be amended to add "action" as a goal. It was agreed, after a good deal of discussion, that a decision on the motto would be reached at the end of these evaluation sessions. (It was not amended.)

It was also agreed that priority would be given to monthly study sessions for the staff on such topics as various African or African-influenced movements, key Blacks and political leaders (such as Marx and Mao), theatre movements and key playwrights (including Brecht and Shaw). Furthermore the monthly Coffee House would supplement the study sessions as a vehicle for presenting historical skits to be developed by the Lab and the study sessions would also be made a part of the new workshop. Ideology, as noted, was taking precedence over production.

Raisin opened the end of August and played for approximately two weeks, with an average audience of about 50 and a gross box office of \$1216.82; the cast received 75% of the receipts; promotional expenses ran just over \$622 which means that despite good coverage and good reviews, the theater lost, rather than raised, money.

FST was once again in debt--over \$3000 in debt--and needed to raise almost \$29,000 to meet the year's budget.

Two solicitation letters elicited "rather good" response (how good is not spelled out in the September board minutes) and efforts to get foundation monies continued. Another direct mail solicitation of 10,000 was planned for October. However these fund-raising efforts weren't sufficient and in October salaries were suspended because of lack of funds.

Also in October Free Southern Productions (a subsidiary of FST) began producing in conjunction with WYES-TV a bi-monthly hour program titled Nation Time which had a magazine format.

And in November New Orleans mayor Moon Landrieu proclaimed the week of November 27-December 3, 1972 "Free Southern Theater Week" and urged "that the citizens of the City give full support to the expansion of this very important cultural institution" (Proclamation rpt. FST 1972-73 Annual Report).

To complete the year the workshop presented two one-act plays by Steve Carter, director of NEC's Writers' Workshop: One Last Look and Terraced Apartment. As the year ended, there were also major staff changes: Oduneye returned to Africa and Costley resigned.

Although staff had been officially laid off, January of 1973 started with the half-hour weekly radio show "Plain Talk," which focused on "events, places, and people in Black New Orleans," and a biweekly Sunday morning (midnight to 5 a.m.) Jam Session. The January board meeting, understandab-

ly, tackled the continuing problems of existence. According to the staff, the primary problem had not changed, that being "the contradiction between the aims and objectives of the Theater and the interests of those persons and agencies who have provided the necessary resources":

Our program is striving to make a useful instrument of the Theater in the struggle of the masses of Black people to gain control over their own reality. In order for this to happen we shall have to struggle successfully against those who oppose the liberation of Black people. . . . To a very great extent these are the very same people who have established the large philanthropic institutions. . . . The result is that no matter how well we decorate the proposals and programs that we try to establish the thrust and direction of these programs is clear. In consequence, the people we depend on for resource support are more interested in finding ways to suppress or change our program than in supporting it. . . .

The rhetoric was not changing, simply becoming more strident. Nor was the financial fact changing: foundation support continued to be sought.

FST did not fold but as it entered its 10th-anniversary year, another change in direction was beginning to solidify. From now on, FST's major concentration was to be on producing plays written by O'Neal himself. Hurricane Season was the first of these. It opened on February 16 to a paying audience of 75 (plus 14 comps) and played through mid-March to houses that ranged from 23 (paid) to 101 (total) for the closing.
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In May FST was happy to learn that the Ford Foundation had promised a three-year grant of \$225,000 based on the Theater's ability to raise matching funds. But there was no

actual money forthcoming until July and there were no salaries paid. However, program expansion was possible

because of the increased involvement and support of poor, Black people in the New Orleans area, the support of Black students' groups in schools across a wide area and deep commitment of the people who have served as staff and volunteer workers in the FST.

That same month FST staged Cha Jua's A Black Experience and We Are the Suns. Certainly these performances did not show "increased involvement and support"; the average audience was about 40 and not all were paid admittances. Attendance was not any more encouraging in the fall for Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers?, a documentary drama that was performed September 7 through October 7: houses ranged from 11 to 55, again with not all of those being paid tickets.

In addition to these Black Theater Workshop productions, the FST season included The Curing Melon, which played weekends from June 30 through July 15 and lost over \$600, and Red Beans & Collard Greens, a poetry program by the FST Black Writers Lab which was presented in August.

That summer the Theater went to the New Orleans city council for \$15,000 help toward meeting the Ford challenge grant. After some questioning, the council approved the request which was unsuccessfully challenged by the president of the Patrolman's Association of New Orleans, Irvin L. Magri, who charged that FST "'deals in racism and anti-American rhetoric.'" The things Magri specifically cited (poetry in Nkombo and the production of The Homecoming),

however, dated from 1970 and involved Blkartsouth members no longer affiliated with FST. In discussing the charges, an article in the States-Item noted that the new (1973-74) season

finds FST considerably removed from the distasteful passivity of its early years, as well as from the fervid militancy of its middle period. It has, like the movement to which it is dedicated, matured into an artistic entity concerned with honest, reasonable responses to the Black situation at large, at home and, in recent productions, its specific locale ("Theatre: Yet Another Struggle . . .").

In April FST had been one of 12 cultural and theatre groups that met in Little Rock to form the Southern Black Cultural Alliance. And during the summer WYES-TV applied for an NEA grant to produce O'Neal's Hurricane Season, a one-hour program to be directed by O'Neal. In the application, this point was made:

[FST had been] vitally involved with drama and its relationship to the black community for ten years, and is one of the only black theater groups [sic] in the deep South with regularly scheduled performances throughout the year. In addition, F.S.T. has placed great emphasis on drama workshops, and as a result has been a fertile training ground for some excellent theatrical talent. . . (Grant application).

That fall the Theater's Nation Time program was approved for regional broadcasting on the SECA Network (the Southeastern arm of PBS); now a half-hour program, it was aired each Saturday. Also that fall there were discussions of a cooperative venture between FST and Cinema Systems (of New Orleans) to produce a film but that came to naught because of, according to O'Neal, too big a gap between the

two organizations' points of view (Letters 23 Oct. 1973, 4 Jan. 1974).

An end-of-year report by O'Neal noted the hardships and triumphs of the anniversary year. Among the latter was the fact that, for the first time, FST had worked solely with original scripts. However, these had not emanated directly from the writers' workshop whose members had not gotten "beyond . . . doing poetry" ("A Narrative Report . . ."). O'Neal blamed this lack of progress on the loose organization of the group and the lack of formalized teaching. He also noted the continuing management problems. And the basic complaint of previous years was echoed: production activities were still not meshed with the overall purpose of the theater.

At a December staff meeting a Production Staff Group had been established "to review, criticize, evaluate and correlate the production activities . . ." (Summary of Discussion . . .). And an FST Special Events program had been started to present Black musical performances which "heighten the level of awareness among Black people . . . [and] permit us to make more significant contributions to the overall effort to achieve liberation." The idea was for the FST to represent various groups: FST performing groups which would, of course, be under the Theater's full control; other groups which were directed by FST staff persons and thus directly influenced by FST; professional groups that

might be influenced to "use more relevant and useful material" through the relationship with FST; and professional performers who were already doing significant work. Program participants were to meet regularly "for political education" and "to develop a sense of group cohesion" (Summary . . .).

Discussions pointed up that the major problem was "the lack of class consciousness" on the part of the Black masses; thus the FST had the responsibility of stimulating this consciousness. Nation Time should be used "to clarify the class nature of the problems confronting Black people in the region. . . ." And the workshop should "produce presentations that will reflect the struggles of the working class and possible solutions to those problems" by training people into a cohesive theatrical group and solidifying the participants' ideology (Summary . . .).

Looking ahead, there was optimism that FST had "reached the point that we feel able and competent to start rebuilding a professional performing group." But this professional group differed from previous companies in being "home grown" ("A Narrative Report . . ."). On the bill for touring in 1974 were O'Neal's When the Opportunity Scratches, Itch It! and Inez D. Williams' Small Winds before the Revolution. In New Orleans these two plays were to alternate with workshop productions of Martie Charles' Black Cycle and An Evening with Langston Hughes to be

compiled and edited by Cha Jua. All except the Charles play were original scripts. Of these, only the O'Neal was staged that year.

As 1974 opened, the booking agency was in the forefront. An undated letter soliciting clients announced that in February the FST would for the first time attend the National Entertainment Convention "where a great deal of booking for the college and university circuit is done." In addition to promoting entertainers, they would "be promoting the Free Southern Theater's Touring Company. . . ." By March the thinking had changed. A meeting was called on March 22 "to redefine program operation in line with program or Theater objectives. . . ." Despite the projection of almost \$22,000 in annual revenue, the question was raised, "Why and to what end is a Special Projects Department?" The staff finally agreed that "special projects be abolished" (Minutes, Special Projects Meeting). A feature article in the New Orleans Times-Picayune on Sunday, March 10, confirmed the above schedule. But the Charles play was cancelled after it was already in rehearsal and another workshop production substituted, Going Against the Tide by O'Neal. Opening finally in September, this production "consumed the better part of five months" and meant that Small Winds was also scrapped. Cha Jua's Langston & Company was not to be ready for production until the following summer.

Although not adhering to the announced schedule, once again FST seemed to be on the upswing with a lot of community activity and a short season of productions. A major shift, however, had occurred in the Theater's thinking, a shift away from touring:

[I]t dawned on us that there's something wrong when artists and scholars from other countries come by the dozens to see us while there are thousands of the very people whose interests we seek to serve within a few blocks who don't know what we're here for!
(Annual Report 1974)

The annual report that contained this revelation also laid the blame for "other organizational, financial and artistic problems" to this lack of community involvement. Thus a Youth Program and Community Theater Production Program were developed, the Coffee House concept was revised and other programs were "re-oriented."

The closing months of 1974, in O'Neal's words, saw a "frenzy of activity" and 1975 opened with a tour of Opportunity to colleges in Alabama and Kentucky. The Kentucky trip was apparently something of a disaster--unorganized and disorganized. But the main problem, at least as O'Neal interpreted it, was "failure to integrate properly our artistic work with our political work." The Louisville visit offered, he thought, a microcosm for examining the specific errors that had arisen along with the new touring program:

The main cause of the problem in my view is that we have fallen into the trap of setting individual interests in opposition to political interests. More pre-

cisely, we have tended to view individual interests in isolation from collective interests. This tendency results in the counterposition of art and politics in the bourgeois fashion. . . ("Sum Up of Kentucky Trip").

And though there were "modest gains on the ideological front, we were unable to mount in three days one performance of consistent quality." Placing individual interests over collective interests is "characteristic of bourgeoisie philosophy. . . ."

[W]e are taught to view artistic creativity as a wholly [sic] subjective and individualistic process almost void of science and order. . . . This erroneous, one-sided view which denies the social basis of art stands at the center of our difficulty. . . . I think that the way to solve this problem is increase our collective study. Our principal aim should be to gain a firmer grasp of the political principals [sic] which apply to the struggle of the broad masses in general and the Black masses in particular to overcome imperialism. . . . At the same time we need to put these principals to the test of more disciplined workshops, rehearsals and performance ("Sum Up . . .").

The troupe was operating, or attempting to operate, on collective principles. In a June 17 meeting, the Play Selection Committee reaffirmed the policy of selecting scripts for performance by "the staff collective." Any play could be rejected by two members of the staff and any one member could recommend "consideration of an analysis." (The artistic director had been replaced by a program coordinator.) It was also agreed that the Writers' Workshop should not have a key role in script selection though everyone associated with the FST "should be encouraged to submit scripts. . . ." (Minutes).

The summer of '75 saw the first major production in nine months and the first Community Theater production when Langston & Company, edited and directed by Cha Jua, at last opened in August for a run of five weeks. More than 700 people saw the 15 performances (Box office records).

A Summer Youth Program was inaugurated and 26 young people aged 10-17 participated; the program was geared "towards helping young people to better appreciate Black culture and the artistic expressions manifested by our culture." The participants presented a show, Look for the Children, featuring original poems, songs and dances which garnered "enthusiastic and supportive" audience response (FST Voice 1.2: 1).

In September it was announced that FST's touring group would present four productions with preview performances in New Orleans beginning October 3: a revival of Opportunity, A Black Experience, Fight the Power and Blood. Audiences were uniformly small for the October previews in New Orleans. In November the company went to the West Coast.

The first big news of 1976 was the production of Theodore Ward's Our Lan' with Ward himself on hand as playwright-in-residence. The April issue of the FST Voice (the quite sophisticated newsletter that had been started the summer before) announced that "some forty-three (43) community people are participating as actors in the play, including for the first time in several years the involve-

ment of some whites. . . ." Our Lan' opened on Friday, April 23 to an audience of 120; the following night it attracted 103 viewers but the Sunday matinee brought in only 51 people--still more than had attended many previous FST performances. The show played weekends through Sunday, May 23 but only the final Saturday night performance saw an audience that again topped 100 (123 people attended to be exact and \$40 was stolen from the box office!).²⁸ Pleased with the success of this production and of Langston & Company the previous summer, FST announced plans for at least two productions by the Community Theater each season.

At the same time of Our Lan', the FST's Performing Group, the chief "artistic performing body," was doing Blood and Opportunity; however, the April and May calendars show no performances of the former and only one of the latter scheduled and that was in Urbana, Illinois (FST Voice 2.1).

Twelve years after FST's reluctant move to New Orleans, members of the Theater continued to argue about the primacy of a New Orleans theatre over a touring company; added was the question of the "professional" versus the community program. The latter, it was finally agreed, should be the focus of the artistic work, the position of artistic director should be reinstated, and there should be more performances in New Orleans.

In line with its new determination to become truly a part of the New Orleans community, the FST actively involved

itself in the Gary Tyler Defense Movement (a project that brought the Klan out in full-force opposition).²⁹

In June the Performing Group appeared at the New Theater Festival in Baltimore doing Blood, one of 19 groups selected from over 100 applicants. In this instance FST described itself as a "'theatre of, by, and for those who struggle for social justice and human dignity.'"

At the festival FST discovered that the ProVisional Theatre, a white collective based in Los Angeles, was also working on a play dealing with slavery. The meeting of the two resulted in a special integrated production of the two plays and, in April 1977, a visit to New Orleans by ProVisional people.

The second FST Summer Youth Program also got underway in June. Two groups, one for ages 8 through 12 and the other for ages 13 through 17, met three hours a day, Monday through Thursday, from June 14 through August 20. More than 50 young people were involved. (Thirty-six actually finished the program.)

Money was, however, once again a serious problem. The August issue of the FST Voice featured a plea for contributions and in September special appeals went out to some 1300 Theater supporters: the goal was to raise \$30,000 "matching funds for the Ford Foundation grant which ran out August 31." But only \$1500 from some 50 individuals and organiza-

tions had come in by the beginning of October. Once again FST was retrenching,

planning activities which will result in the consolidation of a program for the coming year. Yearly planning is something we've tended to neglect, but will not in the future. The financial rebuilding of the FST . . . will be the central focus for the coming year.

A Dollar Campaign to bring the theater into "direct contact with a broad sector of the community we seek to serve" was planned for February. FST was still seeking its audience.

In August, in an end-of-fiscal-year report, O'Neal had equated the history of FST with that of the Black Liberation movement as a whole--a history of "failures, setbacks, frustrations and obstacles" that still had not succeeded in killing either the theater or the movement; in fact both had "endured and grow[n] stronger."

He also explained that time spent developing a "Basic Program Document" had restricted productions and touring during the 1975-76 season. Unfortunately, he reported, failure on the Theater's part to make clear their goals and accomplishments had "been used by the National Endowment for the Arts . . . as justification for making a \$30,000 reduction in their support of our program." The Community Theater program and the Youth Program were conceived as "essential to audience development" and the former was also seen as a training ground for those who could become members of the Performing Company. The Performing Group's objective was now defined as the development and maintenance of "the

highest level of achievement in the struggle for unity of revolutionary content and artistic form" through the building of "a repertory touring ensemble which tours and assists in the training and development of people in other aspects of the program." The Documentary Theater Project, aimed at providing "a deeper understanding of the history and development of the Black Liberation struggle" was to give the Performing Group scripts.

The goal was now this:

. . . a permanent company of 8 to 16 actors, who work to develop a collective method of theater work, designed especially to meet the objectives of the FST. This group should be capable of playing a variety of roles under widely varying circumstances and conditions.

The troupe was to "maintain a repertory of at least three full evenings of theater, always including at least one Documentary Theater production for the duration of the Black history project."

(Blood was the only documentary ever fully produced.) The company for the just completed season had involved essentially 10 actors, all of who worked full time outside of the Performing Group (though 8 of them were working for FST in other areas):

This fact constitutes the most serious impediment to the qualitative development of the work of the Performing Group. Rehearsal time is limited, training time is limited, touring and performance time is limited.

Still the Group had performed for three weeks at FST's own theatre and had toured for eleven weeks for "a total of 39

performances. This is the highest level of productivity that we've ever been able to achieve in any touring season of the FST."

But, O'Neal went on:

[It was] a dubious accomplishment. . . . Because of conflicting obligations . . . , we were forced to refuse many opportunities for performance, and have been unable to maintain a consistent program of training and rehearsal.

Uneven performances and a drop in morale resulted even though "performances were enthusiastically received." Blood was particularly popular and usually received standing ovations.

A community radio station in San Francisco was so impressed . . . that they recorded one of the songs from the show to use as a theme. The enthusiastic response of the audiences, however, did not compensate for our own recognition that we were not [living] up to the potential of the group.

The goal of the Community Theater Program was enunciated as raising "the level of popular understanding of the role of culture in the Black Liberation struggle and [encouraging] involvement in community action efforts. . . ." Because this program was not restricted by the costs and logistics inherent to touring, its productions could "take entirely different approaches. . . ." The first plan for 1977 was to bring Roger Furman, then of New York's New Heritage Theater, to New Orleans to direct "his own exciting drama of urban life, The Long Black Block." This was another plan that never saw fruition.

In October a Times-Picayune feature examined the problem. O'Neal explained that since its inception, the theater

had had "periods of intense activity" followed by "periods of evaluation--and relative inactivity" and that part of "the current evaluation period" was concern about the group's political role and its neglect of its "role as a cultural institution." Concern also centered on trying to "raise a large percentage of its annual \$100,000 operating budget from 'the community'" since there was a noticeable trend away from foundation funding for "their type of operation" and a move to favor "the larger regional theaters." FST had hopes of attracting both more whites and the Black middle class and to plan ahead "for four or five years"; O'Neal said he also hoped to "'work with new aesthetic forms,' continue the summer youth workshops, and be able to mount two large scale community productions a year, in addition to touring productions." By the end of the year the staff was down to three full-time people for the first time since 1970 (Dodds, "Where Is . . .").

The new year brought new plans: in January 1977 the theater announced that Theodore Ward was returning in February for a year's stay on another playwright-in-residence grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Then nothing more was heard from FST until April. As it turned out, the first production of the year was a revival of Hurricane Season which O'Neal had revised slightly; its 15 performances had a "modest response" (328 total attendance). This time the play was presented as a Community Theater production.

The next issue of the FST Voice did not appear until July; then it announced the formation of a new Performing Group and the start of the Summer Youth Program. The latter was to "be on a smaller scale" than previously because of the lack of staff and because of a decision "to limit participation to those children and teenagers who are specifically interested in the performing arts"; this summer's program was financed by a \$1000 grant from Total Community Action.

The new Performing Group, unlike the five previous ones which had combined professional and amateur actors, was comprised mainly "of people who don't have previous backgrounds in theater" but who had exhibited talent, creativity and commitment in the workshops. Plans called for a production by the end of June. The Group did do excerpts from Blood at the FST Annual Picnic, in Greenville, Mississippi, and at the John Henry Memorial Festival in West Virginia. They actually opened on October 14 for a run of three weekends with Blood which had undergone "a lot of major changes and reorganization."

During the summer O'Neal and Cha Jua (who, although no longer a staff member, still helped with the theater) worked with a theater class which Delgado Junior College sponsored at the Parish Prison Rehabilitation Center. O'Neal directed prison inmates in an attenuated version of Opportunity.³⁰

In an effort to rebuild audience participation, FST had decided to host "a variety series of cultural events" aimed

at strengthening "the connection between the fast growing community of progressive, innovative artists in the New Orleans area and the FST audience." The series included Sharon Stockard Martin's SOS: An Evening of Anxiety Pieces for the Contemporary American State, jazz pianist-composer Willie Metcalf, pianist-vocalist Henry Butler, a production by Cha Jua of his own A Black Experience and Dent's Ritual Murder. Also announced were two one-man dramas by Charles Pace from Austin, Texas, and a modern dance presentation by the New Dance Company.

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Fiscal 1976-77 had been "the worst year in 10 years" with the greatest decreases coming "in earned income and contributions rather than from foundations. It has been our tendency to blame the foundations for our bad times but the facts don't support the argument. . . ." O'Neal's February report to the FST board went on to predict that "this year looks like it will be worse than last year" and to beg for the board's financial help.

And 1978 certainly did not get off to a promising start. Candle in the Wind was put into rehearsal. But on March 6, O'Neal sent a letter to cast members:

It . . . has been necessary to suspend all activities leading to the production. . . .

Chakula cha Jua, the Director . . . , has withdrawn from the production for personal reasons. . . .

It is still our intentions . . . to see, what we believe to be a major dramatic work in its premier production. In order to do that, however, a new director who would be approved by the playwright would have to be found.³²

By the end of April another director, Joe Stevens, had been found and casting was rescheduled for May 22-26 with rehearsals to begin June 15 and opening to be August 11.

Meanwhile, in April, O'Neal had terminated the workshop which had begun a year before:

I felt it necessary to take the problematic decision because of a critical failing on my part and the FST. We created a group which we were not in a position to provide with the necessary conditions for it[s] healthy and complete development (Memo).

In May he announced that he intended to form a smaller group of six or fewer actors who had "professional level skills and a high level of interest in the philosophy and political perspective of the FST and a willingness to train others." He also iterated his intentions to continue the Documentary Theater Project. FST hosted several visiting performances that spring but its own activity was centered on Candle.

A few days before Candle finally opened on August 18, in a letter to Larry Rand of the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, O'Neal asked for help:

As the result of an error in our bookkeeping we have run out of money six weeks before we expected to. . . . Our bank account is currently in overdraft by approximately \$1,500.00, we are unable to meet standard monthly expenses for August and September, we are trying to complete the opening of the premier production of CANDLE IN THE WIND . . . [and] finally our bare bones staff of three people, who were only receiving thirty dollars a week, have been entirely cut off.

Unfortunately this long-awaited production did not attract large audiences; most numbered under 20. At the end

of September O'Neal thanked the cast and crew for their participation and assured them that they would be put on the regular mailing list "so that you will start to receive our newsletter, when it's published. Thru the newsletter we'll let you know when we're doing another play. . . ." The memo also asked for donations to the Garage Sale planned for the end of October:

Money is desperately [sic] needed to meet current operating costs. . . . (Just as I sat down to type this note, the water was cut off and the man came by to collect rent that [is] two months overdue!)

As it turned out, there was to be a two-year hiatus before another FST production and that was to be the final one. In the spring or summer of 1980 in an undated news release, the FST announced "three plays to be presented at the Contemporary Arts Center": O'Neal's one-man play Don't Start Me To Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones, The Good Woman of Setzuan, and Buddy Bolden's Blues, a new play by Rebecca Ranson described as "a touching biographic drama with music."

Junebug was the only one of these performed and O'Neal six years later was still touring with it. For a couple of years he presented the show under the FST name but by 1983, two decades after its birth, he had taken steps to legally dissolve FST.

Writing in American Theatre, Jim O'Quinn said that FST had come and gone "without leaving a visible mark" but that

[it had] been indelibly absorbed into the city's racial myth: It was the South's first integrated theatre, bringing together idealistic young blacks and whites, urban and rural dwellers, performing artists and ghetto survivors (27).

O'Neal has said that FST was already an anachronism when it was founded, that the Movement of which it was to be a part had been killed with the March on Washington (Personal interview). Dent too, as early as 1970 when death of the theater seemed imminent, theorized that "the disintegration of FST . . . followed exactly the . . . disintegration of the movement" but that it did inspire other theaters and theater artists. Even at its funeral, little agreement emerged as to what happened or why it happened. But there was no doubt that it had happened and had left its mark on a number of lives if not on the community it hoped to touch.

Obviously a number of factors contributed to FST's problems and eventual death. Behind them all was the initial failure to agree on the group's destination much less which road to take.

Notes

¹ Other performances were by A Traveling Jewish Theater of San Francisco (ATJT); Jomandi Productions of Atlanta who presented FST's first original play, Gilbert Moses' Roots; the Roadside Theater of Whitesburg, Kentucky, an FST "offspring"; the Carpetbag Theater of Knoxville; and Voices in the Rain who did a poetry-music program similar to those of the young FST.

² The money came from diverse sources: National Endowment of the Arts, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, Louisiana Division of the Arts, Southern Arts Federation, National Performance Network, People's Theater Festival, Institute of Human Relations at Loyola University (headquarters for the symposia), Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans (the performance site), Amistad Research Center (holder of the FST archives), Alliance for Community Theaters (ACT I--the, or a, successor to FST), Alternate ROOTS and the Ford Foundation. Some of these same sources were instrumental in keeping FST alive through the '70s. It is an irony of our cultural times that anti-establishment arts groups such as FST, Roadside Theater, San Francisco Mime Troupe, etc. have had to turn for help to the epitome of the establishment--the foundations and governmental agencies.

3

Records too are chaotic--and seem to have always been. What was probably the most orderly set of records was in the hands of one of the long-time New Orleans board members and was inadvertently thrown out during an attic cleaning. Thus it is sometimes impossible to date accurately correspondence and reports and to establish with certainty events and performances. After 20 years memories are also hazy, and even those intimately involved at the time cannot supply absolute clarification.

O'Neal's files which he turned over to the Amistad Research Center, and which form the basis for my research, were more disorganized than organized and Amistad filmed them as they were. Reports are mixed in with plays; fragments of reports appear with no title or date; material is repeated.

4

Derby is now an art professor in Michigan; she attended the funeral and, although most cordial, was reluctant to revive those early crises.

5

Unless otherwise designated, all references in this chapter are to material in the FST archives maintained on microfilm by Amistad Research Center. As noted above, much of the material is undated and/or fragmentary.

6

This prospectus is reprinted in Free Southern Theater (FST) (3-6), an invaluable documentary of the theater's birth and first four years. One must, however, be cautious

in reading the book, realizing that material has been selected and edited and that contradictions exist throughout.

7 Richard's brother Bill had been a roommate of Moses at Oberlin and, apparently by a slip of the pen, the initial letter to Schechner was addressed to "Bill" (FST 206): Schechner still ostensibly wonders if they contacted him by accident (Personal interview). Based on extant correspondence and recollections of O'Neal and on common sense, I doubt that; it seems more reasonable that through Bill, Moses knew of Schechner's position and contacts with New York theatre.

8 The show ended up touring 16 towns in Mississippi plus Memphis and New Orleans--or 22 Mississippi towns and New Orleans or 13 Mississippi towns in three weeks, depending upon which FST typescript or article you read--and played to over 3,000 people.

9 While waiting for the group's tax-exempt status to be granted, Tougaloo College continued to administer funds so that donations would be tax deductible.

10 Yet at a company meeting the previous fall, O'Neal had expressed reservations about playing in New York--away from the audience that FST was intended to reach (FST 39).

11

Nothing in the archives deals with personal matters but O'Neal has admitted that these contributed to the almost constant upheaval in the company during these first years (Personal interview).

12

Day of Absence premiered the following November at New York's St. Mark's Playhouse; it was never done by FST.

13

Apparently some workshop activity had occurred in the interim: a program for the season notes that Denise Nicholas had recently been involved in FST's production of Strindberg's The Stranger.

14

The same article relayed a story told by Orman about his arrest "in New Orleans for riding a bicycle the wrong way on a one-way street" and then being "fined \$10 for having no means of support." In the December 13, 1965, issue of The Downtowner O'Neal reported he spent two weeks in jail for the same violation (FST 83).

15

A 1966 proposal from FST harks back to the original dream: "the establishment of community theater groups in up to twenty-five towns and cities where no such groups have ever existed," involving "at least 2,500 people in theater work as amateurs in these towns and at least 50,000 people as audience."

16

The tours under Dent were, according to him, much more sedate than the earlier one: no drinking while driving, no pot, no taking chances; they could have been "a gospel quartet" they were so well behaved! But, although there was no harassment because they were an all-Black group playing only in Black communities, there were added expenses: no longer was the bed-and-board of the Movement days available. He would have liked the group to do 10 to 12 shows a year, particularly in places that were beginning to breed their own companies, but finances made such a schedule impossible (Dent, Phone interview).

17

In their first year FST had problems with Dramatists Play Service about royalty payments for Godot; now there were problems about royalties for the Ward play. Ward had given his personal permission for them to perform the play and had waived royalties because he shared their aims; he assured DPS that the FST performances were professional and would not conflict with any amateur performances that might be scheduled in the area.

18

FST finance committee minutes report expectations of over \$23,000 but the proposal to the church asked for \$15,000.

19

Blkartsouth was also producing Nkombo as a quarterly, producing plays written by workshop members, and giving public readings of other material by its members. The two

currently functioning parts of the workshop program were a journalism workshop which had, by mid-October, published four issues of a monthly newspaper (The Plain Truth) and the Golden Agers Drama Group with 17 participants between the ages of 60 and 86. (According to this same letter, the Golden Agers had given their first public performance on September 24. Yet an earlier release indicated, as mentioned above, that they made their public debut in 1968.)

20

This meeting was held on November 16 and Moses attended; on November 19 a letter to Peters signed by Dent, Jones and O'Neal requested that Moses "be relieved immediately of his duties as Director of the Ensemble" and given four weeks' severance pay "because of the continual hostilities that have existed . . . over the last few months, and our feeling that there is no prognosis for improvement in working relationships. . . ."

21

Janet R. Kenney, who is working on a doctorate in arts administration at the University of Oregon, is examining the business/management problems of FST in her dissertation. Her working title is The History of the FST: A Study of Theatre, Philosophy, Management.

22

Dent maintains that since O'Neal did turn to producing original works (actually a goal from FST's inception) and did settle down to building a New Orleans organization, "in terms of ideas, we won out" (Personal interview).

23

Attendance for this show was somewhat better but audiences were certainly not large enough to bring the FST anywhere close to being self-supporting: a good house was in the neighborhood of 60 paid audience members, but many performances brought in only 20-30 adult ticket holders. A performance at Grambling College in May had a high of 94 paid viewers and 15 children.

24

The idea was for board members to give parties following the performance; invitations were to indicate that a donation would be solicited at the party.

25

Among the other groups performing at the Expo was the Dashiki Theatre Company of New Orleans. Founded in 1969, it already had over 15 major productions to its credit and was achieving this success in the Black community.

26

This tour included several performances in North Carolina: St. Andrews College, Malcolm X College [sic], Laurinburg Prep Institute, and an unidentified college in Greensboro.

27

In the spring the play had 10 performances by the Buffalo Black Drama Workshop. O'Neal's Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? was done by the Theater Department at Memphis State University in February of 1974.

28

FST and Amistad "Historical Notes" give 1973 as the first production date for Blood; the FST notes list it as having been performed in August-September and the Amistad

notes in September and October. However, a review of the show (which appears to be the first) is dated September 13, 1974. Furthermore a January 1975 evaluation by Spillman refers to Fall 1974 performances in terms that indicate this as the premiere. There may have been workshop performances in 1973.

29

The audience count included at times "neighborhood kids," presumably non-paying. The May FST Voice mentions that "for the first time in many years the Free Southern Theater has had to turn away people for a play staged at its 1240 Dryades Street plant" and that maximum seating for the production was 110.

29

Seventeen-year-old Tyler was sentenced to die for the murder of a white man during a brawl on a school bus. There was considerable evidence exonerating Tyler.

30

Performances on two Fridays were for inmates and on two Sundays for the general public. "Originally, the Sunday performances were scheduled to be held at the Free Southern Theater, but the Sheriff's office found problems with that arrangement."

31

In November O'Neal lectured at Harvard's Afro-American Studies Department on Afro-American folk tradition in theatre.

32

A letter to O'Neal from Ward dated March 7 sheds light on Cha Jua's departure: it was a controversy over money. Cha Jua claimed that FST was unfairly withholding \$400, the balance owed him for directing the play whereas FST claimed that the amount had been garnisheed by another firm. Ward pointed out that he had given permission for production of an original play without a formal royalty agreement; "yet," he continues, "despite my reputation as a black playwright, you seem to be willing to torpedo the venture for the sake of a questionable indebtedness on the part of Chakula. . . . I can't see . . . how if your dis- position should be generally known, you may hope to continue your reputation as an advanced proponent of Black Theatre." However, he reassures O'Neal that he will "continue to swing" with them.

Art is--between ourselves,
quite confidentially...
Art is a weapon --
Art is a weapon in the fight
for my interests.

. . . .
First you introduce yourselves
as a theatre group...and now
you talk about political
propaganda. These are two
distinctly different subjects.
Art has nothing to do with
politics. . . .

--Art Is a Weapon

CHAPTER III

FROM ARISTOTLE TO BARAKA: TOWARD A POETICS OF PROTEST

In the United Workers' Theatres' 1931 agitprop piece Art Is a Weapon (Samuel 301-05), the Capitalist first lets us in on the secret that he uses art to advance his own interests. When, however, the workers appear to proclaim the message that "Art is a weapon [and] theatre is a weapon," he denies it vehemently.

Both O'Neal and Dent have said many times (including conversations with me) that the charge was frequently leveled against FST that it was engaged in politics/propaganda, not art/drama. They refuse to accept this judgment, agreeing that all worthwhile art is political and does transmit a distinct message.

This viewpoint that all art is engaged, and thus propagandistic to some degree, has been defended throughout the

history of Western aesthetics and has become a given with the modern Black theatre movement. In our time Sam Smiley in The Drama of Attack and George Szanto in Theater & Propaganda have made excellent cases for the proposition that because all art is a product of its time, if that art treats the problems of the times, it is engaged--either as agitation (the Workers' purpose) or integration (the Capitalist's use) propaganda.¹ The modern Czech playwright Vaclav Havel summarizes these ideas clearly:

"[T]he best theatre is and always has been naturally political. Political . . . in the broadest and truly serious sense of the term: in other words, in no sense as an instrument of propaganda for this or that political ideology . . . but as something which has the innate characteristic that it is not indifferent to the fate of the human polis, that it has a live, committed and penetrative relationship with its country and its time. . ." (Caute 68).

The debate over drama as didacticism or drama as entertainment undoubtedly traces as far back as the genre's ritualistic beginnings. But as with most questions, we in the West are content to start with Aristotle and Plato. The common contention that Aristotle argued for a mimetic, non-didactic theatre and that Plato approved only drama that bolstered the state is not solidly based. Aristotle's Poetics is broad enough that it has been able to accommodate evolving modes and methods throughout the ensuing centuries. And Plato actually propounded no comprehensive poetics; his references to the arts are sparse and scattered and his specific allusions to drama even slighter--some half dozen

(mostly in Laws). What he has to say about it in these brief passages does verify the usual interpretation of Plato's attitudes toward the arts. There is no doubt that he recognized the power of drama to move audiences emotionally and to manipulate them (preferably in the direction the state wished them to move).

It is the usual dichotomy that is set up between Plato and Aristotle that is disputable. There is excellent evidence that Aristotle too saw drama as a vehicle for propaganda. There is no argument between Plato and his pupil when Aristotle claims that the child learns through imitation and that joy of learning is one reason we continue to enjoy imitation (4.2, 5). He goes on to argue in book 6 that tragedy imitates actions, not characters, and that plot is thus of prime importance:

[After plot and character comes] Thought--that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. In the case of oratory this is the function of the political art and of the art of rhetoric: and so indeed the older poets make their characters speak the language of civil life; the poets of our time, the language of the rhetoricians.

Whereas character reveals moral mettle, "thought, on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated." Only after plot, character and idea come diction, song and, lastly, spectacle which, while it has "an emotional attraction," is "the least artistic" of the elements. "For the power of Tragedy . . .

is felt even apart from representation and actors." In short, power lies in content, not in form.

In book 25 of The Poetics Aristotle iterates that one of the reasons for censoring works of arts is that they are "morally hurtful." Certainly these ideas do not conflict² with those of Plato. Art can, and does, do more than entertain.

Those today who argue that all drama is political would consign such seeming trivia as the comedies of Neil Simon to integrationist, or repressive, propoganda; they lull audiences into passive or enthusiastic acceptance of life as it is (or as it is romantically perceived). Even if it may be difficult to accept this argument, the claim that all Black theatre is necessarily propagandistic theatre is easier to accept.³ In the most objective drama of Black life in America, there is always a message and it is usually agitational. Black directors of today agree that, as Val Ward of Chicago's Kuumba Theater puts it, Black "'art must educate as well as entertain'" ("Black Theater . . . Comeback" 58). Danny Hodges, president of Houston's Maceba Affairs (a multi-media production company), puts it even more emphatically: "'We will not produce anything that does not have a social message'" (58). If the Black theatre artists of the mid-'80s are this committed, those of the '60s were even more so.

But on what bases do we evaluate this Black drama of commitment, particularly the work of FST? Aristotle's Poetics and its offspring are not applicable: although schooled in traditional esthetics, the writers of these works have rejected, at least theoretically, those concepts and conventions. They should, I think, be judged as far as feasible in their own terms.

Nor can a particular piece be judged simply as propaganda or art. Even if contention continues over the proposition that all drama is propagandistic, there is consensus that art and propaganda can combine. Those plays that are purely of their time will not remain the repertory; those that speak to basic human needs and problems not yet conquered will continue to carry their messages. O'Neal put it this way: if a work is concerned with a very narrow specific issue, the work will be time-bound, but "the deeper your understanding of any particular set of problems, then the more connections you will see between this moment and that moment and that moment and that moment. . ." (Personal interview). Each play must be looked at individually--but how? Is there a poetics for plays such as those presented by the FST?

Looking at FST's stated purposes can help provide a basis for evaluation. But to put these into context we need to examine briefly the influences of Marxist aesthetics and the still evolving poetics of the Black Theatre movement.

Marxism has been, and continues to be, one of the molding forces of this century, particularly for artists and even more particularly for Black artists.⁴ Lenin recognized the lack of an explicit role in the revolution for the intelligentsia and called for a party literature:

[It would] serve, not some satiated heroine, not the bored upper ten thousand . . . but the millions and tens of millions of working people. . . . It [would] be a free literature enriching the last word in the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and living work of the socialist proletariat, bringing about permanent interaction between the experience of the past . . . and the experience of the present (Lenin 44-49).

For the generation that came of political age in the '60s Mao was the dominant Marxist influence (O'Neal, in formulating FST policy in the '70s, at times almost quotes him). Mao, even more than Lenin, emphasized the role of literature in building the new society. Literature and art should be first of all for the revolutionary leaders, the workers. Following the workers in importance are the peasants, then the soldiers, then the "labouring masses of the urban petty bourgeoisie and . . . the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, both of whom are also our allies . . . capable of long-term cooperation with us." The new literature should not abandon the best of the past but "should take over the rich legacy and the good traditions . . . that have been handed down from past ages in China and foreign countries" and should also utilize the old forms, remolding and infusing them "with new content" and creativity (Mao 11-12+).

If the militant Black writers of the '60s ignored this admonition to retain the best from the past, the following became integral in their new poetics: the raw materials of this new content are to be "found in the life of the people [and] shaped into the ideological form of literature and art serving the masses of people" (22). Mao of course rejects the idea of "art for art's sake"; all art is informed by politics and while "subordinate to politics" does influence politics. Literature and art are indispensable to the revolutionary cause (26-27).

Mao also goes further than his Russian comrades in formulating specifics of this new literature. He emphasizes the need of the artists to get to know and learn from the workers and the peasants so that they may in turn be teachers. While one task of the arts is to raise the standards of the audience, the starting point must be those of the audience, not those of the intellectuals. Even more pressing is the need to popularize material that meets the masses' immediate needs; popularization leads to a rise in standards; at each new plateau popularization is again the priority and so the cycle repeats (16+).

Revolutionary literature must both expose anti-revolutionary forces and extol revolutionary efforts (just as Black drama must praise Black life and condemn the white oppressors) but it must also criticize shortcomings of the people and of the artists themselves. Essential to this

criticism is satire although satire should be used to criticize outsiders rather than for self-criticism (33-34).

Mao warns too against propagating "empty, dry dogmatic formulas"; these not only destroy creativity, they are actually anti-Marxist:

[To truly study and utilize Marxism is] to apply the dialectical materialist and historical materialist viewpoint in our observation of the world, of society and of literature and art; it does not mean writing philosophical lectures into our works of literature and art (36).

Stereotypes, old and new, in language and in characterization, are tools of subjectivism and sectarianism because they stifle creativity and criticism. Language should be rich and varied, stemming from the language of the masses but also absorbing what is needed from foreign languages and what is still alive in classical Chinese. Always of course the writer must speak to the proletariat audience in terms they will understand. Also to do nothing but insult and threaten or "pass sentence" rather than to interpret is a type of stereotyping (92-113). "[I]t is one-sided to regard everything either as all positive or as all negative. . . . We must analyse things concretely," recognizing both the good and the bad in our work and developing truth through debate (153+).

Marxist literary and dramatic theory has been developed by a number of writers. The Marxist writer who undoubtedly has had the most influence on drama is Bertolt Brecht. (O'Neal quotes or refers to him frequently.) In "A Short

Organum for the Theatre" written in 1948, Brecht sets out "to define an aesthetic drawn from a particular kind of theatrical performance which has been worked out in practice over the past few decades." He presents the theatre as primarily a place of entertainment but distinguishes types of pleasures and pleasures for different eras. Our era is a scientific one with the emphasis on productivity, much of which is "applied to creating means of destruction. . . ." Thus a critical attitude is in order. While today's theatre must remain enjoyable, "it is still free to find enjoyment in teaching and inquiry." Its representations of society can influence that society. Its audience should be the workers, the builders of society:

[They] must be entertained with the wisdom that comes from the solution of problems, with the anger that is a practical expression of sympathy with the underdog, with the respect due to those who respect humanity . . . in short, with whatever delights those who are producing something.

This type of theatre can treat of anything, even the anti-social, because the audience brings to it an active critical attitude.

What cannot be accepted is a passive detached audience. Since detachment intensifies as the acting grows better, the actors should "be as bad as possible." What we need in place of our realistic "unrealistic" presentation is a theatre which both "releases the feelings, insights, and impulses possible" within the particular situation and

stimulates "those thoughts and feelings which help transform" the historical field being dealt with.

Historic perspective is necessary, "and if we play works dealing with our own time as though they too were historical," we will stimulate the critical attitude. What is needed is detachment, distancing, or *Vermendung*, (usually translated as "alienation") so that the familiar seems strange, and complacency is dispelled.

As for the story, "the heart of the theatrical performance," here too artifice must be apparent and the actions episodic with time allowed for the audience "to interpose . . . judgment." If the individual episodes which comprise a play are not visibly "knotted together," the spectators will become too enmeshed in the drama and will lose their critical faculties.

Altogether then, theatre should aim to make the familiar strange, to stimulate the viewer to question rather than accept what is presented, to make understanding of the particular issue easier.

Brecht's "Organum" obviously mixes Aristotelian poetics with Marxist theory spiced by his own theatrical view derived in part from predecessors such as Edwin Piscator. Others since Brecht have developed his basic principles. Sartre agrees with Brecht that theatre should be demystifying (that is, a tool to build understanding) but it must do more than criticize; because most audiences are not

politicized, they must be made to "share in the real demystification" of key characters. A character should be shown in the midst of a specific conflict, making a free choice. Sartre also insists that no theatrical techniques can be renounced in presenting a message since the critical reactions of a non-politicized audience are not to be trusted (49-50).

Szanto argues that Brecht actually wrote a number of his plays for a bourgeois, rather than a politicized proletarian, audience (87). He also goes further than Brecht or Sartre in dividing theatre into three distinct types of propaganda: agitational, integrationist and dialectical. The propaganda of agitation is usually one of negation; such theatre "at its best [excites] its audiences if not to action at least to an awareness they had previously lacked." The theatre of integration, of the establishment, is most prevalent. The third type, the theatre of dialectical propaganda, "attempts to demystify, by depicting separately, interactively, and always clearly, the basic elements which comprise a confused social or historical situation." This is Brecht's "epic" theatre (71-76).

David Caute, while questioning the efficacy of art in the political struggle, works out some variations on the Brechtian base. Brecht's episodic approach to plot and distancing techniques are indispensable to establish "a dialectical appreciation of the relationship of theatre to

reality and of theatre to itself." But only "those aspects of the Agitprop tradition compatible with theatrical self-awareness (or intransitivity)" are adopted. Satire and irony are effective; cartoon and caricature are not. To be rejected are "mindlessness, chaos, the cult of spontaneity, and bogus audience participation." Instead "the writer and the text" should be restored "to their vital primary roles" (201-40).

Georg Lukács, a major Marxist literary theorist, disagrees vehemently with Brecht's theories; while not as influential in theatre as Brecht's, his approach has carried weight with some Black playwrights. Lukács advocates realism that is the "accurate presentation of the total sociohistorical situation of a given society." Characters should be neither unique nor interchangeably abstract "but should unite the general and the particular to form 'types' illustrative of the universal laws of society" (Carlson 387).

As a dual philosophy-English major at Southern Illinois University with considerable work in theatre, O'Neal, the chief theoretician of FST and its major playwright, brought to his theatre a knowledge of classic and modern esthetic and political theories. But even more important to the understanding of Black drama are the esthetics of modern Black theatre.

These esthetics are formed primarily by the political ideas of Malcolm X to whom the leaders of the Black Arts Movement turned for inspiration and commitment to a Black nation. Reading Malcolm X's autobiography proved to be an awakening to "blackness" for many in the '60s, including members of the FST.

But the groundwork was meticulously laid (in this as in so many other areas of black awareness) by W. E. B. Du Bois. In establishing the Krigwa Players in 1924, DuBois enunciated four bases for black drama which have remained building blocks for subsequent manifestos:

"I. About us. That is, they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is. II. By us. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be a Negro today. III. For us. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. IV. Near us. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people" (Haskins 70).

Some 40 years later Baraka echoed DuBois in demanding "a theatre about black people, with black people, for black people and only black people" (Hatch, "White Folks . . ." 18). In his essay "The Revolutionary Theatre" (originally published in 1966), he laid the foundation for a modern Black poetics:

The Revolutionary Theatre should force change. . . .
 The Revolutionary Theatre must EXPOSE! Show up the insides of these humans, look into black skulls. . . .
 It must kill any God anyone names except Common Sense. . . .

The Revolutionary Theatre must Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked . . . because

it is a theatre of Victims. . . .

[It] . . . must be anti-Western. . . .

The Revolutionary Theatre must take dreams and give them a reality. It must isolate the ritual and historical cycles of reality. . . . It is a political theatre, a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dimwitted fathbellied white guys. . . .

This should be a theatre of World Spirit. . . . The language will be anybody's, but tightened by the poet's backbone. . . . We will talk about the world, and the preciseness with which we are able to summon the world will be our art. . . . Wittgenstein said ethics and aesthetics are one. I believe this. . . .

The Revolutionary Theatre is shaped by the world, and moves to shape the world. . . .

It is a social theatre, but all theatre is social theatre. But we will change the drawing rooms into places where real things can be said about a real world. . . .

Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they are themselves victims if they are blood brothers. . . . We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be. . . .

Americans will hate the Revolutionary Theatre because it will be out to destroy them. . . .

American producers will say the revolutionary plays are filth, usually because they will treat human life as if it were actually happening. American directors will say that the white guys in the plays are too abstract and cowardly . . . and they will be right.

The Revolutionary Theatre, which is now peopled with victims, will soon begin to be peopled with new kinds of heroes. . . . We must make an art that will function so as to call down the actual wrath of world spirit. . . . This is a theatre of assault. . . .
(Selected Plays 130-33).

Following in Baraka's footsteps, Ed Bullins and William Kgositsile were equally impressionistic in their creeds for the new Black theatre. Bullins argues that the avant-garde theatre is really nothing new but that Black theatre represents a complete break with Western theatre:

We don't want to have a higher form of white art in blackface. We are working towards something entirely different and new that encompasses the soul and spirit of Black people. . . . We are attempting to take all the things that are positive in us . . . and incorporate them into our art on a collective basis. . . . In ten years, . . . our art will be completely different from . . . Anglo-Saxon art. It will be totally Black! (New Plays . . . xii)

Kgositsile, echoing Baraka, predicts that Black theatre will be "a definitive act, a decisive song" that will show selected parts of real life using "national" symbols and presenting giant heroes such as Malcolm, DuBois and Nkruma at the same time it castigates villains; overall it will be pro, not anti, life (Gayle, . . . Expression 146-48).

Other Black writers attempted more complex and concrete analyses than those of Baraka, Bullins and Kgositsile. Ron Milner in his 1968 article "Black Theater--Go Home!" defined this new theatre:

. . . the ritualized reflection and projection of a unique and particular way of being, born of the unique and particular conditioning of black people leasing time on this planet controlled by white-men; and having something to do with the breaking of that "leasing-syndrome."

This theatre will be the product of writers who understand that for Black people, especially Black Americans, all human maladies, problems, wants, wonders are aggravated and enlarged by white racism.

Milner agrees that this theatre "must go home . . . psychically, mentally, aesthetically, and . . . physically." He explains that "psychically" means rejecting "'outside influences'" and probing "into the real, black, YOU" whereas

mentally means "understanding that you and the experiences of you are in time and history collective repetitions . . . ; going home aesthetically will follow naturally . . . since your aesthetics come out of your mental and psychic environment." The "going home physically" means putting this theatre in the black community who will sustain and judge it (Gayle, . . . Aesthetic 306-12).

Ron Karenga that same year enunciated what Hill (National Conference . . .) regards as the cornerstones of the Black esthetics: collectivism, functionalism, and commitment. Karenga takes these characteristics from Leopold Senghor, who sees them as inherent in Africa art, and argues that they should be the foundation for today's Afro-American art. In "Black Cultural Nationalism" he says that "the most important criteria" for judging Black art are the social, not artistic, criteria: "For all art must reflect and support the Black Revolution, and any art that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution is invalid. . . ." Functionalism involves exposure of the enemy, praise of the people and support of the revolution. This art is collective if it comes "from the people" and is "returned to the people in a form more beautiful and colorful than it was in real life." And the commitment is to the revolution, "to a future that is ours" (Gayle, . . . Aesthetic 32-46).

The summer issue of TDR in 1968 (T-40) was devoted to Black Theatre. In an article on "The Black Arts Movement," regarded by some to be as influential as Baraka's, Larry Neal explains the relationship between Black Art's and Black Power:

Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. . . . [It] proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic.

Inherent in the new Black aesthetic is the "African-American cultural tradition" but it goes beyond that to encompass "most of the usable elements of Third World culture" and is motivated by "the destruction of the white thing. . . ." It asks the ethics-based question, "What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors?" Human survival is the core concern of contemporary life and the Black artist must recognize this. "[E]thics and aesthetics must interact positively and be consistent with the demands for a more spiritual world. Consequently the Black Arts Movement is an ethical movement."

Neal iterates the familiar theme of the sterility of white American theatre and posits the Black Arts theatre as advocated by Baraka as an alternative. This "is primarily a theatre of the Spirit, confronting the Black man in his interaction with his brothers and with the white thing."

Implicit "is the idea that Black people . . . constitute a nation within the belly of white America" (29-39).

Toni Cade sums up the '60s and looks ahead:

What characterizes Black Theater, then, is a newness in content, direction, attitude, a purpose. . . . The playwright need not any longer accommodate his vision to what the white conscience believes is the truth about this country. . . . Revolution was talked to death on the stages of the thirties. The residue hung in the air till the sixties. But at least revolutionary upheaval is taking place in a realer sense in our time . . . [and] the sixties will at least have provided the lessons for the more genuine, more separate, more black, more liberated revolutionary theater of the seventies (Gayle, . . . Expression 134-43).

More moderate voices were heard during the '70s.

Baraka's 1971 definition of Black theatre as that dealing "with the lives of Black people," for instance, is a far cry in tone at least from his call to revolution of 1966. His explanation continues:

It is a theater that actually functions to liberate Black people. It is a theater that will commit Black people to their own liberation and instruct them about what they should do and what they should be doing. It will involve them emotionally. It will also, hopefully, involve them programmatically in their liberation [The] Black Theater is an economic institution, it is a political institution, it is a creative institution, it is a religious institution, it is a place where social organization can be taught. . . (Coleman 32-36).

And in 1978, though he was still talking revolution, it was in a vastly different manner than in the '60s:

The Black Arts Movement of the sixties basically wanted to reflect the rise of the militancy of the black masses as reflected by Malcolm X. Its political line at its most positive was that literature must be a weapon of revolutionary struggle. . . .

On the negative side, the . . . movement without the guidance of . . . a Marxist-Leninist communist party

was . . . left with spontaneity. It became embroiled in cultural nationalism, bourgeois nationalism, substituting the mistrust and hatred of white people for the analysis of the real enemies of black people . . . [A] dead end had been reached that could only be surmounted by a complete change of . . . ideology. . . . Afro-American literature is going . . . [to] leap back into the revolutionary positivism of the thirties and the positive aspect of the black-arts sixties. . . . The Afro-American nation and its people . . . still face a revolutionary struggle. . . . The next wave of Afro-American literature . . . will dramatically record this (Selected Plays . . . 250-51).

Robert Macbeth of the New Lafayette Theatre is among those repeating the call for the Black theatre to be an integral part of its community, providing "not only new plays, but new theatre, new concepts of what 'plays' are." Those in Black theatre "must be of high purpose. . . . Our job has always been to show Black people who they are, where they are and what condition they are in" (ts).

In 1972 Larry Neal pointed the way "Into Nationalism, Out of Parochialism" in an article in which he went against the trend by praising rather than condemning the Negro Ensemble Company. He complains that "a black critic is expected to attack all playwrights working, and all theaters playing, anywhere outside the black community" but adds that he does not think that necessary:

The NEC just represents another tendency within the movement. It wants to be accepted off-Broadway, wants to be accepted by the critics, and honestly says so. Everybody else wants the same thing but doesn't want to admit it.

Neal also remarks that Black artists are beginning to move back to a confrontation with, rather than a retreat from,

western art. The New Lafayette, for instance, is again admitting white critics and trying "to get the works of their playwrights done everywhere they can be done. . . . Our theater should challenge the establishment theater. . . ." ⁵
 (Performance 32-40).

In an interview with Erika Munk in the same issue of Performance, Bullins confirms Neal's analysis of the situation: "The state of the black arts is in flux . . . so there are a lot of perspectives. . . ." For the New Lafayette, "the initial sloganeering has been done and there's no sense repeating it" (52-60).

And in an (apparently) unpublished piece written in 1971 titled "Black Theatre of the 70's--Evolutionary Changes," Bullins recalls that among the young Blacks of the '60s who "imagined the metaphor of the times to be revolution" were the creators of Black theatre which was seen as a "revolutionary instrument" but more important was the emergence of Black theatre groups.

These artists are creating new symbols drawn from ancient prototypes and "translated to the people through Black stylistic, symbolic and literal image/renderitions":

Some of the obvious elements that make up the alphabet of the secret language used in Black theatre are . . . rhythm. . . ; the racial consciousness and subconsciousness of Third World peoples, Black Cultural Nationalism, Black Revolutionary Nationalism and traditional . . . familial nationalism; dance . . . ; Black religion in its numerous forms...; Black astrology, myth-science; also history, fable and legend, vodun [voodoo] ritual-ceremony, Afro-American nigger street styles, and of course, Black music.

The social role of Black theatre is of prime importance:

It is the Black artist's creative duty to plant, nurture and spread the seeds of change [but] Black theatre is part of all theatre, whether this fact is liked by Black theatre creators or denied by ignorant Americans [sic]. Black theatre's evolution into a visible force in the arts and the cultural life of Black America has changed theatre very profoundly, though this change is not yet immediately evident to the white theatregoer.

Bullins prophesies that Black theatre will evolve "into a profound instrument of altering the slave mentality of Black Americans" which is not to say that "Art and Politics should be identical. . . . Black Art is to express what is best in us and for us Black people"; that best may include politics. Black theatre is "a people's theatre, dedicated to the continuing survival and progress of Black people. And the artists will continue to evolve with the people. . ." (ts).

Julian Mayfield's 1971 essay "You Touch My Black Aesthetic and I'll Touch Yours" could almost have been written in refutation of the above Bullins piece. In it Mayfield defines the Black aesthetic in the negative: it is not a secret or a special language. And while Black music may contribute to the Black aesthetic, it is not an essential component. Nor obviously has the Black aesthetic "anything to do with our supposed sexuality." Vague as it may be, this aesthetic "rests on something more substantial than hip talk, African dress, natural hair, and endless, fruitless discussions of 'soul!'" It rests, he continues, "in our racial memory" which will manifest itself in different

individual images. "The Black Aesthetic, if it is anything, is the search for a new program. . . . It is the search for a new spiritual quality, or the recapture of an old one, lost and buried deep in our African past." And it is, finally, revolutionary (Gayle, . . . Aesthetic 24-31).

Eugene Perkins also sets out a program for the Black Arts Movement in the '70s, reminding us of its revolutionary and nationalistic goals:

[T]here is an inherent danger to any cultural movement which arises during a period of social crisis ['60s] that is bordering on revolution. Unless the esthetics of the movement support and reinforce the struggle, then they have no real social or political significance, and become only sterile fads. . . . The Black Arts Movement cannot afford to isolate itself from the Black Revolution.

It is the duty of the Black Arts Movement to nurture the awakening Black consciousness, "to help liberate black people from the oppressive chains of white America and to create a functional esthetic that expresses the total black experience. . . ." In line with this, the Movement must involve the people as participants and must abjure empty slogans. Each of the arts must be dedicated to the revolution. A Black esthetic implies "an interaction between the various art forms which embodies a secular philosophical reference. . . . If we are to claim a Black Esthetic, then we must also define the qualities which make it so." Simply saying art is "black" does not define it.

Perkins goes on to say that the theatre, which embodies many art forms, can best define "the totality of Black Art"

but "the Black Theatre has yet to reach the masses of black people." To combat the hold of film and television, Black theatre groups must reach out and involve the community even if some community groups "do not generally see themselves as part of the struggle."⁶ He reminds us that the majority of Blacks are not, at least not yet, revolutionaries "and if we want this majority's support . . . , then our theatre must capture those daily experiences and tribulations which are living documents to their very existence."

The underlying goal of Black Theatre must be educating the people so that they will gradually move from simple survival to a more aggressive stance. To achieve this the theatre must be aggressively realistic.

Black arts must also guard against white exploitation. "Black Art must be controlled by black people." Perkins concludes by pointing out that art "cannot be expected to remedy all of the problems confronting black people. . . . However, it can help to provide us with a meaningful cultural foundation. . ." (85-97).

Sometime during the '70s Ted Ward, in a paper titled "Black Theatre in Relation to Black Liberation," took issue with some of Perkins' ideas.⁷ Ward acknowledges that Black theatre is operating in opposition to the racist society, a struggle aggravated by the refusal of the black middle class to participate. Stimulated by the activity of the Civil Rights decade, Black artists "renounced the previous strug-

gle for reform and took the path toward Modernism [a term borrowed from Lukács] . . . , the principal [characteristic] of which has been the expression of white hatred, and the resort to scatological language as proof of their revolutionary desires." This Ward sees as a repudiation of socialist ideals and achievements and a revolt against realism.

Also the new playwrights "fail to recognize the need for mastery of dramatic structure" and he quotes from

Lukács' Realism in Our Times:

There . . . is a lack of definition. The protest . . . is an abstract gesture; its rejection of reality is wholesale and summary, containing no concrete criticism. It is a gesture, moreover, that is destined to lead nowhere. . . . In any protest against particular social conditions, these conditions themselves must have the central place.

Furthermore, Ward maintains, esthetics is not a political question but a question of "the capacity of a given artist to capture the truth of his observation relative to his medium. . . ." This is a long way from the collectivism of the Black esthetics of the '60s, a stance still held by other Black artists. Ward goes on to say that although Black artists should build on their experiences, both racial and individual, they should also remember that the white workers and poor whites know nothing of Black lives and they should strive to educate these people and form alliances.

Floyd Gaffney also emphasizes the value of the individual voice: "The black writer who speaks from direct experience, hopefully through plays that are skillful, percep-

tive and illustrative, will find the common denominator between ethics and aesthetics." It is not however possible to apply the same critical criteria to playwrights who deliberately ignore western principles of art as to those who employ them. Thus the agitprop plays must be judged in terms of their own goals, not in terms of universality:

Agitprop techniques of the thirties, Brechtian techniques . . . and aesthetic maxims of Artaud are deliberately applied The idea is to reach predominantly black audiences through a theatrical style that allows the playwright a chance to inform, motivate and activate spectators by direct and simple means. . . . [T]hrough the concrete form of theatrical production lies their potential to revitalize American drama so that action and aesthetics, theory and practice become synonymous. . . ("Black Theatre . . ." 10-15).

That the revolutionary fervor among Blacks was declining in the '70s (Carlson 470) is confirmed by Kalamu ya Salaam and Tom Dent. In the 1971 Black World "Annual Round-up" of Black theatre, Dent sets these goals for a Black Southern theatre:

- (a) Work toward a positive consciousness of our culture . . . ;
- (b) Reinvigorate and celebrate the rituals and lifestyle of our people;
- (c) Provide . . . a forum for debate, discussion, and help us define the terms of our existence, which involves a knowledge of history and an analysis of where the oppressor is at, and how we must counteract this oppression;
- (d) Provide love for our people in a realistic, not bullshit, hysterical or jingoistic sense, but real, based on our self-acceptance, our history, our vision of the future. Theater, particularly, should provide a place of communion. . . ("Beyond Rhetoric . . ." 14-24).

The following year, in his contribution to the "Annual Round-up" Salaam claims that revolutionary Black theatre is

"on the way out." Black theatre is American theatre-- produced by whites and funded by whites and in its essence mainstream. This does not mean that it is not relevant: "Art is not revolution." However art can play a part in the revolution, that part being basically "transmitting information, educating people and offering the principles of work and struggle" (40-45).

Dramatists' interest in tracing Black roots remained strong. In 1979 Errol Hill was still calling for a rejection of traditional stylistic techniques and an exploration of the "true origins" of Black theatre materials. Likewise, he wants Black theatre to be judged "in terms of its authentic black heritage" ("Black Black Theatre . . ." 29-31). Hill, typically, notes the church and other Black community institutions and African ancestry as sources. But what exactly, in terms of cultural contributions, can Africa offer the Black American dramatist?

In 1971, while artist-in-residence at FST, African scholar Bayo Oduneye presented an "Introduction to African Drama" (ts) which provides at least a partial answer to that question. In the past in Africa, drama existed everywhere: "In rituals, ceremonies and mimetic performances the people of Africa enacted the most important aspects of their lives." Dance and mime were integral to these performances which were definitely functional. At night stories were told and news and gossip exchanged:

The storyteller could be a one man theatre or he could draw his audience into the play. Dialogue could move from person to person; it could be a long poetic narrative spoken by one man, or it could take the form of a chant.

Today there is still theatre everywhere in Africa, traditional and modern. And the new Africa draws on foreign theatre as well as on its own past: "From Cairo to the Cape, from Dakar to Nairobi, performances of the works of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Wilde, Arthur Miller, etc. could be seen." African playwrights are employing modern dramatic techniques but they also tend to use stylized forms and such traditional devices as "spontaneous dialogue, folk music, simple stories, and relevant dances. . . ." Their audiences respond actively to performances, often participating in the staged event.

Language is dynamic:

Often a playwright will shift back and forth in style. Vocabulary, diction and sentence structure from a European language . . . , to an African version of that language as it is spoken on the streets, to African languages and dialects themselves.

African drama is growing; changing, assimilating, creating. The parallel, although Oduneye does not explicate it, with American Black theatre is obvious. What the Africans are not doing, he also explains, is rejecting classical and modern "white" forms and techniques.

Of course, despite the rhetoric and proclaimed aesthetics of blackness, American Black playwrights are not rejecting them either; their training is after all in western

theatre and theory, and that knowledge cannot be erased.

There are, however, vital differences between Afro-American and African theatre. Paul Harrison sees one such difference in the lack of spirit ("nommo") in the former. African-based rituals are empty, lacking in the freedom and spontaneity of the original--and lacking the active audience participation. Our theatre tends to bog down in sociological approaches and heavy polemics (196+).

Scott Kennedy approaches the same point: African theatre "is a volcanic eruption of the art forms steeped in the culture of its people." It is "communication. . . . a celebration of life. A communion of vibrations" (14). It is a symbolic theatre presenting the people's history to them; thus it is both classical and folk:

Its purpose is to comment upon nature and life, not merely to reproduce it. . . .

African theatre is universe-connected, concerning itself with both the natural and supernatural (18-19).

But, as noted above, African theatre is richly diverse, tackling both "the roots of yesterday" and "the problems of today" and doing so with both ancient and modern methods. By integrating dance and mime, storytelling and music into their works Afro-American playwrights have enriched their dramatic stock; in simply adopting ritualistic posturing and/or attempting to abandon the western heritage they have misread the lessons of Africa and done disservice to their own art.

From Malcolm X came the commitment to development of a wholly Black idiom. But with the returning moderation in the '70s also came a shift back to more traditional Marxism. How does the FST fit into this frame? Essentially John O'Neal was the FST spokesperson throughout its history. A sampling of his thoughts can give us perhaps a still clearer context in which to look at FST's work.

O'Neal insists that politics and esthetic form can not be split because the relationship between them "is the relationship between content and form" and both are necessary:

Content is an inextricable part of every art work. . . .
If that content is of any moment beyond the entirely
frivolous, then it's going to support . . . be related
to some issue that people are concerned with.

What we might consider psychological matters are, if they are of any significance, socially--that is politically--determined. Granted that many things in our lives are completely unimportant "in the big picture" but the question then narrows:

"Do you want to bother producing art concerned with the essentially immaterial phase[s] of our lives?" . . .
I submit that it is possible to say things that . . .
provide all the tension release, all the joy, all the
humor, all the--whatever emotion you want to character-
ize it with--without avoiding these substantial
questions.

As a political weapon, theatre has its limitations. It is "a kinetic medium" but "I don't think people run . . . out of the theatre to storm the barricades. . . ." Producing good theatre requires recognizing "the nature of the instrument" and using "it for what it is good for. . . ."

One thing theatre is good for is

the examination of more complicated phenomena. . . .
 Now some people use it for other purposes but. . . .
 there's no point in trying to do something if you don't
 try to do it the best it can be done.

When people are more concerned about the immediate
 response, they move from art into another mode, using art as
 an accessory:

They move . . . into the discipline of political action
 with a small "p" and that is not necessarily a bad
 thing except that it is important to know the difference
 when you're playing which role. . . .

As for the FST, a number of statements were made at dif-
 ferent stages as to its purposes. The common thread is "to
 find a way through art to support the purposes of the Black
 Liberation struggle" (Personal interview).

But of course in 1963 when FST was born, civil rights--
 not Black Liberation--was the watchword. In the first issue
 of American Dialog, O'Neal introduced "A Freedom Theater in
 the South," the still embryonic FST. Written in 1964 the
 article suggests that the Movement needs to move beyond
 politics and develop "educational, cultural and public ser-
 vice institutions" and Southern leadership. Theatre "is one
 of the most effective ways possible for a man or a people to
 become aware of themselves."

By the time of his follow-up article "Freedom Takes the
 Stage," written after the first 1964 tour, O'Neal was going
 a step further in elucidating the aim of the FST:

One question that seems constantly to concern people . . . [is] the question of whether this is civil rights protest or propaganda theater or whether we are a "theater theater." Hopefully, the kind of program and the kind of dialogue that we are engaged in show the invalidity of such a question. If a theater that reflects honestly and truthfully the human condition and which provides some insight into a particular situation that may be useful to its audience is a propaganda theater, then that is what we intend to be. If a theater company in the South that refuses to accept the standards of segregation's system for the destruction of the human spirit and the human ego is a civil rights protest theater, then we're that too.

It seems to me, however, that even to ask the question is somewhat of an indictment. For an artist to sacrifice the relevance of his art to his audience and their particular situation is to prostitute his art. For a man to accept what he knows to be evil within the context of his own commitment is to violate his integrity as a man. To paraphrase one of the mentors of modern theater, Bertolt Brecht, the only way for art to be non-political is for it to join sides with the ruling powers.

In the Summer 1968 issue of TDR devoted to Black theatre, O'Neal makes some general observations on the Black artist: an artist in order to develop must be nurtured by those who love him; it stands to reason then that the Black artist needs to be with Black people, speaking to a Black audience. In speaking to a white audience with different cultural interests and experiences, the Black artist "becomes an explainer," a process that "takes him away from his legitimate work as an artist" which is to sing. The Black artist is in the proper milieu when he accepts "the responsibility of speaking from the context of, and to, [the] values and needs" of the Black community.

Also necessary to the establishment of a relevant theatre is "an active and critical" audience. It takes more

than Black actors in a Black community to make a theatre viable; it must address the needs of the audience in terms of their experience:

There is no truth that speaks so clearly to me as the truth of my own experience. If I cut to the essence of my own truth there will lie a truth for all men. One can only achieve that kind of statement, however, in the context of specific historical, cultural, political, economic circumstances. . . . As the truth of Black people finds expression, it will be political ("Motion . . ." 70-77).

A couple of years later in a piece written for The Black Aesthetic, O'Neal begins to sound the more revolutionary note of the times. The job of Black artists, he maintains, "is to help our People to recognize themselves and the inevitable demands of the struggle that lies ahead" ("Black Arts . . ." 47-58).

By 1971 he has identified three types of theatre based on purpose. In a paper prepared for the FST's workshop and titled "The Purpose of the Black Theater Workshop of the FST," O'Neal distinguishes community theatre, which has as its main goal the involvement of "people in a given community in theatrical entertainment"; educational theatre, which has dual goals--to train students for theatrical careers and to "train people to use the theater as a teaching instrument"; and finally the Theater of Commitment, which aims "to use the theater as an instrument to achieve ends that are greater than the theater itself." Black theatre is the latter--a theatre committed to "seeking a change in the

condition and an improvement in the welfare of Black People."

Most of the papers from this era sound the Black Liberation themes: a call for a Black nation and a recognition that the current struggle is for liberation and that "the FST is valid only in so far as it is a vehicle for our contributions to the struggle of our people for total liberation." O'Neal was never really happy with Black Power; his Marxist orientation is too strong to let him feel comfortable with a segregated world but at this stage he identifies himself as inclining toward Pan-African nationalism. The Pan-African tries to synthesize the cultural and Marxist positions and also believes that "a unified continental government in Africa is requisite to the liberation of Blacks the world over."

By the next spring O'Neal was emphasizing that in talking about FST's role in communicating ideas, he wasn't talking about didactic theater:

Blacks in the South tend to be less affected by nationalist rhetoric. . . . Now, I know a lot of northern black theater have moved of late from direct political theater to other forms of raising our consciousness. But for years . . . I haven't been interested in rhetorical or didactic theater. It locks you into a line

We can use the Dozens, the street rap, and black liturgical forms from sermon to prayer meeting. But if we want to shape a new consciousness through ideas, these sources can't just be icing on a white cake--we have to find ways to make their underlying rhythms and spirit part of our total work ("Performing . . ." 41-51).

However in 1975 and 1976 internal papers, O'Neal was still talking about commitment "to the goal of national liberation . . . for the oppressed Black Nation in America" with the Theater's particular role remaining education, unification and inspiration. More pure Marxism was now mixed with the Black Liberation rhetoric:

As an anti-imperialist organization . . . FST bases its program on three basic principles: 1) human rights over property rights, 2) government in the interest of the many instead . . . of the few, and 3) support of the struggles of the world's oppressed people.

FST's works must attack living conditions, the rise in repression and imperialist wars. The political aspect of art dominates the esthetic although the highest esthetic quality should be sought.

In 1979 O'Neal summarized the FST's accomplishments and proclaimed the continuing struggle against oppression and imperialism. He also acknowledged the similarity among the theatres that arose in the early '60s--FST, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, El Teatro Campesino, the Inner-City Cultural Center in Los Angeles, the Bread and Puppet Theatre and Baraka's Harlem Black Arts Theater: "These groups don't share a philosophy. Nonetheless they were among the leaders in an effort to create art which expresses the will of and supports the interests of common people. . . ."

There is however too much confusion of ideas, according to O'Neal. FST by then understood that "the artist . . . is responsible and accountable for the political as well as the

aesthetic consequence of his effort." Others involved in similar artistic efforts also need to clarify their thinking:

In order for the arts to become more useful in our effort to improve the quality and character of life, it is essential that we strengthen the relationship between the arts and people's struggles. . . . There is a great need for deepening and extending our understanding of revolutionary aesthetics. . . . Without firm ground in theory, we are exposed to the risk of pointless pursuit. The quality of our work will be deficient ("Living in the Danger Zone" 11-13).

Two final papers--one for the Southern Arts Federation and one given at a symposium sponsored by Millsaps and Tougaloo Colleges that fall--iterate these basic points. O'Neal ends the symposium paper with this question: "How long before we learn that art is to the struggle for understanding among the people as a weapon is to warfare?"

With this grounding in the movements and philosophies behind the work of the FST, we turn to the works themselves. There is always some presumption in an attempt to evaluate works from another milieu. But in America the Black and white cultures are not discrete but complementary and inter-facing. And with the foregoing glimpse at the Marxist and Black Nationalist theories that motivated the FST dramatists, we can perhaps better appreciate these works.

Notes

¹ Szanto makes a particularly useful distinction between these two types of propaganda: agitation which overtly attempts to stimulate action and integration which covertly aims at maintaining the status quo (9+). In our contemporary Western world agitprop has typically been theatre of the Left; in the United States in the '60s Black theatre adopted this mode enthusiastically.

² For an elegant analysis of The Poetics, concluding that "all theater is necessarily political" and that the Aristotelian system is a "powerful poetic-political" used for integrationist (that is suppressive) purposes, see Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, pp. ix+.

³ As we shall see, Black militant dramatists differentiate between "protest" and "propaganda" (or revolutionary) theatre, reserving the former term for theatre aimed towards white audiences and using the latter for their own theatre.

⁴ Ironically Marxism's appeal has been to intellectuals and artists, such as the leaders of the Black Arts Movement, and to the "peasants" of the Third World but not to the "proletariat." These people, Marx's hope and target for revolution, in developed countries have been absorbed into

the hated bourgeoisie. And it is the lack of Black bourgeois support that has made it so difficult for Black theatres to survive.

5

Of course not even in the '60s were all Blacks pro Black theatre. In his controversial book The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, Harold Cruse lambasts the Black theatre movement. He insists that "Negroes do not want a separate Negro theatrical institution" although those in the theatre insist on "witlessly" discussing the issue. Nor can the content of plays change the world: "The content of plays determines their form but not social forms, although social forms are influential in shaping both the form and content of plays. In our society, however, there is no such thing as revolutionary theater" (520-32).

What is missing in Black theatre is a philosophy, an esthetics. Jones' (Baraka's) impulse behind the foundation of the Harlem Black Arts Theatre was correct but he didn't go far enough with nationalism. Furthermore, the Black writer must understand his major role is cultural, not political (535-36).

6

Perkins hews to the line of Malcolm X who advocated working with non-Movement groups in specific actions although it is never right "to bloc with them in supporting capitalist politics" (Morrison 84-91). This is, of course, Marxism, and Dent and O'Neal echo the theme.

⁷ This typescript--which seems to be a rough draft for an oral presentation--is not dated. It very likely was written during one of the two periods when Ward was writer-in-residence at the FST in the mid-'70s.

long caravan speeding thru alabama
 then georgia red clay
 black theatre of an albany
 backwood church
 and then
 the long convoy stretch to
 new 'O.'. . .

--David Henderson, "A Coltrane
 Memorial"

CHAPTER IV

THE PLAYS: PRODUCTIONS IN BLACK AND WHITE

The selection of plays was from the first a problem for FST. Limited production resources, an integrated company, a theatrical philosophy dedicated to furthering the Civil Rights Movement (at first) and the Black Liberation Movement (later), plus individual agendas for personal and professional development were bound to create problems. From the start there was a desire to develop original material but during the first four years, besides poetry shows and two improvisational scripts based on local events, only one original play was produced--Gil Moses' Roots.

For the initial season in 1964, an impressive repertory was announced: Ossie Davis' Purlie Victorious, Langston Hughes' Don't You Want to Be Free?, John O. Killens' Lower than the Angels, Douglas Turner Ward's Day of Absence and Happy Ending, Ann Flagg's Great Gettin' Up Morning, and an adaptation of Antigone.¹ None of these was done that summer (and only two were ever performed). The one play mounted

and toured was Martin Duberman's In White America and it was done almost on the spur of the moment and then justified as a pilot project.

Moses directed the production and he, O'Neal and Denise Nicholas appeared in it; they recruited three other actors from the Movement plus guitarist Jackie Washington, who had one album to his credit, and some technical help. In ten days they were ready to start for McComb, Mississippi, in borrowed vehicles. A November FST newsletter (ts) reports that the group played to over 3,000 people during some 19 performances that August of Freedom Summer, mostly in small Mississippi towns. The production was simple: one platform, a few lights (FST 17). What few reports exist indicate that reactions were uniformly positive among the mostly Black, mostly rural audiences.

In White America, a docudrama, was first performed in the fall of 1963 at New York's Sheridan Square Playhouse. Written by a white history professor for a primarily white audience, it was probably intended to make whites thoroughly ashamed of their history. The texts used are taken from both white and Black sources dating from the eighteenth century to 1957 and Little Rock.²

FST added current material in the second act relating to the disappearance of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner (their murders weren't discovered until after the tour had begun). In a memo to James Wechsler, Moses asks approval of a "scene

using part of your editorial and one which uses statements by Mrs. Michael Schwerner. . . ":

I thought it necessary for our audience to bring this play up to date. . . . The honesty and forthrightness of your editorial emphasizes [sic] the angle from which those involved in the Southern Freedom Movement regard the inactivity of the Federal Government.

Unfortunately no script of these added scenes is available. Nor is a record of what music was used although a description in the FST book of one performance indicates that at least part of the original music was retained.³

And there are only a few references to the performances themselves. Perhaps the most dynamic performance occurred the night in Indianola, Mississippi, when 25 white men, accompanied by helmeted policemen, showed up and asked permission to see the show. This incident has been reported in numerous articles (including O'Neal's "Freedom Takes the Stage" and Sutherland's "Theater of the Meaningful") but the fullest account is in an August 19th letter (unsigned) to Joy Manoff, head of the New York Fund-Raising Committee:

We were performing in the community center, and it was terribly crowded. . . . The whites sat in a group, quietly. They were all neatly dressed, shirtsleeved, mostly between 30-45 years old; according to a local guy I talked to, they were small businessmen, truck-drivers, a garage owner, etc. . . . The project people figured them for [Citizens] Council members at worst, "moderates" at best. They sat through the entire play, and I have never seen such close attention paid --with so little visible reaction. The actors--everyone else there--were scared, and inspired, and put on the best performances of the entire tour. I was sitting in the aisle, between two rows of these whites, as was Cynthia Washington . . . ; we may have inhibited them, as someone told me that the ones farther back applauded at the end of the play, and were generally

freer in their reaction. . . . I went up to one of them during intermission . . . and asked him what he thought of the play so far. He told me to speak to their spokesman. . . . [H]e said that they had come simply out of curiosity and because they had heard of the play before, that they were very impressed by the quality of the acting, and by Jackie Washington, but that naturally they couldn't accept the play's contents. I asked asked him whether he knew that the play was documentary and he said he did, but he felt there was a bias in the editing. He also said he didn't want to discuss specific scenes until he had seen the entire play. . . . The one time this man made a comment during the second part of the play (aside from laughing at Father Divine) was right after the Wechsler speech, which infuriated him ("Who said that? Who said that? Some god-dam darkie?"). . . .

Sutherland elaborates on the event:

I returned to Indianola two days later . . . to talk with some of the whites . . . about their reactions. There was . . . only one person available: the County Clerk. . . . Quietly, with total hostility, he explained that he had gone to the play to find out what the Summer Project was all about. He thought it was well acted, historically accurate as far as he could judge--and inflammatory. The production confirmed his suspicion that the project was Communist-infiltrated.

Sutherland, who traveled with the group for several days, tells more about audience reactions and production conditions:

"You are the actors," said John O'Neal . . . to the largely Negro, largely youthful audience sitting on folding chairs, benches, cots and the ground, behind a small frame house in Ruleville, Miss. They were waiting to see what was, for probably all of them, their first live play. The "stage" was the back porch; there was no curtain, and lights hadn't been necessary because it was mid-afternoon. Down the road . . . came a pickup truck with a policeman at the wheel, and a large German police dog standing stiff and ominous in the back. It drove by once, then passed back again. . . . Finally the play began . . . In White America, less a play than a dramatic reading of Negro history. . . . [FST's] version . . . was highly professional and compared very favorably to the original. . . . [But] much of its irony and humor eluded them [Mississippi Negroes] and they occasionally laughed when they were not supposed to, or vice versa. They clapped equally

for Booker T. Washington delivering his conservative "five fingers speech" and for Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey. Members of the audience who started to join in singing with the cast would sometimes be hushed by others more decorous. One performance, in . . . Gulfport, turned into a small disaster because it was held in a movie theater and the audience, expecting at least one chase scene and three corpses, expressed its sense of betrayal with loud complaints and constant interruptions.

Elsewhere, response was noisy in a different way. As the actors made their pleas for justice or denounced the white man's cruelty, old women and young men would shout: "That's right!" "Amen!" "You tell it!" . . .

During the performance . . . at Greenville, a man in the audience came up on the stage as a pre-Civil War scene . . . was about to begin. He had obviously believed O'Neal's words: "You are the actors." But then he stood there, frozen, until Gil Moses finally whispered for him to leave. Afterward the man explained, "There was so much I wanted to say and I had it all figured out. But when I got up there . . . , I just couldn't."

The "best"--that is, most understanding--responses occurred generally when the performance was in a church. But, tellingly, by the next tour, audiences in and out of churches already knew what to expect and there were no more unruly movie-goers.

Sutherland was not the only visitor to speak favorably of this first production. In a report titled "Free Southern Theater: History and Opportunities" that traces the group from 1964 through 1966, an excerpt from the September-October 1965 World Theater is quoted: "The Free Southern Theater's version of In White America was highly professional and compared very favorably with the original off-Broadway production."

In White America was revived for the 1965 summer tour, this time with a "professional" cast directed by Robert Cordier. Apparently this production was more sophisticated, using projections for added effect. "Big D" (Costley) describes opening night in Jackson:

[P]reparations for opening night were to say the least chaotic! Our screen was delayed, we had to play outdoors instead of in, we could only get 105 chairs, we had no formal way to seat audiences, no house lights, and were inundated with children as thick as roaches. At 8:15 we had 350 people waiting to see the show, at 8:45 we hit. For the next two and a half hours we had rapt attention. It was beautiful. Our curtain call was greeted with wild applause. We could have taken 20 curtain calls. They were still applauding as the tech crew moved in to start taking apart the set (FST 84-85).

A feature in the National Guardian confirms the effectiveness of this production:

The company's commitment to quality is as great as its commitment to communication. . . . The work pays off; the production of "In White America" which this writer saw in McComb was expertly staged and acted, with an electric quality of timing, tone and movement which surpassed even the off-Broadway original.

The actors were individually fascinating and impressive. Denise [Nicholas] Moses, eloquent in gaze and voice and body sets the tone . . . at the beginning, breaking into Murray Levy's passionate defense of race separation by rising from the back of the audience and moving slowly toward the stage, singing "Oh, Freedom" in a calm clear voice to Levy's baffled face. . . .

The spirit and unity of the company . . . carries across the footlights to ignite an equivalent experience among its audiences, and to spark a responsiveness which often breaks down completely the barrier of the footlights. In many towns members of the audience have risen from their chairs to contribute to performances, have even rushed onto the stage in their urgency to express their recognition of the thoughts and experiences before them (Undated copy).

Despite this record of success with both productions of In White America, as the years went by and integrationism gave way to Black nationalism, the principals' evaluation of the play noticeably shifted. As early as 1965, asked why In White America was picked, Moses responded:

It was a funny choice. We picked it because its theme essentially stated that the Negro revolt was like the American Revolution. And it shows the Negro a history, his history here, from the beginning to now. . . . [I]t shows people brutally treated . . . who have suffered for recognition for three hundred years . . . who have never lost their humanity ("Dialogue" 68).

Nicholas elaborated:

In White America . . . was such a profound experience for everyone in the audience, and for us. The amazing thing was that this play gave people a frame of reference they'd never had before. They saw today's struggle as an old fight, and they recognized that people had been fighting much the same way, all over the country, for a long time: for all the time. They found the history they had always been denied (68).

Writing about "The FST and Me," Schechner (although he was not partner to the original decision to mount the play), reports that it "seemed the perfect script." Although the script is "sentimental" and shortchanges the Black Nationalists, it "matched the temper of Freedom Summer, the time of 'black and white together.'" He goes on to say, however, that in retrospect in 1968 "the play is condescending, patronizing. It is the nearly perfect representation of 'liberal sentiment'. . ." (FST 213).

In 1966 in his Freedomways "Evaluation" of FST, Dent agreed that "plays like In White America, Brecht's The

Rifles of Senora Carrar . . . and the immediate improvisational plays . . . [can] help the participants discover what the Movement means or what it should mean." He then points out the play's educational value:

At a Catholic school in New Orleans an audience of primarily "Creole" Negroes was exposed to a history of black people in America absolutely foreign to their experience. . . . These youths were completely ignorant of W.E.B. DuBois, Father Divine--even Booker T (28).

But by 1974 in another Freedomways article, an update on "Black Theater in the South," Dent sounded less positive about the play:

Unfortunately, the first production . . . set in motion the conflict over choice of material which has raged within the organization since it first had to deal with practicalities. In White America dealt with the theme of the black saga in America, but was hardly a black play in form, though the performance was livened by individual and ensemble songs (248).

Actually its episodic form combines music, narration and dialogue--basic elements in traditional African theatre. It is essentially the form that O'Neal chose later for the docudrama Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? which presents Black history from a Black, not white, perspective.

Reading In White America today, we can see the bases for some of the later objections: its emphasis is on the unfair exclusion of Blacks from American society rather than on (as in O'Neal's follow-up) the Blacks' continual revolt against that exclusion; they are presented more as reactors than as actors. And there is no doubt that the work is somewhat dated: much has happened since 1957 that can now

be put in perspective so no history is complete without recognition of Dr. King and the Movement, of Malcolm X and the Nationalists, of the gains and, more recently, the losses in the continuing fight for rights.

But Duberman is not condescending. In fact he does an effective job of shattering some liberal heroes: Thomas Jefferson is presented as concluding that Blacks are inferior to whites; Woodrow Wilson is shown as rude and unresponsive to a Black delegation; the people of Canterbury, Connecticut, led by the Honorable Andrew T. Judson, are portrayed as bigots. The one scene I find gratuitous is the brief depiction of Father Divine; it adds nothing to the basic tale of the fight for freedom and if intended to be humorous misses its mark and is inappropriate. (Because of the play's structure, this scene can easily be cut; the fact that FST directors did not choose to do so indicates that others may see--or saw--it differently.)

The chief problem with the script is that it is heavily rhetorical--long speeches, short exchanges--rather than dramatic. But again, effective acting and staging can keep the action moving and the audience involved. The work also has the advantage of being easily producible, requiring only seven people (including the guitarist) and minimal costumes and sets. And, as everyone agrees, In White America did in 1964 and 1965 reflect the mood in Black America. It was a good, not a "funny," choice, relating perhaps more than any

of the other plays of the next few years to the experiences and emotions of the FST audiences.

The two plays chosen for the first "official" FST tour in the fall and winter of 1964-65 are "funnier" choices and have produced even more controversy than the Duberman work. Davis' Purlie Victorious, although heavily anthologized, is not today regarded with great favor by Black critics and Beckett's Waiting for Godot is viewed by many as the strangest choice in FST's history.

Schechner reports that he, O'Neal and Moses "met and argued for many days" about the plays for this first professional tour. Considered were Blues for Mr. Charlie and other plays in the Black repertory:

We argued whether or not they were "accurate reflections" of the "black experience." I knew nothing of that experience, and I suspect that Gil and John knew less of it (in the South) than they thought. We rejected the Baldwin play and chose instead . . . Purlie Victorious. An ambivalent choice. Surely in many ways Purlie is a liberating play. But in other ways it, like In White America, offers a sentimental path to freedom. [A year later, he labeled the choice not ambivalent but a mistake ("Dialogue" 68).]

Our audience loved Purlie. Here was a stereotype of Southern rural life, here was the language of the people. Or was it the language of the people? I am still not certain. Surely the rhythms and words were there. But I suspect this was Delta Broadway, the Plaza Suite of the Mississippi flatlands (FST 215-16).

Schechner likes Purlie because it is farcical and funny and "right-on" in terms of its politics (Personal interview). The November 1964 FST newsletter rather tersely reports that the producing directors finally picked Purlie

because they felt it "embodied a spirit essential to the communities in which the FST will play; and comedy, farce, and parody can be liberating elements."⁴

Purlie premiered in 1961 to good reviews (although it did not have a long Broadway run).

[It] ridicules all of the conventional myths and . . . stereotypes of Southern blacks and whites; optimistically it implies that these relics have finally been removed from the American living room. . . (Turner 16).

Laughter has always been a cutting weapon and modern playwrights have used it as a tool with particular keenness. As Robert Hatch points out, "[W]e implicate ourselves by our laughter; more often than not, we are the victims of the jest. . . ." whether that jest mixes "absurdity with terror" or "hilarity with disgust."

Certainly FST's audiences found the show funny even though the troupe were not pleased with their performances or the staging (FST 59-60+; "Dialogue" 74-75). The New York Times reported that it opened to an standing room only audience of about 500 in New Orleans ("Integrated . . ."). The major problem was the staging: the three specified realistic settings proved difficult--even impossible--to execute in the schools, churches and centers in which the FST played, let alone in the field and farmyard performances (Gaffney, "Interracial Theatre . . ." 108).

Although the audiences easily identified with the familiar (although caricatured) characters, Gaffney questions its choice on the grounds of the play's ability "to chal-

lenge an audience's reflective and critical skills" (109). He also thinks that a weak and farcical second act "is at odds with the serious racial issues for which the play is a vehicle" (107). He is, I think, correct: the low comedy of Purlie does dilute the message. We cheer for Purlie but recognize his shortcomings as a hero; we are appalled by the Ol' Cap'n but he is too broadly drawn to take very seriously; we wish Lutiebelle well but she is too gauche and naive to be a wholly satisfactory heroine; we approve Charlie's sentiments but he is too childlike to command real admiration. In short, satire--the sharpest cutting edge of comedy--here is dulled into stereotypical characters (the in-love-with-his-own-words Black minister, the weak liberal, the diehard Southerner, etc.) and familiarly farcical scenes.

But the basic approach--never apparently discussed by the play's antagonists or protagonists--is rooted in Black folklore: the trickster, who always starts in the weaker position, triumphs over the supposedly stronger foe. (For more about the trickster, see comments on Happy Ending.)

Unfortunately, because Davis does parody the Black image, Purlie is too comic to be really revolutionary as Fabre notes (34-35). The main problem is the message itself: it is, as with In White America, an integrationist solution that is posited and achieved. Thus for those critics of today who base their views on the esthetics of the Black Liberation Movement, Purlie is invalid: it is neither tru-

ly collective, committed nor functional. It was written for a Broadway audience, not a primarily Black audience. It satirizes both antagonists and protagonists. And it is traditional Western theatre in form.

But remembering Mao's advice to begin at the level of the people and to popularize the material might make Purlie more acceptable to these critics. FST's audiences were neither sophisticated nor revolutionary so they could relish Purlie's victory and approve Charlie's acceptance. Too, in the hot Mississippi fall of 1964 finding something to laugh about and with must have been a relief, and the show's optimistic message about changing times in the South must have been hopefully understood.

Godot is a different story.

O'Neal comments on the controversy surrounding Godot:

Time and time again the question was raised, "What possible relevance do you imagine Godot to have to the lives of Black people in the South? Why do a play like that?" Ultimately I think it must be agreed that Godot is not the most appropriate kind of material [emphasis added]. The plays should come directly from the experience of the people who are there. Godot was not written for such an audience. It was to be a slap in the face for complacent western intellectuals. There were a number of "incorrect" arguments directed at us, however, that I think it important to identify.

One of the most common arguments against the play was that it was too "complicated and intellectual" for the "ignorant rural mind." Not only is this a condescending and patronizing argument, it is one symptomatic of misplaced Western values which presume education as a prerequisite for intelligence. The uneducated may lack certain specific skills that follow education but they are no less intelligent. Often the very absence of these skills forces them to greater application of creative facilities [sic] simply in order to survive. . . .

Besides theater is a living art. While the script is important, the immediate communication takes place between the actors on stage and the audience. . . . Our production of the play was very good and did, therefore, communicate forcefully.

Some saw it as a political allegory. Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer . . . best typified that approach when she said in the discussion after the play, "Everyday we see men dressed just like these (tramps), sitting around the bars, pool halls and on the street corners waiting for something! They must be waiting for Godot! But you can't sit around waiting. Ain't nobody going to bring you nothing. You got to get up and fight for what you want. Some people are just sitting around waiting for somebody to bring in Freedom just like these men are sitting here waiting for Godot. . . ."5 Others read it as a religious allegory making Godot God and the central image the fall of man. . . ("Motion in the Ocean," TDR 75-76; FST 178; ts).

The reasons O'Neal gave 20 years later for choosing the play are somewhat simpler: it was manageable in terms of cast, and "someone" in the company wanted to do it! He went on to say that doing the play taught them never to underestimate the capacity of an audience, indicating that it had been company members themselves who had wondered about the ability of these uneducated people to understand (Personal interview).

Moses confirms this last observation:

We wanted to see what would happen. We chose it because it's a great play, and we thought Godot would act as a barometer of the limits, the ceiling of this audience. It didn't operate that way. All we learned was that our audience can take Godot ("Dialogue" 69).

In a letter to Grove Press dated October 21, 1964, regarding the waiving of royalties, Schechner emphasized that "we feel it is essential to do plays like GODOT and not simply 'agit-prop' plays." He recalls that, for him, seeing

Godot in the small Southern towns "was an extraordinary experience artistically, socially, politically and personally" (Personal interview).

The November 1964 FST newsletter rationalized the choice:

Waiting for Godot is not only a great modern play, but one which speaks in universal and yet concrete terms about the situation of human beings (not simply racial beings). The successful production of Godot at Alcatraz convinced the producing directors that the play would be readily understood and welcomed in that larger prison, Mississippi. Underneath its anguish, Godot is a play about freedom and its difficult demands on the human consciousness.

The newsletter rationale could have been intended to pacify James Cromwell, the director, who read the play as a metaphysical allegory and "was offended by seeing a racial analogy, the analogy to the circumstances we played in and the master-slave relationship. . ." (O'Neal, Personal interview). Cromwell himself told a reporter that the play was chosen "'because it moved us and we thought it worthwhile'" (Minor). In any case the cast had by the end of the tour stopped answering the question in post-play discussions (Minor).

Whatever the reason for the choice, performances did not go smoothly nor were all audience members as acute as Mrs. Hamer in arriving at an understanding. In fact O'Neal told Minor that "befuddlement" was the best word to describe the reaction.

At the performance in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Cromwell played Pozzo in blackface and finally captured the attention of the audience; previous audiences had tended to ignore him because as the white master, he could obviously have nothing of interest to say to them (FST 57). Halfway through the tour Moses as Didi was directed to put on whiteface. For Schechner this "destroyed the reality of the play" and he wondered why it was done. Moses explained:

The reason was, I think, that the audience couldn't go beyond the Pozzo and Lucky situation: the image of the white man holding the rope around a Negro's neck shocked them out of comprehension.

Nicholas elaborated: "Whiteface immediately stopped that first black-white reaction and forced the audience to deal with something else. . . . It brought them closer to the human heart of the play." O'Neal continued:

Finally we rejected the idea of whiteface, but kept it anyway because there was no other way to deal with the problem of racial hangups. . . . We had a white Gogo and a Negro Didi; two Negroes doing the roles would have been different. . . . If we keep Godot in the repertory--and we will--we'll have to work things out ("Dialogue" 71).

Some people in the Southern tour towns caught the humor, others walked out; kids at one performance threw spitballs. When Minor saw it in Hattiesburg, the show opened to an audience of about 150; by the end some two dozen people remained.

Schechner has identified three distinct FST audiences: the New York audience who came to the performance at the New School "to do their Movement duty"; the New Orleans audience

who made the choice to come rather than to do something else; and the small-town Deep South audience that "was fascinated by a new experience." The New Yorkers knew about the play and "looked for meanings"; in the South "they laughed at the characters" because they continued to wait. In the South it was a comedy; in New York it was "a play of despair" ("Dialogue" 69-70).

O'Neal says that southern audiences "accepted Didi and Gogo as comic characters, whereas Pozzo and Lucky were, somehow, made analogous to the whole question of slavery" (Gaffney, "Interracial Theatre . . ." 115).

Despite the cast's insecurities, the production itself was reportedly quite good. At least Jerry Tallmer reviewing the New York performance for the Post thought that the staging compared favorably with other productions of the play in New York and that Moses as Didi was excellent (FST ts).

Yet it seems from the conflicting reports that there must have been a lack of focus. Obviously the use of black-and-or-whiteface changed the original concept which cast each of the two pairs interracially. (Just as obviously if Lucky had been white and Pozzo Black, a still different interpretation/reaction would have been engendered.) There must have been serious disagreements as to how the play should be approached with Cromwell's "artistic" reading winning, but only partially, over O'Neal's more pragmatic

and political interpretation. It's probably a valid guess that this lack of focus confused the audience more than the play itself. (Godot can, after all, be read in a multitude of ways--witness the plethora of articles and books since its 1953 premiere! But this is not the place to review the various interpretations.)

Focused as it might have been with its interracial cast, the FST production could have legitimately made political implications as a sub-layer to the metaphysical questions inherent in the script. Godot is a complex work and there is no reason to limit a production to a single layer of meaning. Certainly I do not agree with Gaffney's claim that because Godot "addresses itself to the very nature of human existence . . . [it] does not lend itself to politics" ("Interracial Theatre . . ." 16).

Nor is it legitimate to reject the comic aspects of the play and expect only profound reactions. Becket has deliberately used burlesque routines and, if played in that tradition, they will be funny (at least to those who like this type of humor). The play is after all labeled "a tragicomedy," a form that has acquired new significance with the "theatre of the absurd"--theatre that is built on the recognition that life is both comic and tragic, that is, absurd. A director and cast might worry if no one did laugh during a performance! However, some FST performances of the play ran as long as 2 hours and 45 minutes (O'Neal, Personal

interview). It is quite possible that some people walked out from boredom, not from lack of understanding.

Having said this, I must also say that I agree that Godot was not a good choice. It doesn't meet the objectives of the FST, vague as they may have been; it is not about Black problems nor is it revolutionary in any sense. (In fact Sartre considers it bourgeois, even reactionary [51].)

Understood or not, liked or not, Godot was one half of the first official tour, a tour that played to some 5500 people, many of whom had been introduced to the FST the previous summer and who were already adopting the FST as their theatre.

The next season, billed as "The Year of Revolt," included two plays "about revolution" (Handbill)--Brecht's The Rifles of Senora Carrar and the revival of In White America. It is stretching a point to call Duberman's play revolutionary but it does carry a strong message, a much stronger and more direct one than either Purlie or, obviously, Godot. The Brecht play, however, is explicitly revolutionary. O'Casey's Shadow of a Gunman was also scheduled but, although rehearsed, was never produced because of an attenuated season. Moliere's George Dandin had also been announced but it never even went into rehearsal nor did the planned new production of Godot.

Although performed frequently during the Spanish Civil War and in East Germany after World War II, The Rifles (or

Guns) of Senora Carrar is hardly one of Brecht's better known, or better, works. Based on Synge's Riders to the Sea, it was written (with M. Steffin) in 1937 for a group of Germans in Paris. Unlike Brecht's major works, "it is Aristotelian (empathy) drama" but the realism can be allayed "by performing the play together with a documentary film showing the events in Spain, or with a propaganda manifestation of any sort" (Brecht, Fear and Misery . . . xii+, 162). Bentley calls this Brecht's only "straight conversion play," that is, a work that speaks not to the already convinced but to the irresolute (. . . Commitment 129). The dialectic opposes neutrality and advocates commitment, arguing that the former is impossible: if you aren't with us, you're against us.

Brecht has taken the Synge work, moved the locale from an Irish to a Spanish fishing village and the time to that of the Spanish Civil War; he has also increased the cast and substituted the war for the sea as the focus of contention. Instead of a mother, two daughters and the remaining son are the mother, the younger son, the mother's brother, a priest, a neighbor and the older son's girlfriend. The mother has lost her husband to the war and is trying to force her sons to remain neutral instead of joining the other villagers in the fight against the Fascists. The priest argues neutrality; the uncle militancy. What sways the mother, even moving

her to take up arms, is the senseless killing of the older son whom she has sent fishing.

FST used a translation by George Tabori which they had in typescript. ⁶ Moses supplied a song but no copy has been found. Tabori suggests that instead of documentary film, songs and poems "inspired by the event, that great romance of solidarity and commitment," be used (ts). (There is no place to fit a song into the action, so it is likely that the music was used either as a curtain raiser or as an epilogue.)

The play simply doesn't have the power of the Synge drama which is compressed into a dark mood piece. The Brecht version with its extended arguments loses the somber emotionalism that permeates the model. Senora Carrar's conversion comes too rapidly for the reader to grasp although, played by a consummate actress, could be believable. ⁷

The New Orleans premiere attracted the attention of Ormond Plater. In his "Billboard" column in the Vieux Carre Courier he talked about the FST and this particular work, sounding as if he had attended one of the Theater's productions for the first time:

The [FST] arrives with little fanfare. . . . It encamps in a heavily Negro neighborhood where the sidewalks at dusk are alive with children and strollers, no pickets. By and by a young white woman comes to the door of a borrowed meeting place and invites you in. You stroll in or you stay in the street; you pay or you don't pay; you stay during the performance or you walk out bored. . . .

At the far end, crude scenery creaks . . . --just enough scenery to support the illusion. But no quantity

of illusion can hide the fact that the actors themselves, in roles that call for inevitable intimacy and emotional tension, are black and white. . . .

Plater found it "difficult to gauge the response of an audience that included a good many children" who became restless; the adults, however, were quiet and applauded vigorously at the end of the performance he saw. "Though the the distant, intricate politics of the Spanish Civil War may have overshoot the audience, surely the ageless human theme [a mother's passionate but misguided protection of her sons] struck home" (Undated copy). At another New Orleans performance, one young man commented that he "'didn't see what Spain in '37 has to do with what happens in the South today'" ("Free Southern Theater Seeks. . .").

Costley, who had a three-line role, thought the opening of the show in Jackson "was fair" but that "the audience dug it" although, in his opinion, the play was "a poor choice for Mississippi--or New York!" (FST 85) Moses too thought it "a bad play" (95).

Since the tour was suspended after only a month, commentary is sparse but I would raise the same question as Plater and agree with Costley and Moses: in 1965 how many members of the typical FST audience would be likely to know enough about the Spanish Civil War to comprehend the play's situation? Brecht makes a strong statement about commitment --a statement as pertinent to the Civil Rights Movement as to the Spanish War--but the argument simply is not as effec-

tive if the historical background is not understood. Granted that Brecht makes very clear that the conflict is between rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, and granted that the play is much more concrete than Godot, it still does not relate directly to the Black experience. Also it exhibits weaknesses that are typical of short didactic plays: events and relationships are not developed and the dialogue tends to be rhetorical rather than natural.

This was the tour that also saw the development of The Jonesboro Story and The Bogalusa Story, improvisations built on community events and worked out by Moses. These were the closest the FST came to doing what El Campesino and SFMT were doing on the West Coast--developing material for a particular audience and community.

No scripts for these shows are in the files but some information is available. Gaffney reports on the first attempt:

Undoubtedly, the most creative and challenging piece of original theatre--clearly supporting a crucial objective of this company--was Gilbert Moses' improvisational play . . . Jonesboro: 1965. This dialogue resulted from the arrest and harassment of three company members by Klansmen in the Louisiana town of Jonesboro. Free Southern Theatre [sic] actors, CORE workers, and the Negro community took part in this drama. Characters were created to portray leading figures of the community, and significant events of the preceding year were enacted. By active participation in a dramatization of immediate conflicts, the Negro citizens were exposed to a stimulating experience which, from the few available reports, had an immediate impact ("Interracial Theatre . . ." 124-25).

Jonesboro was the trying out of an idea; Bogalusa was a full working out. Dent recalls the event:

Imagine that you are a Negro high school student in Bogalusa, Louisiana. It is late August. . . . You are about to watch a play. The play will be performed by the Free Southern Theater, but not tonight from a written script.

The play tonight is about Bogalusa itself. The cast includes not only the members of the FST but some of your classmates, many of whom have participated in protest marches during the summer. . . .

Outside across the dirt road, the police chief leans against his automobile talking with several of his deputies. The chief is not sure what a play is, but he is present in case any 'trouble' develops. . . .

The play is about the demonstration in Bogalusa that summer, about the violence. . . and the inflexibility of the Mayor, his City Council and the police in the face of that violence, and about the determination of the Negro citizens to fight back, to fight for their rights, and to take action to insure their safety while protesting for their rights.

The audience responds to the subtleties, humor, truth of every situation. . . ("Free Southern Theater. . ." 26-7).

Moses also recalls Bogalusa:

". . . We went to the people and got them to tell us the political story of the town. . . . They complained about the lack of opportunities, the poor quality of education, the ways society treated them. . . .

"I worked all night on the script. We had one rehearsal. . . . I had 30 people on the stage, including the Free Southern Theater actors. We staged a scene in which the Ku Klux Klan came into a dead-end street shouting derisive terms at the people. At that time, there was a group called the Deacons for Defense and Justice, which had sworn to protect and defend the black community.

"As the actors portraying the Klan got hemmed into this little street, the Deacons came out on the roof, and the whole community stepped out with them. They drove the Klan away and the audience was in an uproar because, in a sense, this was them. . ." (Hunter).

It is surely unfortunate that just as the FST was beginning to develop community-specific material, it had to suspend operations. A short item in the New York Times that fall reported that during the next tour a performance in

each town would be "devoted to an improvised presentation" featuring townspeople who would be aided by the professional actors in dramatizing "their experiences in the civil rights struggle. . ." ("Theater Group Seeks . . ."). But although there were to be tours in 1966 and 1967, circumstances had changed: Moses, O'Neal and Schechner were gone; the Theater had begun its move toward becoming an all-Black company and had begun also to sink deeper roots in New Orleans by finally acquiring its own facility there.

The 1966 tour began early in July and continued through September. On the bill were An Evening of African and Afro-American Poetry compiled by the company, William Plomer's I Speak of Africa; Brecht's Does Man Help Man? and FST's first original work (other than the improvisational plays of the previous year), Moses' Roots.

The poetry programs evolved from simply staged readings into full-scale programs with music, ensemble and dramatic effects. The 1967 version involved "three performers on stools . . . all of whom read effectively" and one of whom sang a capella (Novick 354). The prototype in 1966 was surely no more elaborate. Some of the material was written by FST members (Prideaux). And, at least for the New Orleans performances, there was an account written by Tom Dent of how a Negro boy died because it took an ambulance so long to get to the Desire section of the city. A New Orleans performance was filmed for CBS' Look Up and Live and so upset

city authorities that they caused the program to be blacked out in New Orleans. (See Appendix IV for typical poetry show formats.)

The Plomer work, originally published in 1927, is composed of two short puppet plays, "The Triumph of Justice" and "The Man in the Corner." FST did only the former and did it with live actors; how the co-star--a large black cat--was handled is not known.⁹ What is known about this production comes from a short mention by Prideaux plus the report in FST that "it brought hoots of delight from black kids who saw themselves portrayed as heroes for the first time, and whites as crude villains" (133).

It is a violent sketch (as puppet plays frequently are). A "cool" Black man confronts a white farmer who hates him on general principles (Plomer was a white South African). The white verbally abuses the native who stands his ground and continues calmly to speak "the truth." The farmer goes to get the law while his wife propositions the Black who disgustedly refuses her advances. She then cries for help, claiming he has tried to rape her. The native remains calm while the Judge questions him. The large black cat, who has been introduced earlier, reappears and when the native tells it to "punish the guilty," stands up, knocks down the Judge and brings the Judge's wig to the Black who dons it and immediately assumes power. A policeman appears and on command knocks Mrs. White on the head. Her husband,

the farmer, is given to the cat as a prize to take to its kittens. The cat returns saying, "He's full of sawdust" and asking for the policeman who is given to it.

As I said, it's a violent and simplistic piece and the attempted seduction scene hardly seems appropriate for a children, but then neither does Punch and Judy and this is of the same general ilk. So the kids probably did enjoy it! And it was not done for children alone. Although there were frequently a number of youngsters at FST performances, adults were the prime target. I Speak of Africa was half of a doublebill, the other play being Does Man Help Man?

No such title is listed in the Brecht canon, German or English. However, the central question posed in Das Badener Lehrstueck vom Einverstaendnis (variously translated as the Baden Didactic Play on Consent or the Baden Learning Play on Agreement or the Baden Play for Learning Acquiescence) is "Hilft der Mensch also dem Menschen?--"Does man help man?" That FST's production was the Baden Learning Play--or part of it--is proven by a photo in FST showing Roscoe Orman and Joseph Perry in rather grotesque clown costume and make-up and by Prideaux who describes the program as two clown shows.

The piece was written in 1919 to be performed to music by Hindemith who did not like the work and later withdrew his music. (Schechter in fact labels it an "oratorio" [47].) The original script calls for four airmen who are singers,

three clowns, the chorus leader, a narrator and the wise (learned) chorus plus an orchestra and conductor. Also involved is the "crowd" (which Baxandall assumes is the audience [" . . . J.B. 114]).¹⁰

However, the clown scene could stand alone and this is what was done. Such a cutting would definitely dilute Brecht's point which in the main part of the piece is thoroughly Marxist. (The learned chorus in two sequences separated by the clown scene confronts the fallen airmen and with the help of the crowd concludes that "man does NOT help man" in today's society. Only by subjugating individuality and uniting to work for the betterment of society as a whole will man help man.)

Brecht's piece is dramatically interesting, particularly considering its date, but it is flawed. As Schechter points out, the clown sequence does not mesh well with what precedes and follows it, the confrontation of the airmen by the chorus (50). Not only is it a break in form, it is a break with the overt dialectical materialism of the other part. Doing the scene alone of course eliminates that problem. It also eliminates the vagueness of the metaphor of the airmen and the production problems that the whole play presents.

The clown scene--bizarre in its humor but based on traditional clowning--has the same type of violent appeal as the Plomer piece. In the original, we are invited to watch

a clown scene in which men help a man. The first and second clowns proceed to help Herr Schmitt by trying to relieve his discomfort--first by removing his left foot, then the other leg, then his left ear, etc. until what is left of the dismembered body is lying helpless on the stones. At this point the two "helpers" tell Herr Schmitt that he "can not have everything." They laugh. Man does not help man.

Compared with the overt Marxism of the airmen scenes, the clown interlude is apolitical although Baxandall reads variations on Job as underlying the whole play and also suggests that Schmitt can be interpreted as "the proletariat, vast in potential power but victimized again and again until it is helpless" (" . . . J.B." 114-16). But this is not implicit in the scene. If any lesson comes across, it is that we will be victimized if we permit ourselves to be. During a post-performance discussion in New Orleans, "Mr. Smith was variously seen as a symbol of the whites, the blacks, capitalism and Viet Nam. . ." (Prideaux).

Dent reports that the play did work:

It exploded basic emotions in the minds of our audiences, though it wasn't written racially and it isn't contemporary. It touched something deep in the social order--it hit race, then spiraled out similar conflicts like ever-expanding concentric circles (FST 163; letter, 14 July 1967).11

FST was still groping for material related directly to its audiences, material with which they could unquestionably identify. Prideaux "felt that a fair part of [the poetry

show and the Plomer-Brecht bill] had misfired" because of "muddy" symbolism that confused the audience.

Was that material found in Roots, the major production of the season, the first original play coming from a member of FST, and only the second Black play the company produced?

Roots is a one-act, two-character ("an old Negro couple, to be played by young actors") play. It is theatre of the absurd, rooted in Beckett and Ionesco and Albee. As are many absurdist works, it is tragicomedy--a vaudeville routine through which the sad and absurd truth of a miserable existence in rural Black Mississippi seeps in all its squalor and frustrations.

Much Black drama remains embedded in realism, undoubtedly because, as Schevill points out,

black communities and playwrights still feel a great need for confronting real characters in real situations. Their problems are too real and immediate for ironic fantasies of isolation that characterize much white avant-garde theatre (3).

Bullins (The Gentleman Caller), Baraka, Adrienne Kennedy and Moses are among the few who have written plays definitely allied with the absurd.

Moses' play is funny in the uncomfortable way of much absurdist humor; underneath the comic absurdity is that sad reality. Wearing a gas mask, Dot is cooking dinner: beans, greens, cornbread and chitterlings followed by buttermilk--the same dinner she's been fixing for Ray for 45 years. We sense their conversation has been the same also over these

years. Ray has come in from the cotton field where he goes every day--even when it's not cotton-picking season. His routine is invariable: cotton field, home to dinner, next door to shoot craps. Dot asks him if he's washed. He has. Dot continues: "You're becoming so absent-minded in your old age. Did you wash your ears?"

RAY: Yes.

DOT: Are you sure?

RAY: I washed up, Dot.

DOT: All right, now. Don't let me find out you haven't. I'll send you right outside. (RAY stands, hesitant.)

RAY: Dot? Can I sit down?

DOT: Sho, you can sit down. . . . If you've washed up.

RAY: I washed up, Dot.

DOT: All right, then you can sit down.

Ray looks at the paper. He can't read. Dot must read it to him. Ray speaks directly to the audience, explaining who he is. Dot interrupts and they resume a dialogue with both trying to clarify who they are and what they do, at times speaking to each other, at times directly to the audience.

Dot starts to read the paper but reads only snatches aloud. The front page story is about Miss Mississippi's breaking her little finger. Ray asks for details. Dot, who is very light, says she could have been "Queen of the Delta, and she imagines what her life would have been like if she had had courage to try out. She serves Ray's dinner and

makes him give thanks. Ray wonders if Jesus is white or black.

DOT: The Lord ain't got no color, Ray. We all his children.

RAY: He got to have some color. Every statue I see of him is white. See. Our picture shows him white.

DOT: Stop this foolishness, Ray. Do you think that the good Lord would be black? (Laughing) Ohhh, me.

RAY: Oh, Lord. Thank you for letting me out of bed, for letting me pick cotton, for letting me eat, for letting me be an old Negro man. Humble me, Lord. Sometimes I think I'm being unjustly done in. But . . . I can't put my finger on the wrong, Lord. A-men.

DOT: That's a good boy, Ray. . . .

RAY: Awwwww, Jesus. It's terrible here. Terrible! Did you mean it to be this way? And when I die, when I go back to the ashes will I sit on your right hand and know eternal life? Will I? (A lordly voice on tape: "Know thy murderers.")

Ray loses his temper. Dot loses hers and slams a pie in his face. "What follows is an old-time chase, to be choreographed with fast steps. . . ."

They settle down and the conversation resumes. Dot reminisces about her childhood and then tells about the only child she ever gave birth to--whom she suffocated "because it would have been a nigger. . . ." Then they go into a routine about the food:

RAY: I joined the LTPC club long time ago too.

DOT: The lick-the-plate-clean club? I thought it was the SIUWC club.

RAY: That one too. The sop-it-up-with-cornbread club.

DOT: The EIAWF club.

RAY: The ETPT club.

DOT: The CGFIG club.

RAY: The belch and fart club.

DOT: The ins and outs club.

RAY: The ins and outs club?

DOT: You know. The interior and exterior club.

RAY: I don't remember that one, Dot.

DOT: The club that says you cook only the interior: the intestines and the bowels, and the exterior: the snouts, the feet, and the tails.

RAY: Oh boy, that's the main club we've belonged to for forty-five years.

DOT: We're charter members. . . .

RAY: That's my favorite club, Dot.

DOT: Really?

RAY: Well, I don't know if I like it so much.

Reality breaks the routine. Dot continues sharing bits of the news with Ray. He wants to hear more of a story about cotton. She refuses.

Here Moses suggests, "if the theater can afford it," a short silent film called "Cotton Song" accompanied by live funky music. "The end result should be cotton saturation, and an awareness of how back-breaking cotton working is." But film and music, he emphasizes, are not essential and it is unlikely that the sequence was incorporated into FST's production. There are no records relating to it and filming costs would have been prohibitive (cotton fields aren't too accessible in New Orleans).

Ray and Dot continue to talk. Dot sees a mouse. Ray sets traps, "big and small, some exaggerated." A huge rat trap is set by the door. The traps are baited with preserves. Dot reads and the conversation goes on. Then Dot upbraids Ray:

DOT: You could've, if you wanted to, started something out there in that cotton field--a, a, revolution. You could have been bringing home at least five dollars a day. But you didn't.

RAY: I know, Dot.

DOT: You could have torn down the schools, and the Negro funeral homes, built sewage pipes and sidewalks. You could have taken me away. You could have given me a child. BUT YOU DIDN'T!
(Silence)

RAY: Dot, I never knew who I was.

The comedy has turned serious--but only as far as the dialogue. The action remains slapstick: Ray comes toward the audience, stops and tries to scream. Dot comes up, "hits him on the back, as if she were burping him. But only once. . . ." Finally Ray addresses the audience:

RAY: You know what I'm talking about and I ain't said nothing. How long...how long uh...how long (Pause) How long can we stay in a strange land without making it our own? . . .

He gets ready to leave, slips on preserves and is caught in the huge rat trap. Ray weeps and the lights fade during Dot's last speech:

DOT: Raymond? It's just like you to be caught in that trap. Just like you Do you think all old Negro men are like you? I wonder about that sometimes. . ." (FST).

Hatch and Abdullah label the play a "comedy/parody" but it is more than that. If it parodies anything, it parodies the stereotypical misconception of the southern "darkie," the "Tom" who is content to slave in the cotton fields and have his greens and chittlings. But that is an old figure; even in the deep South of the early '60s, this was not an image warranting a full-blown parody. Moses, if he is pointing the finger--as surely he is--is not pointing it at the white images of the faithful old Negro. (Why do that anyway for a Black audience?) He is instead ridiculing--burlesquing--the thing itself, not the image. That there were "Toms" in the communities visited by the FST is accepted. To ridicule the accommodationist is to say to your audience: "Don't YOU be like that. Don't YOU get caught in your own trap." To laugh at the dreamer (Dot) is to say: "Dreams get you nowhere unless YOU make them come true."

But Ray is more than ridiculous. Ray is pathetic. Dot is sad. We sympathize with both despite the Brechtian distancing techniques, maybe even because of them. They are victims. And with this sympathy we move--or Moses moves us--beyond the realm of the comic into the tragicomic of the absurd. As Corrigan aptly describes it:

In tragicomedy, the serious merges with the ridiculous; helplessness is cast in a humorous vein; pain and despair are transcended or are miraculously overcome; joy and sadness become indistinguishable. . . (222).

What bothers me, at least in reading the play, is the lack of clear definition of form. In Godot, Beckett does

not jar us with dissonances: the comic routines, the appearance of Lucky and Pozzo are as logical as anything else in that never-never land of limbo; the thread of farce runs from curtain to curtain. In Roots the chase scene seems out of place; the suggested film intrudes on the action. Farce, burlesque, expressionism are jumbled.¹²

Yet the question is, of course, not how academics in the '80s perceive the play but how Black southern rural audiences in the '60s perceived it. When Prideaux saw it in New Orleans about 80 percent of the audience was Negro youngsters who laughed and loved the play which "was well acted, and clearly meant to be funny. But it also delivered a serious message . . . that misfired as far as the kids went." Again, children were not the target audience. Also recognizing the absurdist influence, Goodman insists that the play is designed for and does address those prime audiences:

It is they . . . who are being portrayed, and they, like Ray, must recognize their personal traps and failures. . . . [They] represent the roots of all black people. . . . [and] thus symbolize the very roots of black experience itself. . . . Significantly, it is not Dot, the "house nigger," but Ray, "the field nigger," who is dimly aware of the pointlessness of their lives.

(I think they both have this awareness but cope with it differently.) While not truly revolutionary, Ray's concluding speech "is a call to awareness. . ." (568-69). (But it is Dot who prods this call.)

Goodman concludes his analysis by identifying Roots as "one of the more imaginative short plays of the Black Theatre Movement," a work that, though flawed, is not nearly as amateurish as many (570).

Gaffney reports that Roots, along with the other Black plays FST was to present, was "enthusiastically received by appreciative southern audiences." He goes on to shatter the academic's reservations:

I have observed these people, most of whom have never seen live theatre or actors before, and they respond to the immediate theatrical situation. Problems imposed by audiences with what I call middle-class socio-psychological blocks are nonexistent, and the human elements become clearer and more significant ("Free Southern Theatre . . ." 13).

The following year, citing Roots in a "Creative Arts Proposal," the FST itself affirmed that the play had "presented audiences throughout the South with an understandable picture of the frustrations of an Old Mississippi sharecropper and his wife" (ts).

Gaffney makes a valid point: FST audiences did not have preconceptions of genre and decorum: they could undoubtedly both laugh at the recognizable foibles of Dot and Ray while identifying with the squalor of their existence and taking to heart the message that they must be the instruments of their own changes. And despite the flaws, the play exhibits a dramatic awareness and talent that many other works of the period do not and is a most promising first effort. Perhaps unfortunately it has been to date an

only work since Moses has concentrated on directing. FST found the play, and surely the response to it, good enough to revive in its 1969 season, and during the 1969-70 season, it was performed in New York at the Afro-American Studio.

All in all 1966 seems to me to have been a strong season. The following year, FST's fifth tour, marks the end of the company's first phase, its life as an integrated troupe. Murray Levy was the only white performer remaining and he was to be the last one until O'Neal reintegrated FST in the mid-'70s.

For the 1967 season FST mounted Ionesco's The Lesson (with Levy as the professor), Ward's Happy Ending and another evening of poetry, folklore and music--this one titled Uncle Tom's Second Line Funeral. Compiled by Levy and Dent, it was built around Robert Hayden's poem "Runagate
13
Runagate."

The Hayden piece is excellent for dramatic interpretation, lending itself to a multi-voice presentation of this brief impressionistic account of the escape of the slaves (the runagates, the fugitives) to the "mythic North." The rhythm recalls Vachel Lindsay's "The Congo"--a chant that tends to be a favorite for oral interpretation:

Hoot owl calling the ghosted air,
five times calling to the hants in the air.
Shadow of a face in the scary leaves,
shadow of a voice in the talking leaves. . . .

A number of ways of presenting the poem come to mind: call-response, alternation of lines, even of phrases.

Consider the opening:

Runs falls rises stumbles on from darkness into
 darkness
 and the darkness thicketed with shapes of terror
 and the hunters pursuing and the hounds pursuing
 and the night cold and the night long and the river
 to cross and the jack-muh lanterns beckoning
 beckoning. . . (Barksdale & Kinnamon 677).

Alternating voices could be used on the first line alone with a solo voice or choral response on the second line. The possibilities for the poem are intriguing; how Dent chose to direct it is not recorded. All we know, from Novick, is that three people presented the program which "consisted of forty minutes of short selections, mostly conventional agit-prop, by Langston Hughes, Ted Joans, Julian Bond, Ossie Davis, and a number of others whose names were new to me" (354).

Dent's journal indicates that the show had problems: the night before the company was to open at LeMoyné, the "poetry rehearsal was a total failure. . . . I decided to reconstruct the show, a frightening idea because of my inexperience. Hopefully, we can add new material later" (FST 146). Three days later he was able to report that the "poetry show went well, though it is too short. . . . We still lack the piece to bring the show home now, and don't know where we will find it" (151).

In Houston the company gave a street performance of the poetry show in a ghetto area. Guitarist-singer Walter

Washington was an instant hit, but the show itself did not produce the same type of response:

Our poems, even if militant and well done, are still too formal, too much like recitation pieces to command instantaneous audience response. . . . [W]e need to arrive at a form loose enough to allow the performers to groove with whatever the audience feels. . . . (157-58).

Another piece in the poetry show was David Henderson's "Keep on Pushing," a narrative poem about the 1964 Harlem riot:

The Police Commissioner can
muster five hundred cops in five minutes
. . . .
For Harlem
reinforcements come from the Bronx
just over the three-borough bridge/
a shot a cry a rumor
can muster five hundred Negroes
from idia and strategic street corners
bars stoops hallways windows
Keep on pushing (Henderson 31).

Henderson joined the company in mid-July as a reader and returned with them to New Orleans to work with the writers' workshop. Apparently he performed outside of (or in place of) the poetry show:

Tonight, reading from his own poetry, David Henderson added something unique to our repertory and to the experience of the Tuskegee audience. His poems--personal, mystical, urban--not the type Negro college students have been exposed to, but David hypnotized the audience. He responded to questions about his work for almost an hour after the reading, then read some more (FST 166).

With the poetry, as with the plays, the group was still searching for the magic formula--the right piece and, in the case of the poetry, the right mode of presentation.

Happy Ending was also a problem for the company. FST had had the chance to premiere this play and its companion piece Day of Absence. (They are not thematically related but premiered together in New York and are sometimes done separately, sometimes together.) Both were announced for the first season but were later rejected.¹⁴ In "Notes on a Day of Absence," Ward talks about his dream of writing for an audience such as southern negroes or Harlem Apolloites. But, he goes on, these audiences--if they come--should be presented not only with plays about themselves but should be treated to theatre that is also

bright, colorful, irreverent, nasty, acrid, soul-stirring, lovely--and, for god sakes! not pretentiously boring or righteously grim. . . . [W]e tend to concentrate merely on that which exhorts, not that which truly excites and entertain[s]. . . (ts).

If not as farcical as Day of Absence, Happy Ending is also funny, and apparently the company never felt at home with it because of its type of humor. During a post-play discussion (July 11 according to one typescript, July 13 according to another and July 9 according to FST's book [163]), members of the company found themselves "saying that Happy Ending is really not our play." Dent goes on to explain, rather abstractly, that what FST was searching for was "the mythology of our experience." The discomfort with Happy Ending was probably the same as that which had been voiced about other works by northern Black playwrights--their urban experience was not the experience of the deep

rural South. Also it is light comedy, non-revolutionary in purpose and in tone.

Happy Ending, like Purlie, is built on the familiar theme of the trickster. Trickster stories show the Black surviving in an alien world by his wits, not overthrowing the world or even trying to do so but making it unwittingly accommodate his needs.¹⁵

Ellie is the trickster, stealing her white employers blind without a qualm for the benefit of her family. Ward is obviously not spinning a simple folk legend but satirizing whites (indirectly) and Blacks (directly)--Junie, the college-educated nephew who preaches Black Liberation while he is on welfare and sponging from his aunts, and the aunts (Ellie and Vi) with their blithe disregard of bourgeois morality.

But remembering what Ward said in relation to Day of Absence, that theatre should be fun as well as exemplary, it is safe to say that the main purpose of Happy Ending is to entertain the audience with a modern variation on a centuries-old theme.

FST's audiences the summer of 1967 were mainly urban, mainly collegiate. But it is likely that the play would have been as well (perhaps even better) received if they had been playing their rural Mississippi communities. Some of the college audiences were upset by the immorality of the protagonists whereas others, as surely did the rural audi-

ences, recognized and enjoyed the trickster theme. Novick reports on reactions during one of the performances at Tuskegee: after Ellie's speech in which she explains to Junie how she runs the Harrisons' house, the audience burst into laughter and applause:

The spectators were applauding not just Ellie, but themselves and their race and the fact that in the three-hundred-year struggle with the white man . . . , they had quietly managed to win their share of victory, to find their own kind of dignity. . . (353-54).

Happy Ending is an irreverent romp in a familiar form. The purpose of the trickster tale is to raise the morale of the downtrodden, to build pride. In that sense, if in no other, it can be viewed as an appropriate vehicle for FST. But obviously it is not what the Theater's leaders had in mind when they talked of stimulating thought and awareness.

However uncomfortable the cast was with Happy Ending, critics liked it. FST's production, according to Julius Novick, was "within the capacities of the actors. . ." (352). He was also intrigued by the post-performance discussion: "'The point is that the FST is dealing with questions that its audience finds important, that here at least art and life are not sealed off from one another'" (355). Dent reports even more positive compliments: some people who had been involved with a Chicago production saw the show in Memphis and said "it was the best production of Happy Ending they had seen." He goes on to say that if that is true, it is "because of the audience, playing before an audience of

black youths who understand and have lived through what Ward is talking about" (FST 151). The play was also well received at Prairie View A & M College (156) and a review by George New in the Houston Chronicle praised it: ". . . in its fast-paced version of Ward's biting comedy . . . , the troupe was living up to its credo of not divorcing art from the essential concerns of black people" (161). (Dent notes that this was the company's "only review by the white press during the entire summer tour.") Such observations plus the lively post-performance discussion contradict the company's own feelings that the play was wrong for them.

The most controversial production of the season, and the least successful, was The Lesson. Levy played the psychopathic professor and Jac'lyn Earley played the pupil. This interracial casting would immediately give the play a political twist. This seems to have been intentional and intensified: after the first rehearsal performance at LeMoyné (the show wasn't ready for production when the tour started), the question was asked: "'Are you not doing violence to the spirit of Ionesco's play by minor alterations in the script to give it a racial application?'" The answer was:

"No, at least not in theory, though in this case the particular changes we made may not work as well as we would like. We try to make productions apply particularly to black audiences" (FST 149).

Interestingly--"surprisingly," as Dent put it--not many of the FST audiences interpreted it racially (Novick 352). The

Lesson was picked because the troupe thought it was particularly appropriate for the colleges which made up the bulk of this year's tour (FST 149). (Dent also told Novick that he wanted to "find out how abstract he could get in his own writing without losing his audience" [351].)

The play is more likely to amuse an academic audience with its satire on higher education than it would be to amuse a more typical FST audience. And it would be easy to give it a racial twist to show the exploitation of the Black student by the white establishment. But this is not one of Ionesco's best plays to start: the two basic jokes--the mathematics and the linguistics--are overextended and the murder is telegraphed from almost the beginning. To make it work at all takes rapid-fire pacing and tight control of the character of the professor. Although Dent credits Levy with being "an effective Professor," after a week of work in Memphis the show was still not ready when it was played at Prairie View or at Tuskegee. Novick, who didn't think much of the company's talents anyway, although he admired their approach and applauded what they were doing in principle, was especially harsh about the "'open rehearsal'" of The Lesson he saw:

This turned out to be a dull, clumsy, spiritless walk-through, with both . . . principals still on book. . . . (I saw no signs that it would ever be good); but no company with even remotely professional standards would think for a moment of offering any audience such unfinished work (351).

At a performance in the gym at Prairie View, where bad acoustics destroyed any possible humor, "the students tolerated us until a dance began" (FST 148+; ts).

The Lesson was a poor choice.

Gaffney sums up the problem FST was having: ". . . until this theatre group clearly decides whether its primary concern lies within the area of politics or art, it will be unable . . . to engage an audience in exploring the ultimate meaning of life" ("Interracial Theatre . . ." 35). FST was still considering classic, Broadway and avant garde works. And Moses was still saying that they were not concerned primarily with "'racial'" plays but with "'plays which deal with the truth of human experience in our contemporary society'" (Gaffney 55).

But 1967 was the last year for this mixed repertory. For the next few years, a Black company would produce Black works.

Notes

1

The Antigone adaptation was to be done by Moses and O'Neal; no such script, however, is in O'Neal's files and it was apparently never written. Also mentioned as a possibility for this first season was The Fantasticks. From the start, the rhetoric was emphatic but the decisions were dubious.

2

In an appendix to the published version, Duberman says that "the decision to make 'Little Rock' the last major scene came about only after considerable experimentation." Later incidents were tried at different times but "it was difficult to 'top' the Little Rock scene dramatically. . ." (81).

3

Oscar Brand chose and edited the songs for the original production, but they were presented in the script as suggestions only.

4

In April, at a SNCC meeting in New York, O'Neal had announced that FST planned to tour both Purlie and Don't You Want to Be Free? that summer: "[T]hey were the only plays we knew of that came close to the kind of thing we wanted" ("Talk of the Town" 34). He told me that Blues for Mr. Charlie was simply too big for the company of eight to handle (Personal interview). Presumably the Hughes work presented the same problem.

In an earlier draft of the newsletter the phrase "although seriously flawed" was used to describe Purlie, and an introductory statement advised that the plays were picked "after much argument and consideration"; in the later version this was changed to "exploration and consideration." Nowhere at this point is there a clear statement of criteria for play selection. O'Neal has admitted that in the final analysis what often determined the choice were available resources (Personal interview).

5

The post-play discussion involving Mrs. Hamer is reported somewhat differently in FST (54); minor discrepancies exist between O'Neal's piece as printed in TDR and in the book; and none of these versions match what he remembered 20 years later! Then, he told me that Mrs. Hamer got up at intermission (thinking an hour and a half long enough for any play) and said what in the printed versions is attributed to post-play discussion.

6

The play was performed in America and Britain in the '30s, so there was an earlier translation but it is not listed in the Library of Congress index. The Tabori translation was published by Dramatists Play Service. The play was also presented for two performances at the Theater de Lys on the ANTA Matinee Series in December 1968 but whose translation was used is not known; the title used, however, was Guns of Carrar which is not the title Tabori and

Sauerlander use. (There is no essential difference between the Tabori and Sauerlander versions. Tabori tends to use more colloquialisms and somewhat more natural diction.)

FST knew Tabori personally, probably through Schechner or perhaps through Murray Levy who, after leaving FST, worked with him in Germany until 1985. After the Carrar production, he promised FST a script but there is no indication he ever supplied one unless it was the translation for Does Man Help Man?

Brecht was popular with the FST directors. Schechner adapted The Mothers which was considered for production. In fact the producers, mistakenly thinking that Carrar was the first of Brecht's plays featuring the mother in a revolutionary situation, considered a sequence of Brecht productions centering on the mother: Carrar, The Mother (actually the first), Mother Courage and The Caucasian Chalk Circle. The others were never done.

7

Helene Weigel created the role and apparently made clear by her every word and action Carrar's evolving feelings. A comparison of her performance and that of Danish actress Andreassen is interesting because it contradicts Brecht's stated principle (in the "Organum") that acting should be "bad" (Brecht, Fear and Misery . . . 162).

8
FST meeting notes (ts) from November 4, 1971, suggest that other improvisational shows may have been done: "Big D told of how . . . they used to go into communities and find out what [was] of interest to that community, get all the facts, and put on a short skit about it." But there is no record of such performances other than those in Jonesboro and Bogalusa.

Correspondence this same year between the two companies discussed a Mississippi tour by SFMT sponsored by FST. Although it did not materialize, the Mime Troupe remained interested in FST. The link continues: in 1986 a National Endowment for the Arts playwright commission grant went to O'Neal for work with SFMT. According to the "Season Schedules" published by American Theater, SFMT will be touring The Mozangola Caper by O'Neal and Joan Holden, with music by Bruce Barthol, this fall (1986) in the Midwest and Central America (including Nicaragua) and in the Southeast in March and April (1987).

9
The FST typescript has no production notes but the dialogue and stage directions support the idea of its being intended for puppets and in all other references both pieces comprising I Speak of Africa are designated "puppet plays."

10
Here is also a question as to which translation was used. There is no record of the publication of any English translation until 1960 when a very literal translation by

Lee Baxandall appeared in Tulane Drama Review. It is of course highly likely that Schechner or his assistant Erika Munk, who also did some work for the Theater, would have known about this version. (Munk included it in her 1972 compilation published by Bantam and titled simply Brecht.) But there had also been an adaptation by Tabori titled "Does Man Need Help?" included in the Carnegie Hall performance of Hell Is Other People on May 9, 1964. This was a performance of Sartre's No Exit and writings of Brecht performed by Viveca Lindsfors, Alvin Epstein and Roscoe Lee Brown. Given that there were only three performers, they too may have done only the clown scene and FST may have used the Tabori version.

11

When performed at Morehouse College, FST's production "almost caused a fight" (over what is not indicated) (FST 133). When the play was first performed at Baden-Baden, the dismantling of the third clown "upset the audience enough to cause a minor riot" (Hayman 33; Schecter 47). Does history repeat itself?

12

I do not know how I would react to a performance, if these elements would seem so dissonant. (I had to leave New Orleans before the Roots performance at the FST funeral.) But based on the reaction of Betty Jean Jones, I expect that performance would sharpen, rather than soften, these dichotomies. Dr. Jones had not read the script before seeing it

and, despite excellent performances, had problems with the play. She too sees the influence of the absurdists (and of Genet) but also is bothered by the split between the absurdist view and the realistic social elements. She wondered, in fact, if the pie-in-the-face sequence was in the script or was a directorial flourish! (Personal conversation)

13

According to Barksdale and Kinnamon, Hayden is one of the major Black poets of this century, publishing consistently since 1946 but receiving little critical attention. An academic, he "had a series of meaningful encounters with the proponents of a Black literary esthetic" in the early '60s. His 1966 collection of Selected Poems, which included "Runagate Runagate," was one of the results of this encounter and contains his "most exciting" work. "Here one finds evidence of the poet's searing encounter with the Black Experience, although he insists that these poems were written by a poet, not by a Black poet" (676-77).

14

Years later O'Neal was to dismiss Day of Absence as no more than a gimmick, a "one-line joke" but many plays hinge on no more than "a gimmick" (Personal interview).

15

The trickster motif derives from African Anansi spider and hare legends which in America became the Brer Rabbit tales. Brer Rabbit is the wily winner of privileges, often achieving them through "underhanded, unsportsmanlike, immoral methods" (Dance 180-81). What is important is that

he bucks the system and wins. Slave John became the human counterpart of Brer Rabbit and today the trickster figure survives in any number of guises--Purlie and, in Happy Ending, Ellie.

And the WORD was given.
 GO TO BLACK!
 An unconscious command
 Understood by the masses
 GO TO BLACK!

--Scott Kennedy. From
 "Ninth Impression:
 Go to Black!" (276)

CHAPTER V

THE PLAYS: BLACK ON BLACK

The second era in FST's history, 1968-1970, was, in terms of the Black esthetic, the most committed. Many of the works produced were short pieces that came out of the FST workshop, now dubbed Blkartsouth. They reflect the militancy and the African emphasis of Black Power. The Theater was finally beginning to supply its own material to at least complement works by established writers. Although Dent reports that "almost thirty scripts developed out of Free Southern Theater writing workshops between 1968 and 1970" (Nkombo [August 1972] n.pag.), nothing major or really finished emerged although there were a number of interesting works in progress. Disorganization and reorganization remained the norm so that, aside from one last grand tour, we are left with an impression of fragmentation and frustration.

Part of the sense of sketchiness may result from the lack of documentation of activities, for these are the years

for which records are skimpier than ever before or since. It is not even definite which plays were done or when they were done. Furthermore what FST records do exist do not always agree with each other, with external sources or with the memories of those involved. Some manuscripts are missing and even the authors do not have copies; the whereabouts of some of the authors are unknown. Still a number of scripts do exist and they give a good idea of the type of work being done during this period.

After the 1967 tour was cancelled in August, the core group settled down in New Orleans and concentrated on workshop productions. Except for sporadic out-of-town appearances by the Black Mink Jockeys (workshop members), there was no tour in 1968 nor were there any major productions.

One of the first productions of 1968, possibly the first, was The Smokers, a play written that fall by Charles Self; it was presented at an Afro-American Festival at Dillard University in February along with a music and dance production by Eluard Burt's Afro-Cuban band and FST's dance workshop, an experimental light show by workshop members, a paper by Dent, and a fashion show.

Only a fragment of the Self play survives in the archives. Basically the play pits Steeple, a seminary student who is convinced that the way to power is through religion, against old friends who are so "laid back" that they are doing little to change their lives. The title refers to the

group who, except for Steeple, are smoking marijuana and discussing life. An interruption occurs when Jomo's wife Shirley comes in to complain about the noise, the smoking, the do-nothing attitude of her husband. By the 18th page (the last extant) nothing has happened--the discussion simply drones on--although there is a possibility that the confrontation between Steeple and Jerry will get more serious, possibly even violent. But what the denouement may be, or how it will be arrived at, is unclear.

What script does exist shows characteristics common to much Black/protest/didactic drama--argumentation instead of action, stock photos instead of custom portraits, declamations instead of dialogue. At one point Jerry tells Steeple: "Man you sound like a damn library. Why don't you speak talk." That's the problem with much of the script: the longer speeches, particularly Steeple's, aren't "talk." And the devices Self uses to make the dialogue sound natural don't ring true. For instance he interjects "ain't" into the middle of speeches by Steeple or Meatball, both of whom are educated and otherwise tend to sound rather pedantic. He tries to approximate street talk and his rhyming approaches but doesn't quite reach the dozens.¹

The themes too are common to much of the Black drama of the era--the drug culture versus old-fashioned morality, man versus woman, Black versus white. Edmonds, in fact, in 1970 was cautioning young writers about some of these tendencies:

The young drama revolutionaries shout loudly about
changing

the image of the black man. Of course there is a revulsion of feelings for the Uncle Toms, the mummies and the other stereotypes created by white playwrights. But one wonders if there is an improvement in the drunkards, bums, prostitutes, homosexuals, dope addicts, criminals, hustlers and such ilk which all too often are the primary and secondary characters of many of these black plays. A large number are in the one-act play type. One also wonders if this short form is sufficient . . . to delineate great black characters on the stage (414).

There do seem to be an idea and a controlling image (marijuana highs) and in some of the shorter exchanges there is a naturalism (though not always a logic). But the script seems too much of a type and too flawed to be effective, at least in the fragmentary state in which it is available.

Many of the works performed during these three seasons were by Dent and Salaam (Ferdinand), and others by them that were not performed until the '70s were written in 1968 and 1969. So it seems appropriate to look at these writers' works as wholes rather than individually in an attempt at chronology.

At the end of 1968 the combined writing-acting workshop was rehearsing Salaam's Mama for an early '69 opening. Other works by Salaam written and/or performed during this period include The Pill (unavailable), The Picket, Black Liberation Army, Black Love Song, The Destruction of the American Stage, Happy Birthday Jesus, Cop Killer (unavailable) and--written with Dent--Song of Survival (unavailable), Turn of the Cen-

tury (attributed to Blkartsouth when printed in Nkombo), The Quest and Homecoming.

Mama is a realistic one-act play treating familiar themes in the modern Black canon: the mother seen as both the bulwark of the family and the non-understanding, non-revolutionary compromiser; the younger generation in its various manifestations--the get-what-I-can-however-I-can high-living pimp, the revolutionary, the intellectual, and the indecisive person who finally makes an irrevocable move.

As evidenced by the title, the mother is the pivotal figure; she is a sister of Hansberry's Mama in Raisin--strong in her beliefs, strong in her determination to keep her children on the moral upward path but narrow in her refusal to listen to their dreams and desires and, finally, faced with an outburst and their truth, capitulating. In Salaam's short play, however, there is not time for character development and the sudden and complete capitulation of the mother is not wholly convincing. It comes when the daughter Jean, who has been trying to please Mama at the same time she has absorbed ideas of independence and revolution from her boyfriend Ahmad, reacts to her mother's "discipline" and calls her "an old nigger woman."² Immediately Jean repents, apologizes and tries to assure her mother that she didn't mean what she had said. But Mama will have none of it. She explains how she was indoctrinated as a child with the idea

that she was nothing but a "nigger" and she had not realized her children would or could overcome this concept:

. . . I tried to raise you without having to tell you like my mama told me. . . . I was ten years old and she told me [never] to forget what I was. And I thought she meant somethin pretty and nice and I was just a-smilin to beat all. She told me never to forget I was a nigger. . . . I guess I made a mistake and thought we'd always be niggers (ts).

Mama slowly walks out, Jean cries, Rufus (Jean's brother) returns and asks what happened. Ahmad tells him that his mother and Jean had a fight, a fight that "started over a empty beer bottle." And the play ends.

Too many strings have been left untied in Mama. There has been a bombing. Was Ahmad involved? Is that why the police are observing the house? The questions are implied but never answered. In the beginning of the play Jean and her brother Pete (a pimp) argue over the role of the Black woman. The argument is never finished nor is the one between Pete and Ahmad over commitment to--in Pete's words--"a bunch of niggers that dont [sic] no more give a damn about you than they do for the Man." A similar argument, but on a higher plane, arises between Rufus (the intellectual) and Ahmad with Rufus arguing for accommodation rather than "black power foolishness" and Ahmad taking the extreme view of wanting nothing to do with the "hunkies" even to seeing a movie made by and about them.

Thus, while the main subject of Mama is Black Power and revolution, the subject is out of focus, blurred by Jean's

emotions about never having been wanted, blurred by unanswered questions, blurred by extremes on both sides--Ahmad's intransigence and Rufus' overwillingness to compromise with "reality."

Some of this fuzziness probably stems from Salaam's own ambivalence toward the militancy of the Black Liberation Movement. (It would for instance be at least two more years before he changed his name from Val Ferdinand to Kalamu ya Salaam.) At the same time he was undoubtedly attempting to reconcile his own conflicting impulses, he was dealing with stock characters confronted with what was for many Blacks the basic dilemma of the day: civil rights or Black power. Still, more successfully than some of the other young writers, Salaam does bring life to his characters, and his dialogue avoids for the most part the long harangues (if not the clichés) of some other plays of the era. Relationships are established, albeit tentatively, and the reasons behind the various positions are at least partially clarified.

Some of the same ambivalence is seen in The Picket, Salaam's first play, which was also performed during 1969. The author considers it "a very interesting play" to do with "class relationships." Of the early plays this and Home-coming remain, he thinks, "very important" (Personal interview). That The Picket still had relevance in the '70s is evidenced by its revival for an FST student workshop production in 1972. Along with Roger Furman's To Kill a Devil and

J. J. Jones' Minstrel Quintet, The Picket had nine³ performances that January.

Termed a "didactic" play by Hatch and Abdullah, The Picket is really what came to be known as a "set" in Blkart-south. These sets are short pieces designed to make a quick point with no attempt at characterization; they are kin to the actos of El Campesino and the SFMT and, while not rituals in the sense of what Teer and some others were doing, often used ritualistic elements such as poetry and sudden shifts.

The Picket deals with an NAACP integrated protest strike. The dialectics, typically, opposes the integration-ist viewpoint in the person of George to the Black Power separationist stance in the person of Rabbit. Involved in the dispute are a white female picket and a Black female picket; on the sideline is Rabbit's girl Joyce, a middle-class college coed. Rabbit sets up a confrontation in which he shows up George for not having the courage to stand up for the Black girl as he did for the white. (See Appendix I.)

The point is clear (although class relationships seem of minor relevance). The difficulty lies with the two men: Rabbit is a bully and George picks the fight. But he vacillates at the end so his voice of moderation becomes, as intended, a voice of hypocrisy--but not convincingly. Who is in the right--George (Rufus' counterpart) or Rabbit (Ahmad's counterpart)? Neither is man enough to be an effective debater of doctrine.

But for this type of sketch, the indicated staging is suitable (bare stage, spotlights), the brief action builds to its climax, dialogue approaches verisimilitude. Salaam, even in these earliest works, shows a dramatic talent.

At least there is no doubt that the FST is now speaking to Blacks about Black concerns. And perhaps the questions being posed are questions without answers. For many Blacks the ambivalence has never been resolved--or it has returned after a hiatus in the certainty of Black Liberation.

Written right after Mama, Homecoming is a favorite with the author and its first director, Costley, who (in an introduction to the piece written for the August 1972 issue of Nkombo) had this to say about it:

. . . "Homecoming" . . . is the best one act play I have read and had the distinct honor to direct in the last ten years. . . . Val [Kalamu] is one of the most incisive and powerful new playwrights on the Black Theater scene. But of all the plays Val has written, . . . "Homecoming" to me comes closest to being the perfect Black one acter. The dialog fairly leaps off the page with the vivid juices of life experienced by Black families and their bewildering offspring that returns from "over there" fighting a war they never started, never wanted, could never win and will never forget. "Ray Junior" is the classic Black vet. The hate, fear, frustration, his coming awareness of how "Amerika" had tricked him and stolen his somebodiness. "Mama" came close, but "Homecoming" is now!

Dent reports that Costley's production had "excellent success" (Personal letter). It was produced during the height of the bitterness over Viet Nam. But the author maintains that although the piece voices anti-war sentiments, these were "not what the play was about" (Personal interview).

An undated copy of a Times-Picayune story reports that the play offended some people. It is "admittedly an angry play" and "typifie[s] a stage in FST's development that paralleled the black community's most powerful outbursts of the black power movement."

What then is Homecoming about--Viet Nam or Black Power? Actually it is about a little of both but basically it is a rite of passage play about Ray Junior's coming into his true manhood. Junior comes home, the returning hero. But when he arrives, he is drunk, bitter, full of hate. He has been wounded; he has shot the "young punk ass 2nd lieutenant" in charge of his unit. He is lashing out not only at "hunkies" but at his own family and friends. We can feel sorry for the soldier, the living casualty of this divisive non-war. But we cannot see a proud Black man in this new veteran who comes home drunk, gets drunker, slaps his girlfriend (who, for no apparent reason he has rejected), insults his neighbor and his priest, argues with his family.

The strong man in the play is the father, Ray Sr. And he is no young Black militant, no spokesperson for revolution, but a man who knows who he is, who has pride--not bitterness--inside. It is not Ray Jr. with his tirades against "whitey" and "Amerika" that carries the day but Ray Sr. with his quiet but firm dignity.

After sending his girlfriend away, Ray drinks more, lies on the floor and recalls his killing of the officer. Yvette,

his younger sister who is immersed in Black Liberation, comes back in and disgustedly tells Junior to get up. He tries but can't manage. She urges him: "Ain't no man suppose to be sitting on a floor. Get up!" But Junior is tired, tired of fighting; he asks for her help. But Yvette has learned her lesson about the roles of Black men and Black women, and she tells him that "no woman suppose to be pulling a man up"; she can't help him but she can encourage him and once he gets up, she can support him.

He tries again but his wounded leg is hurting and he gives up: "I can't get up." As Yvette is sadly wondering why he "always got to fail," the father enters. He tells Yvette to help her brother up and she does not argue. But Junior now refuses her help.

RAY SR.: Well get up boy!

RAY JR.: Daddy don't call me that. I ain't no boy.

RAY SR.: Boy, get up!

RAY JR.: I ain't no boy! (hollering)

RAY SR.: You a boy as long as you acting like you acting. You a boy long as you laying there on the floor too drunk to stand up on your feet like a man.

Holding on to the cane which his father holds out to him, Junior finally manages to get up.

RAY SR.: Now you remember that and don't you ever be bending down low less you sho you can stand back up straight again. You remember that. A man can make hisself low all different kinds of ways. It's easy to go low, but it's hard to stand tall. And getting up is always hard. . . .

The father tells Junior to go to bed and the son complies with a "Yes, sir." As he is leaving the room, the father stops him for a final admonition:

RAY SR.: You a man and don't you ever let nobody call you a boy. And if I ever catch you lettin a white man call you boy, I'm going to knock you down to the ground where all boys belong. You understand that.

RAY JR.: Yes, sir.

RAY SR.: O.K., then. Now go ahead and get yourself some sleep.

RAY JR.: Yes, sir.

RAY SR.: Welcome home, Son. [CURTAIN]

The message here is clearer than in The Picket or Mama, but it does not become clear until the end. In the meantime--through most of the play--we are muddled: is Yvette with her dashiki and natural hairdo the heroine to admire? Or is Roberta with her quiet assurance that she is an American, not an African, the model? The truth, I suspect, lies somewhere between though in the later scene with her brother, Yvette shows unexpected strength and dignity. What about the mother with her middle-class morality and faith in her country, a faith that her son finds ludicrous? Because the author's attitude seems ambivalent, she remains undefined.

Costley is right, however: the dialogue is getting better, the characters more complex. I don't think that Homecoming is by any means Salaam's best play but of these early efforts, it is the best and shows positive development in his skills.

Happy Birthday Jesus was to be included in the 1969 professional tour but ended up having only a workshop performance.⁴ Salaam considers it one of his best plays and it has "been performed by a number of groups" in and around New Orleans (Personal interview). It does have a naturalism and spontaneity missing in the above two. It is also lighter and more humorous than his other available scripts. Very simply, he has transformed Jesus' disciples into a group of Black dudes preparing a surprise birthday party for their master who, when greeted with the surprise, urges everyone to join the party. (He assures his disciples that he will provide enough wine for the crowd.)

The party of course is the Last Supper--with a happy ending. I would guess that Salaam took the centuries-old supposition that Jesus might have been Black as the basis for this short miracle play. Implicit is the message "What a different world this might have been if Jesus and his disciples had been Black brothers!"

This very slight but quite delightful piece could, however, offend Christians of a certain ilk. And while the Moral Majority was still in 1969 an undreamt nightmare, fundamentalist worshippers--including many older Blacks--most likely would not have been amused. This may be the reason the play was not toured.

Although no record exists of specific workshop productions in New Orleans during the months of the professional

tour, Fabre ("Checklist . . .") and Hatch and Abdullah assign 1969 spring/summer performance dates to Black Liberation Army; the latter also list Black Love Song #1 for that period. There is a record of a 1972 FST workshop performance of the latter; it was half of a double bill, the other half being an imported one-man show by Arnold Inniss, Daddy Gander Raps.

Hatch and Abdullah also label Black Liberation Army "didactic" but it too, like The Picket, is a set. It does advance beyond the simplicity of its predecessor to become almost a ritual. Music, poetry, abstraction enrich the short piece. (See Appendix II.) Salaam says that he got the idea for it from a workshop improvisation which he developed into a script. Moses liked the script and decided to produce it (Personal interview).

Pre-play music sets the mood for Lucky's entrance and his greeting of the various set pieces. Happyjack comes on to try to borrow five dollars. The dialogue starts as rhyme (but the dozens doesn't evolve):

HAPPYJACK: . . . looka here boss, you just let me hold
five for tonight, just for tonight. . . .

LUCKY: No nigger. You got a light?

Lucky tries to convince Happyjack to quit begging. Peaches, a tart young tart, enters. Neither of the men can make headway with her. Two more girls come in, wigged and giggling. They are followed by Talk Loud, a negro militant.

But his harangue, while containing familiar exhortations, has a hint of the absurd:

All power to the people. Black power to black people. Horse power to the cars [emphasis added]! Right On! yo-yo. What's da matter wit you niggers. Don't yall realize that we is all slaves of the white man. We got to get togetha. What's da matter with you niggers. Don't yall understand nuthin.

Not only the "horse power" line and the "yo-yo" but the sudden intrusion of eye dialect and non-standard grammar takes the edge off (or puts it on) what would otherwise be a stereotypical speech. Happyjack tries to borrow money from Talk Loud. And he gets the same flavor answer:

Why don't you go rob a bank. Everything the white man has belongs to you nigger. All you got to do is take it. It all belongs to you. La-la. Yo-yo. Ungawa, Black Power!

Talk Loud is a phony. Lucky accuses him of being a high-paid agent of KNQP--Keep Niggers Quiet Program, his synonym for the poverty program. To prove himself, Talk Loud suggests burning down the place. The argument between Lucky and Talk Loud is continuing when X enters on crutches with a truly revolutionary, albeit arbsurdist tinged message:

This sun is not our star. White men are walking live red flower pot titty pink grass we should be more light years beyond apollo moon probes. They burned the 1st nigger astronaut to a crisp. Pull the plugs out of all electric computers and punch your light bills . . . and all other bills full of holes with ice picks.

Talk Loud urges the others not to listen to X but the latter stands his ground: "To do, do too, two do's do do to & what we need is not to do but to be, to be/do only not what others tell us *o do but onliest dos what wants to do."

Talk Loud leaves, X delivers another dadaistic speech (which beneath its absurd surface has a clear message about white America), the musicians return to the stage, X issues a cryptic command ("red sofas") and is assured from offstage that everything is clear. He drops his crutches, moves center and commands "Watu weusi. Umoja!" Everyone now shows their true colors, falling into ranks and clenching their fists over their hearts. X continues: "Tonight is panther walk. All the city must burn. Lucky you check the left, Happyjack you take the right. . . ."

Peaches and the girls get their assignments as do the musicians. But they are interrupted by two "pigs" ("negroes dressed in suits") who are looking for X. X makes his get-away and everyone else reverts to their original poses: Peaches says she's looking for a man with money, Lucky tries to borrow money from the pigs who are thoroughly disgusted with "these niggers" who don't know how to act and just waste their time. The pigs leave, the musicians start playing again, drifting off through the audience: "[When] musicians leave stage all is quiet then very, very loud explosion from back of theater w/h screams & shouts/salaam

THE BEGINNING (hopefully)"

Much humor is packed into this short piece but the message is more blatant than that in Happy Birthday Jesus: stop doing nothing, beware of false friends, join the real revolution. Alain Locke over 50 years ago predicted that

"race drama of the future [would] utilize satire for . . . psychological distance and perspective, and rely upon irony as a natural corrective for the sentimentalisms of propaganda" (Gayle, . . . Expression 125-26).

Here the satire is apparent and it works well for its Black audience. Beneath the garb of the pimp and prostitute may be found a proud Black; beneath the dashiki of a revolutionist may be found a "negro." By abandoning the strictly realistic and truly didactic Salaam has gained in dramatic interest. Of course there is a lack of subtlety and a simplistic approach but that is characteristic of the set (or acto or lehrstuecke)--which is intended to make a point without a lot of argumentation. Black Liberation Army does it more specifically than any of the previous pieces and does it more interestingly. Salaam is rapidly developing scripting skills.

Hatch and Shine compare Blk Love Song #1 to ritual plays produced by the New Lafayette Theatre and point out that "its form, based on verse/chant/dialogue, is designed to raise consciousness by repetition of positive and negative black images" (864). In explaining what the Blkartsouth writers and actors were trying to do at this point, Salaam indicates that they were still finding their way toward "a better/blacker thing":

The closest thing that can be pointed to . . . that will give you an idea of what black theater will be like once we get it together is negro down home church. . . . That's total spiritual/physical

identification. . . . We want that energy/identification in our art. We want to couple that with a straight ahead pan african ideology to produce a nation.

Our writers are increasingly conscious of this direction and their work tries to move that way. . . . We try to appeal to black people, to every facet of our black peopleness. . . .
(Hatch & Shine 865-866).

Black Love Song comes in two versions, #1 and #2, but Salaam says there is virtually no difference between the two. Even more than Black Liberation Army, which mixes humor with some ritualistic elements, Black Love Song moves into poetic ritual. The "plot" line is simple: Sarah and Jethro progress through three scenes from slaves with pride and dreams to beaten down, quarreling, bitter modern negroes to rededicated Blacks starting on the road to liberation. Slick, the pimp, and Peaches, the whore, refuse to hear the message, and it is made clear that there is no hope for Beat who will not listen to talk about Africa. A chorus sets the scene, comments on conditions at the end of each scene and closes the play. The message though is delivered by Blk Man and Blk woman and it is more overt than in the other plays.

At the opening Blk Woman asks:

Where is the seed of africa? Where?
Where are the first men who walked the earth?
. . . . My brother, my brothers
and my father, Our fathers, Where?
Where has the seed of Africa gone?

The chorus responds:

They are gone to America
They are gone to the new world
. . . .

They are gone to America
 Into hell they have been hurled

At the end of scene two, after Sarah accuses Jethro of abandoning her to the rape of the white man and Jethro explains why in fact he finally did leave, the chorus comments:

Black men walk the streets alone
 . . .
 Black men walk cause they ain't got no home
 Some black folks call america home
 . . .
 But if this is home, how come black men alone[?]

Blk Man and Blk Woman preach pride and strength and nationhood. Blk Man urges Jethro to come along:

Come my brother and let us try to live our lives.
 Let us try to get along with each other.
 Let us be people, the people that we are.
 Come my brother. The day is dawning and we've
 much work to do. We have much sickness to look into
 ourselves and extract. We have studying to do.
 New ways to learn. Come my brother and bring
 your woman along to this new day.

And Blk Woman reassures him:

No matter what it is, you will be able to do it.
 Do not be afraid my brother. You are the sun my brother
 and we, your women, we are the earth. We lay
 waiting for you to rise and warm us with the fire of
 your being and nourish us with the strength of your
 manliness. We wait to grow for you a nation. . . .

But Jethro and Sarah must find their own way. As Blk Man tells them:

It is not for any man to tell another what to do.
 Each man must do as he must to help his brother to
 survive. I will tell you this much:
 If you do not become the teller, the one who says what
 is, defines, best, then others will, against your
 interest.
 They will define you out of human existence. You will
 be lost. You must examine your life. You must
 study yourself. You must be careful what you eat.

Be careful of the friends you choose. In the beginning you must do much of it alone. . . .

When Sarah and Jethro leave to work out their new way, Blk Man asks: "Where is the seed of Africa now? Will we make / us a home?" Blk Woman joins in: "Will the nation rise and grow firm in the / bodies of black woman?" And the chorus closes the proceedings:

Where is the seed of Africa? When will they come home? Where is the seed of Africa? When will they come home? How long before from the seeds a new black nation shall bloom
Let a new black nation bloom
Let a new black nation bloom
Let us a new black nation bloom!

Black Love Song, with its chorus and rhythm and music (live music is suggested), could assuredly be an effective theatrical presentation and, judging by the reviews, it was, at least in 1972. Nor does it belabor its message, another point noted by Dwight Ott who reviewed it for the Times-Picayune. He concludes that FST "may have really hit home" in its attempt to at the same time entertain and stimulate "creative and reflective thought." Ott found both the play and the performance superior to other productions of Salaam and the FST ("Love Song . . .").

Joseph Del Papa reviewed the 1972 production for

Figaro:

Except for some pompous and pretentious moments that are almost inevitable in verse drama of this sort, the play is extremely well written and extremely well presented. The theatre is really a beautifully equipped little place, and the intricate lighting and staging worked without a flaw.

But then Del Papa raises an interesting question:

The fact that the whole production was so sophisticated brings me to some nagging questions: Exactly to whom is the Free Southern Theatre [sic] appealing? . . .

Presumably blacks who have had little opportunity to see theatre. . . . This being the case, isn't this sort of theatre just a bit too sophisticated.

This in turn raises another question: how timely was this message in 1969 and 1972? The Black Muslim movement was already past its zenith; the turbulence of the '60s was giving way to the conservatism of the '70s. But the fight for Black rights and Black pride was not over (nor is it yet). The Black Liberation Movement has left its mark on Black thinking and, if integration seems again to be in the ascendancy, many Blacks today would argue that the message of Black Liberation Army and Black Love Song still must be disseminated.

And if, as Salaam suggests, the Blkartsouth members as a group were working their way toward greater blackness, Black Love Song and Black Liberation Army define his progress. While there has been talk of revolution from the start in his plays, these two pieces seem to espouse it finally and wholeheartedly.

Subtitled "A Set for Non-Believers," Salaam's The Destruction of the American Stage, like the above, takes the elements of ritual--music, choral responses, abstractions, poetry--and hangs on them Black Liberation dogma. The piece is described in Black World as "an experimental framework on which to hang new ideas and concepts and to search for new

directions and meanings in the continuing quest for relevant Black forms" (54). Even more than Black Liberation Army, this piece reaches for audience involvement. After initial dancing, singing and mingling with the audience, the Lead opens the ceremony:

We are glad that you have come to see our play.
Asante, thank you. Your kindness is appreciated.
 Our play is you, begins with you, ends with you, and
 for that reason we thank you for being here; without
 you we have nothing. Is there any among us who would
 lead us in prayer? Would you say prayer? (Ask
 someone) Any prayer. We come from many peoples.
 Surely there are many gods present in spirit among us
 Let us thank the creator for life. . . . We
 We are the suns (55).

The chorus affirms "Yes we are" and Lead, with choral support, continues the paeon.

As the opening chorale ends, "a brother comes running in" and, using sign language, tells Lead "that a long haired stranger is coming who swishes when he walks" (56). The Stranger, blonde wigged and wearing both a large cross and hippie love beads, enters and prays--in Pig Latin. His prayer translates to "God help me conquer. . . . Let me teach them your ways. Help me, oh my white . . . god."

Debate follows among a Sister, a Brother and Lead about the Stranger and whether they should help him. The Sister is doubtful: "The stranger seems to me to be in need of help. But he does not look right. He smells strange." Lead assures her that "smell does not make a man different" but she is unconvinced. The Brother has no doubts: "I say kill the stranger. He is a beast. A devil. . . . He will rob us. He

will kill us. He will take the women and children away. . . . I say kill this white death before it kills us" (57). Lead is adamant: "No, we will welcome him as we would anyone."

Lead's faith is misplaced. During a blackout, screams are heard that give way to gunfire and finally bombs. Lead curses the Stranger. When the sounds cease and lights come up, the Stranger--with the U.S. Constitution around his neck --is sitting in the center surrounded by Black people "on all fours pulling down any of those who attempt to rise." The Stranger laughs at the Blacks fighting among themselves and speaks, in English: "Niggers! Niggers! Oh you stupid bastards. You stupid Black bastards" (59). Lead begins reciting David Walker's "Appeal",⁵ then moves to Douglass' "Agitation" speech. Meanwhile the Stranger bribes a Mised Brother who interrupts Lead:

What sort of rot talk is this. . . . We are happy here We are negroes here. . . . We are good Americans; yes, we are. We can do anything the whiteman says we can We don't want to go back to no Africa (59).

He shoots Lead and seduces a Sister into following him. First he must stop to "see the boss man" (the Stranger) who declares him guilty "of willfully and with malice and forethought killing another nigger" and sentences him "to serve two years in jail" and pay a fine of 27 cents. But when Mised Brother assures him that "I kills me a nigger every chance I get," the Stranger suspends sentence and puts him on two years probation (59-60).

Lead, in a new guise, is now dragged in before the Stranger/Judge:

STRANGER: What's you name boy?

LEAD: Elijah Muhammed.

STRANGER: You ain't going in the army, huh?

LEAD: I must follow the will of ALLAH.

STRANGER: You is the most dangerous type of criminal there is. . . . In law school they taught us that a man with a conscious [sic] of his own is more dangerous than any other type of man You a law breaker. There's a law against a nigger being a man. It say right here . . . that a nigger ain't no better than three-fifths of a man. . . (61).

Having disposed (again) of Lead, the Stranger sets the men against the women: "Now you will hate each other. . . . From now on all black women will be bitches and all Black men will be no good niggers" (62). The men and women, alternately, voice their desires while a slick couple move around the room pushing dope and "leg." The pusher and the prostitute are of course employed by the Stranger. The dope business is booming but free love has ruined the prostitution business so the Dude suggests that they put his wife on the stage--big time prostitution. The Stranger acquiesces, invites the two to his place and then suggests wife swapping. That too seems a good idea. The Stranger laments:

I only wish more Black people were like you two and could realize that it only takes a little hard dirty work to become a full-fledged American. And then you could integrate into the system completely (66).

The three of them leave and Lead returns to plead with the other Blacks who have been frozen in place:

Let us help each other. Do not fight your brother and sister. Let us come together and work out some programs for our survival as African people. . . . Come, let us help one another (66).

Here there is another chance for audience involvement:

(The cast struggles, crying out for help from/to everybody that is near. . . . If someone comes to help any of the cast the STRANGER will call Dude & Dude's wife and will pay them some money to go over to the person that is trying to help a cast member and try to talk him/her out of helping)

DUDE: You a fool, man. This is only a play. They can wals and talk as good as me and you. Let um get up on they own. That's the American way. . . .

DUDE'S WIFE: I'll kiss you if you stop (If that stops someone, she should call them a "liver lipped nigger fool" and tell them that they are too ugly to kiss). . . .

(If a person persists . . . he will have to do most of the work of pulling a Black person up alone. . . . If a person helps a Black brother or sister up, then the brother/sister--should thank him/her [this is for Black people that help cast members]. Greet them. Ask their name . . . and then the cast member should teach his/her helper to say "WE ARE AN AFRICAN PEOPLE". . .) [67-68].

The Lead applauds the coming together and asks the Stranger to go away, implicitly including any whites present.

(If there are a number of whites present, the STRANGER will say: "I have seen the beast in me and I want to cast it out. I want to be worthy of trust and love. . . ." To which the leader's reply is: "If you are sincere in your wish to help Black people you are to become more like a human yourself. . . ." The STRANGER will then leave. . . . Otherwise the STRANGER'S DECISION TO STAY OR LEAVE SHOULD BE BASED ON WHETHER OR NOT HE THINKS HE CAN TALK PEOPLE INTO LETTING HIM STAY. . .) [68].

If he does not leave voluntarily, he is cast out, after which the Blacks "should sing and eat fruit, play music, sing songs and celebrate." During the rite, "copies of different programs for the uplift of African people should be passed out. . ." (68).

If, however, the cast has not all been helped up after some 10 minutes, this is the procedure:

Those that have not been helped up should begin shouting "NIGGERS AIN'T SHIT" & "WOMEN ARE BITCHES." They should also try to pull those who are up down to their level. If they succeed in doing this they will shout for 30 seconds more and then run out laughing. . . . The STRANGER then will rise and begin laughing and pointing at people. When he tires of that he too will walk out, and that will be the end.

If white people want to help a cast member up, the castmember should tell them that they can best help by going out and helping other white people to cast the beast from out of themselves. If white people still do not leave, then they should be ignored and/or asked to leave. Those cast members who are helped up by white people should fall back down as soon as the white person stops supporting him/her. (NOTE: If you have a celebration make sure you clean up the room after you are through) [68-9].

Hatch and Abdullah give no production date for this work, Fabre does not list it, and there is no record of a production by FST. Thus both external and internal evidence suggests that Salaam wrote the piece after Blkartsouth broke away from FST. It is a much more sophisticated and more fully worked out set than either Black Liberation Army or Black Love Song and shows an evolvment both in his thinking about Black Liberation and in his theatrical techniques yet, interestingly, Salaam has no particular attachment to it (Personal interview). He may have seen The Performance

Group's Dionysus in 69 or been told about it by Schechner; the audience involvement suggests this. More than any of the other FST writers, Salaam experimented with the ritual approach of other Black theatre groups and with avant-garde techniques of off-off-Broadway.

The Turn of the Century: A set/for our rising... does not have the coherence of Destruction and is more obviously a workshop pastiche which Salaam smoothed out. The piece opens with a scene between goDevil and Brother Man #1. The latter is praying to be turned into anything but a nigger because "a nigger, a jiveass nigger, ain't got no place to go, no place to call home." goDevil comes on and Brother Man appeals to him to be changed from a nigger to a white man.

goDevil: You really want to be a faggotty white boy, huh?

BROTHER MAN #1: Yes no. Yes yes. No. I mean...huh . . .
No. But on the other hand. JUST GET ME OUT
OF THIS TRICK BAG.

goDevil obligingly transforms Brother Man into a dog who exits bow-wowing. goDevil delivers a long harangue urging audience members to put in their applications for a change so they can be something other than niggers in the twenty-first century. If they wonder why they should change, he invites them to look at themselves.

The first reflection of themselves is a black couple arguing. "They are strivers and their diction is letter perfect but quick lasping [sic] into negro smears as the

argument heats up." Barbara is urging Charles to be a man and he is telling her to stop nagging him. He has given her "a good place, furniture, a car, clothes, money. . . ." His question "What more do you want?" is the cue to move into a poetry sequence, starting with Barbara Malcolm's "Black Woman Throws a Tantrum" and moving to other works by Blkartsouth writers (including several performed in the poetry shows) accompanied by music and dancing and interspersed with brief bits of scene-setting dialogue. The last segment involves Brother Flagg and Dr. Daddy Dope the Death Dealer (Mr. D.). The message is "Stop doping and dying, rise and live. Change but change with the future in mind." During the final poem, "Build Bros/Sisters" by Kwesi, cast members distribute a "prepared handout."

What Turn of the Century essentially is is a poetry show built around the theme of change. In performance it very likely had more impact than it does on the printed page where the seams between poems seem forced and awkward at many spots.

Dent does not remember the piece ever being staged (Personal letter) though it was printed in the drama issue of Nkombo (August 1972).

With The Quest Salaam returns to realistic theatre. The Quest is also post-FST. It was first performed by the Voodoo American Theatre and revived by Blkartsouth. A second version (unavailable) was mounted as late as 1985 by

the Chakula Cha Jua Theater Company at the Alliance for Community Theaters' third annual New Orleans Black Theater Festival.

While the theme of The Quest is familiar, the characters and situation are better developed than in Salaam's earlier one-acts. The militant Black Lib message has given way to an examination of a continuing problem within the Black community--the young dude who refuses to take responsibility, who has rebelled against mother and her church, who resents his blackness and who is strung out on dope and women. Opposed to him is an older brother, married, going to school, optimistic about the chances to better himself.

Woody accuses his brother of being "square" and trying to be white "married to a high fallutin sadiddy ass, colored woman dat works as a secretary...downtown with the white folks to help send wonder boy through school."

Clarence countercharges:

You the one trying to be white. . . . Yeah you just like the white man. You going to try and misuse everybody for your own ends. You got your white women plus you want to have some black girls on the sides.

The brothers have completely different outlooks on life but unlike Mama--with whom Woody has just had a vituperative quarrel--Clarence is beginning to understand his younger brother: Woody is lost; he's getting nothing from his street life but is too stubborn to admit it, too scared to try something else. Woody leaves but Clarence follows,

determined to find him and "bring him home. . . . I got to find him. He's my brother."

Here is Mama of Mama along with Pete and Rufus. But the men are more fully developed, the relationships clearer. In this play the didactic speeches are gone. Instead we have conversations--between Woody and Clarence, between Mama and her sons (mainly Woody), between Clarence's wife Odessa and her husband and her brother-in-law. If at times strained (particularly in the scene between Mama and Woody), the dialogue is much more natural than in the earlier scripts and, as noted above, the relationships are more apparent, fuller. This is not simply an ideological message but the universal one, "I am my brother's keeper." And, while the dialogue puts the situation squarely in the black community and while Woody's hurt may stem particularly from the Black situation, the problem is at base a human one--the miscast, the outcast. It is popular today in the Black artistic community to sneer at Raisin in the Sun; The Quest is of the same ilk.

Salaam continues to write poetry but has moved away from drama. He has his own small public relations company, works with the New Orleans Jazz Inheritance Festival, and concentrates on non-fiction. He says that many of the editors for whom he writes articles are not even aware of his published poetry.

The other major writer in the Blkartsouth workshop was Dent who also continues to write although he too has shifted away from drama. (He is currently working--or may have finished work--on a book about Andrew Young.)

One of Dent's earliest plays, dating from 1967, is Ritual Murder. Dent says the play was written for the FST but insists that it was never done by them and a long-term FST board member bears him out; Fabre ("Checklist . . .") and Hatch and Abdullah credit FST with a production and the FST "Historical Notes" lists the play as having been performed in 1969. It would seem, however, that it never got out of the workshop. Chakula Cha Jua, in his "Director's Notes" that accompany the published script in Callaloo, says he directed the premiere production at New Orleans' Ethiopian Theater in 1976. (It was probably this production that he brought to the FST in 1977 as a guest attraction.)

The play is documentary with a narrator leading the investigation to find out why Joe Brown Jr. killed his best friend. The young wife, Joe's teacher, a Black psychiatrist, Joe's boss, his mother and father, the chief of police and the head of New Orleans' anti-poverty program are interviewed; finally James Roberts, the victim, tells what really happened. None of the people involved fully understand the why any more than they understand Joe (or their own attitudes). But the message, the complex of reasons, the frustration of Joe come through to the audience. The title

comes from the psychiatrist's explanation: "When murder occurs for no apparent reason but happens all the time, as in our race on Saturday nights, it is ritual murder."

Dent indicates music at several point; Cha Jua used it throughout, an appropriate song to introduce each character. He also used actors not involved in the particular scene as a chorus to emphasize points. The piece is simply but dramatically written and, as with Salaam's The Quest, it is about people, not abstractions. In fact Joe Brown Jr. is brother to Salaam's Woody--hurt, frustrated, seeking, finally exploding.

Inner Black Blues is an extended, not as successful version of the same story with Joe telling his own story in a succession of scenes. Dent says that he was "so disgusted that Ritual Murder had not been done, I started to do it in different versions"; this version was one he had always liked but on looking it over "for the first time in 13 years," he decided "it reads more like fiction than a play, so Chakula [was] probably right in not choosing to produce it" (Personal letter).

In the same letter, Dent offers a glimpse into what he was attempting to do theatrically during this era:

At that time I was also into using slides, or attempting in some way to blend cinema and theater, to make theater a more varied experience, as much because of my love for cinema as a way to make theater more viable. When Bob Costley produced Snapshot in 1970 we used some slides (and my mother's slide projector), but that is the only time we actually tried it.

Snapshot, along with Feathers and Stuff and Riot Duty, also dates from 1969. ⁶ Snapshot has been revived since-- most recently by the ACT I Players for the 1985 Black Theater Festival. A sketch rather than a play, Snapshot is billed as "a horror-comedy." It is essentially a long sermon by the preacher--"a real smoothy [who] always strives for the theatrical effect [and has] total confidence that he has his congregation under control."

The occasion is the introduction of the court for the Steady Strivers Greater Missionary Baptist Church's Spring Festival Homecoming. The court is composed of those who raised the most money. The queen and her two maids are bedecked in gaudy finery and their short acknowledgment speeches deal with their clothes and appearance. The king is even more wildly outfitted--"the wildest fantasy of what Louis 14th might wear." He is hard-working and ever-suffering but he loses his inhibitions and reveals that he has dreams of being able to "quit shinin shoes and get out and maybe get my own church sometime..." (ts). In the version in Nkombo this speech is unfortunately cut for it provides the opportunity for amusing reactions by the preacher.

The court is ludicrous but pathetic. These are all people who must work hard for what little they have and they have exerted even more effort than usual to raise money for their church--money for the building fund, money for a Cadillac for the preacher because naturally they don't want him

riding around in an old Ford! But, the preacher exhorts them, they are going to have to continue striving because more is needed:

We need a new wing on the church. We need a new pastorage. I know you want to see me in that new cadillac [sic]. . . . BUT I DON'T WANT ONE. I DON'T...DO NOT WANT A CADILLAC. YOU HEAR. . . . I WANT A LINCOLN CONTINENTAL. . . . A MAROON LINCOLN CONTINENTAL (Nkomo 90).

Dent quickly and neatly captures the rhythm of the type of preacher he's satirizing and his point comes across through the laughs: separate yourself from this rip-off religion. In a note at the end of the typescript (which differs only slightly from the published version and in no essentials except that mentioned above), he makes this point:

No matter how it's done, the effect must be that the people actually participating in the court are not happy, and are drawn away from their natural selves. The PREACHER is always the manipulator. The use of slides to show at several points the images of poverty stricken [sic] blk people can help make this point. The freeze at the end is designed to emphasize this imitation of the extravagances & pretensions of white culture.

Dent, more than Salaam, used humor, and used it well, to make his quick points.

Feathers and Stuff is another humorous sketch involving just four characters: Leroy and Jennie, a Black cat and Black chick from New Orleans; Mr. Robinson, an effeminate white liberal businessman-industrialist; and Miss Smithers, his secretary who is described as "a whiteized black chick" with a Bryn Mawr education but who has almost no lines and contributes nothing to the action. The setting of this skit

is Mr. Robinson's New York apartment. Robinson has invited Leroy and Jennie over to discuss a study they propose to do on the Indians whose dances are performed by Blacks during Mardi Gras; they are asking for \$50,000 to finance this study which they are sure will substantiate their theory that a close alliance existed between the Indians and the slaves. Robinson, although fascinated by their theory (which Leroy spells out in some detail), wonders if they could cut their budget to \$35,000. They promptly agree and Robinson promises that they will hear officially about the funding in about a month. When Jennie and Leroy are alone, they start to laugh: they have successfully conned Mr. Robinson out of \$35,000! (See Appendix III.)

Here is another modern trickster tale with the victim being an effete white liberal (a favorite target of Black Nationalists--too gullible of course to be believable but that is irrelevant. There is a deftness in Leroy's presentation that we expect from the traditional wily trickster and the piece does what a trickster tale aims to do--produce a chuckle and reinforce a positive image of Black ability.

Riot Duty, which may be part of the 1969 tour but probably was not (see below), is an even shorter piece than the above two and uses humor that turns to horror. Roberts, a Black plainclothesman, is trying to get a call through to headquarters to make his report from the riot area. The humor comes from his battle with the phone operator. He

finally gets through and is recommending the deployment of more forces--perhaps even the National Guard--when two white cops come on, see him in the phone booth, grab and beat him without giving him a chance to explain or show his identification. The piece ends with more shots and an off-stage voice: "BLOOD WILL RISE. BLOOD WILL RISE UP. ALL BLOOD TOGETHER WILL RISE UP. ALL BLOOD TOGETHER WILL RISE UP TONIGHT. ALL BLOOD TOGETHER." It doesn't pay to play the white man's game.

Dent's output was not as great as Salaam's and he never apparently went beyond these very short sketches. What he did write demonstrates a deftness with dialogue, a sense of humor--and a sense of dramatic effect--missing from many other such pieces. He makes his points more subtly. But then in his articles too Dent seems to be more interested in form than in pure polemics. Although he was one of the strong advocates of making FST all-Black and although he has told me that he had no quarrel with O'Neal's Marxism, the didacticism of Black Liberation is not that strong in any of his writings. ⁷ A clue to his approach is found in a 1971 Black World article in which he advocates using the rich Black musical heritage to enrich Black drama. This, he says, will be more effective than "rhetoric and polemics alone. Too often our plays sound like mere reactions against white theater in the same forms the man speaks to his money honkies" ("Beyond Rhetoric . . ." 20-22).

Also performed during 1969 was To Kill or To Die by Adam Weber who seems to have been a workshop participant. To Kill or To Die is another very short (six pages) play about commitment that is not very convincing because of its too rapid development and lack of orientation.

Jomo asks his friend Rick for shelter. Jomo is the leader of the Black Freedom Army, a group Rick has drifted away from because he doesn't like Jomo's "flunkies" and the wanton violence the group engages in. Jomo leaves to get his gear. The police raid the Army's headquarters. Two policemen are killed and four wounded; five members of the Army are critically injured and eight arrested; Jomo is reported to have escaped. But he was not there, not involved. While all this is happening (off-stage--we hear a radio report about it), Marilyn comes to beg Rick to stop being a loner, to return to her. (Is she his wife? girlfriend?) He loses his temper and tells her to get out. Jomo returns, followed by the police. He goes to another room while Rick tells the police they can't come in without a search warrant. They break down the door anyway. Jomo comes in and shoots one cop; Rick grabs his gun from the dresser and kills the second one. Jomo apologizes to Rick for having gotten him "into this shit" but Rick reassures him:

No man its not your fault. I never worried about you getting me into anything I didn't want to get into in the first place. . . . You see the only mistake you made was thinking a man had to fight to prove his

manhood, while he only has to fight to protect it. These pigs tried to take my manhood. The only thing I have the only thing I will not surrender [sic] (ts).

And the incident is over.

Jomo comes across not as a proud young leader but as a hoodlum, Rick is not sufficiently developed for us to understand him, and six pages is not enough to treat two different relationships AND plot development that is extraneous to at least one of these relationships.

While these workshop productions were being presented by Blkartsouth, the main focus in 1969 was on the professional touring company directed by Gil Moses. Unfortunately there is a good deal of confusion in the records about the 1969 season. Evan Walker's two-act play East of Jordan was done in New Orleans but whether it toured or not is unclear. One printed flyer from the archives announces simply N'Kombo, two evenings of one-act plays--Slave Ship, Roots, Riot Duty, Black Liberation Army, Sharon Stockard Martin's Proper and Fine and Ben Caldwell's Riot Sale and Hypnotism. The "Historical Notes" lists the Walker play, Slave Ship, Roots, Riot Duty (mistakenly attributed to Ferdinand/Salaam) and the Martin piece. And a news release dated July 29 says:

The 1969 repertoire has included East of Jordan . . . , Slave Ship . . . and Roots in six communities. For the second leg of the tour two scripts by New Orleans writers Val Ferdinand and Sharon Stockard were added, Black Liberation Army and Proper and Fine. . . .

O'Neal says that Jordan was short lived and was not taken on

tour (Personal interview). And Dent says that in his recollection "it was never used on the road because it was too cumbersome to set up and too long." But apparently it was meant to be part of the tour, for Dent goes on to recall this incident:

Gil, who had an explosive temper, fired Jose [the technical director who had also helped Moses with his conception of Slave Ship] in Canton, Miss. when he demanded that Jose set up for East of Jordan, which had not been done since New Orleans. Jose said he couldn't do it on a moment's notice . . . whereupon Gil flew into a rage and fired him, and we haven't heard of Jose since (Personal letter).

In any case, Walker's work has much to recommend it (although Dent doesn't seem to be impressed by it, reporting that he saw it only once, as best he recalls, at its "overblown 'opening'" [Personal letter]).

Walker, a Georgia native, was living and working in Harlem at the time. (He has since died.) His plays, according to the opening night program, had already been produced in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania and he had "been the recipient of several awards including a Playwrighting Fellowship from the Yale School of Drama."

The FST production was the premiere for East of Jordan, described by Hatch and Abdullah as a "morality drama." The program notes summarize the play:

The dreams of a black family in Harlem are shattered as they learn the score about each other and learn that the price of a home like the paradise "Just a little East of Jordan" is tragedy. Sam, an unschooled Black shipping clerk, turns his back on his Southern Roots and the wisdom of Harlem's streets for his wife, Gussie, who lives in a world filled with dreams of

"refined and educated house niggers." The action of the play takes place between July and September of 1949, in the Harlem apartment of SAM KNIGHT, on the street outside . . . , at his job downtown . . . , at the GOLDEN LOAN COMPANY and in the LUCKY DOLLAR BAR and GRILL.

The term "morality drama" is misleading (despite the names, the characters are more than abstractions) and the summary does not do justice to the drama. If Death of a Salesman is a modern tragedy, so is East of Jordan which, although not as technically innovative as Salesman, is about the same subject--the destructiveness of the American dream of material success. Like Willie's wife Linda, Sam's wife Gussie will have her house but it too will be empty, for like Willy Loman, Sam Knight will have committed suicide as an unwanted and unnecessary gift to his wife.

The major difference between the two plays is that in Jordan it is Gussie, the wife, who has lived the life of lies that eventually destroy the family and it is her secret that devastates the son.

The plot, in brief, is this: Sam and Gussie were childhood sweethearts in Georgia but her preacher father didn't think Sam good enough for her. She goes off to college, marries, has a son, is soon widowed and returns home to care for her father. Years later Sam, who works in New York's garment district, comes home and they are reunited. Now Gussie, Sam, her son Johnny and Sam's brother Charlie and sister-in-law Ella are cramped into a Harlem tenement.

Gussie's dream is a house and Sam has built her one in Yonkers. It is finished except for the wiring and the law says Sam can't do that himself; he must hire an electrical contractor at a cost of \$1500. That is the situation as the play opens.

Sam, on his own time at work, has learned to be a master cutter and he wants the job left open when his mentor died. Abe, the owner of the business, promises it to him--later, meanwhile giving him a small raise. The bank turns Sam down because he has insufficient income. He thinks he has the money lined up through a regular loan company but the final decision maker also says "no." In desperation Sam borrows the money, at exorbitant terms and with an excruciating loss of dignity, from a Harlem hustler called Candy. Charlie, college educated but bitter, jobless, drunk, tells Sam the truth: Gussie was never married. The fabulous husband she still brags about never existed. Sam is crushed; his hurt and fury almost destroy him but he is beginning to accept Gussie and his love for her despite her deceit when the situation comes to a head. Candy is pushing Sam for money. Johnny, who works for the same company as Sam, missends a shipment of dresses because he is writing poetry. Sam approaches Abe for help just after Abe has heard about the misdirected order. He is so upset that he doesn't even comprehend Sam's pleas. Sam, bitterness re-stirred, in turn tells Johnny the truth--he is a bastard.

Later that evening, at his 18th birthday party, Johnny confronts Gussie and more of her sad truth is revealed: she does not even know who Johnny's father is; she was gang raped after getting drunk at her first and only fraternity party. In the midst of the family uproar Candy calls up from the street: he wants his money--now. Abe has phoned and promised to bring the money but he isn't there yet. Sam goes down to see Candy who pulls a knife on him. Sam gets the knife away from Candy and uses it--on himself in order to nullify his contract with Candy and assure Gussie her home.

Melodramatic? Yes. But believable? Also yes. What holds East of Jordan together and makes it truly touching is the character of Sam--a strong man, a proud man, a decent man, a loving man who cannot handle the crush of events that are out of his control. With each blow, his self-respect and his faith weaken a little more until--like Willy--the only thing he has left to give, mistakenly, is his life. He is more touching than Willy because of his honesty and decency. Walker allows us to see this crumbling and to feel each successive hurt; there is a progression, not a sudden turnabout.

The straightforward plot development is broken only by the commentary of Shango, the conjure man. Rather than being distracting, Shango adds poetic melancholy and strengthens the idea of the alienation that accompanies the move north.

Two questions, so far unanswered, arise in conjunction with the FST production. First, why was the play chosen? (It was Moses' choice [Dent, Letter].) This is domestic, not Black Liberation, drama. Yes, the unfairness of the white establishment contributes to Sam's death. Yes, the American dream has soured for many of those who "fled, escaped, followed the North Star" because they "wanted in on a piece of the biggest hustle of all. . . . That blinking lady who winked false promises of hope, happiness and Yankee gold" as Shango tells us in the prologue (ts, I 4). But it has proven false not only for Blacks but for immigrants, for the hillbillies of Appalachia, for many. Jordan, like Salesman, is political drama in that sense but, like Raisin in the Sun, it is more than Black political drama. In short the same criticism can be leveled against it as is aimed at Raisin: it is not revolutionary or inherently Black.

The second question is this: was the production weakened by having an all-Black cast? There is no reason that Sam's boss could not be a bourgeois Black or the young man at the loan company an establishment negro. But that was not Walker's intent: the action occurs pre-Black Liberation Movement, Abe is established as Jewish both through his business and his speech patterns ("For you, Sammy, I always got time"; "Solly, I didn't need. He was an old man, like a father to me. So I keep him on. . . ." [I 30, 33]) and he and Sam have a friendly relationship. The loan officer is

surely meant to represent the rather patronizing white establishment. Having Blacks exploit Blacks would put a significantly different reading to the play. At the time FST was "doing white characters with masks, so that may have been the case here" (Dent, Letter). If so, the device would surely have seemed jarringly out of a place in an otherwise essentially realistic play.

The centerpiece of the season was, however, not the full-length Walker play but Baraka's one-act expressionistic Slave Ship. Subtitled "A Historical Pageant," Slave Ship is extremely fluid. The FST July 29th press release describes it as "a brilliant impressionistic depiction of the history of Black people in America. It recreates the rape of Africa, the middle passage, and sets forth the major struggle in America." It hardly accomplishes all that except by implication! The printed script is only 13 pages but a considerable portion of these pages is devoted to directions for music, dance, mime, and ad lib sequences. When all these effects are added, the pageant (and that is a better term than play) could fill the major part of a theatrical evening and create an overwhelming impression. Eric Bentley called it "the strongest piece of theatre I have seen in the past few years" when he saw Moses' version at the Chelsea Theatre Center (. . . War 404). And Salaam discussed Southern audience reactions in his report to Negro Digest. In the small towns of Louisiana and Mississippi where many people were

seeing theatre for the first time, Slave Ship was a different play, a play "that the audience experienced, not as if it were scenes of slavery for a 'negro history,' but rather a play that [they] readily identified with as scenes from their lives." Who, he asks, took notice of this production?

No one! Except, of course, the Black people in Greenville, Mississippi, who were ready to revolt after the performance was over and who were only reluctantly persuaded to go home.

And then there was the entire audience in West Point, Mississippi, which rose to its feet, waving fists and singing, "When We Gonna Rise Up!" (the song which is included at the end of every Slaveship [sic] performance). And there was also the large gathering . . . which witnessed a performance on the Lake Pontchartrain shores in New Orleans--the same play that Southern University refused to allow in its auditorium. All who saw it got the message (Ferdinand 28-30).

The press release also refers to "a tussle" between Black youth and a photographer in Greenville and to "the exodus of several white people" during a Clarksdale performance.

It must have been a stunning production. Dent, in his letter to me, briefly described the setting:

a raised wooden platform in the middle of the stage, a brilliant device since it symbolized both the slaveship (masters above, slaves prone underneath), the auction block in the new world, and the speakers platform from which the slaves are implored to rise up against their masters. It just worked very well, providing the piece with tremendous economy.

First performed in 1967 by Baraka's Spirit House Movers in Newark, Slave Ship is very different from The Toilet or Dutchman, two of the earlier plays which had won Baraka fame/notoriety. His work, Baraka himself says, had taken

"a leap from partial truth to a more wholesided reality," from "'Hate Whitey'" to "'Marxists-Leninists Unite. . . !'" (Motion . . . 15-16) Baraka, more than many other playwrights of the '60s, experimented with form, moving from the brutal realism of The Toilet to the abstract metaphor of Dutchman to the impressionism/expressionism of Slave Ship.

As noted, Slave Ship is mostly sensory images created through music and movement, images that take us from the Middle Passage back to glimpses of Africa and forward to glimpses of slavery, past and present, in America and always back to the central symbol of the slave ship. There are no distinct characters, only abstractions: 1st Man, etc., 1st Woman, etc., dancers, musicians, children, voices and bodies in the slave ship, Old Tom Slave, New Tom (Preacher), white men and voices of white men. (Presumably the whites were played by Blacks in whiteface; this would work here whereas it would not in an essentially realistic play such as Jordan.)

According to O'Neal, Moses always moves at a superhigh level of intensity and with his "piercing . . . brilliant intellect" inspires actors to surpass themselves (Personal interview). We can surmise, by the reports from the South and the awards from New York, that his staging of the Baraka work was brilliant. (The New York production won him his first Tony although Dent preferred the FST production which

"was more sparse [about 50 minutes] and I thought sharper" [Letter].)

Moses is a musician also and the FST flyer for N'Kombo (see above) credits him with writing the music for Slave Ship; the previously mentioned press release says specifically that he "authored three new songs" for his production of the play. "One, which comes at the end of the play, 'When we gonna rise up,' never fails to capture the audience at the peak of their enthusiasm. . . ." The program for the Chelsea Theatre Center production credits music to both Moses and Archie Shepp. However, in the published script (Motion . . .) Moses is given no credit for the music and "When We Gonna Rise" is central to the final minutes (maybe five, maybe ten) of the action and is then used again after the final blackout when the lights come up again and the audience is enticed to join in the dance/celebration. With the FST copy of the play is a prologue titled "Names/Places, Us" which is not part of the printed script and which seems better suited for spoken than musical interpretation. Too, this was probably written by Salaam and was incorporated to set the scene for FST's unsophisticated audiences.

In any event Slave Ship was the highlight of the tour which leads one to wonder why FST never did more of Baraka's works. Dent and O'Neal have both said that Baraka speaks to an urban audience (Personal interviews) and it is true that many of his plays do but there are others--such as Slave

Ship--which speak to the Black, or societal, situation in general.

O'Neal claims that a second version of Roots was performed this season (Personal interview) but no revised script nor any notes are available.

The other work that seems definitely to have been on the touring bill is Martin's Proper and Fine: The Entourage of Fannie Lou Hamer.⁸ Proper and Fine was written in 1968. It is a very simple short piece with quick interchanges reminiscent of Moses' Roots and Beckett's Godot, both of which she must have seen. Here also are two central characters.

Afrique and Sam are in a clothing store. They have already collected piles of clothing which they are waiting to buy. A salesman can be seen lounging against a counter. He ignores them. They discuss the situation. Sam urges patience but Afrique's feet hurt and she is impatient:

AFRIQUE: Lord know if he doesn't come over here and take this stuff off my hands, I have a mind to stomp on it.

SAM (horrified): WHAT are you saying?

AFRIQUE: You heard me. I'll throw it at him.

SAM: Mercy.

They discuss various reasons why he may not be able to see them. None seems logical. They sing a song (a few bars of "We Shall Overcome") to get his attention. He applauds. They sit down on the floor. Afrique, looking up, notices the ceiling and admires it. The salesman too looks at the ceil-

ing. Afrique and Sam go back to discussing the situation with Sam continuing to urge patience. But Afrique wants him to "do something." Sam finally approaches the salesman as he is about to ring up another customer's sale. The salesman brushes Sam off. Sam suggests to Afrique that they leave the clothes and the store. But Afrique wants these things which have almost become a part of her. Finally Sam capitulates and they leave the store but not the clothes. Immediately the salesman yells for the police! An uproar and shots are heard off-stage. The salesman reenters: "These nigras kill me. They think they can get away with anything. What's the world coming to?"

With the typescript in the FST archives is a prologue by Sam Hill, another workshop member. It is unnecessarily heavy-handed and seems even more so contrasted to the incisiveness of Martin's work:

1ST MAN: Hunting season is yearound for them crackers. They kill us black people for sport! Here lay two more of our people killed at the hands of white beasts! . . .

WOMAN: Listen to me my brothers and sisters. Look! Look! They (lying, laying) dead here are our mothers and fathers, our sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, great grandmothers and grandfathers. . . .

2ND MAN: Men . . . STOP OVER LOOKING THE WRONG! . . . [T]he time is now to destroy this white beast before it destroys you. . . .

This prologue seems more appropriate as an epilogue if anything but is on the whole gratuitous. Martin makes her

point without this call to violence. (Whether or not the prologue was actually used is not known.) And surely the combination of Black Liberation Army, Proper and Fine and Slave Ship is enough to get across the message of oppression answered by revolt!

For an early script by a young writer Proper and Fine shows a flair for dialogue and a grasp of dramatic logic. Like Roots much of the conversation is funny, but the situation is not funny and the denouement is a logical (in terms of Black Liberation drama) and expected culmination.

At least two other pieces by Martin are associated with the FST: Edifying Further Elaborations on the Mentality of a Chore, which was toured together with the Molettes' Rosalee Pritchett in 1972, and SOS, Baby Death, and Other Anxiety Pieces for the Contemporary American Stage, which she produced and directed at the Free Southern Theater in 1977 (and which are discussed in chapter 6.)

Ben Caldwell's Hypnotism and Riot Sale apparently never went into production. Caldwell is not an FST product. He worked with Baraka at Spirit House and with the New Lafayette. Hypnotism is a one-page skit in which a white magician dressed in an Uncle Sam suit hypnotizes a negro man and woman to dream of non-violence and integration: "When you open your eyes you will be what I want you to be..... DUMB BLACK NIGGERS!....." (ts). The subjects come to attention, the woman is grabbed by a white policeman who curses

her, the man goes to her defense only to be himself beaten. "He falls to his knees and begins to sing verses of 'We Shall Overcome.' Covering his eyes to the scene. . . . The magician . . . nods his head with satisfaction. . . . YOU CAN STOP IT FROM ENDING THIS WAY!" At the most Hypnotism is a curtain raiser, entr'acte filler or sketch in a revue. It might have fit into the FST bill but there is no particular reason why it should have been used--which may well be why it seems to have been dropped.

Riot Sale is unstageable with limited facilities. It lends itself much better to film than to stage, calling as it does for a full-scale Harlem riot, a group of "125th ST. jew merchants," police, Molotov cocktails, tear gas missiles and an essential cannon that shoots millions of paper bills. The firing of the bills diverts the rioters' attention from their protest. The sketch closes to the sound of laughter from the cops and a police officer's line "Look at the black bastards go after that money!"

Salaam estimates that the Blkartsouth writers produced some fifteen scripts in 1969, six of which were done by the FST and these were ones by himself, Dent and Martin (Ferdinand, "Black Theater . . ." 41-42). He seems to have forgotten the Weber plays (though it is possible that they were not products of the FST workshop). And it is impossible to pin down the ones that were done just in workshop.

So the only other "productions" we can look at for this period are the poetry shows. These shows, according to Salaam, were tailored to particular audiences and featured poems written in the workshop which were thus mostly "period" pieces with no lasting relevance (Personal interview). Dent says that the Blkartsouth poets made "much use of music, ensemble and dramatic effects" and that the poetry was being done more, and working better, than the plays. They had three or four poetry shows ready, he says, each emphasizing a different point. Before each performance they would study the audience and pick what seemed to be the most appropriate show ("Beyond Rhetoric . . ." 23). In 1974 he elaborated:

[W]e found it necessary to organize and structure the poems, trying to mix types, humorous and serious, long and short, personal and generic, so that the poems reflected off each other. . . . All of the work dealt with black consciousness, black reality, black definition. We were excited by the response of audiences, particularly young audiences. . . . It was as if the audience . . . understood what was happening, could relate to it with an enthusiasm that surprised and encouraged us.

So we went on, further developing and refining. We broke down the material into thematic sections, usually three. The first might deal with racial loss of identity and impotence, the second with the beauties and rewards of the black life style, black love of self and family, and the conclusion, with black positiveness, assertion, and power. As our performances became more frequent, we added ensemble poems embroidered with chants and interchanged lines, audience response poems and music, both vocal and guitar, and narration over instrumental music and humming. . . .

The next stage of development happened naturally. We began to think of the poems as more than an oral device; it seemed that the meaning would be clearer if one or more of the members not reading . . . assumed harmony, dialogue and mimetic roles . . . similar to

the routines of black soul music groups in support of the lead singer ("Black Theater. . ." 251-52).

Not all the poetry was coming out of the workshop, however, according to handwritten poetry show formats in the archives. One, titled "Interests in Black," was slated to be performed at the Desire Community Center in April 1970. It lists as sources not only the FST itself but several books and journals including Umbra, American Negro Poetry, Black Voices and African Proverbs. Nine people were scheduled to read some 22 selections including two by Claude McKay ("If We Must Die" and "The Negro's Tragedy"); the others have not been identified except for an alternate selection, "Black Woman Throws a Tantrum" which is by Nayo (Barbara Malcolm) and was also used in Turn of the Century. (See Appendix IV for sample poems and formats.) Nor is there any indication of music or performance techniques but these may have been already worked out and the list could be simply a pulling together of already set pieces.

Two other handwritten formats, although undated, seem to be from a later date because of the people involved. One, featuring O'Neal, Ben Spillman, Gwen [?], and Chakula Cha Jua, lists 14 poems, most of which seem to be originals. Another adds to these same works for a total of 27 poems and involves more readers. A third lists 20 songs and poems (including works by Gwendolyn Brooks and Mari Evans) and features the above readers plus "Yvonne" and "Tommye" but Cha Jua is listed under his original name (Cayette McNeal) so

must predate the above two although it seems more sophisticated. But again these listings give little indication of the complexity of the presentation although a few of the poems are scored for multiple voices.

Another undated format (this one from O'Neal's own files) is very complex with a lot of narration, songs and dance and a range of published poetry. It is labeled a "draft," however, and may never have been used. Or it may have been the basis for Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? (See Appendix V.)

What we can be sure of is that poetry performances were integral to the FST program from its inception. As Dent points out, poetry is natural to the Afro-American tradition:

[T]hrough poetry we could evoke a sense of immediacy and spontaneity that seemed to flow through the audience. . . . We could deal with the same themes any play might. . . . It was simply that poetry seemed to be a way of perceiving the things that Black audiences understood. On a good night, a chain reaction fundamental to black art was created; performer and audience could get the call and response going. . . ("Black Theater . . ." 252).

He goes on to paint the power of poetry in Black performance, concluding that Black theatre must "reconceive itself" and must do so "in terms of the oldest and most proven values of black culture--our music, in all its forms--rhythm, dance, the oral tradition. . . ." Black poetry, he emphasizes, is "musical, immediate, improvisational, and is a natural form of black art because of its origin in the African oral tradition" (254).⁹

Both poetry and plays during this middle period in FST's history were for the most part marked by the Black Liberation Movement. Short as this era was, and tentative as most of the works were, the Theater came closer to fulfilling the tenets of the new Black esthetic than it had before and more concentratedly than it was to do in the future as, under the guidance of O'Neal, it moved back toward a broader dramatic base.

Notes

1 Playing the dozens is engaging in conversational battle with a friend. The exchanges are rhymed insults focused on the opponent's mother.

2 The term "nigger" occurs frequently in these plays. It is at times simply an affectionate term between two very close friends but more often in modern Black drama it (or "negro") is used to signify Uncle Toms and other accommodationists.

3 "The Free Southern Theater Historical Notes" compiled by Amistad from FST records gives the above listing. Hatch and Abdullah give a December 1971 performance date for Minstrel Quintet and do not mention the revival of The Picket or the FST performance of To Kill a Devil which was first produced in 1970 at Columbia University's School of the Arts.

4 Fabre ("Checklist. . .") notes a 1968 performance; FST files do not record any performance but most workshop shows went unrecorded.

5 Walker, born in Wilmington, North Carolina, to a slave father and a free mother and therefore technically free, lived from 1758 to 1830. He left the South and went to Boston where he became prominent in the Black community. His "Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble, to

the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America" was published in 1829; it was "at the time the most bitter and fiery condemnation of white racism that had ever been written" (Barksdale & Kinnamon 151). Two subsequent revisions sharpened the tone even more.

⁶ Feathers and Stuff was originally titled Negro Study Number 34A. Hatch and Abdullah mistakenly list the title as Feathered Stuff and they list Negro Study separately with a 1969 Blkartsouth premiere. There may have been a workshop tryout of Negro Study but FST records refer only to performances under the new title. The essence is the same in the two versions. The earlier one plunges into the middle of the conversation; the revision sets the scene and introduces the participants. Other than that, changes are minor--a few added lines.

⁷ Perhaps this moderation stems from his age and his educational background. He is older than the other principals of the FST and he was an ABD with a major in Political Science at an upstate New York university (Cornell, if I recall correctly) when he decided that to continue work on an obscure European event of another era was totally irrelevant and he returned to New Orleans. Although he used the name Kush for some of his published work in Nkombo, he never adopted permanently a non-Western name.

8

Sharon Stockard (Martin) was an adolescent in New Orleans when FST was born. She credits FST with considerable influence on her own work:

The theatre's successful wedding of social awareness and entertainment and its effectiveness so evident in the faces of members of the audience who had never witnessed life theatre before inspired my earlier writing attempts (Ostrow 123).

She worked with the FST writers' workshop and also had work performed by the Dashiki Theatre during this early period. She went on to earn an MFA in playwriting at the Yale School of Drama and to work with a number of other writers' workshops. She was a Shubert Fellow and received the O'Neill Award and the CBS Foundation Prize in Playwriting for the best student play in 1976. Proper and Fine was published in The Scholastic Book Series on Black Literature. She is writing and living now in California.

9

A poetry show of the type the FST did was performed at the FST funeral and earned high marks for effectiveness; unfortunately, I was still trying to get to New Orleans through actual fog and the haze of airline ineptitude.

"We don't think of our theater as simple entertainment, but as a means of jogging the consciousness of the audience and stimulating mind development."

--John O'Neal

CHAPTER VI

THE PLAYS: A THEATRE IN DESIRE

The third and final era in FST's life began with the departure of Dent and Salaam with Blkartsouth in late 1970.¹ Although it was to span a decade, the era was marked by so many hiatuses and problems that productions were anything but numerous. There were more full-scale productions and a pronounced emphasis on staging original works, the majority of them by O'Neal. But, despite O'Neal's development as a playwright, FST still suffered from lack of focus. Energies were split between the various projects and enervated by Marxist study and soul-searching sessions. The unifying thread of Black Liberation doctrine had become untied, and the staged works hovered between traditional realistic theatre and experimental presentational theatre. Essentially FST became the community theatre that Dent had wanted in that it trained and used community people and performed regularly at its own theatre in the Desire area of New Orleans; tours continued but not on the sustained basis of previous ones with professional casts. O'Neal, however,

never gave up his interest in touring. In a May 1971 interview for the Washington Post, he pinpointed the purpose of the FST:

[to] help people, black people, understand more about their own history, culture and background with the hope this will improve their ability to think creatively and effectively about the problems they have to solve now.

He also emphasized the teaching role of the players (Mearns).

One play that the FST did tour quite extensively in Louisiana and Mississippi was Ron Milner's The Warning--A Theme for Linda, the first FST workshop performance under the new leadership, which was mounted in October of 1971.

Warning was presented at the Chelsea Theatre Center in Brooklyn in 1969 and then at Tambellini's Gate Theater in Greenwich Village as part of A Black Quartet which also included one-acts by Caldwell, Bullins and Baraka. Actually the Milner work, which was the centerpiece of the Quartet, is long enough to hold its own alone as it did with FST.

Warning is about a young woman's rite of passage into adulthood. Linda is 17, disturbed by feelings of strong sexuality but more than that, in search of a strong male image. She lives in a household of women: the bitter matriarchal grandmother who holds the household together and has no use for men, particularly her drunkard husband; Linda's mother who has drifted from man to man, domestic job to domestic job, who can't even remember if she "loved" the first of the men, Joan and Linda's father; Joan, the slight-

ly younger sister, already starting with parties and men, led by their cousin Nora; Paula, the nine-year-old half-sister, seen only as a rescuer of stray animals (just as, according to the grandmother, her mother is a picker-upper of stray men). The men in the play are only half-realized: the grandfather who appears in one of Linda's dreams as a delightful man adored by his young granddaughter but who caused a young daughter's death (the reason his wife hates him) and who Linda finally sees honestly as a drunk old man; the lecherous neighbor who attempted to sexually abuse Linda when she was a little girl (seen in one of three dream sequences); and finally Donald, Linda's boyfriend, the intellectual who wants to be a writer and who Linda invites to spend the night with her in a motel as she decides to take the step into full womanhood. Linda is on her way to becoming a strong woman who knows what she wants, who can face reality and who will neither retreat into wantonness or into bitter loneliness. There are indications that Donald can match her strength but his character is not fully enough depicted and thus the ending is somewhat abrupt and weak.

The women characters in this basically realistic play are full and believable. We can understand them and hope with Linda that her choice is right. Whether or not it is, Milner leads us to believe that Linda is the new Black woman who will cope with her life and who can be the mate Donald needs. Speaking of Milner's female characters in toto,

Clayton Riley equates them with "songs heard from Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight," or from the early gospel and blues singers, the women "despised by their own forebears as fallen daughters. . . ." To these women, Riley says, "Milner gave a reality consistent with fact. . . ." and made them "complete human beings in a nation given to regarding them as indefatigable vessels of passion. . ." (Introduction xix-xx).

O'Neal says this of Milner:

[He] is concerned with the relationship between making political, philosophical points and reflecting real life; his work is an effort to synthesize these goals in more or less traditional dramatic terms. . . . He's negotiating between the now and the future. . . .

This type of approach, O'Neal concludes, is "the one that works best, means most, for the FST's audience" ("Performing. . ." 46). It was the approach O'Neal was to take in much of his own work.

When the play was performed in New York, Riley, despite his admiration for Milner's writing, took issue with his treatment of Black males:

Other than for a few vague references to the fact that times have been hard for them, Milner displays a self-perpetuating contempt for the males in his work that is in sharp contrast to the wealth of understanding and compassion he affords the women.

Riley also has problems accepting the transformation of Linda into someone who will become "'a really strong woman'" but while he finds the theme "at the very least arguable," the writing he finds superb ("Adjust Your Binoculars. . .").

William Raidy, reviewing the New York production for the Long Island Press, found the play's strength in "its vivid portrayal of family life, raw and real"; its chief weakness is its length and slowness "at getting to the point. . . ." Whereas Raidy thought the Bullins piece (The Gentleman Caller) the highlight of the Quartet, Daphne Kraft of the Evening News of Newark agreed with Riley that honors should go to Warning for its universal appeal and powerful writing:

Milner's concern is with an issue central to all people in contemporary life, as he shows how crowding in a domestic situation can operate like a time bomb, ticking off on each generation with destructive psychological results. . . . Suffocating, explosive, funny Milner's work packs a great, wrenching wallop.

Richard Shepard of the New York Times also thought the Milner play the most human of the Quartet: "Mr. Milner is looking for, and finds, people rather than symbols."

A reviewer for the Vieux Carre Courier had this to say about the FST production which was directed by Costley:

There is black theatre here--theatre for, by and about blacks--that is truly alive. But more than that, it is honest and beautiful and meaningful for a larger community. I say this because I saw it--from my white perspective--as some of the finest theatre I have seen in years.

He went on to praise the "amazing performance from a group of people who worked intensely with each other to be real at all times, and, even though none of them had ever been on stage before, succeeded" ("Living Black Theatre. . .").

For all its humanness--and that is Milner's strongest point--Warning is more than a psychological study: it is a study of the Black family without a male head and in this sense is social drama--drama which, as Rowe explains, uses emotion as "a means to opening and sensitizing the mind to receptivity for perception of the truth revealed, or to energization of response when the purpose is reform. . . ." He goes on to note that "the playwright's passions must be disciplined so that emotion is checked and thought stimulated" (173-74). Warning does arouse thought about the effects, if not the causes, of the matriarchal household but only tentatively offers an answer in Linda as the burgeoning Black woman of today. Despite its shortcomings, the play is a substantial one and its production seemed a happy omen.

Workshop productions of three one-act plays opened 1972. A revival of Salaam's The Picket, Roger Furman's To Kill a Devil and J. J. Jones' Minstrel Quintet were performed in New Orleans but not toured. Apparently not all three plays were presented the same evening: a reviewer for the Jewish Civic Press reported that "although three plays are advertized [sic], only one one-act [To Kill a Devil] and one blackout sketch [Minstrel Quintet] are presented, and the evening is over in forty minutes" which leaves one "wanting more--like having a delicious appetizer at a meal and waiting in vain for more courses" ("Free Southern Theatre"). David Cuthbert of the Times-Picayune, on the

other hand, saw Devil and The Picket as a double bill ("Black Theater Future . . .).

Quintet involves three Black men in clown whiteface dressed exactly alike. There are also a Smiling Man dressed in a Mao jacket and with "a dignified red star medallion" around his neck and a Pretty Lady dressed in traditional African garb. Onstage is a table. At one side of the stage is an American flag; at the other, a Russian flag; and upstage center, a United Nations flag.

Three quick speechless scenes open the skit: first Mitchell and Michael are seen trying on angry masks which they reject; second they try happy masks but don't like these either. Third they put on compassionate masks; these they like but when they suddenly see each other, they yank off and hide the masks. They sit, each near his flag. (Directions do not specify who is Russian, who American; they are interchangeable.) The Smiling Man enters and sits apart from the others; he never says a word.

Mitchell and Michael verbally duel, saying nothing substantive but disagreeing with, while echoing, each other. The third man, dubbed Dangerfield and representing the U.N., comes in and joins the absurd dispute, urging compromise but doing nothing to defuse the dispute. The Pretty Lady enters and each man claims her as his fiancée. In a tug of war, they half unclothe her. She tells them to leave her alone

and exits. The Smiling Man rises, bows and follows her. The other three sit. Blackout.

Obviously this is political satire with the lady representing the Third World and the Silent Man, China who, it is implied, will win her.

Interestingly the Jewish Civic Press reviewer found the piece "stunning" but failed to note the political implications which are patent and which are enhanced by having the three protagonists/antagonists in whiteface: it is Western civilization that is ridiculous and making a mess of the world. What makes the sketch more intriguing is that its international theme makes it unique in the FST canon.²

The major piece on both bills was the Furman play. The Civic Press reviewer calls it "a strong treatise between mother and son" and summarizes it:

Set in Harlem, it depicts the love and need of a youth for his mother. She in turn rejects him for the latest in a string of lovers. Because she throws . . . [him] out so that she can share her bleak flat with her newest boy friend, the lad has no choice but to join his buddies to play a deadly game . . . "to kill a devil"--devil referring to a white man.

Cuthbert, who found the piece much more dramatically satisfying than The Picket, interprets the play:

A mother and son tangle in their Harlem apartment, berating each other for their individual follies. Their hope for what they know can never be keeps them going, one anesthetized by beer and dreams, the other by drugs.

Ostensibly they are angry at each other, but it is very clear that they are trapped by the feeling they have no control over their lives ("Black Theater Future . . .").

The script is not in the archives but there is an excerpt, the opening scene, in Black Scenes (Childress 14-18). Carl comes on, urging his mother (a woman in "her late thirties, becoming too plump for comfort," who is drinking from a quart bottle of beer) to go to the movies with him as his treat. But she tells him she has met a new man:

This man is really into something. He ain't no fool and you don't hear him talking that Black Power either. He got a real good job and a business on the side. This fool ain't got nothing but some money.

Carl points out that she's said the same thing about Mr. White and Mr. Lee--and apparently about a whole string of other predecessors. This one, his mother insists, is different. She tells him again that she needs a man to love her, that life has been hard for her bringing up Carl by herself. She complains that she has never had any luck and this is her last chance. Carl's remonstrances that he loves her, no matter what happens, are not good enough. She suggests he go to his aunt's house but Carl demurs. The suggestion turns to a request: "You said you wanted to see me happy. You know how some men are when they see a kid around the place. Please, Carl, don't make me beg you." Carl is adamant. He offers to sleep on the fire escape and to keep out of the way but she insists he leave. Carl turns bitter. He accuses her of always wanting to get rid of him and tells her to wise up: this new boyfriend won't last any longer than all the others.

His mother tries to bribe him with "that pretty pink suit you saw on 125th Street last week" but Carl does not want to leave. Nor does he want to go out with his gang: "They've got a thing on for tonight. They might even kill somebody. I don't wanta be with them no more." She won't listen and orders him out of the house, screaming, "Get your things and get the hell over to my sister's house before I knock your silly head off." Carl runs out, yelling back at her, "Drop dead! Drop dead!"

The scene must switch to Carl with his gang but the opening offers no clue to the climax although, if the play runs true to form, someone will be killed--Carl or "the devil"--with Carl being the likely killer if not the killed. Judging from the excerpt available and the reviewers' comments, I assume this to be a play about relationships rather than about Black Power. Here is not the typical Black nurturing "Mama" but a woman who has become little more than a whore whereas her sister has married and is raising a large family. The implication is not so much that she has been driven to a succession of men by necessity but by her own weakness. But without the complete script, no valid conclusion is possible.

Both reviewers admired the skill of the actors although the reporter from the Jewish Civic Press did wish that the actress playing the mother, "powerful and excellent" as she was, might have been made up "to look older than her son."

A much more ambitious project was tackled next: the two plays that toured under the umbrella title of The Black Bourgeoisie...or It Hurts Doesn't It?--the Molettes' Rosalee Pritchett and Martin's Edifying Further Elaborations on the Mentality of a Chore.

Rosalee Pritchett had been presented by the Morehouse-Spelman Players in 1970 and by NEC in 1971.³ Barksdale and Kinnamon in their introduction to the play make this claim:

[It] provides searing insights into the insipidities of a Black middle class so encumbered by the meaningless values of the white middle class that its bridge-playing members have lost all sense of identification with their race.

The editors point out that only a decade previously these white values had been presented as good in Raisin while now "the imitation of society's most meaningless bourgeois practices is condemned." (This, I think, is an oversimplification and a faulty analogy; the Youngers have nothing in common with the women the Molettes depict.) The play, they continue, "is a timely and moving comment on the ever-changing social values of Black America." It is "grim" because "none of the characters at the end has learned anything regarding renewal and change. . ." (824).

The Molette work is broadly satirical but Barksdale and Kinnamon are right: the comedy turns to horror--for the audience; the characters remain unaware of societal realities. The setting is a Southern city during a racial riot. Rose (Rosalee Pritchett), wife of a prominent physician,

introduces herself and explains that she is in the hospital because of a nervous breakdown, a collapse due to the riots. There is a flashback to Rose and three friends playing bridge and making small talk about diets, the upcoming deb supper, husbands, the riot (which, they believe, has little effect on them; their area, they are confident, is perfectly safe and immune from National Guard interference). Four National Guardsmen introduce themselves and discuss the riot, sex, the "niggers" until they see and stop Rose's car; she is going home from the bridge game. The men harass and then rape her. The final scene is another bridge game with Rose's place taken by a woman named Thelma. The women discuss the deb ball, Rose, the spring dance and their summer vacations. They have learned nothing from Rose's ordeal.

The playwrights advise slides throughout; they used in the original production about 300 on four rear projection screens. Rose is always isolated, even during the bridge game in which she participates verbally, so that we are always aware of her. The Molettes suggest having the guardsmen acted by Blacks in whiteface since they would have "the kind of objectivity that is necessary in the portrayal of those roles" (Barksdale & Kinnamon 825). They also advise against a curtain call:

[C]urtain calls say to the audience "the whole thing was make-believe, and it's over now." The audience then leaves the theater unperturbed, satisfied. The audiences ought to leave this play perturbed, dissatisfied --so, no curtain call (825).

This Brechtian presentational approach is more fully realized here than in other contemporary works staged by the FST and should have worked very well to focus attention. But, as in Brecht's own works, the audience still responds to the human situation. Rose may not be likeable but that weakness of character only contributes to the pathos of her ordeal.

The portrait of the women is cruel but reflects the opinion many Black intellectuals have of upper-class Black professionals who emulate and integrate into white society. But the portrait never slips into caricature: the Molettes have too true an ear for dialogue to let that happen. And while any one of us might argue that Black bourgeois does not necessarily equal Black sellout, no one can deny the gulfs within Black society (as with the encompassing American society).

No script is available for the companion piece, Martin's Edifying Further Elaborations. Hatch and Abdullah call it a "domestic ritual" whereas a partial inventory of FST scripts (from O'Neal's files) describes it this way:

Tragi-comic absurdist farce about the confused effort of two black middle class couples . . . to reconcile reality to their own ideas. A complex, sophisticated, intellectual one-act piece. . . .

Copies of three reviews of the twin bill have been found, however, in the archives. Larry and Nona Einhorn writing in the Vieux Carre Courier summarize Edifying:

A young middle class black couple, Aswa and Esol. . . , who have finally come to accept Black Is Beautiful, cannot cope with a new black social pressure [--] The Revolution In the comfort of their home, stocked with all the right "black" books and trappings of their "ugly past" and "beautiful present" they await the arrival of two guests, Jamal ("Super Spade") Thomas and his wife Sonia ("Negative Nigger"). With shades of Virginia Woolf, the two couples attempt to tell each other the answer but fail miserably because they are all on a superficial trip. Finally alone, Aswa and Esol have perhaps learned that being black isn't an afro hairdo, a dashiki, or a slogan.

The Einhorns found the performances "commendable" in light of the fact that the actors were untrained. O'Neal directed the Martin piece and did "his best to stylize this wordy play that gets hung up on role playing and revolution, but never clearly defines any of it." They thought the Molette work needed "editing and a faster pace which director Ben Spillman should [have been] able to resolve by this writing."

Shirley Harrison, writing for the Clarion Herald, was more impressed although she agreed with the Einhorns about the pace of Pritchett. We know too from her review that FST did, as suggested, use slides and follow the Molettes' idea of playing the Guardsmen in whiteface, a device Harrison did not like:

When NEC did the show in New York, white actors were used as the rapists. The effect was much more chilling. NEC has learned to use white actors in white roles, and the effectiveness aids verisimilitude 1000 percent.

Still the authors "have captured a penetrating message: that many upper class blacks scorn the 'black thing' and are more comfortable being pro-white." Both plays, she feels,

are "vital" although the first is the antithesis of Rosalee Pritchett. In Edifying, according to Harrison, "a healthy aspect [of being black] emerges, and this is that the black man can now, at this stage of black militancy, sit back and laugh at his foibles."

Like the Einhornes, she comments on a Black Power handshake and agrees with them that it is a hilarious bit of business. She concludes her comments on the play by advising that Martin is a talent to watch. "The comedy is genuinely effective and deserves wide recognition."

Dwight Ott, writing for the Times-Picayune, adds nothing to our understanding of the plays but he too had compliments. About Edifying he said, "Overall the acting is compelling and seems to do justice to a well-written play by a local talent. . . ." and with the Molettes' play he admired the staging:

What [it] may lack in consistently forceful acting, it makes up for in the novel integration of slides, music and staging which enhance the quality of the play, the the acting and the overall theme.

He concludes that "both plays are handclapping good. But neither is for the squeamish." (Earlier in the review he reported that six nuns had walked out of the performance at Loyola University.)

In 1977 Martin was responsible for two other scripts performed under FST auspices. One was We Can Be: A Poetic Dramatization that was devised for the Summer Youth Program

and the other was SOS: An Evening of Anxiety Pieces for the Contemporary American Stage, that she staged herself as part of FST's guest artist series.

The program description of We Can Be, "compiled by Sharon Stockard Martin," reads:

We Can Be is a journey of the soul. It is the formation of hope out of despair [sic], of courage in the face of fear. The Liberation of Black People in this country depends heavily on the children, and their awareness of the social and political condition in which they live, and the conditions that influence their day-to-day existence. We Can Be is the legacy we offer our children; the Will To Endure (ts).

The "script," which is designated "an improv-recitation," is explained in these terms:

The journey uses poetry, grouped to form emotional islands of displeasure, alienation, proselytizing [sic], glorification, and celebration. . . . WE CAN BE is a montage of images and emotions. Success of the piece depends upon timing and effectiveness of delivery.

What we are then given is a 28-step format calling for the reading of certain poems, recordings, film, and improvs. After group activities by the younger children (choreographed games) followed by the "older kids characterizing what children do become," the first specified improvisation involves "two men talking about their lack of luck in finding work and the poor quality of life in general," and the second calls for an angry wife nagging her husband. Another has "simultaneous 'preachings' of Baptist minister, Black, muslims, Black Nationalists, teachers, etc." It all sounds rather too complex for an amateur youth group working during a short summer session.

One of the poems called for in We Can Be is "SOS"--the overall title for the program Martin staged that fall. This "evening of anxiety pieces" included the following: Birdseed, Baby Death, The Interview, SOS, ANOPDFS, Ransom and Party. Only the script for Ransom has been found.

Ransom is a three-page skit (or at least, three pages exist in the FST files; it is difficult to tell whether an ending is missing or whether the piece simply ends abruptly). Basically Ransom involves Jane and Dudley who have been holding hostages in a vault and holding police off for 25 years. Jane asks, "How long do you think this can go on?" and Dudley replies:

It's gone along for this long, baby. And we're not doing none too bad neither. We got a roof over our heads, food in our bellies, clothes on our backs, and it beats workin'.

Jane is, however, dissatisfied and remembers ruefully what her mother told her:

My mother told me not to marry you. When you put that gun up to my head 25 years ago and told me to give you all the cash and loose change in my drawer or you'd blow my head off, I felt the cold metal and thought I was in love. But after thinking about it over the last few years, I'd say it was really fear, anxiety, and a touch of loathing that made me love you more than anything else I can come up with offhand.

Perhaps a missing page would supply the reason for the situation. Or perhaps the other six pieces on the bill would put this piece in context. As it goes, Ransom seemingly has only a slight and vague message--that fear and anxiety can drive people to truly irrational acts.

Taken as a whole the Martin and Molette duo seems to have been a successful production--both in terms of script selection and presentation. Certainly reaction was favorable enough for the group to continue the production throughout the spring, adding in May A Black Experience.⁴

This program of interpretive readings (the only identifiable one being Owen Dodson's "Black Mother Praying" [Chapman, Black Voices 451-54]), interspersed with dances and comedy routines, was followed by the one-act play No Snakes in the Grass,⁵ apparently written by workshop participants.

Whoever wrote it, it is a delightful skit! Snakes updates the story of Eden. God is explaining who he is, where he is (Eden), and what he has done when he breaks suddenly: "Aww, can't go through with this. I'm not God. You know I'm not, and I know I'm not. I'm just an unfortunate actor cast in an unfortunate play. . ." (ts). If we have not caught the clue from his first few lines (when he asks "Who am I?" and castigates the audience for not being quicker with the response), we now know that "Snakes" is going to treat Christian legend creatively.

Adam, when he comes on, is dressed in modern clothes and, having read the Bible, knows exactly what is expected of him and what is going to happen. God finds Adam a little difficult to swallow and goes off for a walk. Left alone, Adam tries reading his Bible but he is interrupted--first by the

sound of an automobile, then by the sound of an air hammer, and then by the entrance of a monkey and a lion. Adam of course thinks these are the "beasts of the field" and he names them. The beasts pay no attention to Adam and, after dancing with each other, begin quarreling--a quarrel which Adam finds himself powerless to stop. Realizing that events are not proceeding according to his script (the Bible), Adam implores "Who are you? What is your name?"

LION: My name is Hate.

MONKEY: Furances [sic] for Jews, hanging trees for Negroes, death for five girls on a Sunday morning in Alabama.

LION: My name is War.

MONKEY: We have weapons that can kill a man without bother or mess. . . . We have bombs, rockets, tanks, and poison gases that kill without regard for race, creed or color.

LION: My name is Poverty.

MONKEY: [Explains]

LION: My name is Indifference.

MONKEY: Fifty silent people, watching behind darkened windows as a woman cries for help. . . .

LION: My name is Disease.

MONKEY: [Expands]

LION: My name is Slavery.

MONKEY: Slaves with chains on their feet . . . , slaves in air-conditioned offices. . . .

And so it continues: the Lion is vanity, lust, boredom, hypocrisy, unemployment, pride, ignorance, pain, ugliness, bigotry--death. This obviously is not the Eden that Adam

has read about and so he tells God. He also tells God he's ready for Eve and, after he explains to God how to go about it, God produces Eve--a Black woman. (We must assume that Adam has been appearing in whiteface; God from the beginning has been at least half-masked.) Adam is shocked. Eve is calm. Adam proposes "separate but equal" facilities; Eve is not impressed. Eve understands their interdependence. Adam does not. And Adam cannot accept that what is happening is not according to plan. Eve tries to explain that "there are no snakes in this grass," that they are responsible for their own actions. Adam doesn't understand. They argue and he finally slaps her at which point God returns:

(. . . God holds a white mask to his face. He is silent. Adam finally looks up.)

ADAM: You see...He is white! (Suddenly God flicks the white mask away to reveal a black mask beneath.)

EVE: You see, he is black! (God flicks the black one away, replacing it with the white.)

ADAM: You see, white! (White is replaced by black.)

EVE: You see, Black! (Quickly God turns away from them. . . . The masks are at his side.)

GOD: You must leave this place. Out there, perhaps, you will find another. I don't remember whether that is biblical or not. Go now. (No one moves. Angrily.) Go, I say!

They leave by different exits. God tries to touch and bless them but can't reach. As sounds of modern civilization rise again, he turns to the audience. "He sits covering his face with his hands[;] he is crying."

Snakes needs no interpretation. It makes its point-- probably very enjoyably if done well, and it is simple enough to do well. Equally as obvious is that this goes beyond the usual Black Liberation message. Both Adam and Eve are stubbornly unseeing, albeit Adam is more so! We are all responsible, says the author(s), for our expulsion from Paradise, and thus implicitly only we can regain it through recognition of our interdependence. This message is the first in a long time to suggest a coming together instead of a further separating of the races.

Snakes does not mean that FST or its workshop members had suddenly abandoned the militant mode of the late '60s, but it does indicate that the militancy of the younger folk was perhaps not as compelling as for those who had been on the '60s scene.

That May the workshop also did Black Love Song #1 (see Chapter 5) in conjunction with the imported show Daddy Gander Raps by Arnold Inniss. All that is known of Daddy Gander is from Dwight Ott's review in the Times-Picayune and all that report reveals is that "Inniss brought gales of laughter from the youths while getting his message across [to] the adults present" ("Love Song . . .").

While the bulk of attention that summer was centered on FST's production of Raisin, two other shows were also in the works: Black Fragments and the poetry-dance-song presentation We Are the Suns (which was remounted the following year

with Cha Jua's A Black Experience and will be discussed together with that work). Fragments is subtitled "An Historical Dance Drama" on a flyer announcing a performance at St. Monica Hall (New Orleans probably) and "An African People" on the script (ts).⁶ The cast consists of six "Messengers" who take various roles. The opening directions give a flavor of the piece:

As the lights come up the Messengers are involved in improvisational chant, music and dance. This is the beginning of the ritual. During this time two of the actors prepare the stilts and body costume for the manifestation of God. The manifestor is stage center and messengers are stationed around him in dance fashion.

Messenger I is the manifestor: in free verse he voices his approval of the way the African people have made use of his gifts and concludes by telling them to "Go! Hunt." A mime/dance sequence follows in which a hunter stalks and finally kills a gazelle. He brings his trophy back to the village where there is a ceremony honoring God: "God appears for a brief second then disappears." This ends the sequence.

God (Messenger I) next is heard bemoaning the fate of his chosen people who are destined "to be carried to / a Motherless land." He admonishes them to remember him:

Through this hell you must
not forget me
though my appearance
will change
my substance will not

I will be the whispers you say
 at the Devils [sic]
 back
 the songs you sing to
 clarify your world
 the motivation that
 moves you to the
 next sunrise

 Remember me I am freedom

Messenger II as the Devil pantomimes beating and cursing the slaves while, on the other side of the stage, Messengers III, IV and V as slaves pantomime their troubles and seek help from God. God briefly assures them that he will not forsake them and exits. Messenger II voices the viewpoint of a slave trader:

Best business there is...
 stealing these niggers
 like this
 They must be the dumbest [sic] animals
 God ever made--if he ever made
 them at all

Ain't nothin lower than a
 nigger
 They oughta be glad we come
 over here to get them
 learn um to be civilized

 Move niggers! Move!

The next scene is back at the African village. The Devil, in his guise as the slave driver, enters and confers with the King (represented by Messenger I) who tries to get rid of him. A fight ensues and the King is killed. This is all done in mime and dance. (In the script in the archives, Messenger II had a wheedling speech addressed to the King but it was crossed out.)

As the [next] scene opens there are four actors on stage with one male dancer St[age] Center. . . . The dancer in the center dances while the other ones pantomime and dance their hardships. During the course of the song each actor delivers a short monologue on the things that happened to them and things they heard tell of--and resume their movement.

Three brief monologues recount incidents from slave life after which there is a scene between Big Missy (Messenger IV), Tom (Messenger V) and a disobedient slave (Messenger VI). (The other messengers/slaves observe and answer questions.) Messenger VI, after being beaten, determines to escape that night. Tom tells Big Missy who confronts the would-be runaway. She makes Tom kill him. The scene ends when the dead man's woman is shown--and thrown onto--his body and sings, joined by the other slaves, "Soon will be done with the trouble of the world. . . ." (There is some confusion in the script here because of what are surely typographical errors: Messengers V and II switch roles.)

After this the script becomes difficult to follow due to crossed out sections and unclear markings. But a short monologue dealing with emancipation seems to be left in:

Now, in consideration of 'mancipation, and the well established need, comes this declaration to the nation, the subject on the floor. Which, whereas and thereupon considered, it remains, tho somewhat withered, as it was the time before.

Right this moment the battle rages, making calm and cautious deliberation hard to do. We must analyze the stages of the conflict, confront without hesitation the truth that rocks the nations. My cool and calm appraisal of the gaping bloody sore? Niggers are the cause of the whole damn situation.

I'll make a proclamation, 'mancipation, give em constipation of the heart and mind.

A convoluted version of the Emancipation Proclamation says nothing but seems about to free the Africans in Africa when the speaker is shot by another actor in whiteface. During this "Dixie" is being played in the background. After the shooting comes the song "Just Want Freedom."

The next "movement" is a series of short dances on "Post-Suppose to be Freedom" subjects while a medley of patriotic songs plays:

- a. KKK dance in and hang a man
- b. Marchers carrying organizational signs NAACP etc.
- c. Tap dancers and shufflers in white face
- d. Protest signs and more marches
- e. Demonstrations. . . .
- f. Integration sequence (song and dance)

These are followed by a poem, "The Ghetto, and then a ghetto dance sequence which shows:

- a. Children playing games in the street. . . .
- b. Pimp and whore scene
- c. Church scene
- d. Purse snatcher scene
- e. wino scene [sic]
- f. mugging scene [sic]
- g. Party scene
- h. Dope shooting up scene

During the latter the "Dope Poem" is read. Then come a "Black-white struggle poem [not given] while dancers do dance" and a [concluding] "Unity Piece."

The script as it exists is rather disjointed. The first part, through the Emancipation Proclamation, is quite fully worked out but the second part is quite sketchy. Light cues marked on the existing script mark it as a working version. Of course so much of the development is carried by mime and

dance that it would be vital to see it before judging the work. The theme is a typical one in Black theatre of this time, taking us from Africa through slavery to present-day exploitation in a rather ritualistic fashion. How effective this particular presentation of the history was is difficult to judge.

As noted earlier, it became--and remains--fashionable to disparage Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun. In 1976 O'Neal regretted its choice for the FST. In it, he claimed, Hansberry was trying to show that Blacks are human, a point he hardly thought debatable (Dodds). In 1984, although acknowledging it as a "benchmark event," he was still withholding the praise that was being showered by many during the play's 25th anniversary year:

At a time when most commercial vehicles were racing to see who could get the farthest away from the issues of current concern . . . , Hansberry had the courage to face an important issue. . . .

[However] Raisin is most significant because of its economic (rather than political or aesthetic) impact--it established that there is a viable portion of the theatre-going public . . . who will support serious plays about black life. . . ("From 'Raisin to the Present" 10).

Costley, conversely, defended the play in a paper he wrote about the FST production:

[W]hen "Raisin" opened . . . , the opening salvo in Black Drama . . . had been fired. And it was revolutionary. . . . I chose to direct "Raisin," because I believe it is still . . . relevant in the struggle of Black artists to bring Black life to the stage. All Black people have a positive frame of reference when we honestly look at the situation of the Younger family (" . . . In this Age . . .?")

In another paper (likely a draft for the above) he elucidated:

. . . I feel that "Raisin in the Sun" is one of three or four outstanding plays written by a Black playwright in the last two decades. The others being, "Amen Corner," James Baldwin; "Purlie Victorious," Ossie Davis; "Roots," Gilbert Moses and "Homecoming," Val Ferdinand. . . I look[ed] back at the other plays and realized that consciously or not (and the latter is probably closer to the truth), they all owe a debt to this powerful and honest play. Like "Raisin" they deal with what really is or really was, not with what might be (" . . . Concept").

David Cuthbert tackled the question of the play's suitability in his Times-Picayune review:

FST is identified in most minds as a political theater, angry and intense. "A Raisin in the Sun" has been called . . . "domestic drama" and "commonplace." Stanley Kauffmann rather harshly labeled it as being "to Negroes what 'the Goldbergs' were to Jews."

Cuthbert goes on to say that the question probably doesn't matter because of the excellence of the production: "It is rare that a local theater experience can seem so painstakingly right, down to the last gesture and inflection" (" . . . Raisin"). In a follow-up piece on Fran Roberts, who played Mama, he calls the FST production "absolutely splendid" ("Curtain Lines . . .").⁷

Jim Otis also gave Roberts plaudits and commented, "FST's production of this important, even classic, work is a salutary combination of zealous acting and some nifty technical stagecraft." And Thornton Penfield, then president of the New Orleans chapter of ACLU, in an August 29, 1972,

letter to Raisin's cast and crew reflected sentiments of other letter writers:

The benefit . . . which you did for/with us last Sunday was the finest and most rewarding event that the ACLU in New Orleans has participated in during my six years in town. [As a fund raiser, however, the project [flopped.]

. . . . You gave up your free time, you went on before a small house composed of people who had to miss a lot of the play's humor and a lot of its anger and grief, and you communicated. I've seen A Raisin in the Sun half a dozen times and even directed a workshop production . . . , but it has never been such a powerful experience for me as it was two days ago. When you leave a play hurting all over . . . you know you've just seen something true.

What FST needed in 1972 was a commercial success, which Raisin was supposed to be, but despite the rave reviews and the decent press coverage, the audiences which could have made a difference continued to elude the Theater. Perhaps New Orleans audiences were never fertile ground in which to sow the seeds of Black militancy. But the militancy was beginning to abate, and still the people did not come in the necessary numbers to keep FST healthy.

The busy and productive year ended with the production of two Steve Carter one-acts, One Last Look and The Terraced Apartment. Both plays had been done in 1968, Look by the NEC and Apartment at the Old Reliable Theatre Taverne.⁸ Neither play is typical of FST fare as Jesse Morrell wrote in "An Aftermath to Death" (whether this was the basis for a P.R. release or what is unclear from the undated one-page, post-performance piece which is not on letterhead):

Both plays were a departure of sorts from the kinds of plays usually presented at FST, but did represent two views of the Black experience from different ends of the spectrum.

Neither play--particularly Apartment--is especially concerned with the Black experience. Look takes us to the final rites for Eustace Baylor, a man who for many years had supported two families--his legal one and the one he had left them for--and still managed to entertain a succession of lady friends. We eavesdrop as each member of each family approaches the corpse who stands behind the coffin and converses with his mates and their offspring (a son and a daughter each).

Eustace left his wife because her father looked down on him because he was Southern Black, not West Indian, and he felt inferior. Not surprisingly neither the son nor the daughter of this union have fond memories of their father; what is surprising is that the wife still harbors a hidden love for him.

The second family is at the other end of the class scale: the daughter, who seems to have incestuous feelings for this supposedly charming ne'er-do-well father, is a prostitute with, at the age of 34, nine children; the son, who has always longed for his father's love or hate, has become a wino and is, at the age of 33, on the verge of death. The mother, contrary to Eustace's expectation, tells him she never loved him; what she loved was the victory of having a man of her own.

Theoretically comic relief stems from the comments and ministrations of two Harlem ladies, two among Eustace's long string of friends, and the interspersed eulogy of the funeral director who has a hard time finding anything positive to say about the dead man. The poignancy evidently is supposed to arise from the fact that only now when Eustace is dead can his families reveal their true feelings. It doesn't work. While psychologically each character is valid enough, a true person does not come through the printed words. The main problem, I think, is in Eustace--we are simply not given enough to make us understand the appeal he had for his women and children. He seems in fact most unappealing in character and personality, a selfish, unthinking and unthoughtful man lacking even in surface charm.

Perhaps performance provides the note of truth that is needed. Coril Joseph, a reviewer for Figaro, thought so:

Though the long speeches are similar in structure, each of the actors has enough individual drive to make them interesting and fresh. . . .

Dolores Mitchell . . . and Julia Davis are nothing short of fantastic as the devoted and misused wives. Charles Harris and Duke Elligan are fine, developing talents as the sons, as are Liz Fields and Sharon Martin as the daughters. Director Bob Costley is a master of moods.

Frank Singer, in the Vieux Carre Courier, agreed that the performances were fine--displaying "an unusual (for FST) consistency," but he cites different actors (Bolar, Roberts, Spillman). "The chief problems," he decides, "seem to be the over-long speeches . . . which . . . Costley never

wants to cut out, and the anguished shouts that he always puts in."

The Terraced Apartment reflects even less of Black life than does One Last Look. In that play there is some slight sense of caste conflict and Harlem stereotypes but Apartment could be about any "yuppie" couple. Only because it's by a Black playwright and played by Black actors do we interpret it as a snide look at, as Joseph describes them, "a super-bourgeois NEGRO couple."

In this skit, wife awaits husband. She wears a hostess gown; she mixes drinks, lights candles, puts soft music on the stereo (hardly a setting with which most of the people in Desire could identify). Husband comes home. This is not a cozy cocktail hour but a confrontation: the previous night husband and wife's family, coming in to stage a surprise birthday party for her, found her in bed with the elevator operator. They talk. And talk. She explains that she has simply fulfilled bodily needs; her "soul" has always been her husband's. He rejects her explanations. But he cannot divorce her: "That would be too much of a scandal for my job. My boss wouldn't like that."

He can do only one thing and he has planned it carefully: he will kill her. To everyone's knowledge he is holed up still in a hotel, shocked and grieved at last night's discovery. People will conclude she has committed suicide from shame. There is, in fact, a witness to testify that

she "just decided to leap off our little expensive piece of Paradise. . . ." "Who?" the wife wonders. The husband tells her: "Oh... The woman I shall marry after a proper year of mourning and a few months of her consolation. Our neighbor." Then push her he does.

Singer found it "a well-directed and acted fast-moving bit of irony" and Joseph "a great relief after the heavy drama of the previous play." It too must gain something in production. Reading it, I found the dialogue too ponderous to be cleverly satirical and the people too shallow to be interesting. For instance, replying to his wife's request to talk over the matter civilly and to not spoil the neighbor's "nightly entertainment by acting as beasts," the husband says:

Dear Wife! My dear, twenty-six year old, young-modern, terraced apartmented wife. . . . [T]hough I risk sounding more archaic than you already think me to be, I am not ready to talk over the any situation... difficult or easy. . . .

Later he tells her:

Well, you'll have to pardon my puerility but, when I see my wife and another man in the bed that I've worked like a member of the K-9 corps to pay for..and they're costumed as Adam and Eve..before the apple incident, mind you..well, my senses tell me that infidelity is being practiced. . . .

It is a wonder the wife has "given [her] 'body' to the elevator operators of life" only four times!

Not only is the playlet not very funny, it has the wife begging her husband to be a man:

Beat me. Make me beg for forgiveness. Make me crawl!
 Make me grovel! Make me wallow in the mud. Beat me
 and then go and beat him. Beat me because if you don't
 I'll do the same thing all over again. Everytime I get
 the opportunity.

Presumably Carter means this satirically too, as another
 manifestation of the depravity of the unenlightened up-
 wardly striving Negro. It comes across only as offensive.

According to Joseph, the two plays enjoyed "a success-
 ful month-long run. . . ." I wonder why. They neither
 advance Black Liberation (or any of its corollaries) nor do
 they, on paper at least, entertain.

1973 was not as productive. It was the year that saw
 two O'Neal premieres, Hurricane Season and Where Is the
 Blood of Your Fathers? (considered along with O'Neal's
 other works at the end of the chapter). Other than that
 there was the double bill of A Black Experience and We Are
 the Suns plus another poetry program and The Curing Melon, a
 choreographed folk tale.

Tom Dent rates A Black Experience as one of "the best
 productions done by the FST" (Personal letter).⁹ Sub-
 titled "An Exercise for Black Theater" it is summarized in
 the inventory of plays:

a full-length theater piece in 2 parts that shows the
 experiences in the life of an ordinary Black youth that
 leads [sic] to his recognition of what the Black
 liberation struggle is for and about. . . .

In other FST references it is characterized as a set.

Nor is the piece as straightforward as this description
 makes it sound. Two Brothers and Two Sisters (identified

only as 1st Brother, 1st Sister, etc.) enact the various roles, much as in the rituals where characters and settings are fluid. But in this it strikes me that needless confusion is built into the script. In the beginning, for instance, the 1st Brother introduces himself:

My name is James...James Williams...you can call me Jimmy if you like. . . . You might be interested in knowing that this show is all about me.... [I]t's also about you. . . . That's why we call it "A Black Experience."

Then the 2nd Brother introduces himself:

I'm Jimmy. That's what they call me anyway. My real name is James Williams. . . . This is where I live; right in this housing project. Been living here all my life - all five years of 'em.

So the 2nd Brother is James as a little boy. That much would be easy to accept but immediately the 1st Brother returns as a young playmate of little Jimmy and our orientation is disrupted. In the next sequence this same 1st Brother is seen as an older (how much older?) Jimmy reading the comics. We next encounter Jimmy as a teenager: here the 2nd Brother is involved with one Sister and the 1st Brother with the other Sister, both of them representing the two-timing Jimmy. To make the situation even more bewildering, the two Brothers are next in a scene together, talking about their conquests, but the 1st Brother seems now to be a friend of Jimmy. Yet in the next sequence he is again Jimmy, involved now with another girl who announces she is pregnant. This girl is portrayed by the 2nd Sister while the 1st Sister

comments on the conversation, acting "as an inner conscious [sic], a sort of other self for Gloria."

The 1st Brother takes over as Jimmy in a series of one-sided interviews and mimed menial jobs. But then, after a poetic commentary by the Sisters, this brother becomes Daddy Jake, an old man who is Jimmy's mentor, and the 2nd Brother is Jimmy. The Jimmy-Daddy Jake sequence is full of heavy thoughts which, however, do not sound natural:

1ST BRO.: [D]on't let it get to you, son. As old Marcus once stated "We have determined among ourselves that all barriers placed in the way of our progress must be removed, must be cleared away for we desire to see the light of a brighter day." Yeah, Marcus Garvey. . . . You remember me telling you about him don't you?

2ND BRO.: Yeah, Daddy Jake, I remember. I been reading about a lot of the things you been telling me about. And I'm always sort of inspired when I read, but then when I go out and spend a lifetime looking for a decent job I sort of lose that inspiration. . . . Sometimes I just get so mad I feel that black folks ought to just gang up together and go out and take what we want.

1ST BRO.: That would do no good, son. Wouldn't be organized enough. Old Marcus also said "We do not desire to create offense . . . , but we are determined that we should be heard, that we shall be given the rights to which we are entitled."

2ND BROTHER: You think a lot of him, huh, Daddy Jake?

1ST BROTHER: Yeah, the old boy was out there then. Ha. But to quote a great person is only good if you make quotes with your own life son.

The scene switches to the Sisters. The 1st Sister has taken over from the 2nd as Gloria; the latter now plays a

friend who is bubbling over with the excitement of her engagement. In contrast, Gloria is despondent: Jimmy has joined the army. In an impressionistic sequence of poems, mime and music, we see him as a soldier. During this sequence the 1st Brother is Jimmy. Now the 2nd Brother assumes the role as Jimmy is being interrogated by a bully of a policeman (the 1st Brother); he does not however speak--the Sisters speak for him. The 2nd Brother continues as Jimmy in the final major scene--a party at which Jimmy, the returned serviceman, is revealed as having seen the Black light:

[B]ut it is a fact that once a black man has gone through this U.S. military system he definitely begins to see things somewhat differently. He can't but come back realizing that America is anything but the "land of the free" and "home of the brave" that it professes to be. Then again one doesn't have to join the military to become conscious of the fact that black people are still very much oppressed in this country, and there is still very much work to be done.

Suddenly the 1st Brother is Jimmy again, talking to

Gloria:

It's important that I've changed, Gloria. It's important that we all change. Black people have got to change if we're ever going to move into anything positive. . . . The first change has to come in our homes. . . . It's important that our family is a complete one.

All four performers join in the concluding verse. (Music and verse are interspersed throughout the piece, between and within scenes.)

Experience is clearly back in the didactic mold of the Black Liberation Movement and is obviously an attempt at a

poetic presentation of the message. The constant changing of persona makes the point that Jimmy is the universal Black youth but it would seem that it also strains the audience. Then again, in performance--with lights, music, etc.--the movement may be easier to follow and appreciate. According to Tom Fitzmorris in Figaro, two separate platforms were used; apparently each Jimmy had his defined territory.

The Jewish Civic Press reviewer liked it:

Cha Jua is particularly adroit with words. His style is penetrating. Moreover, his direction of this piece is at once stylized, creative and imaginative ("Free Sourthern [sic] Theatre [sic] Shines").

Cuthbert is more critical: "Too simplistic at times with poetic interludes that don't always work, 'Black Experience' has a number of strong sequences" (" . . . Has Viewpoint, Purpose").

What the reviewers saw when they viewed We Are the Suns is not so clear. It seems to be a variation and elaboration of the poetry format headed "We Are the Suns" (see Appendix III). Announced as "A Poetic Dramatization of Black Life," the piece is hailed (in what appears to be an undated press release) as "a strong statement on the Black life situation in America." The description continues:

Although the show utilizes poetry to get over its meaning, it is not a poetry show but a polished dramatization of many phases of the Black life experience. Four actors, two men, and two women are used . . . and with the help of drums, bells, tamborines, and other rhythm instruments they enact scenes from the total span of Black life touching a bit on the past, the present, and making suggestions for the future.

The presentation did strike some reviewers as a play:

[W]hen it comes to a long one-act called "We Are the Suns," by FST's Black Writer's Workshop [the fact sheet also attributes this one to Cha Jua], one can even use words like "excellent" and "invigorating". . . . When was the last time you heard actors on a local stage speak words as if they really meant them? . . . [T]he play is an absolute knockout. . . . By turns, it is blistering, hilarious and starkly harrowing. This is good writing, strikingly staged and performed by a highly proficient cast. "Suns" delves into slaveship roots, pokes caustic fun at black campus involvement and balances despair with a tough survival instinct (" . . . Has Viewpoint, Purpose").

The Jewish Civic Press reviewer also calls it a one-act that "is a purging of the soul of suffering, of anger, of suspicion of the white man, of revolution and militancy." She finds "shades of Godard" and a reflection of the philosophy of Bullins and Baraka. "This is a readers' theatre type of oral interpretation of constantly changing multi roles." She concludes that the excitement at FST "is akin to the excitement of the Negro Ensemble Company" except that NEC's audiences are integrated whereas FST attracts mainly Black audiences. She goes on to ask, "An indictment of this city's white theatre audiences? Yes, why not. FST is creative, dynamic theatre, and it deserves the support of all theatre lovers" (" . . . Shines").

Fitzmorris says that Experience and Suns "are two more chapters in a steady rise in quality theatre on the corner of Dryades and Erator. And, as always, the product is deeply related to its community." He describes Suns as

loosely dramatized poetry [more accurate than the terms "play" or "one-act"], the essence of what Free Southern

has been doing over the years with straight plays. Not surprisingly, this turns out to be one of the best and most natural productions yet."

Poetry or play, Suns must have been an exciting production.

The Curing Melon is an African fable scripted by Kenneth Odom and choreographed by Bostic. It is a charming and typical quest tale. Bobo Muma is sent out into the world to find the curing melon, the melon that will bring back happiness and the good life to his village. He seeks the Ju-Ju man who sends him to find the wise Queen Fuddisitu. On his way he encounters a large griffin that he manages to subdue, sparing its life (and proving his goodness). He arrives at the court of Fuddisitu just as she is performing her last dance and passing on her powers to Tunuka. The new queen sends Bobo Muma to capture Death. And this he succeeds in doing. As a reward he is given his choice of a wife and chooses Ayisatu. But Death breaks loose and in the confusion our hero loses his bride. With the help of some birds, however, he finds her. Moreover the birds bring them the curing melon and they return, bringing prosperity and happiness, to Bobo Muma's village.

The story is told by the narrator, Bobo Muma himself and in interludes of dialogue. But it is the music and dance throughout that vitalize the tale of goodness and gallantry, a tale which must have charmed all the children of all ages.

The following year, 1974, could be called the season of cancelled plays. Among the productions FST did NOT do that year (see Chapter 2) was Inez Daggs Williams' Small Winds Before the Revolution, a play which came out of the FST Writers' Workshop. Winds is not a good play although it shows promise in its basic idea and its approach to characterizations. Its problem is that nothing happens. Action is not indispensable to drama; Sartre's No Exit for instance can be spellbinding but the characters are strong enough, their relationships dynamic enough to maintain interest. Williams doesn't have that power of presentation.

She shows us a lower middle-class Black family at home on Sunday: Daddy, a retired doorman; Mama; Lulu Mae, six years out of high school and beginning to be aware there is more to life than clerking and churchgoing; and Earl, her younger brother whose main interest is football. It is an apparently typical Sunday morning in the Jackson household-- Earl not wanting to get up and go to church, the others yelling at him--first to get up and then to eat and get ready for church. Mama and Daddy never go but Earl must go with Lulu Mae (why is not clear). This morning, however, Lulu Mae finally shocks them all by saying that she doesn't feel well--probably because of too much excitement at last night's basketball game--and that she is not going to church either. The television is turned on just in time for the family to catch a news bulletin: the downtown Howard

Johnson's is on fire; it has been taken over by snipers who are believed to be Black revolutionaries; two firemen have already been wounded. From here on, the TV reports are the controlling factor.

Lulu Mae phones to warn the people already at church to stay away from downtown but the police have already given warning. (The time factor is confusing--people are already gathered at church when Earl and Lulu Mae weren't even ready to start.) The bickering and TV watching continue. Lulu Mae becomes hysterical: one of the snipers, she is sure, is Marvin Harold. He is a high school friend who has returned to town. He had inspired the crowd after the basketball game with a revolutionary call to action. She was so inspired that she went to bed with him. At the height of her hysteria, the phone rings and it is Marvin.

In a comic [?] interlude, Earl calls the girl next door and suggests, since he can't go out to play football, they do what they had done the previous September on a rainy day. By now Mama and Daddy are having a good time drinking wine while they watch the "revolution" on TV and encourage the snipers. Lulu Mae has another phone conversation with Marvin; we get the idea the police have killed only one of the leaders. Maybe, Lulu Mae suggests, they deliberately let the other one get away as a decoy. Earl finally goes out to play football, deciding he'll go to the revolution "tomorrow." The sound of a helicopter is heard, growing

louder and louder. The chorus, which has introduced each act, announces "The Revolution is still another day away." Shots come from the helicopter--blackout.

Marvin must be the other leader. But is it logical that he would take time out for prolonged phone chats? Is he near and are the shots aimed at him? Or is Earl to be killed as so many other innocent Blacks have been?

The basic message is clear: the revolution, in any form, cannot be a reality until the Mamas and Daddies and Earls join in. But there are too many questions about this particular battle, not only about its outcome for Marvin but about its immediate instigation and purpose. Nor can we sympathize with the snipers, for we never see or hear them; they seem to be terrorists only, not thoughtful--albeit misguided--revolutionaries.

If produced, the play would have struck notes of recognition among many in the audience but it would have raised some of the same questions. In 1974 Black audiences in New Orleans and environs would not have automatically accepted that Marvin's road was the best route to change and power. So, while showing talent, Williams' play is too flawed to have been a positive addition to the repertory. It is probably just as well that it was preempted by O'Neal's Going Against the Tide.

Two new productions were mounted in 1975: Cha Jua's treatment of Langston Hughes' works finally premiered in

August under the title Langston and Company. Fight the Power! or Culture for Liberation was a workshop production by O'Modelle Ra (Jeannette Williams) in collaboration with Jesse Morrell and Bill Rouselle. It appeared on the same bill as A Black Experience.

Power is as didactic a piece of work as ever produced by the FST; from the opening choral/response reading of Mari Evans' "Speak the Truth to the People" to the closing chorus of "Fight the Power," there is a relentless call to action. In performance with the music, video additions, mime and other effects the piece is bound to have been much more dramatic than on the typed page. Some of the poems (including the opening one by Evans plus another of hers, "I Am a Black Woman," Hughes' "Ballad of the Landlord," Julia Fields' "High on the Hog," Sterling Brown's "Ol Lem" and O'Neal's "If I Could Promise You a Love Song") are well worth interpreting. But the narration too often tends to sound like a Marxist lecture--which is not inherently dramatic:

It becomes clearer every day that in this system the illusion of democracy is only being maintained to shield the wealthy [and] they rule only in the interest of themselves to make a profit and not the interest of the american people and certainly with little regard for the Black and poor people of this country at all. The democratic illusion is being torn down. More open and brutal becomes the method for controlling our discontent. And as the recession becomes depression our discontent and disillusionment grows [sic].

Despite moving moments, I suspect that this was one of the less successful of FST's poetry productions. It does

not seem to have been kept in the repertory or revived as We Are the Suns was.

It is probably safe to claim that no Black American writer coming of age in the middle of the twentieth century escaped the influence of Langston Hughes. Prolific raconteur, poet, dramatist, Hughes was also a political activist. He has been an inspiration to and model for those who have followed. His deceptively simple works hold a wealth of wit, tenderness, anger, tragedy and advice. Cha Jua's Langston and Company was not the first staged compendium of Hughes' work and I am sure it is not the last. It may, however, be the best, equaling even Hughes' own Don't You Want to Be Free? which incorporates a number of his folk poems and ends in a plea for union solidarity.¹⁰

Cha Jua uses as his starting point Hughes' play Simply Heavenly (Five Plays 113-81), eliminating some minor characters and bringing in others, using some of Hughes' original dialogue and providing additional, and setting some of the poems to original music by Jane Sapp.

Boyd, Hughes' persona in Heavenly, is here given his actual name, Langston. The plot of Heavenly (Semple's prolonged wooing and final winning of Joyce) is abandoned but key characters and the Paddy's Bar scenes are used as the framework onto which are deftly nailed excerpts from Tales of Simple ("Feet Live Their Own Life," Chapman, Black Voices 99-101), poems, scenes from Mulatto and Little Ham.

Among the added characters is Madam Alberta K. Johnson; thus several of the "Madam to You" poems are naturally worked in (Selected Poems 201-18). And having Langston tell some of his latest stories provides a logical introduction to scenes from other plays.

The two-part presentation opens with "Weary Blues" and in addition to the "Madam" poems includes, among others, excerpts from Montage of a Dream Deferred and from Cross ("my old man's a white old man..."), "Lynching Song," "Life Is Fine," "Homesick Blues," "Hard Daddy," "Morning After," "The Backlash Blues," "Ballad of the Man Who's Gone," "Port Town," "I, Too," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Question and Answer" and two long poems, "Good Morning, Revolution" and the concluding piece "Let America Be America Again."¹¹

As Hughes ended Free with a call for revolution and a call for "no more black or white," so Cha Jua ends Langston and Company--with a call for a social/economic revolution, not a Black Revolution. For the most part, the rhetoric of the Black Nationalist Movement has given way at the FST to the rhetoric of Marxism.

Because Cha Jua has for the most part let Hughes speak for himself, providing only a few connecting strands in his editing, Langston and Company is a beautiful powerful piece. No reviews were found in the files but according to the 1975-76 annual report (ts), it was "very well received by the community and ran throughout the fall." This was the

first of the FST's Community Theater productions using members of the community, not just workshop participants and Theater employees; this in itself should have created extra awareness and stimulated attendance.

The new production in 1976 was Theodore Ward's Our Lan', another Community Theater project. (The Performing Group continued to tour two of O'Neal's plays, Blood and Opportunity.) First produced in 1946 at the Henry Street Playhouse, Our Lan' moved to Broadway the following year in a slightly modified version. In 1975 FST had rejected the play for the Performing Group because of its size (Play Selection Committee Notes, 5/30/75) but for the Community Theater program, it offered the chance to involve more than 40 people in the production--including for the first time since 1968 some whites (FST Voice, 2.2, May 1976).

In a report covering the fiscal year ending August 31, 1976, O'Neal extols the play:

Our Lan' is probably the first truly great play that the FST has ever produced. We have done many good plays, we've even been responsible for the writing of some. But "OUR LAN'", written in 1941, produced in 1946-7 . . . and seldom produced since then, is a great play with historic, literary as well as durable dramatic value. For the first time ever in the history of the FST, we had three turn away audiences and several filled houses in the course of a five week run. . . (ts).

Our Lan' is a documentary tragedy--saved from melodrama because of its basis in history. It is the story of a group of Blacks at the end of and just after the Civil War who are given land on one of the Georgia Sea Islands by Sherman. We

are with them as they struggle to cultivate their land and raise their first crop--a bountiful crop of good cotton which they then find they can't sell because of the new regulations of Reconstruction under Johnson. These new regulations go further: they return the land to the former plantation owners. The freedmen are to sign contracts for slave wages and the promise that they can each buy their 40 acres in three years. This group refuses to sign, maintaining that the land is already theirs. Pushed, they offer to make a down payment with the little money they have received for illegally selling part of the cotton. The plantation owner refuses their offer; he will not then, he makes clear, or ever sell them his land. The Union captain, although understanding the Blacks' viewpoint, believes he must uphold the law. When they will neither sign the contracts nor leave the island, he brings troops. It is war. And the Blacks must lose this battle.

 Weakening to a degree the impact of the historical drama is a love story between Joshua, the Blacks' leader, and Delphine, a pretty island girl. She is raped/seduced by Ollie, a wealthy free mulatto whose father has been helping the ex-slaves. Delphine has fallen in love with Joshua but he is reluctant to return her affection because he is so much older than she. He finally declares his love only to be told by her that she is pregnant by Ollie. Hurt, he turns from her. At the end of course he accepts her and her

unborn child. The acceptance has come too late for their happiness: Delphine comes down from the safety of the "big house", where the women and children have been sent for refuge, to wait with Joshua for the firing of the cannon that will end the "rebellion" and their dreams.

The love story does reinforce the idea--introduced by other other actions of Ollie and his father--that the free wealthy mulattoes of the South were not in many cases true friends of the freed slaves. But Ollie is somewhat too precipitous in his propositioning of Delphine, Joshua perhaps somewhat too magnanimous in his forgiveness, and Delphine somewhat too weak in her rejection of Ollie.

This though is a minor flaw in an otherwise gripping play. Ward describes New York reactions and his own idea about the play:

"The play is about the past, and is better off dead!" the Reverend Bishop Shelton of Harlem said. . . .

"I am entirely tired of hearing this sort of opinion," the late reverend Dr. Wm. Burghardt Du Bois replied sharply: "The past is the present! . . . Shall we let this important play which expresses the authentic truth of the Negro's struggle for his economic survival . . . die, or shall we fight for its survival?"

The responses of both Dr. Shelton and Dr. DuBois [during a post-performance discussion at New York's Royal Theatre] exemplify the dilemma of our leading advocates of the role of black culture today. Is our history to be discounted, or taken as a weapon in our fight for black liberation?

At the moment of its inception down on the lower East Side of New York, one leading critic of the New York Press hailed the play as an honest exploration of the problem of America's failure to meet the need for the black man's rehabilitation economically. Another characterized the play . . . as revealing the triumph of material values over the spiritual values in the conflict of the freedman's future.

This in essence is what Our Lan' is all about. The title is ironic, attaching as it does to the patriotism of the blacks, and at the same time the denial of their right to full-fledged citizenship (ts).

A piece of copy (probably a press release) from FST dated April 13, 1976, elaborates on the above:

This play's message is still very important . . . because even though the form of oppression has changed from what it was in 1865, that oppression still exists in 1976. We must understand, believe and commit ourselves to the struggle . . . to break those shackles of oppression and exploitation.

The play is definitely not dated in its presentation of human determination and courage--and its look at the opposite characteristics of greed and inhumanity. It is a dramatic history lesson humanly and movingly enacted.¹²

If Our Lan' was a big event for FST, the premiere production of Ward's Candle in the Wind two years later was even bigger. (Between these two shows no new plays were staged by either the Performing Group or the Community Theater Project.) O'Neal has described Candle as the greatest play by a Black playwright (Personal interview). This is arguable. It is actually inferior to Our Lan'.

Like Our Lan', Candle is based on fact: it is the story of Charles Caldwell, Mississippi state senator, ardent Republican, uncompromising and incorruptible. The setting is 1875 during election time--an election that was to see the return of the Southern aristocracy, in the robes of the Democratic Party, to power, an election that was marked by murder on the part of the Democrats and accommodation on the

part of key Republicans. Candle traces the mounting violence, the deals and no-deals, the defeats and deaths--culminating in the death of Caldwell. Again like Our Lan', it deals with history that is in itself dramatic and tragic.

Unfortunately for theatrical effectiveness, Ward let himself become too immersed in the details of the history. Thus the play is simply too long--115 pages of typed script with nine settings, one of these repeated non-sequentially four times. Not only is there too much detail for sustained dramatic interest but at several points polemical debate stops action. For instance in Act III, Caldwell, in command of a company of state militia called out by the governor, approaches Edward's Depot where a group of armed Democrats await them. Ward takes the opportunity here to have Roulac, a small businessman, speak up and argue for the rights of all the non-aristocracy, Blacks and whites alike. Ward made the same point but much more quickly in Our Lan': in 1865 and 1875 and, by extension, in 1975 the struggle was--or should have been--economic, not racial. I have no quarrel with the premise, only the treatment. In Candle the debate arrests action and the action itself is already too time consuming to allow this.

Too, the speech--particularly Caldwell's--too often sounds unnatural. If Joshua's speech at times was inflated, Caldwell's is artificially literary in tone. In, for instance, an informal audience with the governor, he explains:

Our enemies, Sir, have cast off all restraints. Under the slogan: "That the white man shall govern, and that niggers are not rightly entitled to vote," they have instituted a reign of violence and terror which is unparalleled in the history of civilized mankind. Within the last four weeks alone, no less than 150 of our leaders have been slain. Such is the organized, ruthless, systematic manner through which these usurpers of our County Governments hope to overthrow this Administration--Such is the basis upon which, in behalf of the people whom I represent, I appeal to your Excellency for the protection which the laws of the State guarantee every citizen regardless of party or race (II, 4).

At the end, mortally wounded, he begs: "No. Take me home...and let me see my wife before I die. I cannot live long." In still impeccable sentences, he asks again: "Surely, Gentlemen... As you see...I am in a manner already dead--I only want to bid my wife goodbye." His last words are: "Just remember when you killed me...you killed a gentleman and a brave man...Never say, you killed a coward...I want you to remember it...when I am gone."

Caldwell, unlike Joshua (who in a way was also too good to be true), never comes across as wholly human; he is rather a cardboard silhouette cut from the pages of a musty history book. Granted that in performance a skilled actor could give dimension to the picture, the script does not.

Apparently that necessary dimension wasn't added. Dodds, briefly reviewing the play for the Times-Picayune, implies that the play was too much for FST:

For a theater so long inactive in theater production, "Candle in the Wind" is a large undertaking. . . . Ward's dialogue is occasionally unnatural, but he does capture a certain sadness that that time must have contained for many people. . . . Performances from the

large cast vary considerably, with the awkward dialogue at times the problem, and director Joe Stevens could work to improve pacing, especially between the dozen scenes ("Stage . . .").

Bruce Egglar, arts/entertainment editor for the States-Item, was less kind:

"CANDLE IN THE WIND" is a high-minded, serious, earnest but somewhat boring drama about a black leader in Mississippi in the closing months of Reconstruction. . . . The story is certainly not without plenty of dramatic situations and apparent opportunities for vivid theatrical re-enactment, yet (at least in the first two acts) the play rarely achieves real vitality. [Did he not, I wonder, stay for the final two acts?] It seems didactic and dutiful, with too many characters introduced more for the sake of historical completeness than for dramatic purpose.

Egglar goes on to compliment individual cast members and the directorial approach as a whole:

Ron Castine and Joe Stevens, the directors, apparently tried to strike a compromise between historical tableaux and fluidity. They succeed a fair portion of the time, despite the stiffness of many of the lines. . . .

The reviewers seem to have pinpointed the difficulties with the script. What was to have been FST's coup de grace turned out to be rather a letdown. It was also the last work not written by O'Neal that was done by FST,

From Producer to Playwright: the Plays of John O'Neal

The O'Neal productions had begun in 1972. A November 15, 1972, memo from the FST staff informs the intermediate students in the Black Theater Workshop that rehearsal and production dates for the winter production have been changed. (It also notes a change in production dates for Lena and Boseman but this Fugard work was never staged.)

The winter play is to be "a new full length script by John O'Neal (who will also direct). . . ." The title was Black Power/Green Power/Red in the Eye and production was slated for February 9 through March 11, 1973. What actually was produced that February was O'Neal's Hurricane Season. Although O'Neal had obviously done considerable work on Power, there is no record of an FST production.

Power is about a New Orleans election but, with minor changes--place names, organization names--could apply to any city. The hero, and he is a hero, is Eddie Parran who has survived the primary to become the first Black mayoral candidate in New Orleans. His trust is betrayed by his long-time friend and campaign manager, Dan Rathers, and by his finance director, Dr. James Williams. Dan is a "practical" politician, willing to make nominal compromises in order to win; Williams is simply an opportunistic, con-ning, totally untrustworthy and--as both Eddie and the doctor's uncle-in-law call him--a sissified nigger. He is perhaps too cold and calculating and too thoroughly unlike-able to be convincing! When Eddie refuses to go along with their plan to take bribe money from controlling interests in the city, they decide to blackmail Eddie (the doctor has set up a secret bank account that would be seen as compromising) and, if that doesn't work, to sell out to the Republicans.

The details of the bribe are overheard by Angela (the doctor's wife) who reveals the scheme to June (another key

member of Eddie's campaign) and to Foots (Eddie's cousin and a radical Black leader). They in turn tell Eddie who, having already fired Williams from the campaign, now tries to fire Dan. He learns about the blackmail scheme. But the dastardly deed is foiled when, at Foots' suggestion, Eddie takes over a called meeting of the executive committee and, having invited citizens in general and the press, reveals everything. The people of course enthusiastically agree to stick with and back to the fullest their hero, Eddie. Angela, incidentally, who we gather has not been ecstatically happy with her husband even before all this, decides to leave Williams and become her own woman (much to the joy of her uncle).

Summarized, the plot seems terribly melodramatic. And it is--melodramatic and cliché-ridden. Despite this, and despite some awkward and unnatural dialogue and only partially developed characters, recognizable people are involved in an all too realistic situation (in most details) and humor and suspense enliven the predictable action. This relatively early work demonstrates O'Neal's basic grasp of dramaturgy and is playable. Like most of his writing, its appeal is not limited to Black Power fighters; the Black cause is grafted onto a political situation that could occur, and has occurred, in many different milieus.

The O'Neal play that was done in 1972, Hurricane Season, also involves unions and politics. Labor problems

and a possible strike on the waterfront were peripheral in Power; here they are central. Hurricane revolves around an actual New Orleans waterfront problem. A script, undated, for a Nation Time program gives the background to the play, concluding with a reference to a work stoppage "earlier this year" on the New Orleans wharves. The disagreement was over royalty payments, an issue that was still not resolved at the time the program was taped. According to the script writer, "the contention takes on an edge that the play . . . barely approximates" (ts).

Although O'Neal sometimes refers to the work as a play, its subtitle is "Story and Text for a Black Theater Experience [emphasis added]" (ts) and O'Neal took a number of opportunities to separate Hurricane from the concept of a play. He was quoted in the FST Voice of April 1977:

" . . . I don't call 'Hurricane' a play. I call it a Black Theater experience. 'Hurricane,' unlike most plays, does not begin and end on stage. The experience that 'Hurricane' refers to has already started in New Orleans and will not end until the people who live here make a decision about what's going to happen, or permit that decision to be made for them. That decision will depend on what we do. . . . At the same time, I've tried to accomplish the objective good plays achieve. We have strong characters in sharp conflict, an interesting story that's full of human and strong feeling" (1).

To be sure that the audience understood the situation, a handout contained "facts about the Central shipping facility actually planned for New Orleans and the likelihood that there will be a strike like the one Joe Lee [the play's protagonist] was involved with" (ms 59).

Another handout dealt with

the death of a real black leader who was trapped in between the forces; on the one hand trying to represent the interests of the Black community and on the other trying to negotiate 'responsibility' with white authorities. . . (59).

Whether "play" or "experience," Hurricane obviously grew out of FST's new commitment to New Orleans as well as the author's interest in political action.¹⁴ The play, however, was staged in other communities (in Buffalo by the Buffalo Black Drama Workshop in 1973) for the particular New Orleans situation is not a sine qua non; the essential message of exploited labor--particularly exploited Black labor--can easily be translated, actually or mentally. O'Neal gives suggestions:

If the production is staged in some other community, then it will be necessary to identify a comparable problem in that community. The point is that human labor is rapidly being replaced by technology. Black people are suffering from this "progress" because no alternatives are developed to provide opportunities for Black working people. What is to be done to correct the situation? Or are Black workers simply obsolete as Nixon and company seem to believe? (59)

In a March 20, 1973, letter to the Buffalo group, O'Neal warns that the play "is harder to do" than it may appear:

The biggest thing is getting people [the actors] to really understand how important it is to do the research assignment on the last page of the script [material for the handout dealing with the death of a Black leader]. Outside of New Orleans I suspect the best thing to do is to point to the fact that the problem of the displacement of human labor by technology will have some specific form and impact in Buffalo, too. Maybe it's not a Port problem for you; but, it'll be something.

O'Neal is right about the play's sharp portraits and the realistic concerns a striker's family faces. In the family are Theresa, the mother, forced by the strike to spend extra hard hours working as a seamstress outside the home; Joe Lee, the father, whom we meet only at the end when he is dying, betrayed by his union and beaten to death by the police when he goes out to try to make peace among the dock workers; Joetta, the youngest daughter, hip and flighty, headed toward integrated trouble with her two out-for-a-good-time friends Darlene and Wanda; Lola, the middle daughter, the student and intellectual of the family; Anna Marie, the oldest daughter, the good girl and work-hard student, pregnant "by mistake." The other characters, in addition to Darlene and Wanda, are Rashied, the militant young Black who has gotten Anna Marie pregnant (and who, there is a hint, will stick by her) and who is now intellectually involved with Lola; Hester, a good-time neighbor, and her frustrated sister Hattie; Father Weber, the priest who brings Joe Lee home and who is briefly seen as a well meaning but ineffectual man; and Mr. Walker, cousin to Hattie and Hester, viewed as crazy but harmless by the neighborhood, and the poet of wisdom. It is he who establishes the metaphor of the hurricane:

* * * * *
 They got a story to be told in these hurricanes.
 It's the punishment of evil doings!
 Nature turns against men
 when they get too evil!
 That's why they have so many hurricanes down here

And I can smell a hurricane
brewing now!

.
It's a hurricane coming alright.....
.....they been plenty hurricanes down here
.....you can look at it and see,
they been plenty hurricanes down here.

Marcus garvey [sic] was a hurricane.....
.

But they got a hurricane coming for true.
The ships don't move out of the docks
when it's a hurricane coming
Ain't no ships moved out of here
in more than two months now
cause the ships
they know 'bout the hurricanes coming.
.

It's hurricane season now Nigger
You better watch out.
What we got to do is get ready
A hurricane coming
Are you ready for the hurricane brother?
Are you ready for the hurricane season, ha. ha.

Darlene and Wanda, overhearing his last comments, come in to argue that "this ain't no hurricane season. It's almost February. It'll be carnival in another few weeks. . . ." Others later echo the same refrain, "This simply is not the season for hurricanes!" The hurricane that is coming of course is the explosion on the docks: there is a literal (heard but not seen) explosion at the end, a bombing obviously by Rashied and his group of revolutionaries, and there is the figurative explosion that is sure to come, later if not now, when the men learn of the union's sellout and Joe Lee's death.

The audience at the show's beginning and end are drawn directly into the action:

Mr. Walker should be on stage when people start arriving. . . . He may talk to the people about the weather, about how they are dressed, etc. -- just don't tell what's on the papers in the bag. He may sing. Blues line....

At the end, after the explosion, smoke fills the theatre and stage action freezes. Mr. Walker, shedding his rather fey manner, starts passing out the papers that are in his bag:

While the actor continues to pass out the papers . . . the house begins a slow fade to black. A Jimi Hendrix recording, something frantic and very electric comes up slowly to a series of slides of Jo, Darlene, and Wanda having a ball at an integrated nite club. The psychedelic lights, a strobe on acto[r]s as they come out of the freeze, come out of character without leaving the stage. The sound gets louder. . . . The slides continue until the end of the recording. Black out. The actors leave the stage. The audience leaves when they get ready.

Within this audience-involving frame are a story that develops progressively and logically, characters that come alive, dialogue that is for the most part natural and character specific, humor and ideas and sadness. If the conclusion is somewhat contrived, it is by no means impossible: men are killed and betrayed during strikes. And although the particular situation is localized and time-bound, the basic labor exploitation and displacement-by-technology problem that is central to Hurricane is, as O'Neal has pointed out, universal and unsolved.

Of the same period, Hurricane is a much better work in terms of characterization and dialogue than Power. Tom Fitzmorris, reviewing the original 1973 production for Figaro, was complimentary:

John O'Neal knows his audience, his theatre, and the recipe for cookin' the two together. As author and director of the current "Hurricane Season," O'Neal brings Free Southern Theatre [sic] one of the finest and certainly one of the most immediately relevant dramas in the theatre's history. . . . The technical staff did its usual great work on the box set [split scene--inside and outside the Wilsons' home]. This sort of stagecraft is almost a lost art in New Orleans There were a few rough spots, but then, this is not a show for uninitiated whitey. Black theatre has conventions all its own, one of which is that rappin' is just as good as theatrical overbearing. The several spots of dull composition or faulty kinesics didn't worry the mostly black audience. . . .

The 1977 revival was a Community Theater Production of a slightly revised script directed by Costley. The reviews this time were mixed. One unidentified review in the files dated May 6-13, 1977, is headed "Ineffectual 'Hurricane' spouts rhetoric." The reviewer claims that the show "barely kicks up a mild flurry of dramatic intensity": while it "is a well made propaganda piece," too many plot threads remain untied and "with the exception of Hester . . . , all the characters are ideological mouthpieces or class prototypes that lack development." The dialogue too is overly rhetorical although it does contain "some clever lyric poetry and highly expressive spontaneous jive." The production did nothing to minimize the flaws in the script:

In a play based heavily on dialectical [sic] rhetoric and incendiary propaganda, the main thrust of the action should move fast and hit hard, but in FST's production, the pacing is slow, the business uncertain, the dialogue muffled, the energy low, and the sense of conviction totally absent.

Apparently the production was not on a par with the original (hardly surprising since untrained actors were

used.) The Courier reviewer seems also to have missed excitement:

When the Hurricane Season is in mid-stream, I want to make the same kind of visceral connection, find somebody to put my money on . . . but I don't see anyone, no heroes or villians [sic], just plodders and bunglers . . . so vulnerable, so real. . . .

He concludes that the play leaves him with his mind in a whirl ("Hurricane Season"--whirling").

The New Orleans DATA News Weekly reviewer, on the other hand, urges readers not to miss the play which is "a good production" with "characters [that] are full" ("Last Weekend . . .").

It is impossible to know whether differences in reaction stem from differences in personal tastes or differences in production values and/or the two scripts.

The labor question (or questions) continued to engage O'Neal. In Going Against the Tide, his play that was substituted for Martie Charles' Black Cycle in 1974, he deals with a strike by New Orleans bus drivers. The Theater's 1973-74 report to the Ford Foundation discusses the latter:

Rehearsals for "Black Cycles" [sic] were underway when we realized that . . . the conclusion offered by the play is that black poverty and oppression are part of an inevitable, devinely [sic] ordained cycle that poor black folk can do little or nothing about. At first it seemed that the point of view could be corrected with a few minor adjustments in the script and the mode of production. However, the effort to make these adjustments turned into a major task that eventually became an entirely new play after several postponements and delays which the workshop produced under the title, "Going Against the Tide" (ts).

The result of the five months work is a draggy didactic disquisition that lacks the veracity and verve of Hurricane-- although the play did anticipate an actual strike. (In December of 1974 the New Orleans bus drivers did indeed strike.) But the FST's own description of the play as "an attempt to show how organized and structured struggles can be waged around these goals [better wages and working conditions]" credits the play with a coherence that is simply not there ("Letter to the Editor" from FST Staff dated 1/22/75).

The Charles play is flawed but it evokes an emotional response that Tide does not generate.¹⁵ Charles focuses on a mother-daughter conflict/cycle. Vera is a beautician, an ex-whore, who is determined that her daughter Jeannie is going to have everything she never had. To this end, she is sending Jeannie to an exclusive private school. Jeannie would rather be with her friends back at her old high school. Too, Jeannie is becoming militant, aware and proud of her Blackness. As the play opens, she refuses to go to a school banquet at which she is to receive an academic honor because of the way the Black students on scholarship (dole) are treated. Vera cannot--will not--understand her view. Jeannie goes to see her friend Carolyn who is unmarried and pregnant (by her steady boyfriend). At Carolyn's suggestion, Jeannie "splits" until too late to go to the dinner; when she does return to her mother and attempt again to explain how she feels, Vera hits her. Jeannie goes back to

Carolyn who takes her to Calvin's apartment. Calvin is Carolyn's future brother-in-law; he is also a dealer in stolen merchandise and, by implication, a pimp. The one conclusion the audience can draw is that Calvin seduces Jeannie, who is at this point vulnerable to any gentleness and kindness, and that she is following in Vera's footsteps.

What Charles is saying is that the cycle must be broken:

. . . . Spirits of black womanhood, be with me.
 Fill every pore of my being with a knowledge
 of who I am
 Remove the layers of white thought, white talk
 . . . ("Invocation," Black Cycle, King & Milner 526).

Hers is a call to Black pride, to understanding, to breaking of the cycle.

O'Neal has taken the basic cast--Cassie equals Vera; Yvonne equals Jeannie; Caroline equals Carolyn and so forth. In the O'Neal version, Yvonne has already won her college scholarship and in her valedictory speech a few nights previous to the start of the play has lambasted her school and the school board for racism. She and her friend Caroline, not pregnant and apparently as dedicated to Black radicalism as Yvonne, are involved in a group called ARSAC, Anti-Repression Strike Action Coalition. ARSAC members are attempting to guide the bus drivers who have just gone out on strike. There is violence (off-stage). An ARSAC member is badly beaten by the police. Cassie doesn't understand Yvonne's dedication to and involvement with the group. But

her mother, Minnie, sides with Yvonne and eventually--at great length--explains to Cassie that her own father was killed because of his involvement in militant labor activity. This news begins to awaken Cassie. Adding to her new understanding is the bankruptcy of an insurance company she had a policy with, a failure triggered by embezzlement of a huge amount of money by the company's top officials. At the end of the O'Neal play, having been inspired by the teenagers to take pride in themselves, everyone is rallying around everyone else.

The plotting is labored and diffuse: there are at least four main plots--the Cassie-Yvonne relationship, the strike, Black radicalism, and Cassie's attempt to buy the beauty shop from Flora (who is in bad health). Throw in a couple of sub-themes (mistaken values, Black culpability, and discriminatory garbage service) and nothing stands out.

The dialogue is disastrous. Throughout there are switches between colloquial and formal diction. Cassie, for instance, habitually uses colloquialisms (such as "girl") and non-standard grammar (as in "I ain't lying!") but her mother's diction is very precise and her daughter does nothing but lecture. In Act I, Scene 1, Cassie and Minnie are having their heart-to-heart talk:

CASSIE: . . . And even worse, what am I going to do about Yvonne? She's going to keep on messing with these police and before you know it they going to do more than take away a scholarship.

MINNIE: Cassandra.....maybe it would be wise for you not to stop Vonnie but to try to understand what she's doing and why. Else you might find that you and your daughter are on different sides in a war.

Certainly within the same family distinct differences in diction can exist but Minnie never relaxes! (Incidentally in this scene there is a seven-line speech by Minnie's dead husband, the only flashback and departure from realism in the entire play.)

Typical of Yvonne's speech is this reply to a comment by Bert (a friend of Cassie) that it's easy to understand what happened with the insurance policy: "These guys in Boston stole all that money and run off so you and Flora and a whole bunch of others got to pay for it." Yvonne explains:

It just so happens that these guys got impatient. It's not they were doing anything different than ordinary, they just did it all at once, and it's not all that hard to see how they did it. In a way this is a very good thing because it helps to wake people up to the true nature of the system of imperialism (III:2, 2).

Cassie, uncharacteristically, interjects, "If the system is as bad as you seem to think then people will automatically wake up." Yvonne continues her explanation:

People will automatically resist the system when it attacks them in forms they can understand: they use strikes and boycotts against inflation; people who can't get a job in the first place are forced to petty crimes . . . ; the more frustrated turn to dope, suicide missions . . . or individual acts like Mark Essex.

Her mother adds, "And stuff like you're involved with" but Yvonne patiently continues her sermon:

No mother. Organizations like ARSAC are necessary because the changes in the political and economic situation move faster than the peoples [sic] understanding will if it just goes along naturally. See if your theory were correct 6 million Jews wouldn't have made it to the gas chamber. Or to bring it closer to home, untold millions of Black people couldn't have been captured into slavery. Our job is to help speed up the process of peoples [sic] coming into a conscious understanding of what's going on in the world. . . .

In addition to such lengthy lessons, we are told about the bus drivers' strike, about the police's unwarranted visit to the local bar and subsequent beating of an ARSAC organizer, about Cassie's father, about Minnie's sister and brother-in-law, about Yvonne's speech, etc. The script is only 39 pages, hardly full-length, and most of those pages are taken up by descriptions of what has happened somewhere, sometime else and with lectures by the young people. Dramatic tension is nil. Atypically of O'Neal, the medium is smothered by the message (or messages).

Whereas Charles' people are believable, O'Neal's are inconsistent--in speech, in actions, in reactions. He misread Charles' message, I believe, and he belabored his to the point of engendering audience apathy rather than action. No wonder the play was never revived. (He must realize the weaknesses as there has been no further work on it.)

This pounding propaganda does not, happily, permeate Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? and, as a result, Blood purveys a stronger message. Apparently first produced in 1973, Blood toured in 1974, 1975 and 1976 and was remounted

in a revised version in 1977. Actually there were constant revisions: at least six partial versions of the script plus an outline for a particular performance exist. All follow the same basic pattern but with differences in organization, content, etc. Copyrighted by the FST in 1972 as "A Workshop Project of the Free Southern Theater Edited by John O'Neal," it was later credited to O'Neal and Ben Spillman (at least as editors) and eventually came to be regarded primarily as one of O'Neal's works. The 1985 presentation at the FST funeral by The Black Liberated Arts Center of Oklahoma (BLAC) credits authorship to "John O'Neal and others" and the adaptation to director Albert Bostic (an FST alumnus).¹⁶

Blood is a documentary in the mode of In White America and was to be the prototype for the never-realized series of documentaries by FST workshop members. The presumed first two states are subtitled "A documentary examination of the role that Blacks in the Gulf South played in the effort to secure their freedom from the oppression of slavery in the twenty years before the Civil War" whereas the description on the third [?] state drops "in the Gulf South" and increases the time span to "35 years before the Civil War." By 1977 the program specifies 1827 to 1860 as the period covered.

There are few substantive differences between what I take to be the first and second versions; in fact some pages have not even been retyped. Some judicious cuts have been

made (Garnet's 1843 speech has been cut by a third and some narration has been shortened or deleted). At the same time some dramatic bits have been added along with some clarifying transitions. (To compare openings, see Appendix VI.) Both are one-act versions, 33 and 35 pages long, that end rather abruptly--jumping from the escape of William Wells Brown in 1834 to an 1860 editorial by Thomas Hamilton of the Anglo African newspaper and thence to a brief concluding reprise from the Garnet speech: "Where is the blood of your father[s]? . . . let your motto be, resistance, resistance, resistance." The 1974 production obviously had a different ending which is not in any of the scripts I have. Joseph Larose, reviewing that production for the Clarion Herald, reports:

The finale recalls the blacks killed in the 70s. . . . The implications are obvious, but in the context of the past, it evokes not so much a spirit of white hate as of black sympathy and perspective.

In an evaluation of the fall 1974 production, Spillman had this to say about the script:

This documentary presentation attempted to demonstrate the efforts of Black People (prior to the Civil War) in securing their freedom. As a subtext, the play issued forth a challenge to the audience [sic]. This challenge was to do more in our daily lives to advance the liberation struggle of our people.

From the on-set there were problems with the script, however after weeks & weeks of editing and re-editing, a "workable" script was delivered that mediocrelly (sp?) supported our hypothesis ("Evaluation," 6 Jan 1975).

He went on to recommend the following:

[T]his script should be tightly scrutinized, organized, and systematized before it goes into rehearsal and is again performed before an audience. I base this recommendation [sic] on the fact that too much of the allotted rehearsal time (1 month & 20 days) was spent/wasted putting the script together.

Spillman then analyzes the problems he had with the cast and his own shortcomings as a director. Many of the performing group, according to him, had no concept of the actor's responsibility in creating and shaping a role nor did they have sufficient energy, enthusiasm or dedication. Of himself, Spillman says:

From the start, I misjudged the production needs of the play. I soon realized it would be impossible for me to do an adequate job of rewriting the script, directing the script, and taking care of the technical chores. . . . Something had to come up short! Well, I goofed!! Little did I know that everything would come up short. . . .

The production may not have been as bad as Spillman thought--or Larose may have been kind. Crediting O'Neal rather than Spillman with the direction, he says:

Free Southern Theater's well-researched drama-documentary of the black man's resistance to his Southern enslavement creates a frequently vivid picture of the cruelty of slavery and, less effectively, of efforts of the slaves to "resistance!". . . . The play is a trifle long [another indication of the existence of a third script] but it is well worth seeing. . . .

In what may be a review of the same production (it is undated), Noel Cazenave expands on the two-act
17
production:

Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? is a historical, contemporary, and futuristic analytical "experience" written and directed by . . . O'Neal.

As I walked into FST's wooden hut, I was immediately met by a smiling black actor who handed me a program

and said, "Here you go, brother, I hope you enjoy the show." Before I could escape from that feeling of inclusiveness, I was again captured by the Drums. . . . the drums went on and on and on. . . . The audience was young and mostly black, the theatre was packed. The stage was simple, direct, and beautiful. The Drums (yes, again the Drums) were neatly packed away in the rafters. . . . Unfortunately, the African proverb used in the introduction also symbolized the major weakness of the production: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." John O'Neal's script and direction both seemed to follow this maxim. . . . and in many ways O'Neal's script represented a rather "catechistic" exploitation of black history. His direction often failed to keep his actors involved in what they were doing. . . . The costumes were makeshift and cheap. The lights were sometimes jerky and uncertain. Among the production staff is listed a choreographer [sic] and dance instructor, but there appeared to have been no systematic dance instruction at all. . . . The second half of the performance was stronger and more polished than the first. We were finally going to see some of the direction of which O'Neal is capable.

His closing kaleidoscopic review of significant "high points" was in itself a climax. . . . The next thing we knew, names were being read, people were being shot, and life went on as entering characters walked over the bodies of the dead. Where is the blood of your fathers? We saw the blood of the two young black students murdered at Southern University. . . . We saw Gerald Williams shot down by the Felony Action Squad We saw a young Muslim murdered in front of his wife and children in Baton Rouge. . . . And we saw a city brake tag worker shot down . . . because "they" thought that "thing" he had was a gun, and it went on and on and on. . . . And finally, in rather gloomy anticipation . . . , O'Neal reminded us that . . . in each case where black blood was shed, "No one was charged, no one is to blame, and no one was prosecuted."

What I take to be the third state (at least among the scripts I have) is broken into 22 scenes (whereas there are no scene indications on the previous two versions) but is still in one-act. After the opening Congo Square scene (see Appendix VI), a slave sermon has been added followed by

excerpts from David Walker's "Appeal" and subsequent comments by Garnet. These in turn are now followed by Nat Turner's "Confession." Only then do we move to the New Orleans Slave Market, Scene 7, which in the previous two versions was the scene immediately after Garnet's speech. These quite long speeches in a row must have slowed down the pace considerably and made it difficult for the audience to maintain attention.

The script then follows the previous versions except that the Garnet speech which originally came at the beginning is inserted as Scene 13 in a slightly different edition. Scene 15 is an addition: it discusses Tubman's role and adds Robert Jackson's account of his attempted escape on the Underground Railroad and letters from John Henry Hill, a successful escapee. Again there are large blocks of unbroken dialogue. An excerpt from Douglass' "Fourth of July" speech is inserted between the Brown scene and the Hamilton letter and the Garnet reprise is expanded somewhat:

Where is the blood of your fathers? Has it all run out of your veins? Awake, awake; millions of voices are calling you! Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves. Heaven, as with a voice of thunder, calls on you to arise from the dust.....Let your motto be resistance, resistance, resistance.

Any of these one-act versions could have been the basis for the 1974 (and perhaps 1975) production; the second half of the show referred to by the critics was possibly an unscripted review of current atrocities. If this last state was the one used in 1974 (with the earlier ones being tried

only in workshop), it is understandable that Larose found the play "a trifle long."

The later versions are broken into acts, the two undated ones into two and the 1977 script into three. There are three distinct prologues (see Appendix VI). All the versions move from Congo Square to the Slave Market although there are minor differences in the presentations of this scene.

In one undated script (which may be for an attenuated special performance) from the Amistad files, the slave market scene is followed by comments from various observers of the pre-war southern scene, by the catechism of the slaves by the white preacher and then by a new bit--an excerpt from a report by Colonel Higginson who commanded a Black regiment in the Yankee army (a jump in the time sequence)--and by the Black preacher's sermon embedded between two spirituals; Act I (the only act in this file) ends with a scene between Reverend Loguen, an escaped slave, and Miss Logue, his former mistress. This scene is not in one of these scripts, is in Act III of the one from O'Neal's files, and in a performance plot is indicated as Act II, Scene 7. Blood can truly be considered a work always in progress!

The other unplaced script from the Amistad archives has a paddyroller scene preceding the slave sermon, a scene about Tubman and an excerpt from the Walker "Appeal" into which the catechism is inserted:

WALKER: We the people of these United States are the most degraded, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began. . . . wretchedness and endless misery were reserved to be poured out upon us by Christian Americans!

ACTOR 5 (answered by all actors):

Q. Who keeps the snakes and all bad things from hurting you?

A. God does.

Q. Who gave you a master and a mistress?

A. God gave them to me. . . .

WALKER: The whites have always been an unjust, jealous unmerciful avaricious and bloodthirsty set of beings. . . . We view them all over Europe, and we see them acting more like devils than accountable men.

Q. What book tells you these things?

A. The bible.

etc.

This scene ends Act I in this particular version. The Walker/catechism combination reads--and should play--quite effectively. It does not, however, appear in any of the other versions and was not used in the adaptation presented by BLAC.

The 1977 script from O'Neal's files does not have the new material noted above in Act I which ends with the "Oh, Freedom" spiritual following the catechism. A mimed insurrection scene, not described in any of the other variations --and not played by BLAC--opens Act II:

This opening scene is played all over the theater space--thru, around, over the audience as well as on stage. The objective is to provide the audience with a

sense of the frequency and intensity of slave insurrections during this period.

THE TWO open the scene as white people in the established playing area. There are rumors about that a rebellion is afoot. They are scared. Thru out [sic] the scene the theme of "Steal Away" is maintained. . . . A third member of the ensemble plays the PATROLLER. He too is white. The objective . . . is to kill the white people at all costs without being caught. . . . Those who succeed in killing the whites are in turn killed by the PATROLLER. After each killing the action freezes. On breaking the freeze the action resumes as if nothing had happened. Each killing is more violent than the one before. Each crisis builds higher than the previous one. Each time the whites are killed, the blacks die. It builds to one final unbearable explosion and a freeze.

This is followed by alternating comments by whites and Blacks on the historical situation.

This script continues with what is now labeled the "Party" scene and which incorporates the comments of the various observers. This moves into the scene recounted by Brown about a young slave named Randall, a scene which comes earlier in other versions. The next "movement" (scene) is the one about John Henry Hill which is followed by Brown's own story. A brief reference to Tubman and the "Drinking Gourd" song end Act II.

The other script opens Act II with the Turner scene, follows it with Garnet's address, then moves to the "Party" and on to the close of the show with excerpts from Douglass' speech, and concludes with the Hamilton editorial--here spoken in sequence by three actors and ending with a chorus of all the actors:

No hope.....democrats, republicans, No Hope, No Hope.
 WE MUST RELY ON OURSELVES, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF OUR
 CAUSE, AND THE ADVANCE OF JUST SENTIMENTS AMONG THE
 GREAT MASSES OF THE PEOPLE!

The ensemble sings "Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers?" before admonishing "Let your motto be resistance, resistance, resistance!" and "reciting key lines from speeches made during the play." A freeze and blackout end the show.

The three-act version has the last act opening with the Logue-Loguen scene, continues with the Walker "Appeal" and ends with the usual Douglass excerpt followed by the Hamilton editorial and the concluding song, one-line "resistance" reprise, and key lines from other speeches.

The scene plot (undated) adds no new material but rearranges some elements: Act I has the prologue and Congo Square followed by the Slave Market scene, the "religious thing" (probably the catechism), the paddyroller scene and the slave sermon. Act II opens with the abolition "party," which is followed by the Randall scene, the Walker "Appeal," Nat Turner, Tubman, and the Loguen-Logue interchange, and concludes with Douglass, Garnett and Hamilton speech excerpts (and undoubtedly with the admonition to resist).

The October 1977 issue of the FST Voice announces the 1977 tour of Blood without going into detail but explains that the new version is in three acts and is considerably revised. A review of that production by Paul Beaulieu in the Louisiana Weekly (October 22, 1977) describes this Blood, as directed by John O'Neal, as more than

a documentary: "It is a combination musical-drama-comedy that is more than adequately choreographed by Noel Jones." In discussing the opening Beaulieu comments on the prologue's capturing "the deep emotions experienced by blacks, who were captured, brutally treated and shipped to America where slavery awaited them." The play concludes, he says, "with black people standing up to demand their freedom [the resistance invocation]." Beaulieu says that overall this production was "well done" although the inexperience of the players showed at times.

A letter dated November 15, 1977, from "Brother" Randolph Scott of New Orleans to the "Brothers and Sisters" of FST congratulates them on "the excellent production . . . [which] reflects the truth about our peoples' capture in Africa and bondage in America. . . ."

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Some of the scripts work better than others. But I expect that it would be almost impossible to take documentary material about the horrors of slavery from this period and NOT have it work to some degree.

Having apparently decided that In White America is the work of a white liberal and therefore of only peripheral validity, O'Neal seems to have purposely avoided much of the material used by Duberman. Only the Logue-Loguen scene and Turner's "Confession" are duplicated and they are treated differently. But the approach is generally the same. And each work has its particular strengths and weaknesses.

White America is more comprehensive in its coverage whereas Blood provokes a wider range of emotions, incorporating considerable wry humor and more music than does the earlier docudrama.

It is unfortunate that the ongoing documentary project envisioned by O'Neal never saw fruition. There is more drama in Black history than can be crammed into one play and O'Neal's approach could have produced a series of powerful productions.

The other O'Neal work that joined Blood in touring during the mid-'70s is When the Opportunity Scratches, Itch It--a very funny play. Despite jumps in action, unfilled gaps and lapses of logic, Opportunity makes its point hilariously.¹⁹

In the "Letter to the People" from the FST staff cited above (1/22/75), the play is summarized very generally:

[It] is an exploration into a highway scheme to get rich at the expense of the people in Gertown, who would have to relocate. The play focuses on the exploits of a few profit greedy Black opportunists who wanted a larger slice of the pie in the sky. But they themselves are only used as fronts for the powerful City, State and Federal Government, which represents big business, not the people.

(The suggestion is made that the play can be brought "closer to home" by relating "this situation to a similar one in your community." Apparently, as with Hurricane and Tide, O'Neal used an actual occurrence as his basis.) In the program for the "Fall Touring Repertoire" featuring Blood and

Opportunity (and dating from 1974, 1975 or 1976), the summary is still non-specific:

A three-act comedy about opportunism in the black community. The play deals with the exploits of a greedy real estate broker and deacon of the church, Mr. Montgomery Ward Turnbull. Deacon Turnbull develops and pursues elaborate schemes to get rich quick only to find that opportunism leads to disaster. This play, satirical in style, attacks sharply the large white business syndicates and their counterparts in the black community which combine to exploit poor people. "When the opportunity scratches, itch it" is a hilarious and pointed exposure of an exploitative system.

This does not begin to convey the complexity of the plot in which Turnbull manipulates the church board for his own profit only to be doublecrossed in turn by his protégé, the fake Reverend Doctor Cushenberry III; Cushenberry enlists the help of Black business manipulator Rupert Percival Allistair III who, in his turn, doublecrosses Cushenberry. Manipulating all of them is the white tycoon Colonel Bulmoose Warbucks. The only character who does not allow himself to be involved and who has insight into all of the others' manipulations is Frank, the shoeshine man; he serves as a sounding board for much of the necessary exposition, making it quite natural and conversational.

The Deacon is a stuffed shirt who looks down on his fellows but who immediately falls for Cushenberry's smooth talk. Cushenberry in turn is completely taken in by Allistair's airs but the latter is nothing but a stooge of the Colonel. Act II, Scene 3, brings the two together in a caricatured confrontation of the Boss and a Tom:

Colonel Bullmoose Warbucks' spacious mansion on the spacious patio. The patio table is set with very ornate silver service with wine. A full course chicken dinner is concealed beneath the silver. Rupert's place is set with paper and plastic throwaway materials, however.

The chicken dinner is a box of Colonel's Fried Chicken, this colonel's own enterprise:

WARBUCKS: . . . Oh, Rupert, that's what I like about you. You're so resourceful and bright and energetic. There's nothing at all lazy or trifling [sic] about you. Nothing at all. Have some of this special Louisiana Fried Chicken.

ALLLISTAIR: . . . That's right! Nothing trifling or lazy at all. I'm your new breed Negro. Aggressive, bold, dedicated to getting our fair share of the public pie so to speak. That's why we can appreciate progressive, farsighted, old, liberal white gentlemen like yourself sir. Of course, we still have a long way to go. There are still a good number of the old fashioned shuffling type of Blacks around just like there's still a good number of your poor, white trash, Klu [sic] Klux Klan type of white men around too.

WARBUCKS: Yes, it's true. . . . But America is making progress. . . . But you know sometimes I do yearn for the good ole days. I never will forget good ole Essie Mae. When she used to cook that fried chicken so it would just melt in your mouth. Why she was so good, she'd cook and clean for me before she'd take care of her own children. . . . I remember the day she died. . . . She tole me, "Colonel" she said, "Oh Colonel, the only thing bad about dying now is that I didn't stay around long enough to see you dead and packed away first". . . .

A little later, after Allistair has told the Colonel about Cushenberry and how they can use him, the old man asks, "You mean, we got a legitified hard working Nigger?"

Allistair protests, "Colonel! You know I can't stand that word!"

WARBUCKS: Oh, I'm sorry Rupert, really, I'm sorry, son. But you know how I just get besides myself when I run across one of your people who really loves to work. . . .

ALLLISTAIR: I know how it makes you feel, Colonel. . . . but if you insist on using that...that... word, I'll just have to start submitting my reports by mail. . . .

WARBUCKS: I'm sorry Rupert. . . . I forgot you was one of them. Please don't leave me....
(Offering money)

ALLLISTAIR: Alright, I'll forgive you this time....
(Accepting money)

The conference continues with Allistair unveiling plans for foisting an unprofitable winery (strawberry wine) on Cushenberry and the church: they can make money, he'll convince them, on communion wine. Allistair's presentation is a model of marketing research complete with charts and projections and reports. The Colonel is impressed. He asks only one favor of Allistair before the latter departs. Allistair demurs but finally gives in--singing and dancing to the jingle for the Colonel's chicken!

But in the end the Colonel sells him out as he has sold Cushenberry out. The new man in the Colonel's employ is another of the deacons, Green, who has been made a special agent and who arrests the plotters. What is not clear at the end is whether Green has truly sold out or is really working in the interests of justice.

That is hardly important. As noted above, much in the convoluted plot is opaque. The essential message is clear: there are too many pious-acting, out-for-a-buck "niggers" in the employ of the controlling interests. They really aren't very smart but until the people themselves get involved in their own community and their own destinies, these operators together with the big bosses will call the shots.

Reviewing the play in the Times-Picayune, David Cuthbert is generally complimentary: "O'Neal is on target most of the time, but for maximum impact the play should be shorter, punchier. Its impact and momentum tend to be blunted by sheer length." He likes O'Neal's performance as Frank: ". . . it's a tossup as to which is better, the role or the performance." And he has positive comments for Earl Billings, both as director and actor, and for Ben Spillman, Jesse Morrell and Chakula Cha Jua. Cuthbert makes an interesting point generally applicable to Black theatre in 1974: "In the political theater we are seeing at FST, the characters who approach heroic status are not glamorous, wild-eyed revolutionaries, but ordinary people who question the way things are" ("Senseless Self-Defeatism . . .").

In a follow-up feature on Opportunity and the FST, Cuthbert quotes Earl Billings (the new artistic director of FST): "'First we identify a problem for the audience . . . and then we present an approach, a method for solving the problem.'"

Opportunity does not present a solution but it does highlight the problem. Actually it has more in common with The Sty of the Blind Pig, Ceremonies for Dark Old Men, and other such Black plays of the era than O'Neal and his cohorts cared to admit--or perhaps recognized. It simply presents a segment of Black life, often humorously, and lets that picture speak for itself.

Mark Hemeter also liked the play and the players:

The oblique political struggle of Free Southern Theatre [sic] is being given a thoughtful and well-acted exercise in John O'Neal's new play. . . . O'Neal is a marvelous actor. . . . As a playwright, he has a sure feel for conversation--most of it witty--and a strong sense of developing a realistic situation into good theater. The impact of "Opportunity" might be even more powerful if he could tighten the flow of events.

Billings . . . gives the show a steady pulse. . . . "Opportunity" is probably the best directed show I've encountered at FST ("Crusader . . .").

Opportunity toured extensively in the South and Midwest and, in the fall of 1975, on the West Coast. The Oakland performance was enthusiastically reviewed in The Black Panther:

This totally committed and highly professional drama troupe was an inspiration to all of us. . . . The play itself and the spirited production were both of the highest ideological and professional level. . . . It is a play clearly written for a Black audience, basing itself solidly on a sharp and clear familiarity with the institutions and individual types that are found in the Black community of capitalist American. . . . The play ended to enthusiastic and sustained applause. . . . But as we sat waiting for the curtain call . . . , we were informed . . . that the cast does not appear for curtain calls after its performances ("When Opportunity Scratches . . .").

Instead the troupe's message was read to the audience:

"We at the Free Southern Theater hope that you've enjoyed this presentation, but even more so, have

gained deeper knowledge and understanding of the role of culture in these days of conflict and turmoil. Culture's role, so we've tried to convey here, should be to unify, inspire, and educate our people. We say culture for liberation. The resources to bring about needed change . . . are at our fingertips, but we have to organize and mobilize in our own interest to confront the barriers ahead. It's important to recognize the true nature of our oppression and use the collective knowledge of oppressed peoples' struggle throughout the world if we are to be victorious. Dare to Struggle!!! Dare to Win!!!"

Fortunately the play's message is not as heavyhanded as that of the post-show; if it were, there would probably have been no one left, or awake, to hear the proclamation.

O'Neal was to do only one more play at FST, Junebug Jabbo Jones. But on March 30, 1981, his The People Are the Ones Who Make the Music was presented at an unidentified Lab Theatre. No record of this production apparently exists except for a printed handbill in O'Neal's own files.

People is a presentation of Black theatre history performed by Ms. Mathilde Armstrong-Shephard (MAS) and Joe Jones (JJ). MAS sets the scene:

I am the producer of this "informtainment"
I have always been enraged by racism and ignorance.
At the same time I've always enjoyed a peculiar affection for the Theatre. . . . So I found this small theater troupe . . . and asked them to put together a theater piece that demonstrated the greatness of the Negroes' contribution to the theater. . . . I told them I wanted it to inform and entertain. . . . Last week I asked if I could see a rehearsal. . . . I was embarrassed, no I was livid! They had some naked women doing what they called African Dance, they had a parody of a church service and some spirituals, then buck and winged their way thru the mi[n]strel period, jumped up to some Amos and Andy . . . and wound up with a servey [sic] of Good Times, the Jeffersons and Sanford and Son!

I told them their ideas were reprehensible and that I'd do it myself. Unfortunately, it took me so much time to find the selections . . . that I did not have the opportunity to find actors of the caliber I would have liked. . . . Joe is my Yard Man, but I'm sure that he will do quite well. . . .

What follows is--or seems to be--a mixture of tongue-in-cheek and a serious approach to this overview of Black theatre. They open with the smothering scene from Othello. MAS is astounded by JJ's grasp of the material.

She is disgusted by the minstrel bit which follows, proclaiming that its contribution to vaudeville and musical comedy was the only accomplishment of minstrelsy. Porgy and Bess, she remarks, "is one of the most enduring theater pieces in history." (It is also anathema to most Blacks today.)

MAS' next selection is from O'Neill's All God's Chillun Got Wings, a selection JJ understandably finds "really depressing." And although he knows and admires the work of Langston Hughes, the scene from Mulatto makes him wonder why "these people want to write stuff like this." More than that, he wonders "about the people who came to see these plays. Who were they and what did they think about them, stuff like that?" MAS can't help him: she is "a devotee of the arts" but "not a scholar." JJ demurs that he "ain't no scholar either" but insists that he finished school and nobody ever taught him "about this stuff."

It is difficult to know whether the point is that "this stuff" should be taught or that it is just "stuff." I doubt that seeing a performance would clarify the point.

The first half of the show concludes with an excerpt from Our Lan' about which JJ has no comment. The second part opens with a very brief historical overview of the period from the depression to the Civil Rights movement. JJ doesn't understand why Louis Peterson's Take a Giant Step was so popular: "I mean they talk good and all that but what good's it do to stir up stuff if you got no intention or purpose to do anything about it?"

JJ can identify with Walter in the scene from Raisin. (Yet this was only five years after O'Neal had said that FST's doing Raisin was a mistake [Dodds, "Where Is . . ."]). A scene from Baldwin's Amen Corner, "one of the most underrated of the domestic melodramas to come from this period," follows. JJ comments on the lack of heroes:

I notice that before OUR LAN' there were no real heroes except for Othello and he's kind of suspicious. Look like the white people could not see a black man as being big enough to be a hero. Now looking at these things that come after OUR LAN' which black people have been the ones to write, I still can't find no real heroes. . . .

Certainly "Purlie is not the kind of person we could really look up to either." MAS again explains that many modern characters are not heroes: "In fact, there is a substantial school of thought devoted to the idea that heroics are no longer possible. . . ." JJ won't accept that explanation

and he takes over the lecturing. A hero, he maintains, is a real person who will "do their best to try to see those things done that will be a benefit to everybody." A hero doesn't want to die but is "willing to face death if it comes to that. . . . I think you have to look among the common, ordinary working people to find that man or woman these days. . . ."

MAS is again impressed and comments that she has noticed most significant art "is preceeded [sic] by a great tradition of 'folk art'"; she cites a West African story but botches the telling of it. JJ tells his version plus another tale from slavery times. MAS is so overwhelmed she announces that, rather than continuing the discussion, she is going home to rethink, with JJ's help, her concepts.

People is interesting because of JJ: he foreshadows (as did Frank in Opportunity) Junebug. But why did O'Neal patch this piece together? The scenes selected provide a tour de force for the two performers but they hardly point to a coherent artistic view. Perhaps, after all, he let his performer's instincts overcome his writer's skill and his dialectician's purpose.

There is no ambiguity about Don't Start Me Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know: Sayings from the Life and Writing of Junebug Jabbo Jones (JJJ). It is a warm, witty, subtle script and O'Neal's performance is masterful.

He began his Junebug performances in 1980 as an FST production and has continued them since the Theater's demise.²⁰

Ronald Castine and Glenda Lindsay helped O'Neal write the first Junebug show and he had directorial help, first from Curtis King and then from Steve Kent, but it is O'Neal's concept and O'Neal's show.²¹ JJJ as a character was created by Movement workers in the early '60s; the material for the play is based on the Afro-American oral tradition. Actually none of the tales seem to be taken directly from that tradition but they have its flavor. In the opening story, for instance, of Nigger Bill and his evocation of lightning to strike his master are the ingredients of a folk story but it and its companions are probably products of O'Neal's imagination. (At least I have not been able to trace them.)

Mules appear in many of the Afro-American tales and O'Neal may have heard from someone else about "Senator Bilbo and Bessie Mae" but it's definitely a modern fable. (JJJ's grandfather named his "cantankerous old jackass" Senator Bilbo and would cuss him and beat him loudly and lengthily: "The only thing Colored people loved more than watching him beat up on Senator Bilbo [was] watching Joe Louis beat up on a white man and get paid for it!") Again the "In the Old Cotton Fields Back Home" episode has the ingredients of a typical tale--the white massa' trying to cheat the Black field workers, the redneck overseer, the discovery and

foiling of the trick by the Blacks. But the organization and strike of the workers are contemporary and undoubtedly directly from O'Neal.

Whatever their origins Junebug's stories convey, without belaboring the message, the theme that the individual, in any societal situation, can take action and control. JJJ is the wily trickster out of Africa, the aware knowledgeable Black of today, the person--of all times and any race--who can apprehend, understand and take in hand a situation. JJJ offers insight, humor, pathos--the ingredients of drama. What makes this offering so effective is O'Neal's performance: he is this old Black Southerner with the wisdom of his years and his people behind him.

O'Neal has performed Junebug all over the country and the collection of rave reviews (from New York to Los Angeles) is voluminous. Steve Amidon, reviewing the 1984 performance at UNC-Greensboro, sums up the show aptly:

. . . The Junebug Show . . . is a strong vehicle for the rich yet often neglected oral tradition of Southern blacks. John O'Neal combines strong acting with an engaging story telling style to weave together a series of anecdotes that quietly evoke the atmosphere of the South before the Civil Rights era. The result is a show that is instructive without being didactic, a show whose subtle sense of morality does not prevent it for a moment from being marvelous entertainment ("Joyous Jabber . . ." 16).

He also neatly summarizes the material:

His stories have less to do with overt acts of justice or injustice than with the atmosphere of that not-to [sic]-distant era and place. In one tale, a jackass named for a racist Mississippi senator becomes so stubborn . . . that it dies from its own blind ignorance.

In another story, a poor young black takes responsibility for a preacher's daughter ill-used by the son of a rich black family. O'Neal's abilities easily range through these varied stories, from the irony of a shoeshine man dousing a white panderer with black polish to the pathos of two brothers whose dire poverty forces them to break the boycott of a greedy plantation owner (16).

O'Neal has said that the show is probably "more accessible to 'upwardly' mobile and middle-income black[s] and whites than to poor urban blacks" because of Junebug's "rural nature" and "upbeat message" (Mason, "Junebug. . ."). This may be, but surely poor urban blacks can relate to the story of Youngblood who "was a freedom rider before the first Freedom Ride!" and who became a shoeshine man in New Orleans until he poured that black polish on that white "movie cowboy" and to the tale of "Tommy Too Tuff," the ex-DJ who still thinks he's broadcasting through an old tin can. JJJ, it seems to me, has appeal across the lines.

Junebug was "the rock on which the unquenchable O'Neal hope[d] to rebuild the . . . Free Southern Theater" (Hurley). He was not successful in that. He has been successful in building an admiring coterie for Junebug. O'Neal said in 1983 that he felt he had finished his apprenticeship and was now "like a journeyman playwright" who had apprenticed himself "to the process of doing theatre"; he has, he said, "a few more objectives to try to satisfy" before he can consider himself qualified "to start working as a full-time author." Once he can devote time to playwriting, he hopes

to "be qualified--in maybe another 20, 25 years--to start some really serious work" (Personal interview).

O'Neal has already begun his serious work. He began it with his early FST plays, flawed though they are. He continued it throughout FST's final years, culminating with his Junebug saga. If anything is serious, it is Junebug Jabbo Jones. The time is soon coming, however, for O'Neal to give Junebug a vacation while he develops other work. Perhaps what he is doing now with SFMT is a step toward that.

And so this final phase of FST can be seen as a period of personal growth for O'Neal. But despite his efforts, he could not keep his Free Southern Theater alive. Ironically, his own growth could have been one of the contributing factors in FST's demise: his dedicated embrace of Marxism and its appendages, for instance, took time and energies from the work of the Theater. His search for his style and substance took the Theater from Black militancy to a more moderate stance and perhaps contributed to its failure to find an audience (although that had been a problem from the time it settled in New Orleans). It also took him into experiments with various theatrical styles. While this search and experimentation was necessary to his artistic and philosophical growth, it did not provide artistic stability to the FST. As noted above, the critics were at times confused. So must the audiences have been. Finally his

success as Junebug took him away from New Orleans and monopolized his time.

Or perhaps, FST was simply born at the wrong time and reared in the wrong place. It did, however, manage to live--albeit often precariously--for almost two decades. What kind of legacy did it build and bequeath?

Notes

¹ Blkartsouth survived only a short time more, dissolving during 1971.

² There is no clue to J. J. Jones' identity. My suspicion is that it is O'Neal who may already have been toying with his Junebug Jazzbo Jones character; certainly the political bent to the piece gives credence to this possibility. An inquiry to him remains so far unanswered.

³ Two of the New Orleans reviewers--those for the Clarion Herald and for the Times-Picayune--refer to the play as Rosalie or Rosalee Pritchard and that is how it is listed in Amistad's inventory of the archival material. The one release I have copied from the archives correctly identifies the play as Rosalee Pritchett as do the Vieux Carre Courier reviewers.

⁴ This piece which may have been performed one time rather than having been a repertoire addition as the "Historical Notes" suggests. On May 6 there was a performance by "'Grambling College Drama Students'" labeled A Black Experience; this program is not the same as Chakula Cha Jua and Leppaine Chiphe's A Black Experience which was staged in 1973 and again in 1977.

5 These included Albert Bostick (Bostic) who is now with the Black Liberated Arts Center (BLAC) of Oklahoma City and who adapted, directed and choreographed the version of Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? presented at the funeral.

6 A contract in the FST files credits the piece to Bostic and Spillman whereas the program blurb calls it "a collective writing effort of the company." It probably originated with the company and was shaped and formalized by Spillman and Bostic.

7 Roberts, still a teenager, was regularly receiving outstanding reviews. Cuthbert dubs her "the best possible advertisement the theater could have for its workshops, of which she is a graduate" ("Curtain Lines . . .").

8 Based on the fact that Denise Nichols appeared in the latter, that she was then with the NEC and that Carter was an NEC writer, Apartment was probably also an NEC production.

9 His other four "best" productions are In White America, Roots, Slave Ship and his own Ritual Murder (which he insists was written for but never produced by FST). He credits Chakula Cha Jua with A Black Experience as does a fact sheet distributed at the funeral but the typescript also lists "[Leppaine] Chiphe Cha Jua."

10

That same summer FST sponsored two performances by the NORD Summer Funshop Players of Don't You Want to be Free? (The play is in Hatch & Shine 263-77.)

11

Most of the poems can be found in Hughes' Selected Poems. "The Backlash Blues" and "Question and Answer" are in the Randall anthology. "Good Morning . . ." and "Let America Be . . ." are in the typescript in the archives.

12

It is dated in Ward's use of eye dialect, a device common in earlier decades with both Blacks and whites writing about uneducated Blacks but one used much less frequently today. This use presents problems only in the reading, not in the performance.

13

Originally titled Private Places and Public Trust, the manuscript was labeled "a work in progress"; however the only difference between the two versions is the title.

14

The play was revised for the 1977 revival and it is probably this version that I have. It is marked "Copyright 1972-3" and sets the time as February 1974-75. O'Neal points out that all these scripts are "scripts in progress", that they were constantly being revised--before, during and, presumably, after performance--so that comments on a particular typescript may not apply to preceding or succeeding versions (Personal interview).

15

The script from O'Neal's own files is an early version titled Only the Strong Survive but it is unlikely that revisions salvaged the script.

16

It is impossible to date the existing scripts with precision. I presume that the typescript from O'Neal's own file titled Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers? and described simply as "A Working Project of the Free Southern Theater" with a 1972 copyright is the earliest typed version; this presumption is reinforced by a handwritten note on the title page: "Marilyn--This is a rough draft. I'll let you see it at the next stage of development too--Love John." I further presume that the typescript from the Amistad archives titled the same as above and still credited only to the Workshop is the second state and that the archival copy of the light cue script with the authorship credit modified by the addition of "Edited by John O'Neal" and with a slight change in the subtitle is the third state. Another script from O'Neal's files which combines handwritten segments with paste-ups from earlier scripts must be from 1977 because actors' names which are written in match those on the program. I am simply guessing that the other two versions are interim performance scripts. Too, excerpts were done on various occasions so there may have been almost as many versions as places of performance. The one rather attenuated script which is missing transitional material

(and for which I have only Act I) may be a cutting made for one of these special showings.

17 This definitely is not the 1977 version being reviewed: actors mentioned do not match the '77 cast nor in the '77 program is "choreographer" misspelled. It may have been an interim production since only O'Neal is credited and since it seems somewhat more complex than that discussed by Spillman and Larose in 1974.

18 The adaptation by Bostic adhered, as best as I recall, to none of these but came closest to the two-act scripts detailed above. Unfortunately it was not the best of performances/productions and failed to have the impact I expected.

19 The script I have is dated 1974 and bears a C2 notation, indicating that it is a revised version.

20 Recently O'Neal introduced You Can't Judge a Book by Looking at the Cover: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones - vol. 2 which was presented as a work in progress in Atlanta and was done by the Wisdom Bridge Theater in Chicago before being presented at the FST funeral in New Orleans. According to the program notes, it tells the tale of Po Tatum, JJJ's childhood mentor, who left home at 17 for "the promised land of Chicago." It shows how

people have to leave their rural homes for the city which "is often the source of their undoing."

Barbara King is credited as co-author and, according to the program, is already working with O'Neal on a third Junebug play. This second volume also involved Steve Kent who worked with O'Neal on the first play.

I have an in-progress script, "a series of episodes" which need "an introductory piece that establishes the purpose, time, place and circumstances" and "a summary piece that recapitulates the experience and frames it off in some way" (Letter from O'Neal to Dr. Carolyn Rocamora, of the Philadelphia Festival Theater, 19 Dec. 1982; author's files). O'Neal planned to organize the piece around the premise that "arrogance leads to its own downfall, (even if it could use a little encouragement from time to time)" (Letter). The "series of episodes" is, however, too sketchy to provide a good idea of the completed work. And unfortunately I had to leave the funeral before the performance. However, Dr. Jones says that it measures up the the first Junebug show.

21

Program notes in the Piedmont Playbill (September/October 1984) for the JJJ production at UNC-Greensboro give this explanation:

Written by John O'Neal with research and support from Ron Castine and Glenda Lindsay, the first version of the piece was the last production of the Free Southern Theatre [sic] and was directed by Curtis King of Dallas. After a year of touring, a long collaboration

with Steven Kent began. The result . . . was that a revised production . . . became the last production of the Provisional Theatre of Los Angeles. Thus, Junebug has the dubious distinction [of] having been the last production of two historically significant theatre groups (9).

22

To date O'Neal has refused to release the rights to JJJ to anyone else. Larry Leon Hamlin of the North Carolina Black Repertory Theatre is aching to do Junebug; it would be interesting to see if the script holds up as well under someone else's interpretation.

"Our failures are more important than what we succeeded at. The greatest value in what Free Southern Theater did was in making the right mistakes."

-- John O'Neal

CHAPTER VII:

THE LEGACY: PERSONAL AND PUBLIC

Although functionally dead since 1980, legally dead since 1983 and officially buried in 1985, FST will live in a sense as long as O'Neal tours JJJ. But does it live in other ways? Did it leave a legacy? Or was it simply one of many theatres that have flared and folded, leaving no real contribution to other theatres, to their community or to the wider world?

The personal bequests are significant: O'Neal's continually developing artistry and audience, Moses' professional success, Cha Jua's and Salaam's ongoing involvement in theatre and the New Orleans cultural community, Bostic's and Martin's theatrical careers which were nurtured in the FST workshops, Dent's return and commitment to New Orleans and the Black community. Erika Munk of the Village Voice credits FST with being instrumental in developing her ideas (. . . Project). Surely too there were others, workshop participants probably, who were marked by what the FST introduced. Dent has said that "at its best, at its height"

FST was more than a theatre; it was a cultural center, and perhaps its chief value arose from its exposing so many folk to the possibility that they too could be culturally active and that the arts could make a difference (. . . Project). O'Neal echoes this idea: art doesn't change the way people think; if people are changed by art, they are changed through participation (. . . Project).

Thus over the years, through its workshops in New Orleans and through direct contact with audience members during the tours--particularly in post-performance discussions--FST did make it possible for people to participate or, at least, to understand that they could participate. In this individual respect then, FST made a mark.

But no one I have talked with (Schechner, Dent, Salaam, O'Neal) will hazard a guess as to whether or not FST performances had any deep effect on the audiences. Surely some of the ideas generated by the performances and discussions--especially during those first years of touring rural Mississippi and Alabama--must have not only opened some cultural vistas but must have stirred some consciences. A critical conscience, however, does not necessarily translate into productive action. It is unlikely that FST in itself wrought any real societal or even attitudinal changes among its audiences. (There are of course those who would argue that the Movement as a whole accomplished no real changes.)

On the other hand, Schechner thinks that "during its time of urgency, it did communicate to a lot of people" and that it was part of a network of contributors: he argues that obviously the Deep South has changed considerably over the past twenty years; while much remains the same, there are "absolute and profound changes as well" and FST can be seen as a contributor to these changes although that contribution cannot be measured (Personal interview).

Gaffney presents the problem of influence in these terms: "Perhaps FST was born out of time. The Black community is not . . . ready to support a radical, or even challenging, Black theater" ("Black Theater . . ." 13). He also points out a flaw in the Theater's original goal of bringing culture to these Southern communities: the problem is NOT one of introducing culture to the Blacks--they already have a rich heritage--but of developing self-identity and awareness (11). He claims, and I agree, that "as a revolutionary force, the FST . . . failed to echo in art that which the Black Movement [was] expressing in politics" (11).

O'Neal attributes this problem of FST's failure as a revolutionary force to the fact that FST was "a reflection of the Movement" which was already becoming passe when the Theater was born; furthermore he sees the Black Power Movement as coming to the end of its philosophical rope by the late '60s and asking questions such as "why are we not

winning?" and "why are the masses of Black people not only no better off but perhaps worse off [economically] than before the Movement?" Thus follows the question: "What did revolutionary REALLY mean?" For O'Neal the revolutionary thrust became Marxist but he could not arouse the same commitment among other members of the FST (Personal interview). And, as suggested above, his very strong commitment to Marxist methods probably contributed to FST's problems.

The Movement artists, he believes, were naive--politically and economically. And their art of course reflects this naiveté. He has observed that "the art work of the '60s is limited by the philosophical shortsightedness of the movement itself" and that it "is more important as historical data than as an aesthetic product" ("Art and the Movement" 80). Tom Brown of Spelman College notes the shortcomings of Black Power-inspired art in that era: ". . . as long as one cried and spoke of how good it was to be Black, it was considered artistic" ("Black Theater . . . Comeback" 58). The era, in effect, was conducive to polemics, not poetry--although at their best, productions emerging from these movements (at the FST and other Black theatres) merged the two successfully.

The definitive history of the Movement and analysis of its effects is yet to be written. Perhaps when it is written, FST's relation to it will be clarified. Joseph Hurley

goes too far, I suspect, when he credits FST with being "one of the fullest flowerings of the brief period when SNCC, CORE, SCLC and other civil rights groups managed to suspend . . . the philosophical and procedural differences dividing them. . . ." Yet O'Neal probably shortchanges his offspring and the Movement when he laments that earlier Black artists, those who worked from 1918 until 1940, were better than those of the '60s because they worked from a stronger philosophical base and that the work in FST had been "basically egocentric" ("Art and the Movement" 80-81).

Certainly after its ties with the Movement loosened, the FST was isolated both from the mainstream of Black Power politics and Black theatre although key troupe members did try to remedy this in later years with their visits to other theatres and their participation in the Black Theatre Alliance and in ROOTS. But their contact with other people's theatres of the era remained loose. As Vantile Whitfield (now chief executive officer of Arts Media Services in Washington, D.C., which provides advice and assistance to neighborhood arts groups, and once director of the National Endowment for the Arts' Expansion Arts Program) points out, by the beginning of the '70s there were some 160 Black theatre groups (of which fewer than 70 survive) (. . . Project). FST helped spawn one or two, was in touch with some half dozen more, but knew little or nothing about most. This isolation hampered the Theater in its pursuit of mate-

rial and methods to convey its message. Not only did the group lack valuable interchange with similar groups, because of this isolation, it perceived its work as unique; an understanding of its place in the historical/theatrical continuum could have pointed to helpful lessons in how to make a touring people's theatre viable.

Nor was FST ever able to identify its audience. Was its primary community those rural towns of the Black Belt or was it New Orleans? Was that audience Black only? For O'Neal the revolutionary thrust crossed racial lines:

It's clear that the majority of oppressed people in this country are white people . . . which is often overlooked by the white people who are in fact oppressed. . . . With all this racist claptrap being spread around, they are encouraged to think of themselves as a part of the privileged few when in fact they are simply victims. . . . It's also true that an extraordinarily large percentage of Black people [and others such as Native Americans] . . . are being oppressed and exploited (Personal interview).

The FST did not reach these expanded audiences or even really attempt to establish such cross-cultural presence. It was hampered even in reaching the target audiences since, as O'Neal also points out, FST members were not members of "the Black masses" but among "the Black [and white] privileged" (Personal interview). For that matter, it was not always clear that they were playing for the "Black masses"; some of the plays definitely did not stem from the experience of these masses.

The split among early FST key people as to the Black-white approach was only one of the dichotomies holding back

the Theater. There were also the argument over building a community theatre or concentrating on touring, the tension between pursuing personal professional goals and committing energy to FST, the diffusion of energies in peripheral projects (such as the booking agency) as well as the differences in political philosophies--all contributed to a blurring of purpose and procedure.

Aggravating the split between the pro-community empha-sizers and the pro-professional tour advocates was, for the first five years, the New Orleans-New York separateness. Two boards do not a smooth operation make. And the New York supporters had been, and continued to be, attracted by the idea of FST's brave ventures into the dark hinterlands of the South; this original concept was what made the FST different. New York, after all, had its own struggling Black community theatres that were worthy of support--Teer's NBT, Bullins and Macbeth's New Lafayette, Ward's NEC among others. But the initial concept of what the FST would do and where it would do these things is what grabbed the imagination of the press and New York theatre people. And it is undoubtedly what grabbed the foundation monies that were finally forthcoming. So when FST decided to focus on a New Orleans theatre, much of its New York appeal dissipated.

And whereas it was building a loyal following in those small rural communities--communities that had adopted FST as their theatre--the competition and audience diversity in New

Orleans were never squarely faced. Because it never found its community, FST never built the type of support that has enabled some of its contemporaries to survive. Val Ward, for instance, says that what has kept Kuumba alive have been "the people in our community. . . . There was always some church, some business, some organization we could turn to for help. . . ." ("Black Theater . . . Comeback" 61).

O'Neal has also said that the concept of a "free" theatre was a toe-stubber for FST:

We tried to be a free theater. We meant three things by free. . . . We meant free in the sense of freedom of [the Movement]. We meant free in the sense of having freedom to explore all the options of the medium we were working in. And finally we meant free in terms of cost . . . (. . . Project).

This last idealistic concept--that people should not have to pay for what was their due--was "ultimately . . . the undoing" of FST. It failed, he says, to take into account that people investing all their time and energies into such a project must have recompense.

O'Neal approaches the key problem, I think, when he says that FST produced good work but never reached its maximum potential:

. . . the artistic and political potential of our work is far greater than anything we have actually been able to do. We have not created works which adequately illuminate those values or actions which the masses of people recognize as being helpful . . . to their struggle to improve the quality and character of our collective life ("Art and the Movement" 83).

Gaffney put it this way:

The idealistic tenets of its young founders . . . have somehow lost their eloquence in the face of the "real" South. . . . [T]he FST has failed to echo in art that which the Black Movement is expressing in politics ("Black Theater . . ." 11).

The FST, like the New Lafayette and NBT, was searching --probably too hard--for new forms and images. Their failure to transform Black theatre was a failure of the times, a failure to set realistic reachable goals. Yet in that failure to build a distinctive Black idiom was a nugget of success. FST, and its cohorts, did bring new life into the Black (and therefore American) theatre with its exuberant embrace of music and poetry and open emotion. Specific movements (such as that toward ritual) may fail, but they frequently leave their distinctive marks, enriching the theatre (or other art) for those to follow.

Those works, particularly O'Neal's, which were not direct offspring of the Black Liberation Movement but which stemmed from the more general American sociopolitical situation remain viable today. In the mid-'80s we are realizing how little the larger picture of American life has really changed since those heady years of the '60s.

Talent abounded on the FST staff and in the FST workshops; some of the original work is worthy of refinement and remounting. And some of it is still being produced but only sporadically and only on small local scales. Somehow FST--despite its national and New York coverage--never broke into

the Black consciousness, let alone the national. Probably more people in New York City than in the South knew about the group.

In the same way, as suggested above, it never captured the New Orleans imagination even when the Theater began to get good local press coverage and settled into a community role. "A Proposal for the Initiation of a Process to Build Professional Theater in Louisiana" sets out the basic requirement for success:

At the center of a strong theater program is an artistic vision, a particular artistic vision. . . . integral to the life of a given community. . . . It [a theatre] must grow out of that community in some organic way. The successful theater will reflect the lives and interests of its audience and will serve to improve the quality and character of life in the community (ts, O'Neal's files).

FST did not grow out of the New Orleans community but came into it. It seems to have always been the stranger on the block.

FST suffered from excesses of the era. More than that, it suffered from personal conflicts, ideological conflicts and procedural conflicts. It suffered even more from lack of sustained managerial skills and fuzziness of focus. These in turn contributed to more serious problems: the inability to build a persona or produce a body of uniquely identifiable works.

What is amazing is not that FST died but that it survived for as long as it did. And in surviving, it did influence other people's theatres that are at work today.

Martha Jones was wrong in 1972 (12-13) and Mance Williams was wrong in 1985 (62) when they credited FST with being a parent to the modern Black theatre movement; the Black theatre movement began generations before the FST. Nor was it parent to the more general people's theatre movement. That too has a much longer history.

Perhaps FST's continual poor health and eventual demise can be summed up by saying that the Theater was born in the wrong time (at the end of the Civil Rights Movement) and brought up in the wrong place (New Orleans) and that it was never subjected to the proper discipline. The groups, such as Kuumba in Chicago and Jomandi in Atlanta, that are thriving today learned to live without the grant monies. Perhaps even more important, they built for themselves a clear persona. Martha Jones, co-director of Jomandi, credits that group's success to its "concentrated effort to carve out a particular niche on the Atlanta entertainment scene." She elaborates on this:

The audience we have gained comes to us because we have very consciously chosen our themes. . . . Jomandi involves various disciplines in the rendering of a dramatic work. People find that they are uniquely drawn not only by what we do, but by the way we do it ("Black Theater . . . Comeback" 61).

FST had no consistent theme nor continuity in its production and training approaches.

Still FST did leave and continues to leave its mark and to serve as one source of inspiration for those few who view

theatre as more than Broadway entertainment, who believe in it as a tool in the centuries-old struggle between humanity and its oppressors. O'Neal sums it up by saying that "the greatest value to be gleaned from the . . . struggle to build the FST is the understanding that politics and art are integral to each other" (" . . . Living in the Danger Zone" 13).

The FST sent out during its two decades numerous messages--political messages, personal messages and, above all, messages about the integral worthiness of the honest human. Moreover by its very existence, tenuous though it often was, the FST says to all of us that the dream, when it is dreamed by people of courage and concern, can be made real.

People's theatre in various guises is stronger in the United States today than in the decades before FST and its cohorts appeared upon the scene. The Free Southern Theater is an inspiration to many of those working in that theatre just as it was an inspiration to those who birthed and bred it. It seems unlikely that the plays themselves that came out of the FST will outlive their century. (Let us hope they do not, for if they do, that will be an indictment of American society.) But the Theater itself exemplifies the doctrine of theatre as a messenger. This is its legacy.

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APPENDIX I

The Picket

by Val Ferdinand (Kalamu ya Salaam)

(NOTE: Spelling, punctuation, etc. have been transcribed as they appear in the original script except where punctuation is needed for clarification or an error is obviously typographical. This practice has been maintained for the scripts following.)

CAST

- RABBIT:* Loose, bearded, hatted, touches Joyce often throughout play, voice is heavier, dangerous, louder than all others, walks slowly
- JOYCE: Attractive, holds a large brown wallet, is wearing shorts and a sweatshirt of local college or university, speaks slowly
- GEORGE: Tall, neat, articulate, papers stick out of his shirt pocket, has ring of keys hanging from his belt, gestures with his hands constantly, calm, even voiced
- PICKETER: Dark girl, walks slowly, wearily, is wearing a big straw sun hat, sneakers, and blue cotton dress or shift
- WHITE GIRL: Dark girl with bush, wears babu and small glaring white mask, gestures are all exaggerated, smiles constantly when facing someone, otherwise looks toward the floor.

The stage is bare. No lights. White girl stands with back to audience downstage center and does not move. Play In A Sentimental Mood by Archie Shepp from Impulse A-29. As music begins three spotlights come full on at downstage left, upstage right, and at upstage center. All action takes place within these lights. After lights are full on, Picketer with only a broom stick in hand begins walking very slowly counterclockwise (if stage has wings, half the route should be off stage). George enters from downstage right and remains, begins gestures as if talking with someone, occasional pats on the back and handshakes. White girl

faces audience, comes up into spotlight and gestures (with appropriate exaggerations) as if passing out leaflets. At music's end all action freezes and spotlights are turned off. Rabbit and Joyce enter from downstage left, stop, look toward picketer, Rabbit is closer to audience with his arm around Joyce's shoulder. Spotlight on picketer is on now.

RABBIT: Hey I didn't know they were picketing down here.

JOYCE: Who is?

RABBIT: NAACP sign says.

JOYCE: What employment?

RABBIT: I guess so. Come on let's find out.

(They move to spot where picketer turns to face audience)

Hey what's this all about?

PICKETER: I can't talk while I'm walking but you see that guy down by the mailbox, he'll fill you in.

(Points with one arm towards George, simultaneously spot on George comes on)

RABBIT: Thanks. Come on Joyce.

(Spot out on Picketer. As they pass white girl spot comes on and they accept leaflet remaining in spot.)

They're protesting this store's hiring policies. Say they don't hire no brothers. Here you want to read it?

(Joyce takes leaflet, glances at it and puts it in her wallet. Spot out. Rabbit and Joyce continue movement toward George. Spot on George comes on.)

How long yall been out here?

GEORGE: Not very long but with your help we can succeed.

RABBIT: Yeah we read your thing.

GEORGE: Are you members of the N double A C P?

RABBIT: No man.

JOYCE: I am. My father gets one for us every year.

- GEORGE: Well wouldn't you like to join brother? We ha...
- RABBIT: Naw indeed. It ain't nuthin' but a bunch of Toms controlled by white liberals frontin' integration as the answer to our people's problems.
- GEORGE: No brother. We don't insist that integration will cure all the problems of our people. And I must say that we are the largest civil rights organization actively fighting for the rights of all people in the United States. Many of our branches are as militant as any other organization you can name.
- RABBIT: OK baby. OK. I won't shop here but spare me the bullshit.
- (Rabbit and Joyce turn to leave. As they do Rabbit runs into the white girl. The white girl drops the leaflets and Rabbit, Joyce and George help her pick them up. They are all still in the spotlight. As they finish the white girl and George are standing together.)
- GEORGE: Wait a minute, aren't you going to apologize for what you did?
- RABBIT: Man you...
- JOYCE: We're sorry. It was an accident.
- GEORGE: What about you brother?
- RABBIT: What about me...brother!
- GEORGE: I'm waiting....
- WHITE GIRL: Let it go George it was an accident like she said.
- GEORGE: No, people have got to learn to respect each other. This is what I mean by prejudice is not blind.
- RABBIT: Prejudice! Why....
- JOYCE: I said, we were sorry Gregory or whatever your name is.
- GEORGE: I didn't hear the good brother say anything and he did it.

RABBIT: And you won't hear me say a damn thing either.
Turns to Joyce) Come on Joyce let's go. That's
he first time I've ever seen a black boy protect-
ing a white girl.

(Starts to walk away. George puts a hand on Rabbit's
shoulder)

GEORGE: What did you say?

RABBIT: I said that dumb nigger was about to get his ass
kicked over some white bitch. (Has not yet faced
George, speaking over downstage shoulder.)

GEORGE: Now you'll have to apologize to me.

RABBIT: Nigger get your motherfucking hands off me.

(George drops his hand as Rabbit faces him)

GEORGE: I don't mean to offend you brother.....

RABBIT: I ain't no brother of yours. You whitey's
brother. What I got to apologize for? For
calling you "nigger" or her a "white bitch".
(shouting in George's face)

GEORGE: No man, it's a simple matter of all people
respecting each other.

RABBIT: Who the hell you trying to fool. What you mean
is, is that it's a simple matter of me--a black man
apologizing to Miss Ann.

GEORGE: The fact that the girl happens to be white has
nothing to do with it.

RABBIT: On the contrary baby, it has everything to do with
it. You see that black girl carrying that sign
down the street. If some hunky came up to her and
spit on her would you demand that he apologize to
her?

GEORGE: You're confusing the issue brother. I'm just
asking you to show a little common courtesy.

RABBIT: To some white bitch.

GEORGE: Why are you so intent on calling the girl a bitch?

RABBIT: A white bitch.

GEORGE: OK a white bitch?

RABBIT: Why are you so intent on protecting her? Why aren't you out there protecting that black girl?

GEORGE: You're dodging the issue bro....

RABBIT: You must be gettin' some from her!

GEORGE: My people, my people.

RABBIT: Don't "my people" me.

GEORGE: Man why don't you just go ahead and apologize to the young lady.

RABBIT: Fuck her!

GEORGE: If that's the way you feel about it then it's no use in our fighting for you, it's no use in our picketing but you'll see the light. Someone will tell you better.

RABBIT: That's the way I feel about it nigger and I better never catch her on my block or you either cause then I'll have something to apologize for for truth.

George and Rabbit glare at each other.)

GEORGE: Are you a muslim or....

RABBIT: Why I got to be a muslim, baby. The man done got you trained ain't he. Look at him Joyce ready to protect the flowers of the south at a moments notice. No, I'm not a muslim and I'll tell you something else, I'll tell you what you ain't. You ain't shit nigger!

GEORGE: Please brother...

RABBIT: Please shit! If you were half the man you playing at you would try to kick my ass. You'd make me respect that white bitch but you ain't shit. You ain't going to do a goddamn thing.

GEORGE: Brother let's not put our business in the street, we're drawing a crowd.

RABBIT: Well you take it inside nigger!

GEORGE: (speaking to Joyce) I'm sorry this happened.

RABBIT: You are sorry. About the sorriest black man I've ever seen.

JOYCE: Please, look why don't you forget about it. I don't know about you but if you keep pushing him you're going to have to fight. So please we've had enough fighting among ourselves.

GEORGE: I guess you're right.

RABBIT: Call her a name, nigger and I'll show you how to be the man you think you are.

(After about a minute of glaring at each other George turns away and Rabbit and Joyce move toward the Picketer stopping at the spotlight on center stage. As George turns his spot dies and center stage spot is lit just as Rabbit and Joyce reach it.)

If I thought he'd a fought back I think I would have kicked his ass.

(Rabbit looks back toward George whose spot flickers on briefly revealing him talking with the white girl. Rabbit turns again to face the Picketer, her spot comes on and George's dies.)

JOYCE: Forget about it. He wasn't worth the trouble.

(Both Rabbit and Joyce move forward toward the picketer entering into her spotlight. The white girl is seen briefly in the center stage spotlight passing out leaflets.)

PICKETER: Did he tell you what you wanted to know?

(Rabbit immediately turns to Joyce without answering the Picketer)

RABBIT: Joyce, ask her can you carry her sign awhile. I want to talk to her.

(Joyce goes over and exchanges the sign after a few words are passed.)

Could you do me a favor?

PICKETER: Depends.

RABBIT: Go down there and tell that guy I slapped you and called you a black bitch.

PICKETER: What?

(Rabbit slaps the Picketeer)

RABBIT: Now bitch go tell your boss what I did.

(The picketer flees quickly. As she leaves all spots die out. Center spot flickers on as she passes by the white girl. George's spot comes on as she approaches him. They exchange words. As she points toward Rabbit that spotlight comes on and then dies after a few seconds. They exchange words again and the girl starts back toward Rabbit very slowly. All spotlights are out. In A Sentimental Mood starts again, very slowly. When the Picketeer reaches Rabbit the spotlight over them comes on. She goes over to Joyce to take her sign back, passing by Rabbit. She is blinking her eyes and obviously trying not to cry, brushing back the tears with her hand and also passing it across her face.)

RABBIT: I'm very sorry for what I did to you. Believe me I'm sorry I hit you, I sometimes go too far just to prove a point.

PICKETER: I understand. (She avoids looking at Rabbit)

RABBIT: I'm truly sorry.

(Rabbit and Joyce leave stage. The spot on the Picketeer remains on until the music ends.)

*The name is spelled "Rabitt" on the first two pages but since "Rabbit" occurs thereafter, the latter is assumed correct.

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APPENDIX II

Black Liberation Army

by Val Ferdinand (Kalamu ya Salaam)

(Lights have been on for at least ten minutes. 3 musicians should be sitting in audience with their axes (bottles, cans, and at least one instrument which the lead musician may or may not have technical knowledge of) they come forward one by one with the lead musician starting off and building a polyrhythmic climax of screams and hollers (during this number lights and other improvisations can and should be used) at climax of piece musicians should bow to each other and audience and return to their seats in the audience.)

Lights dim and Lucky comes slowly onto the set with an unlighted cigarette in his left hand.

LUCKY: Table like white women your legs to be fine...how you doing chair, got a light?...vase you heard the story that the other day...that uh...you uh... they...uh, you have...yeak OK...alright, alright...cadillacs, buicks, chevies, olds, sting rays, plymouths, cougars, GTO's 'n fords, uh... table I aint guilty...look here wall whatcha say we go out tonight...OK, OK...(to the audience) you know I hates for people not to answer me when i talk to um (he wanders across stage)

HAPPYJACK: (entering walks over to Lucky) looka here boss, you let me hold five for tonight, just for tonight...

LUCKY: No nigger, You got a light?

HAPPYJACK: No man but dig it, three bucks will do till...

LUCKY: Man why don't you go hustle Rev. Clark or a nun or something.

HAPPYJACK: Aug man they got they game so tight till you got to go way five or six years just to learn the hustle.

LUCKY: Yeah, I don't know which is worst, a catholic or a christian.

HAPPYJACK: Yeah, look a buck and a half huh how bout it huh somethin come on man, damn.

LUCKY: Man quit begging. That's the problem with our people now. They beg too much. Worst than a bunch of vultures sitting around, can't kill nuthing and won't nuthin die.

HAPPYJACK: Yeah, you right. But man I'm hungry. And right now I'm ready to beg, borrow or steal.

LUCKY: Ain't we all hungry for one thing or the other.

HAPPYJACK: Yeh, you right. (Looking offstage right) Hey man, check it out.

Peaches enters chewing gum, reading cheap comic book, walks past them & sits. Happyjack crosses over to her.

HAPPYJACK: Hey baby!

PEACHES: What the shit you want nigger.

HAPPYJACK: (retreating) Aw nothing. Not a damn thing.

LUCKY: (comes over & stands next to Peaches) Whatcha reading there?

(she ignores him) You got a light?

PEACHES: Get lost!

LUCKY: Look here baby you could learn to like me once you got to know me.

PEACHES: Yeah, I bet. (smacking gum)

LUCKY: Yeah I got me a boss record collection and...

PEACHES: You got a car?

LUCKY: No, but...(she ignores him again)..never mind.

Two girls come in walking under an umbrella and laughing & giggling pointing at various people in the audience and then laughing to themselves, they have on wigs of red & blonde,

they sit down somewhere backstage. Enter negro militant (beard, dashiki, & big mouth)

TALK LOUD: All power to the people. Black power to black people. Horse power to the cars! Right On! yo-yo. What's da matter wit you niggers. Don't yall realize that we is all slaves of the white man. We got to get togetha. What's da matter wit you niggers. Don't yall understand nuthin.

HAPPYJACK: Hey man you got a couple bills till tomorrow.

TALK LOUD: Why don't you go rob a bank. Everything the white man has belongs to you nigger. All you got to do is take it. It all belongs to you. Ungawa, Black Power!

HAPPYJACK: Never mind. You can't even change my mind much less get off some dust.

TALK LOUD: We needs to understand who & what we are. Like them two bitches. Sisters don't you know how ugly you looks wit them hog-hair wigs on yo haids. (They giggle) We needs to organize. Of the pigs. Off the pigs. Oh yeah!

PEACHES: I'm looking for a man with some money.

TALK LOUD: Sister the movement needs black women.

PEACHES: Yeah and black women needs green money.

TALK LOUD: You all is so hung up on money.

LUCKY: Hey Talk Loud how much money is you making with KNQP.

HAPPYJACK: The K-N-what?

LUCKY: The K-N-Q-P. Keep Niggers Quiet Program. He works for the poverty program. Can't you tell. Look at that silk dashiki.

TALK LOUD: LOOK Here niggers. Yall wants to do somethin. WE Burn this damn place down. Right nah. Burn it to the ground.

LUCKY: Talk Loud you got a light?

HAPPYJACK: How much money you make with that nigger program?

TALK LOUD: Man I don't make no money. I'm out here trying to help my people. All power to the people. Black...

LUCKY: Shucktime, fat mouthin, no count nigger you is making \$700 dollars a month for doing nothing but keepin niggers quiet.

X...: (entering on crutches) This sun is not our star. White men are walking live red flower pot titty pink grass we should be more light years beyond apollo moon probes. They burned the 1st nigger astronaut to a crisp. Pull the plugs out of all electric computers and punch your light bills, and electric bills, and all other bills full of holes with ice picks.

TALK LOUD: This is hoo-doo. Don't listen to this mess. What we need to do....

X...: To do, do too, two do's do do to & what we need is not to do but to be, to be/do only not what others tell us to do but onliest dos what we wants to do.

TALK LOUD: Nigger you sick. Peace, power, pigs, whiskey, grass. Later on, Power! Power! All power to the people. Nigger power to niggers. Right on. Wrong off. Almost in. Nearly out. (he exits, in a hurry)

X...: Green cheese is not a man they say but we say green cheese is round bout the other side or it aint even worth that. Donald Duck is more real than the last 37 ducks what been quacking for our entertainment which is to say he may not been nearly so funny if he'd been created by Walt Dizzy instead of selected by hunky americans. Dizzyland is the white house and mickey mouse our next president.

Musicians come on stage, bowing to everyone

X...: red sofas.

VOICE: (from offstage) all clear

X...: (dropping crutches & moving to center of stage)
Watu weusi. Umoja!

At X...'s command everyone falls into two ranks and when name is called responds with clenched fist over the heart.

X...: Tonight is panther walk. All the city must burn. Lucky you check the left, Happyjack you take the right.

They exit to wings of stage and stand on lookout

X...: City Hall.

PEACHES: Check.

X...: Downtown stores.

TWO GIRLS: Check.

X...: Water Plant.

1st MUSICIAN: Me and Lucky got that. Check.

X...: Police Headquarters.

2nd & 3rd MUSICIANS: Check.

X...: Airport. (no answer/he repeats louder) Airport!

PEACHES: I believe Happyjack got that.

X...: (hollering down to Happyjack) Happyjack you got the airport.

HAPPYJACK: Right On. Check.

X...: We go at 11:30. It's 9:4.....

LUCKY: (running onstage) Cool it. Pigs coming.

X...: (picking up crutches) Salaam!

ALL: Salaam.

X... leaves, going offstage in Happyjack's direction

LUCKY: Let's sing a song. (Lucky raises his hands and counts out a beat. On the downbeat everybody begins singing but every person is singing a different song. Lucky is directing his ass off. Two negroes dressed in suits enter and stand watching and listening for awhile and then shake their heads and go over to Lucky. Everybody stops singing when the pigs approach Lucky but Lucky continues directing.)

1st PIG: We looking for a man what calls himself X...

PEACHES: I'm looking for a man with some money.

HAPPYJACK: ME man, I'm just looking for some dust. How bout a buck till the eagle flies.

2nd PIG: (to 1st Pig) What's the matter with these negroes. Our people need to quit acting the fool and begging so much. They need to get a job and do something constructive instead of just laying around on the streets.

Shouts of "Right On," "Yeah, You Right," and "Oink, Oink" come from the people onstage & [are] directed at the two negro pigs.

1st PIG: See you all just don't know no better. Cause if you did, you wouldn't be acting the way you acting.

ALL: Yeah you right. Right on. Right on. Oink, Oink.

2nd PIG: Come on. We're wasting our time with these niggers.

ALL: Right On! Right On! Oink, Oink, Yeah, You Right! Oink, Oink!

The pigs start to leave and Lucky goes over to them and motions for a light. They stop and just stare at him.

LUCKY: Would either of you gentlemen happen to have a light?

The Pigs ignore Lucky and walk away.

LUCKY: I hates for people not to answer me when I talks to um...

The musicians begin playing again & everybody slowly drifts offstage, some into the audience, when musicians leave stage all is quiet then very, very loud explosion from back of theater w/h screams & shouts/salaam

THE BEGINNING (hopefully)

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APPENDIX III

Feathers and Stuff

by Tom Dent

SCENE: Leroy and Jennie are ushered into Mr. Robinson's apartment. It is as snazzily furnished as possible, paintings on the wall, liquor around, a few unusual antiques--well not so much expensively furnished as unusually, but comfortably furnished.

TIME: Now. It is early evening, after dinner.

ROBINSON: Yes, sit anywhere. Anywhere. This is just my little hangout. Please feel at home. I hate formality.

LEROY: New York is a real gas.

ROBINSON: And now I would like to introduce you to my private secretary, Miss Jeanne Smithers. Miss Smithers is a recent graduate of Bryn Mawr College in Philadelphia. I don't know what I would do without her.

(Smithers, Leroy, and Jennie greet each other.)

ROBINSON: I'm sorry I couldn't arrange this meeting earlier. I'm interested in your project. You know, New Orleans is the most incredible city. You don't know how fortunate you are to be there, able to see every Mardi Gras. Please, would you like a drink?

(They go through the drink bit. Robinson offers gin and tonics.)

LEROY: Well, that's what we're here about, Mardi Gras. When you grow up with something it ain't so groovy. But damn, Mardi Gras is special. Of course, our whole gang gets up early to see the Indians.

- ROBINSON: Yes, tell me about your Indians. It's the most intriguing of.....of racial and cultural phenomenon.
- JENNIE: Really, it's just fantastic! Out of sight! Positively original, not to be duplicated anywhere in the western hemisphere, Africa either.
- LEROY: The whole scene is totally a groove, of course (smiles at Miss Smithers) everybody just gets down bees real.
- ROBINSON: Well, I must say, I was excited when I was there in 1955. I was traveling through the South for my father. I was in Atlanta at the time and my friend said, "Oh, oh Louie, we must go to the Mardi Gras." So we left a martini and some delightful friends at a restaurant and--well...we just went. My greatest thrill, of course, would have been to see King Zulu, but by the time we got there everyone told us he was through for the day.
- LEROY: (snapping his fingers excitedly) Damn! Zulu! Yeeehaaa! That's another project someone's got to do. (Smiles at Mr. Robinson) For another time.
- JENNIE: But Zulu, Zulu, well Zulu has become...well, let us say compromised. It used to be more swinging than it is now. The NAACP, you know. Respectable nigg...Nearoes. (sighs) But this Indian thing we're after, this Indian dress culture, this is pure very, very, very, very few white people see that. Those cats are bad, and they have their own rituals, and they've maintained them, and their own costumes. Why the Indian Mardi Gras... phenomenon...is like nothing else in northern America.
- LEROY: We believe of course it's a black thing.
- JENNIE: That's one of the things our study will substantiate.
- LEROY: Yea. We gon check out some of them tribes to see what they got going.
- SMITHERS: (doubtfully) Is that what the \$20,000 for travel to Indian reservations is for?
- LEROY: Mostly. That's correct, Miss Smithers.

- ROBINSON: (after a pause) Well, it all does sound so fascinating. Tell me more details about the dances. The dance rituals and the costumes.
- JENNIE: Well I think Leroy can tell it best.
- LEROY: As far as we know, the tradition started about 200 years ago, when blacks, mostly escaped slaves and slave rebel leaders many straight from Africa, unspoiled by the cha[ttter]s of Western civilization, used to co-mingle with the Indians who was giving the white man hell in Louisiana. There was...like man there was this fantastic unofficial like alliance between the black man and the red man in Louisiana. Like when them cats would skiddo from them horrible sugar plantations they would make a bee line for the Choctaw tribes up the river from New Orleans (gets up, his voice rising with excitement) and man...they would say to them red men, "let's go down and wipe them moth...slave-owners out, let's come up with a raid, I'll be yawll's guide", and man that's how it started, 200 years ago, this fantastic alliance between the blacks and the reds in Louisiana.
- SMITHERS: Why...why that's...that's fantastic. I never heard that before.
- JENNIE: I guess they don't teach that at Bryn Mawr.
- LEROY: But it's true! And the blacks of Louisiana, that is New Orleans, have honored this tradition ever since. Not the Creoles. Not those amalgamated colored who thought they were white and wanted to be white....
- ROBINSON: Of course.
- LEROY: (pointing . . . at Mr. Robinson) But the real blacks, and man, when they started Mardi Gras some of those blacks said we're gonna honor this alliance, we made with the red men, they our friend, we had a groovy thing together. The white man done messed over both of us, we gon dress up like Indians and fuck up the white man's mind. And man they dressed up in red man suits....You know what they wear, feathers and all that shit, and they come out hopping early in the morning, and it's old New Orleans tradition that they do this cause they wanted to fuck over the white man's mind. (jumps up) Man they come out like this (goes into a wild dance, lifting his feet high)

ROBINSON: Wow! It's so exciting.

LEROY: Don't interrupt. And man them cats is jumping around with their blades (still dancing like an Indian war dance), and people be crowding around them looking at their feathers, and when people ask them something they just say 'don't bother me nigger' and go on and on. Next thing you know they gone (knocks over a table.)

SMITHERS: Oh! My God!

JENNIE: Leroy!

ROBINSON: That's all right, Roy. That's all right. Don't worry about the table. It's just an old antique. My, you do that dance well.

LEROY: (picking up the table) Man, that scene...Man, that scene.....It's just toooooooooooooooooo Much. It should be studied. Got to be studied. Somebody just got to study it.

JENNIE: (rather apologetically) Leroy did get rather carried away.

ROBINSON: (after a long pause) Well.....I don't think....we have available.....what you requested. \$50,000 would simply be out of our reach. Do you feel.....you could revise your budget.....to say.....\$35,000?

LEROY: Yea

JENNIE: (cutting him off) I think.....I think we could. We could cut out some of the travel here, some of the travel there. It would still be a valuable study.

LEROY: How soon.....how soon.....how soon do you think we can be funded?

ROBINSON: (smiling) Oh not long. I would say a month. You'll hear from me in a formal letter.

JENNIE: You should come visit us in New Orleans. That is at Mardi Gras.

ROBINSON: I'd love to. But I'm so busy. You know how it is.

LEROY: We'll turn you on to some first-hand, raw experience.

JENNIE: We'd better be going now.

(they exit)

Later by themselves

JENNIE: (cracking up with laughter) That was too much. Man them jive hunkies believe anything. But you almost ruined it when you knocked over the table.

LEROY: Shit, I planned that. They think a nigger ain't dancing unless he knocks over something or cuts somebody. We got away clean. For a while there, when he started stammering out 'out of our reach' I thought I was gonna have to give that cat some bad action. We got away clean.

JENNIE: Two hundred years ago! Lord have mercy! I never heard anything like that in my life!

LEROY: Two hundred years, three hundred years. What's the difference

JENNIE: All I got to say, is Leroy you one hustlin motherfucker.

LEROY: It's an old ritual, baby. An old ritual.

(they exit)

APPENDIX IV

Poetry and Poetry Show Formats

We Are The Suns (Poetry Show) FST

(NOTE: I have two formats for We Are the Suns; one lists all the poems below and does not indicate performers; the other contains only those marked "B".)

1) Names, Places, Us (B)	Group
2) New Born (B)	Chakula
3) Little Black Boy	
4) My Brother (B)	Gwen
5) Look for the Children	
6) Image Poem (B)	Ben
7) Community Poem (B)	Chakula
8) Newspaper Ad (B)	Ben
9) The Choice	
10) Blk Girl (B)	John
11) Woman w/o Her Man (B)	Gwen
12) He Was My Brother (But He Done Her Wrong)	
13) 3 Shorts	
14) Legacy of a Brother (B)	Chakula
15) Christianized Niggers	
16) Just Another Jive-Ass Nigger	
17) The Poisons	
18) Autumn Leaves & Old Men (B)	John
19) Blk Eyes	Ben
20) Necessary Poem	Gwen
21) The Womb	
22) Let It Be, Blk Woman	
23) Oh Happy Days (I Want to Go Home)	
24) I Want Africa	
25) People of the Land (B)	John
26) We Are the Suns (B)	Chakula/Group

"Names/Places, Us" [Initials VF at end suggest Ferdinand/Salaam as author]

[C = CHAKULA, B = BEN, G = GWEN, J = JOHN, A = ALL]

Who did they kill? [C]
 What were the names of those Blacks they killed then?
 No one knows no one knows [ALL]
 no names no places just us here to witness

they are dead, killed only because their skins were [B]
 Black,
 we are here only because their skins were black [G]
 who did they kill what, were who, who they killed [C]
 murdered what, [A on "what, were who"]
 they killed you, who, who dead drift now who they killed
 are you hip to the middle passage how many of your peo-
 ple rest now at sea
 their bones & flesh chewed & eaten by fish abandoned to [J]
 to die in a turbulent sea
 whipped by the frenzied hands of white masters into
 their places
 what were the names of those Blacks they killed then [G]
 Who did they kill? What are you/
 WHAT ARE YOU BLACK PEOPLE: WHERE ARE YOU? [A]
 I often go down to the sea & stand looking out acro [B]
 wondering
 how many of my people rest now out there their bodies
 eaten by fish
 thrown there, in those waters from slave ships years ago
 abandoned to die in a turbulent sea whipped by the hands
 of white masters
 Who were they, what were the names of those Blacks they [C]
 killed then
 no one knows, no one knows they are dead, killed only [A on
 because their skins were Black [1st "no one knows"]
 one day bones will wash from the sea and rest gleaming
 in the sun on eastern seaboard shores
 let them then try to lie to you, let them try explaining [G]
 where those bones come from
 those bones/bones of our ancestors, dead, killed, murdered
 nameless Black people, countless Black people we do not
 even know now
 Black bones from the sea Black/bones [A]
 bones Black bones washed upon the shore/washed upon the [J]
 sand
 Black bones resting in the sand from the sea/no home no
 name just bones
 legs&arms, large, small bones/Black bones Black bones [B]
 thrown up from the sea
 Black bones from the sea, Black bones
 and when i die throw me too into that sea facing toward [C]
 Black Africa
 let fish eat my hair, and my eyes, and my Black flesh [G]
 let me go home again and if nct home at least to the [B]
 bottom where i know others rest
 let me join others like me dead at the bottom [A]
 Black forever more.

"New Born"

How to do you break the news
 To a newborn blk baby
 That after all that
 Fightin' and Strugglin'
 To come out the womb,
 He She
 Still ain't free?

"Little Blk Boy"

"Little Blk Boy Where Is
 Your Maw?"

"At Work."

"Then Little Blk Boy, Where Is
 Your Paw?"

"Who?"

"My Brother"

My brother is only four
 But he can greet you in swahili
 give you the 'handshake'
 can tell you who Coltrane is
 And if you don't sound exactly right
 He knows how to cut you
 He's very together

"Look for the Children"

Look for the children
 In any new place you go
 Look for the children
 and they will tell you what there is to know
 about that place
 they will tell you
 what the people are like
 they will tell you
 how welcomed you are
 and they may or may not be able to talk to you
 But any new place you go
 Seek them out

Look for the children
 for the children know all that there is to know
 the children know all that will ever be of any use
 in preserving the life, their lives and ours too
 on this twisted mad spinning planet
 look for the children
 and say quietly,
 "where y'at lil brer,
 whats going on?"

"Image Poem"

Our children/ tomorrows blk earth people/ need some images/
 Images of you/ me-us/what we are/
 What we look like in the morning/ serving them righteous
 food.
 What we look like sweeping the floor, carrying out the
 trash.
 (look out brothers, you gotta use both hands now).
 What we look like taking a bath, talking quietly to each
 other.
 Our childrens eyes are flash bulbs/ fast cameras
 Developing time/ after time/ faster than any film Polaroid
 has on
 the market.
 The pictures hanging upon the walls of their minds,
 And in the albums of their heads, are important pictures.
 We cant allow them to fade.
 I realize wearing a natural might not mean much to you,
 Just another fashion, a hip head way.
 But to a little girl with thick black hair it means our
 world,
 Our worlds life style for tomorrow,
 It means what we are and gone be.
 The next time you open your mouth, picture your child saying
 that.
 The next time, picture your child being just like you
 And see if that flash image you develop of yourself
Is the picture worth a thousand words
 Or just another Kodak brownie nigger snapshot.

"Community Poem"

so it came to pass that
 all
 the niggers on campus
 rapped
 & organized

& held meetings, meetings,
 meetings for days/
 and from the union of
 rapping & meeting & organizing
 came the fruit
 a jewel of a thought/
 that the campus?niggers
 wd go down
 wd go down
 w/their knowledge
 & book learning
 & organizational ability
 & dedication (unerasable Blkness)
 they wd go down &
 work for a semester (maybe two) in

THE COMMUNITY

So the collegians boarded a volkswagen bus & rode & rode & rode

'til finally someone realized that they were
 lost/

so one brother stuck his head (beret & all) out the window & asked the first dude he saw/ "excuse me sir but cd u tell me which way the COMMUNITY is?"/

whereupon the brother gave him the finger, laughed at him, jacked him for his money & stole the bus./

after walking awhile (in groups of 3 for protection) the campus niggers:

helped a old lady cross the street

played chinies w a group of 5 yr olds

picked trash out the gutter for 2 whole blocks

got woofed at 4 more times

& invited the community up to their school to

learn about blk people, their heritage & lifestyle./

and the campus niggers went back to school talkin about how worthwhile it was & howfulfilling it was & howthey were going to make it an annual thing.

[ts. Very likely by Salaam]

"Newspaper Ad"

3 boys needed to do porter work
 Ages 19-45. \$25.00 weekly
 (and all you can steal).

"Choice"

Unwed pregnant girls have two choices
 have a baby or have an abortion
 if no abortion and no husband
 cry Divine Conception.
 it was believed once,
 it can be believed twice.

"Black Girl"

Black girl
 Black girl
 tell me where in the world
 tell me where did you sleep
 last night

Did you sleep in the arms
 of a lonely black man
 whose time was lost
 in the cry of revolution
 the tears of struggle
 whose need to be
 to be strong
 denied the tender need
 that makes the shallow place
 in your own bosom sore
 is your bosom sore
 this morning

Black girl
 Black girl
 tell me where in the world
 tell me where did you sleep
 last night
 Did you sleep in a tarpaper house
 on a mississippi farm
 hungry and sad
 because the smiling children
 with bloated stomachs
 looked dead
 as they slept
 huddled in a mass
 on the blanket on the floor
 beside the pee stained bed you slept in
 the bed their mother made
 made fresh for you
 and you could think of nothing
 to say when she asked you
 why she should

register to vote
 did you wake up smiling
 this morning

Black girl
 Black girl
 tell me where in the world
 tell me where did you sleep last night
 Did you sleep
 on a couch in the house
 of a friend after many tired hours of driving
 highways dirt roads
 to come to this house
 where warm food
 and warm friends welcome
 the passing of a lonely
 black girl traveling
 did you dream
 when you slept on their couch
 did you wake
 from your dreaming
 with a start
 not quite understanding
 where the door should be or
 why the window had moved around behind you
 that you weren't in your own house
 at all
 did you stay awake then
 wondering
 who will be the father
 of the child you want to have
 not trusting the thought of
 any other family
 because you know the men
 you could love
 won't be there
 they'll be taken by the death
 in revolution
 they'll be taken by the death
 in revolution...
 or some other death

"one wins or dies . . ."

Black girl
 Black girl
 tell me where in the world
 tell me where did you sleep
 last night

"Woman Without Her Man"

A woman without her
 man ain't
nothing
A Blk woman without her
 man gets
to be like
 a vegetable
 not even fit to eat
She need that Blk man
 To hold on to
to take care of and when
he aint there
 she gotta go to him
even if he be miles
 away
 she gotta go
A woman without her man
 no matter how good
a woman
 aint
 nothing.

"He Was My Brother (But He Done Her Wrong)"

he was my brother
 (but he done
 her wrong)

no! my man/the fact that
yo blk rap
is so strong till
that you can
get next to
damn near any
sista you want to
ain't really
impressive
 i mean like any tom
 or dick
 can fuck in a hurry
i mean like getting over ain't
so hard
if you is quotin malcom
at the door
& fanon[?] in the bed
for my brother you
is a negro
& the little sistas

whose legs you
 have jacked up
 so high
 & whose nose
 you have opened up
 so wide
 believes in you/no
 us, we blk men
 but will she
 forever/will
 she always
 no, my man it ain't
 hip to feel that
 since there is
 more women than men
 you got to get around
 & your revolutionary
 thot ain't right
 or left (should be left out)
 for i heard your
 whisper into that
 sista's ear:
 "come on babe
 bee let's make
 bab-bees for the rev-vo-luuuuu-tion"
 makin them ain't the
 problem/but like
 who's gon be
 round to raise them
 when you is busy
 fuckin someone else

"3 Shorts"

Everywhere I go I hear talk of war.
 And when I hear brothers talk of war,
 I wonder which one are they referring to?

*

FAIR PLAY

I asked God to give me a hand
 And he dealt it from the bottom of the deck

*

(SING)

Oh say can you see
 By the dawns early light....
 THE PIGS CAN ... CAN YOU?

"Legacy of a Brother" by Renaldo Fernandez

Markings on a shitter wall
 crude markings
 carved with crude tools
 yeah, markings on a shitter wall

WILLIE WAS HERE IN '59

but Willie died in '63
 fighting VC
 and his body was never found
 Now...all that remains are
 crude markings on a shitter wall

WILLIE WAS HERE IN '59

please
 dont let um paint
 that wall

(Rpt. New Black Voices, Abraham Chapman, ed., p.380)

"Christianized Niggers"

Christianized niggers starve
 Don't fuck on Sunday
 Can't eat on Friday
 Christian nigger men beat christian nigger women.
 Christian niggers want to die
 live to die
 die for christ
 go to heaven
 live in hell
 White folks live
 niggers die
 Christian niggers live to die
 White folk live to see christian niggers die
 White folks say "My Christ"
 and they're right.

"On Men and Autumn Leaves"

As the leaves
scuttle about
in a fussy
October
back yard,
My own thoughts
suffer the whiff
and puff of breezes
inside me.

The old men
sitting by the
door of the
laundrymat
next door
to my house
sit all day
every day
with walking sticks
and crumpled hats
tobacco juice
and one always has
pee stained
trousers.

I wonder where they'll sit
when the winter that they're
waiting on
comes.
Their black and brown
and tan faces
remind me of the leaves
October breezes
toss around
the ground
and stick
in the corners of fences.

Is death a dreary
prospect now
on the other side
of sunshine
warming something?

What sun has warmed the stuff
these lives now withered
were made of
what loads these

bended shoulders
 have been made to
 carry.

what roads these
 slow feet
 have walked?

Old men and autumn
 leaves fuss about
 the coming winter
 till the summer's
 tale is told
 and
 I find my own thoughts
 curious to me
 like the old men are curious
 about the wind's
 song of
 winter's coming
 in October

"Blk Eyes"

Blk/eyes searching
 eyes
 a brother's eyes
 looking for
 what
 a response from
 an other
 eyes that contain 400
 yrs. of not being able
 to gaze into his woman's
 eyes
 eyes moving to regain
 that which always did
 rightfully belong to us.

[1st WOMAN]

Blk/eyes/brown [1st MAN]
 eyes round
 wide & wondering
 where, who
 why?
 a sister's eyes [2nd MAN]
 eyes filled w centuries
 of hurt, longing to be
 ccmforted
 eyes asking will her man
 claim him self--her self.

Blk/eyes
 meeting turning

away & meeting
 touching
 feeling [2nd WOMAN]
 living

coming
 together
 dangerously

to cause
 a
 destiny
 to be
 fulfilled &
 a nation
 to be
 born

(Copy in archives is from a journal--probably N'kombo)

"Necessary Poem"

Out of necessity
 came me
 black and ready to defend/defeat/dethrone
 and from the same pattern came he

and out of necessity
 we talked
 and dug the conversing of black to black

and out of necessity
 we touched
 gently, yeah just touched
 finger tips and eye lids and lips

and out of necessity
 we fucked
 and released all that had been withheld [sic]
 in negro fucks

and out of necessity
 we spent time together
 to talk and touch and fuck
 and fill empty spaces
 and hours and days
 turned to weeks and months
 and out of necessity we somehow ate
 and slept and read and worked
 and talked and touched and fucked

and out of necessity
 I watched the days of my monthly cycle
 and suspected it wasn't coming
 and it all became quite natural
 talking and touching and fucking
 and watching

and out of necessity
 we got a pad
 and a gun
 and a kitchen sink
 and an understanding
 of what to do when comps come

and out of necessity
 I wondered if he'd love me
 when I'm old and grey
 and he wondered why
 I needed to deal with that at all

and in the midst of the necessities
 of living and loving
 we are learning to be
 necessary

"The Womb"

There is life inside me
 Life
 It moves/and with every push you become me
 A thousand/million times/over and over again.
 In me is the seed of a nation
 U are me/I am U.
 Love I feel for you/the love I feel for you
 this love I feel for you/this love I have only for you
 U are my hope/my joy/my very soul itself.
 In your veins in the blood that will feed the nation
 in you I will carve something
 No man can destroy
 What I will give to you even death cannot take away
 U will be eternal
 I'll form and mold you into that image
 You will be the blk hope
 the wish
 the gold.

"Let It Be Black Woman"

Let it grow
 and grow
 expand & swell

Let it grow
 and grow
 expand & swell some more.

Don't stop it!

Don't
 let some avoidable complication
 be an obstacle
 to stand
 in the place of that growth either.

Let it grow
 until it is as firm & hard
 as an air packed basketball.

Let it expand & swell
 until it is as round & full
 as the revolving earth itself.

LET IT GROW WOMAN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Let it grow
 Strong with POWER
 WILL
 & BELIEF
 & healthy with KNOWLEDGE
 WISDOM
 & FORCE.

And finally when it has grown
 & expanded
 & swollen

to its fullest capacity
 Then let it FIGHT!!

Let the New Life Force
 fight its way through
 that narrow passage way
 to find air

FIND AIR AND BREATHE
 & LIVE
 & LOVE
 & CONQUER!!!!!

Let it be black woman.
 Let it be.
 LET THAT STRONG BLACK NATION BE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

"People of the Land"

This is the season
the planting/growing season
season of the crops.
of her children.

Now we have to turn the soil and
get rid of the dead clay
ruined by the trampling of foreign footsteps.
We have to plant the seeds we know
will yield the right fruit;
a fruit on which we can all live
and grow strong in the spirit of
Africa;
a fruit that brought us through the four
hundred year winter.

This is the season of the good harvest.
We will have a goodcrop this year
We will have a nation.

"We Are the Suns"

WE ARE THE SUNS

YES WE ARE

WE ARE THE SUNS AND SHINE WITH LOVELINESS
WE ARE THE VESSELS

YES WE ARE

WE ARE THE VESSELS AND CENTER OF LIFE
WE ARE THE PEOPLE AND THE SOUND OF THE PEOPLE AND THE BEAT
OF THE PEOPLE

YES WE ARE

AND THE BEING OF THE PEOPLE, YES WE ARE
AS LONG AS WE REMAIN OURSELVES, AS LONG AS WE DO NOT FORSAKE
WHAT WE ARE,
AS LONG AS WE DO NOT IMITATE OTHER ENERGIES, AS LONG AS WE
ARE.

YES WE ARE

WE ARE THE SUNS AND MOONS AND STARS AND SHINE WITH LOVELI-
NESS

SING MANY PRAISES

SING MANY PRAISES

PRAISES TO OUR PARENTS

WE ARE THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE EARTH, YES WE ARE

YES WE ARE

PRAISES TO OUR PARENTS PARENTS

WE ARE THE GRANDSONS AND GRANDDAUGHTERS OF THE BEAUTY OF THE
EARTH, YES WE ARE

WE ARE OF THE EARTH, YES WE ARE

PRAISE ONTO OUR ANCESTORS

APPENDIX V

(The following format, a draft from O'Neal's files, although identified by him as a poetry show format, may have been the basis for Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers?)

- OPENING: African Song--"Hurry Mama, Don't Let Them Catch You"
- NARRATION: Introduction--Africa Before White Man & Development of Slave Trade & Slave Factories
- SLAVE TRADER: Robert Hayden's "Secret Passage II" [undoubtedly Hayden's well known "Middle Passage," which is divided into three sections, is meant]
- NARRATION: Slavery in America--Destruction of Negro Family
- SONG: "Goodbye"--Mothers sang to their children on sale on the auction block in Americus, Georgia
- NARRATION: Protest of slavery: Suicides, riots, revolts, mutinies
- CAPTAIN: Amistad revolt
Hayden's "Secret Passage III" [sic] (spoken by white captain, integrated thru dance.)
- NARRATION: Continue protest. Introduce Harriet Tubman
- SONG & DANCE: "Wade in the Water"
- NARRATION: Continue protest: runaways before Underground Railroad.
- SONG & DANCE: "Steal Away"
- NARRATION: Abolitionists--Frederick Douglass (edited "4th of July" speech)
- BLACK OUT: DRUM ROLL
- SONG: OFFSTAGE: "No More Auction Block for Me"

- NARRATION: Introduces 3-generation family from Civil War: grandmother, today's grandson & daughter
- GRANDMOTHER: Covers Civil War, Reconstruction, KKK terrorism, sellout, Negro church through backs, songs & drama
- NARRATION: Nigeria [?] -- Booker T. Washington & DuBois Debate (2 readers)
- NARRATION: NAACP & World War I
- DUBOIS: Riots & the War
- NARRATION: Lynching riots of 1918 & 1919
- SONG: "Southern Gentle Lady" (choral reading)
- NARRATION: Depression Blues [?]. Introduces the mother
- MOTHER: Adam Clayton Powell marches & M. M. Bethune & hard times
- DANCE & POEM: Claude McKay's "Outcast"
- NARRATION: Jazz, post-war boom, Negro protest
- JAZZ NUMBER
- NARRATION: Introduces son
- SON: Goes from 1954 to 1964 & Selma March (includes flashbacks of mass meeting, argument w/family). Expresses bitterness over limiting Civil Rights Movement, draft notice [& remembers - ?] Malcolm X's "Ballots & Bullets" speech (separate reader)
- SON: Statement of condition: riots, ghettos, lack of jobs, Georgia elections, too many blacks Vietnam--What will HE do? Where do we go from here?
- NARRATION: No one answer--Through study, understanding of culture & history heretofore denied us we might each find ways to develop society where we have "The Right to Be."
- SONG: "Ain't We Got a Right to the Tree of Life"

APPENDIX VI

Where Is the Blood of Your Fathers?--ProloguesProbable 1st State:

You act as though, you were made for the special use of these devils, You act as though your daughters were born to pamper the lusts of your masters and overseers. And worse than all, you tamely submit while your lords tear your wives from your embraces and defile them before your eyes. In the name of God, we ask, are you men? Where is the blood of your fathers? Has it all run out of your veins? Awake, awake; millions of voices are calling you! Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves. Heaven, as with a voice of thunder, calls on you to arise from the dust.

- from "An address to the Slaves of the United States", a speech delivered by Henry H. Garnet at the National convention of August 1843 in Buffalo, N.Y.

NOTE:

Drummers and musicians play happy drum music in front of place where performance is going on. Draw a crowd and make the people want to dance. Actors join the crowd of people who listen to the drummers. They do what the crowd is doing; if the crowd listens they listen, if the crowd dances they dance.

Musicians take prominent place in theater. Continue music.

After a while male actor dances to center stage. Commands the attention of all by his dance. He dances around and on a large black box. From the top of the box, he wheels to a quick stop, raises an arm and commands all to "STOP"! Everything stops instantly. He surveys the audience. He thanks the musicians. He sits on the box. Otherwise the stage is bare.

MALE ACTOR:

Thank you for coming to join our play. We have worked very hard for a long time to prepare it for you and we are very happy that you thought enough of it to come tonite. There

are two or three things that you need to know in order to understand the play, however.

To begin with, take the play's title - Where is the Blood of Your Fathers? This is a quote from a speech made by a young Black preacher in 1843. You can see the section of his speech that this comes from on the front of your program and you'll hear an actor do it in a moment.

The rather long subtitle is important too: A documentary examination of the role that Blacks in the Gulf South played in the effort to secure their freedom from the oppression of slavery in the twenty years before the Civil War. Everything that we present this evening is really true, it really happened. The words were really spoken in real life. Everything comes from historical documents and records of these people and these events.

Occasionally it will be necessary to stop and explain something - when we use our own words we'll wear a thing like this.

(He reaches in the box, takes out one of the things that a priest wears around his neck and puts in on)

Now I have to tell you who I am.

I am the prop master. We're going to use different things to make the story seem more alive to you. When an actor needs a prop or a piece of costume, I'll be in charge of giving it to him. Sometimes I'll stop and explain things to you if it seems necessary. When I'm not needed I'll get out of the way.

Finally I want to tell you why we're doing this play. There's an old African Proverb which goes "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." In order for us to know where we're going we have to know where we came from to get to where we are now. Too many of us believe that Malcolm X was the first Black man who called for Blacks to fight, too many of us think that Black people didn't do anything but wait for the white folk to set us "free".

Once you get into it, it's easy to see that the main thing that's been on our minds since the beginning of oppression has been how to get the white people off our backs.

(Music starts)

It's time to start the story. Congo Square!

(Actors dance from places in audience to get costume bits from Prop Master - An old hat, a ragged shirt, and trousers, a piece of cloth to wrap a skirt)

PROP MASTER:

The slaves worked from can to can't. They saw the sun set fire to cane and cotton fields and the moon found hungry black children waiting in and near dirt floored shack[s] waiting for a mother to come from white houses on hills to suckle them on tired breasts at least six days a week.

But Sunday afternoons in New Orleans were special! In the place on the edge of the old city, now called Beauregard Square, on Sunday afternoon they were left their only chance to get together alone.

There was music, and dancing, a chance to remember... Africa perhaps. And sometimes a chance to talk.

(Two actors sit...talking quite seriously and quietly about an escape plan. All the others dance with a terrible abandon. . . . It's kind of like blues...a joyful celebration of a sad occasion. The Dance goes to terrible proportions til a white man approaches. A lookout gives a signal. The two actors involved in conversation stop talking and join the dancing.

As the white man enters, the music makes a change. The Dance changes to an imitation of what white people do. It matches the description of what the white man describes.

WHITE MAN:

[Blank space]

ACTOR: (Wearing sash)

Between 18__ and 18__ it was the custom for Northern Blacks to meet together to plan strategies for the race. At one such convention between August 21-24 in 1843 held in Buffalo, N.Y. Delegates including such outstanding men as Frederick Douglas [sic], William Wells Brown and others. A 27 year old presbyterian preacher named Henry Highland Garnet, delivered a very militant speech at the convention which failed by one vote of being adopted as the sentiments of the convention.

[Male actor wearing shirt, tie and jacket goes to downstage podium and delivers Garnet speech.] (ts, O'Neal files)

Probable 2nd State -- © 1972 by the Free Southern Theater

In the name of God, we ask, are you men? Where is the blood of your fathers? Has it all run out of your veins? Awake, awake; millions of voices are calling you! Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves. Heaven, as with a voice of thunder, calls on you to arise from the dust.

- from "An address to the Slaves of the United States", . . . by Henry H. Garnet

NOTE:
Drummers and musicians play happy drum music.... [Note continues as in state #1.]

MALE ACTOR:

Thank you for coming to join our play.... [Continues as above for first two paragraphs.]

This is a documentary theater piece. That means that all the material in the play is taken from real historical documents. We have studied and found copies of speeches, letters, and books written by people who actually had the experiences we're going to show you. Everything that we present this evening is really true, it really happened - Check It Out! It's in the book.

(He reaches in the box, takes out one of the things that a priest wears....)

Now I have to tell you who I am.

I am the prop master. We're going to use different things to make the story live for you.... [Continues as above through introduction, dancing on of other actors and Prop Master's first paragraph.]

Beauguard Square, on Sunday afternoons they were left their only chance to get together alone....sometimes.... [Continues as above through white man's entrance.]

ACTOR:

The white man comes! The white man comes!

WHITEMAN:

(with pencil and pad furiously taking notes. Off stage voice repeats what he writes)

Tho they have the means to achieve all manner of contrast that discord can furnish, the African can see no end to the ecstasy born of maddening repetition [sic].

And yet there is entertaining variety. Where? In the dance! There is constant exhilarating novelty - endless invention - in the turning, bowing, arm-swinging posturing and leaping of the dancers.

(The dance desolves [sic]. Singing "when the tater's cooked don't you eat it up", some of the actors move into and through the audience.)

ACTOR:

When the tater's cooked don't you eat it up. Often Mammy's in kitchen poisoned the food they served in the Big House. Tho our writer didn't understand. The warning was understood by those it was intended for.

[Continues with introduction of Garnet and his speech.]

Possible 3rd State:SCENE 1 - (Outside Theater)

[Same instructions for musicians and actors as above]

SCENE 2 - (Inside Theater)

[Continues as above through actor's dancing on and stopping music.]

STAGE MANAGER 1

Thank you for coming to join our play.... and we are very happy that you thought enough of it to come tonite.

STAGE MANAGER 2

This is a documentary theater piece.... It's in the book.

STAGE MANAGER 1 and 2

Now, I have to tell you who I am.

STAGE MANAGER

I am the Stage Manager.... [Continues as above through introduction to Congo Square which is now designated Scene 3.]

STAGE MANAGER 2

Slaves worked from can to can't.... There was music and dancing, a chance to remember home.....to remember Africa. To make plans for freedom.

[Continues as above through the dance to and explanation of "When the tater's cooked...."]

Actors perform a song and dance for the actor in white masks. No music, just clapping of hands and the stomping of feet. Finally, somebody picks up the following lyric

ACTOR

Once upon the heel tap,
And then upon the toe,
And every time I turn around
I jump Jim Crow

ACTOR

Sister, you better watch how you walk on the cross
Yo, your foot might skip and your soul git lost.

ACTOR

Juba dis, Juba dat;
Juba skin a yeller cat
Juba, Juba

This song continues until the white masked actor exits.

SOLO VOICE (Mournful)

My Old Mistus promise me
Fo she died, she'd set me free
She lived so long that her head got bald
And she give out the notion of dyin at all.

SOLO VOICE

My Old Master promise me
When he died to set me free
A dose of poison helped him along
May the devil preach his funeral song

(Laughter brings the dancing to a gradual stop-the attitude gradually becomes one of worship.

(Scene 4 is a church scene.)

Possible 1977 VersionACT I - Scene I (Prologue)

The entire company is placed strategically on stage. The male and female actors are involved in improvisational work; mourning, hungry, being whipped etc. All other actors address them.

ACTOR 4

Where is the Blood of your fathers?

ACTORS - ALL

Has it all run out of your veins?

ACTOR 3

You act as though you were made for the special use of these devils.

ACTOR 6

You act as though your daughters were born to pamper the lusts of your masters and overseers.

ACTOR 7

And worse than all you tamely submit while your lords tear your wives from your embraces and defile them before your eyes.

ACTORS-ALL

In the name of God...we ask, Are you men? Are you men? (audience) Where is the Blood of your fathers (done in a round to the audience)

ACTOR 4 (to couple)

Your intellect has been destroyed as much as possible, and every ray of light they have attempted to shut out from your minds. (to audience) The oppressors themselves have become involved in the ruin. They have become weak, sensual, and rapacious - they have cursed you - they have cursed themselves - they have cursed the earth which they have trod.

ACTOR 7

Fellow men; patient sufferer! Behold your dearest rights crushed to the earth! See your sons murdered, and your wives, mothers and sisters doomed to prostitution....let it no longer be a debatable question whether it is better to choose liberty or death!

ACTOR 3

You are not certain of heaven, because you suffer yourselves to remain in a state of slavery, where you cannot obey the commandments of the Sovereign of the universe!

ACTOR 6

It is impossible, like the children of Israel to make a grand exodus from the land of bondage. The Pharoahs are on both sides of the Blood-Red-Waters.

ACTOR 4

Your condition does not absolve you from your moral obligation.

ACTORS-ALL

Neither God, nor Angels, or Just Men, command you to suffer for a single moment. Therefore it is your solemn and imperative duty - to use every means. Both moral...intellectual...and physical that promises success.

Chorus

Tell me where is the Blood of your fathers?
 Tell me where is the blood of your fathers?
 Tell me where is the blood of your fathers?
 That are dead?
 Has it all run out of your veins?
 Has it all run out of your veins?
 Has your fathers blood run out of your veins

Millions of voices are calling for freedom
 Millions of voices are calling for freedom
 Millions of voices are calling for freedom
 Everyday....and from their graves
 Millions of voices are calling for freedom
 Millions of voices are calling for freedom
 Millions of voices are calling for freedom
 Every day.....

1st VERSE

Hear the cries, the cries
 of your poor.....children
 Remember the stripes, the rope
 that your father bore
 Think of the torture and disgrace
 Your mothers had to face
 Every, every, every, single day

2nd VERSE

{There is no hope of redemption
 without the shedding of blood
 But if you must die
 let it all come, come at once!
 Rather die free men
 Than live to be a slave [Marking indicates possible
 live to be a slave in the grave.) deletion.]

ACTOR 1

This is a documentary theater piece. All the material in the play is taken from real historical documents. We have studied and found copies of speeches, letters, and books written by people who actually had the experiences we're going to show you.

ACTOR 2

Everything that we present this evening is really true, it really happened - check it out!

ACTOR 1

There's an old African proverb which goes.....

COMPANY

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."

ACTOR 3

In order for us to know where we're going, we have to know where we came from.

ACTOR 2

Too many of us believe that Malcolm X was the first Black man who called for Blacks to fight. . . . It's easy to see that the main thing that's been on our minds since the beginning of our oppression has been how to resist that oppression. To be free!

ACTOR 4

Let the story unfold.

ACTOR 5

Yeah let it be told. (music starts)

ACTOR 1

Congo Square!

Possible 1977, or Earlier, VersionPROLOGUE

There is an instrumental prologue while the audience finds the space. The actors are in the house. When the action is ready to start the song starts in the house. The actors find the stage singing:

Chorus

[As in above version]

(Simultaneously the voices from the epilogue speak from the record of history, movement, music.)

THE VOICES OF HISTORY

ALL ACTORS

Hear the cries, the cries
of your poor.....children

Remember the stripes, the rope
that your father bore
Think of the torture and disgrace
Your mothers had to face
Every, every, every single day

(Pause)

Actor

There is no hope of redemption)	
without the shedding of blood.)	
But if you must die)	Choric repetition
let it all come, come at once!)	
Rather die free men)	
Than live to be a slave)	

(Pause)

ACTOR 1

This is a documentary theater piece. All the material in the play is taken from real historical documents. We have studied and found copies of speeches, letters, and books

written by people who actually had the experiences we're going to show you.

ACTOR

What we present this evening is a summation of our examination of the 30 years of struggle leading up to the war between the class of southern planters and the class of northern industrialists, called the Civil War.

ACTOR

We believe that a people ignorant of their past are doomed to be victims of those who would oppress them.

ACTOR

We believe that the history of the Black nation in America has been intentionally hidden.

ACTOR

Distorted.

ACTOR

Destroyed wherever and whenever possible.

ACTOR

In order to maintain the oppression of the Black Nation in America.

ACTOR

We believe that this has been done to protect and serve the interests of the ruling classes of America who form a series of even smaller, ever more exclusive circles.

ACTOR

The class of merchants gave way to the class of planters, the class of planters gave way to the class of national industrialists, the national class of industrialists gave way to the international class of imperialists.

ACTOR

They have used the vicious tools of racism to keep us divided from our friends.

ACTOR

They have tried to destroy the knowledge and the lessons of our history.

ACTOR

We believe that knowledge of the truth can be a great weapon in our struggle.

ACTOR

Too many of us believe that Malcolm X was the first black man who called on Black folk to fight. Too many people think that Black people didn't do anything but wait for "de Yankees soldiers" to set us free.

ACTOR

There's an old African proverb which goes.....

ALL

If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.

ACTOR

Once you check it out, it's easy to see that the main thing that's been on our minds since the beginning of our oppression in this country has been how to resist that oppression. How to be free!

ACTOR

Let the story unfold.

ACTOR

Yeah, let it be told!

ACTOR

Congo Square! (music)

(The Congo Square scene, Scene 1, is the same as in the previous version through the "tater" song and warning. Then it ends with with the two short verses about "My old missus" and "My old master.")

1977 Version

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Prologue - MOVEMENT 1

Drummers & musicians play happy music in front of the place where the performance is going on. Draw the crowd into the sharing, into one place. Let them focus. Create a single rhythm for all to share in and tune to. If there can be dancing, let there be dancing. The mood should be joyous and celebratory.

The actors join the crowd. They do what the crowd is doing; if the crowd is listening they listen; if the crowd dances, they dance. It is important to begin by being with and working with the crowd of people. One of the main aims of the experience is to win an understanding of the point that common ordinary people (as opposed to "great men"), in their collective action, are the ones who make history.

At the appropriate time, the actors begin the welcome song - (Aki wowo or some other song of African motif). During the welcome song the actors bring the stage to life, coming from the audience. They continue the dancing until the audience is fully focused. On signal from the song leader the song is ended. Wait for silence.

In the stillness, all but the musicians work for a total freeze. One then two persons break the freeze. They work from images of isolation, aleness [sic] in a hostile place. The frozen figures are made into slave traders, slave ship captains, auctioners [sic], slave holders, slave drivers, patrollers, etc. The effect should be an impressionistic emotional summary of the slave ex-perience that results finally in the breaking of the slave. The two persons portraying the slaves end the sequence nearly defeated, docile.

As they are about to resign themselves to utter failure firm but still quiet voices inquire without condemnation "Where is the Blood of your Fathers?" The question develops into the song chant. As the song develops the two find courage and hope in the discovery that others who have shared their burdens and struggles have taken the time to criticize and to help them. The two are made a part of the group and collectively the song becomes an anthem of resolve to struggle on til victory is won.

[Chorus and verses as above until the 2nd verse]:

There is no hope of redemption
 without the shedding of blood!
 But if you must die
 let it all come at once!
 Rather die free men then live to be slaves!
 Where is the Blood of your fathers?

ACTOR 1

We are happy to be with you here in (NAME, PLACE, and OCAS-
 SION [sic]). We are all members of a Black Theater workshop
 of the Free Southern Theater. Since March we have been
 working and studying together. Today/tonight we have come
 to share with you some of the fruits of our study and work
 together.

ACTOR 2

The purpose of our work and study together has two parts.
 First we are trying to understand how art in general and
 theater art in particular can be useful as a powerful weapon
 in the struggle for the liberation of Black people in
 America and oppressed people thruout the world. At the same
 time we are trying to develop and improve our skills as
 theater artists so that we can carry out theater work that
 genuinely supports the work of the Black Liberation struggle
 while we entertain you at the same time.

ACTOR 3

Today/tonite we're going to share with you a portion of a
 piece that we're still working on. The name of the piece is
 "Where is the Blood of your Fathers?" That title comes from
 a speech made by a very militant young Black preacher in
 1843 named Henry Highland Garnett. We'll do some of that
 speech for you in a few moments.

ACTOR 4

"Blood," as we call it is a Documentary theater peice [sic].
 By that we mean that all the material in the peice is taken
 directly from historical documents. We are using letters,
 diaries, court records, speeches, first hand reports of
 people who were directly involved to try to get a clear
 understanding of what really did happen.

ACTOR 5

What we do in the future is determined, in large part by how we understand what happened in the past to bring us to where we are now. What we have begun to discover is that the schools we've gone to have given us incomplete and wrong information about what has happened.

ACTOR 3

The idea that most of us get is that Black people never did that much about trying to change things in this country until the Civil Rights movements of the 1960's and that only lasted for a few years. But we'[r]e beginning to see that that's simpl[y] not true.

ACTOR 5

For example in "Blood" we have aimed to deal with the period between 1827 and 1860. We want to find out what Black Folk really did: is it true that the slaves were happy and carefree? Did our great grandparents and their parents before them just sit idly by while others debated, struggled and fought out the issues that determined their fate? [Or] did we play a decisive role in making the Civil War happen?

ACTOR 1

When did the Black Liberation struggle begin? What roads have we traveled to come to where we are now? Are there lessons to be learned from the experience of those who have gone before us that might help us now?

ACTOR 6

There's an old African Proverb which goes, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."

ACTOR 7

In order to know where you're going you have to know where you come from!

ACTOR 8

Once you checked it out, its easy to see that the main thing thats been on our mind since the begining [sic] of our oppres-sion in this country has been how to resist that oppression. How to be free.

ACTOR

Let the story unfold!

ACTOR

Yeah, let it be told.

ACTOR

Congo Square!

(Music Starts, Movement starts)

(Congo Square scene continues as above in the version containing the "Juba" song. After the verse about "My Old Master," the "chorus picks up the melody and the blues line converts into a near long-meter blues moan.")