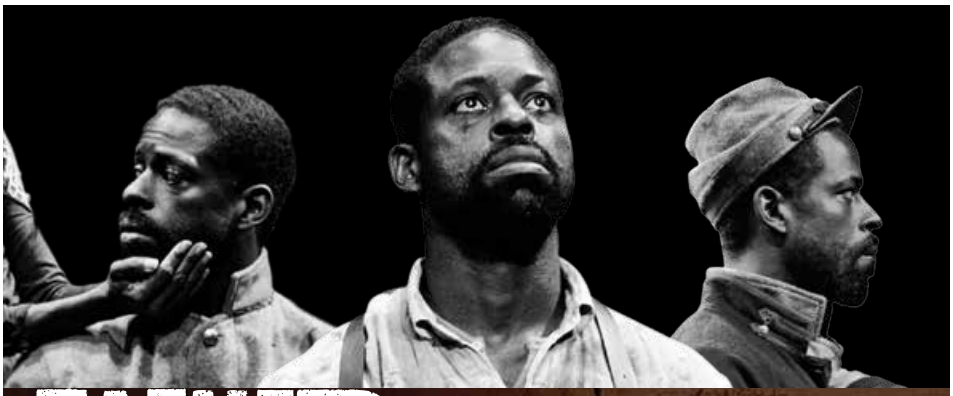
Center Theatre Group
L.A.'s Theatre Company

Discovery Guide

YOUNG AUDIENCES PROGRAM



FATHER COMES HOME FROM THE WARS

Parts 1, 2 & 3

BY **SUZAN-LORI PARKS** DIRECTED BY **JO BONNEY**
MARK TAPER FORUM APRIL 5–MAY 15, 2016
213.972.4400 **CenterTheatreGroup.org**

Sterling K. Brown. PHOTOS BY JOAN MARCUS.

Welcome to Center Theatre Group and *Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)* by Pulitzer Prize winner Suzan-Lori Parks, the opening trilogy in a nine-play cycle that will take us on a journey from the Civil War to our present-day world.

Hero, a slave, is offered his freedom if he will go with his master to serve in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy. Hero must decide whether to stay or go, and whether to believe in the possibility of freedom or to realize that this may be another empty promise.

Before we tell you more, take a moment and think about freedom. What does freedom mean to you? What would you risk for freedom?

Father Comes Home From The Wars uses the power of theatre to dive deeply into our country's history and asks the audience to look honestly at our legacy of slavery and its connection to race and inequality in our country today. And the play explores honesty itself, asking us to think about what it means to be honest, what it means to be true, what it means to be faithful.

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers. See what questions this information raises for you and what discoveries the performance provides. Thank you so much for joining us for *Father Comes Home From The Wars*. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre.

"BOTH CHOICES ARE
NOTHING MORE THAN THE SAME COIN
FLIPPED OVER AND OVER
TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN
AND THE COIN AIN'T EVEN IN YOUR POCKET."

—Father Comes Home From The Wars (Part 1)

Center Theatre Group
L.A.'s Theatre Company
A non-profit arts organization

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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CenterTheatreGroup.org/Education

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FATHER COMES HOME FROM THE WARS

Parts 1, 2 & 3

In *Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, playwright Suzan-Lori Parks creates an epic story.

While Parts 1, 2, and 3 are full-length plays that stand on their own, they are also part of a nine-play cycle about three African-American families and the wars that surround their lives. Parts 1 through 3 take place during the Civil War. Parts 4 through 9 will follow the descendants of these Civil War characters up to the present day.

L TO R: Louis Cancelmi as Smith and Sterling K. Brown as Hero in the Public Theater production of *Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*. PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

PART 1

A Measure of a Man

Early spring 1862, an hour before dawn.
West Texas, a plantation.

It is a year after the Civil War has started, and a Chorus of Slaves place bets on whether Hero, a fellow slave, will go to war with the Boss-Master to fight for the Confederacy. The Oldest Old Man, who has been like a father to Hero, comes with the news that Hero's dog—Odd-see—is missing. Hero, who has been helping the Boss-Master get ready to go to war, enters. The Oldest Old Man and the Chorus of Slaves are anxious to know his decision. Hero hasn't made up his mind. Penny, the woman who lives with Hero, arrives. She also wants to know if Hero has made a decision. Hero is torn. Then Homer, a fellow slave, confronts Hero with a secret Hero has been keeping. This pushes Hero to make a decision. Hero will to go to war.

PART 2

A Battle in the Wilderness

Late summer 1862.
A wooded area in the South.

As cannon fire explodes in the distance, the Colonel—the Boss-Master the slaves talked about in Part 1—tries to convince, his prisoner, Union soldier Captain Smith, that owning slaves is wonderful. The Colonel insists that Smith would love it. Smith knows he would not. Hero returns from gathering firewood and lets the Colonel know that both the Union and Confederate armies are coming their way. While Hero makes dinner, the Colonel bullies Smith into guessing how much money Hero is worth. After dinner, the Colonel leaves to scout the approaching armies. Hero and Smith have a dangerous talk about freedom. The Colonel returns, informing Smith and Hero that they are moving out to rejoin the approaching Southern troops.

PART 3

The Union of My Confederate Parts

Fall 1863. An hour before sunset.
West Texas, the same plantation as Part 1.

A Chorus of Runaways talk about escaping that night. They debate whether Homer and Penny will go with them. Homer enters with food for the Runaways' journey. He is torn. He wants to run, but he doesn't want to leave Penny, who is still in love with Hero. Penny comes with news that the Boss-Master/Colonel has been killed in the war. Penny and Homer debate leaving with the Runaways. Penny is conflicted. Is Hero coming, or did he die with the Boss-Master? Odd-see, Hero's dog, returns with the news that Hero is alive and on his way home. Penny's decision is made—she is staying. Homer has decided as well—he will leave that night. Hero comes home from the war. He has changed his name to Ulysses. He has presents and an announcement.

The Title(s)

The title a playwright chooses can capture the feeling or the essence of the story. The title can make an audience member curious to know more.

Father Comes Home From The Wars, (Parts 1, 2 & 3) has not just one title but four titles. One for the whole play and a different title for each of the three parts:

Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)

A Measure of a Man (Part 1)

A Battle in the Wilderness (Part 2)

The Union of My Confederate Parts (Part 3)

- **What feelings or images come to mind when you read these titles?**
- **Is there one title that makes you the most curious?**
- **Why do you think the playwright gave her play four different names?**

WHO'S WHO

HERO
A slave. The main character in *Father Comes Home from the Wars* (*Parts 1, 2 & 3*).

PENNY
A slave. Hero's woman.

THE OLDEST OLD MAN
A slave who has been like a father to Hero.

HOMER
A slave. He has one foot and is in love with Penny.

A CHORUS OF LESS THAN DESIRABLE SLAVES

THE COLONEL
The Boss-Master. A Colonel in the Confederate Army.

SMITH
The Colonel's prisoner. A Captain in the Union Army.

A CHORUS OF RUNAWAY SLAVES

ODD-SEE
Hero's dog. His eyes go this way and that.

ULYSSES
Hero from *Parts 1 & 2*. He has changed his name.

Sterling K. Brown as Hero (CENTER) and the cast of *Father Comes Home From The Wars* (*Parts 1, 2 & 3*) at the Public Theater. PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3) is both a personal and epic story. Suzan-Lori Parks was inspired by her father, a career army officer, who was going to and coming home from wars throughout her childhood.

Influences/Inspirations

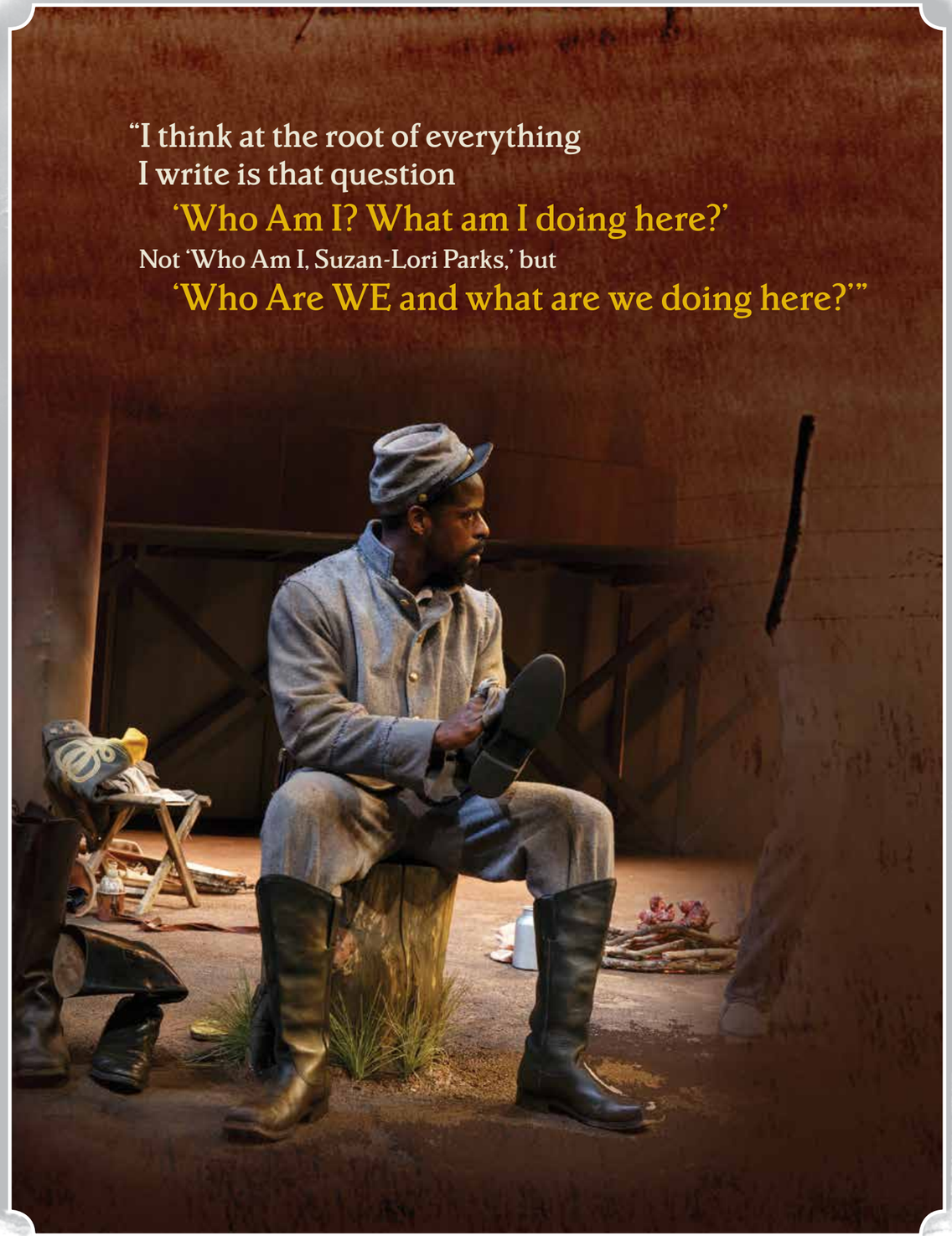
Another ingredient in this heroic play of enslaved Americans is the Greek story *The Odyssey*. Ms. Parks draws ideas from this ancient poem and also incorporates elements from Greek theatre that were popular when *The Odyssey* was written.

In the time of the Greeks, epic poems were not read but were performed with music, like spoken word poetry today. Suzan-Lori Parks wrote the songs in *Father Comes Home From The Wars*, and her music takes its inspiration from the blues, spirituals, and bluegrass. The music acts like a chorus weaving in and out of the action and commenting on the story. The language the characters speak adds another layer of musicality to the play. Ms. Parks' words use rhythm and repetition to give the play a pulse and a heartbeat.

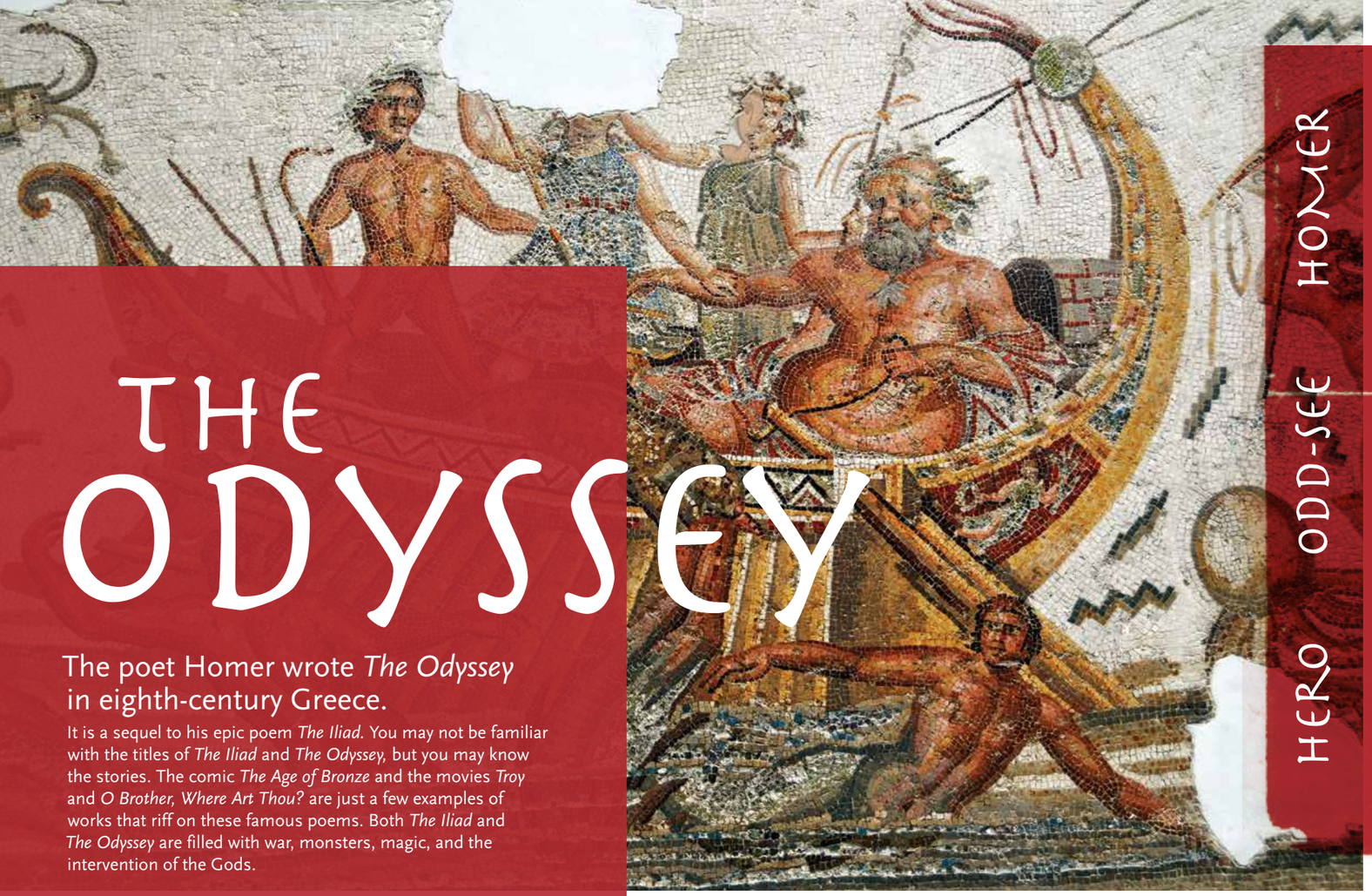
Other epic work woven into *Father Comes Home From The Wars* include *The Oresteia*, *The Mahabharata*, and August Wilson's *Fences*. Like other great artists before her, Ms. Parks weaves together many influences to create work that speaks deeply to the human journey of both the characters onstage and the people in the audience.

Music...
"the river that the words float on."
–Suzan-Lori Parks

"I think at the root of everything I write is that question
'Who Am I? What am I doing here?'
Not 'Who Am I, Suzan-Lori Parks,' but
'Who Are WE and what are we doing here?'"



Sterling K. Brown. PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.



THE ODYSSEY

The poet Homer wrote *The Odyssey* in eighth-century Greece.

It is a sequel to his epic poem *The Iliad*. You may not be familiar with the titles of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, but you may know the stories. The comic *The Age of Bronze* and the movies *Troy* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* are just a few examples of works that riff on these famous poems. Both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are filled with war, monsters, magic, and the intervention of the Gods.

"*Father Comes Home From The Wars* is inspired by my dad. It was not inspired by *The Odyssey*. *The Odyssey* is in our drinking water. So you get bits and pieces and shards and shrapnel of a lot of things. *The Odyssey* is a big thing you get. It's a big thing that people latch on to and think I'm doing a re-telling of *The Odyssey*. No, I'm not. That's not where I'm coming from. It's *Star Wars!* It's Ulysses S. Grant." —Suzan-Lori Parks

- What do you think Suzan-Lori Parks means when she says, "*The Odyssey* is in our drinking water"?
- How do stories become part of our heritage? How do these shared stories shape our lives and our world?
- What stories did you grow up being told? What stories are in your family's or culture's "drinking water"?

HERO ODD-SEE HOMER

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In *Father Comes Home From The Wars* (*Parts 1, 2 & 3*) you will meet characters whose names borrow from both the Greeks and the Civil War. There is a dog named Odd-see, a play on the words of the title of *The Odyssey*. A character is named Homer, the poet who wrote *The Odyssey*. The names give us clues about the characters and help connect this story with other stories in our shared history.

HERO: A slave. The main character in *Father Comes Home From The Wars*

- In Greek mythology a priestess of Aphrodite who killed herself when her lover Leander was drowned.
- In mythology, a man of extraordinary strength and courage, celebrated for his deeds, often the offspring of a god and a mortal.
- The principal male character in a novel, play, movie, or TV show.

ULYSSES: Hero from Parts 1 & 2. He has changed his name.

- The Roman/Latin version of Odysseus. The clever, resourceful, and mythological hero in Homer's *The Odyssey*.
- The first name of Civil War General Ulysses S. Grant, who became the 18th president of the United States.

PENNY: A slave. Hero's woman.

- A nickname for *Penelope*—the wife of Odysseus/Ulysses in *The Odyssey*. Penelope waits 10 years for her husband to return from war.

HOMER: A slave. He has one foot and is in love with Penny.

- Eighth-century Greek poet famous for the epic stories *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Odd-see: Hero's dog. His eyes go this way and that.

- *The Odyssey* (Odd-see) is an epic poem written by Homer in eighth-century Greece—about a man and his adventures trying to get back home after a long war.
- A long wandering or voyage, usually marked by many changes of fortune.

THE CHORUS

In *Father Comes Home From The Wars*, you will see something that is not used often in contemporary theatre: a chorus.

A chorus was a part of drama in ancient Greece: a group of performers comprised of 12–50 members. The chorus danced, sang, or spoke their lines in unison and sometimes wore masks. Their speaking was rhythmic, and they often communicated in song.

- The chorus would provide commentary on the actions and events that were taking place onstage. This would help create a deeper connection between the audience and the characters.
- They controlled the mood of the play, highlighting certain parts, narrating offstage action, and telling the audience what they could expect to see onstage.
- The chorus represented the values and views of the society. Like our modern-day media, they set and advocated certain moral and cultural standards.

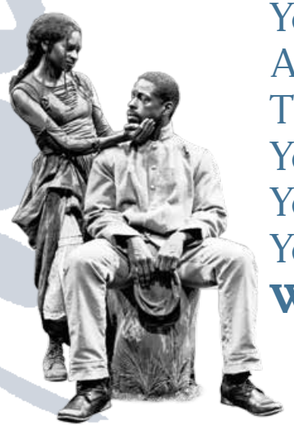
In *Father Comes Home From The Wars* there are two choruses: a Chorus of Less Than Desirable Slaves and a Chorus of Runaway Slaves. While you watch the play, notice the different ways the chorus is used.

How does the chorus help deepen your understanding of the story and the characters?

"Old stories, they guide us

Each its own north star
You don't know them
And how could you?
They happened so far back
Years ago
Years and years ago
Years and years and years ago
What could they have to do with you?"

—Father Comes Home From The Wars (Part 3)



Jenny Jules and Sterling K. Brown. PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

In *Father Comes Home From The Wars*, playwright Suzan-Lori Parks starts with a moment in history—the Civil War—that happened over 150 years ago. She explores this history with the help of an even older story: the Greek epic poem *The Odyssey*.

Without ever leaving the 1860s, *Father Comes Home From The Wars* shows us a straight line from slavery and the Civil War to the reality of inequality and injustice for many people in our country today. The play asks us to think about the human cost of oppression and the toll it takes on an individual and a group of people. Can we ever be free from our history?

Suzan-Lori Parks gives these large questions human faces. The characters we meet know that change is coming. The characters wonder what the future will look like. Will things actually get better? What is the promise of freedom and will that promise be kept?

And as an audience, we are living the answers. We know that while we have made progress, many things still need to change before the promise of freedom for all Americans is fully realized.

While you watch the play, notice the choices that the creative team weaves into the story to let us know that this is both about history and about our lives today. Listen for the modern language and slang that the characters use. Watch for how the designers blend historical style with modern elements to link the problems of the characters during the Civil War to issues that we are still dealing with today.

- **How do old stories guide us?**
- **Do you think we can learn from history or are we doomed to repeat it?**
- **What does this history have to do with you?**

"Oh yes, this is an account, not of what happened but of what was. **Or an account of what is."** *—Suzan-Lori Parks*

SLAVERY

Slave. *Noun.*
1. A person who is the property of and wholly subject to another; a bondservant.
2. A person entirely under the domination of some influence or person.

Slavery. *Noun.*
1. The condition of a slave; bondage.
2. The keeping of slaves as a practice or institution.

"IF SLAVERY IS NOT WRONG, NOTHING IS WRONG."
—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The institution of slavery is as old as human civilization.

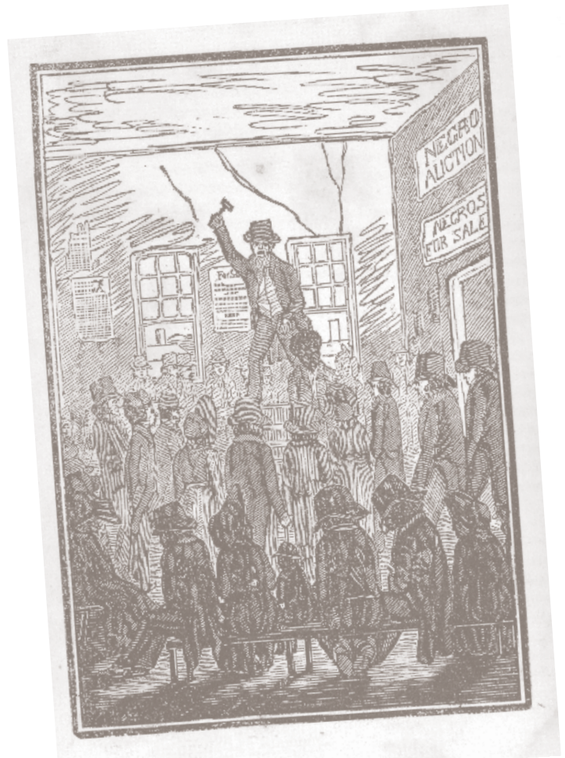
When people lived as hunter-gatherers, there was no economic advantage in owning another human being. As humans evolved to living in cities and on farms, there was a need for more labor for city construction and to work the land. Slaves filled the need for a cheap and plentiful workforce. There were many ways that people became slaves. War was one way humans were forced into slavery. Captured soldiers and people of conquered lands were often taken to enrich the victors. Slavery was used as a punishment for criminal behavior. Poverty forced people to sell themselves or their children into slavery.

Many ancient civilizations had slaves, including the Hawaiians, Vikings, and Egyptians. The culture of Ancient Greece was dependent on slavery. At the time *The Odyssey* was written, slave labor touched all aspects of Greek life.

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

"Sometimes I get the feeling that the heart of the thing won't change easy or quick. Cause of the way we were bought and brought over here in the first place."

—Father Comes Home From The Wars (Part 2)



Slavery began in the United States in 1619. People captured in African tribal wars were sold to slave merchants. These merchants forcibly transported the enslaved to Virginia to work on tobacco and cotton farms. For the next 246 years, slavery would help build the economic foundations of the country and create a cultural and social divide between the North and the South. It would be a major cause of the Civil War. Slavery would leave scars on our nation that we are still dealing with today.

The American Revolution ignited an intense debate about the existence of slavery in America. As colonists demanded the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, they simultaneously held other Americans in bondage.

In 1776, there were about half a million slaves in the United States. In 1777, Vermont outlawed slavery. By 1804, all Northern states had voted to abolish the institution of slavery within their borders. By 1830, slavery was primarily located in the South.

The familiar image of Southern slavery is that of a large plantation with hundreds of slaves. In reality, such situations were rare; most slave-owners had 20 or fewer slaves. Three-quarters of Southern whites did not own nor could afford slaves. Yet many non-slaveholding whites identified with and defended slavery. The institution of slavery gave non-slaveholding whites a group of people to feel superior to and have power over. It gave them status. They may have been poor, but they were not slaves.

Enslaved people were not considered human beings; they were property. Slaves could not use their own names, but had to take their master's. There were limits on where they could go and what they could do and say. They had no rights.

Slaves' status as property was enforced by the threat of violence and the danger of being sold. Families were routinely broken apart and sold off. Parents were separated from children. Husbands from wives. Any rebellion or resistance—running away, slowing of work, standing up to cruel treatment, asserting their humanity—was met with violence in the form of whippings, maiming, or death.


PUBLIC SALE
OF SLAVES!!
FRANKLIN CIRCUIT COURT.
JAMES HARLAND Administrator, Plaintiff, } In Equity.
JAMES HARLAND Heirs, Defendants.
The undersigned, as COMMISSIONER of said Court, will, on
November 16, 1863,


VALUABLE GANG OF YOUNG
NEGROES
BY JOS. A. BEARD.
Will be sold at Auction,
ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH INST.
At 12 o'clock, at Banks' Arcade


A LARGE NUMBER
OF
NEGROES
WANTED!
The undersigned wishes to purchase throughout the year, a large number of
SOUND & HEALTHY
Negroes
OF BOTH SEXES.
Negroes Wanted.
THE undersigned having entered into Partnership under the firm of
NORTHCUTT, MARSHALL & CO.,
For the purpose of dealing in Slaves, and will transact the business at the house lately occupied by Jos. H. Northcutt, on Main Street, Lexington, nearly opposite the Woolen Factory of Messrs. Thompson & Van Dalsem. They wish to purchase a large number of
NEGROES, OF BOTH SEXES,
And will pay the highest prices offered in the market. Persons at a distance having Negroes for sale, not having it convenient to bring them to the city,

"Where is the path? Where is the path?! The path it isn't marked."

—Father Comes Home From The Wars (Part 3)

ESCAPING SLAVERY

During the hundreds of years that Americans were held in bondage, there was an active and strong resistance. One way to defy slavery was to run away. To steal yourself and your labor. It took bravery and daring to escape. The punishment for capture was violent and brutal. If a slave ran and made it North, they would be far from everything and everyone they had ever known. The price for freedom was great.

For the slaves we meet in *Father Comes Home From The Wars,* running away was often a better choice than enduring slavery.

Can you imagine how awful life must be if leaving everything behind is the only choice? Can you imagine the courage needed to run?

Many of us in this country are here today because our ancestors had that courage. They left behind all that was familiar and came to a country (or to a part of this country) where they knew no one, where they were not always wanted, and where the risk of prejudice and violence was always a possibility.

And people are still running today. We no longer call them runaways but refugees and immigrants. People all over the world are fleeing terrible situations and running toward the promise of freedom.

WORTH, VALUE, & THE MARKETPLACE

"How much is Hero worth? In dollars and cents." *—Father Comes Home From The Wars (Part 2)*

The institution of slavery caused enormous physical, emotional, and mental suffering for the enslaved. It spiritually corrupted slave owners and others involved in keeping people in chains. Slavery created great wealth for individuals and the country. The ugly truth was that slavery made lots of money.

Slaves had a monetary value determined by their age, gender, and skill set, plus the expected output of work minus the cost of maintenance (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) over the slave's lifetime.

- In 1860, the price of a slave was $800–$1,200, which is equivalent to $17,000–$266,000 in today's dollars.
- In 1860, there were about 4 million slaves in America. Their estimated value was over $3 billion or $450 trillion in today's dollars.
- In 1861, slaves were 48% of the South's total wealth. Their value was more than the banks, factories, and railroads combined.

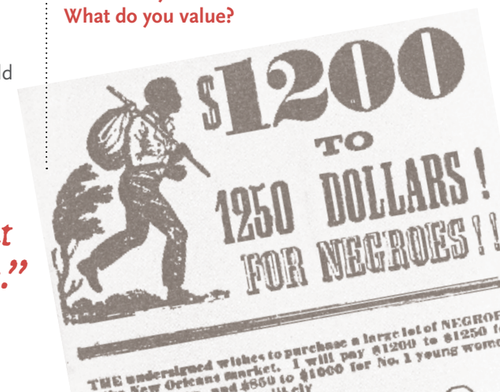
The end of slavery didn't bring economic freedom to the enslaved. Unfair institutional practices such as fees to open businesses, higher interest rates on loans, and exclusion from social programs like Social Security continued economic inequality. The legacy of these policies still impacts us today. In 2013, 148 years after the end of slavery, the average white American household income ($58,000) is almost twice as high as the average black American household income ($35,000).

Questions of worth and how we measure the value of a human being run deeply throughout *Father Comes Home From The Wars.* These are questions that continue to shape and challenge our country today.

- **How do we measure worth today? Is there a measure other than money?**
- **What messages do the media, family, friends, school, and other institutions tell us about who has worth and what is valuable?**
- **How do you measure worth? What do you value?**

"Maybe even with Freedom, that mark, huh, that mark of the marketplace, it will always be on us."

—Father Comes Home from the Wars (Part 2)


$1200
TO
1250 DOLLARS!
FOR NEGROES!!
THE undersigned wishes to purchase a large lot of NEGROES

THE CIVIL WAR

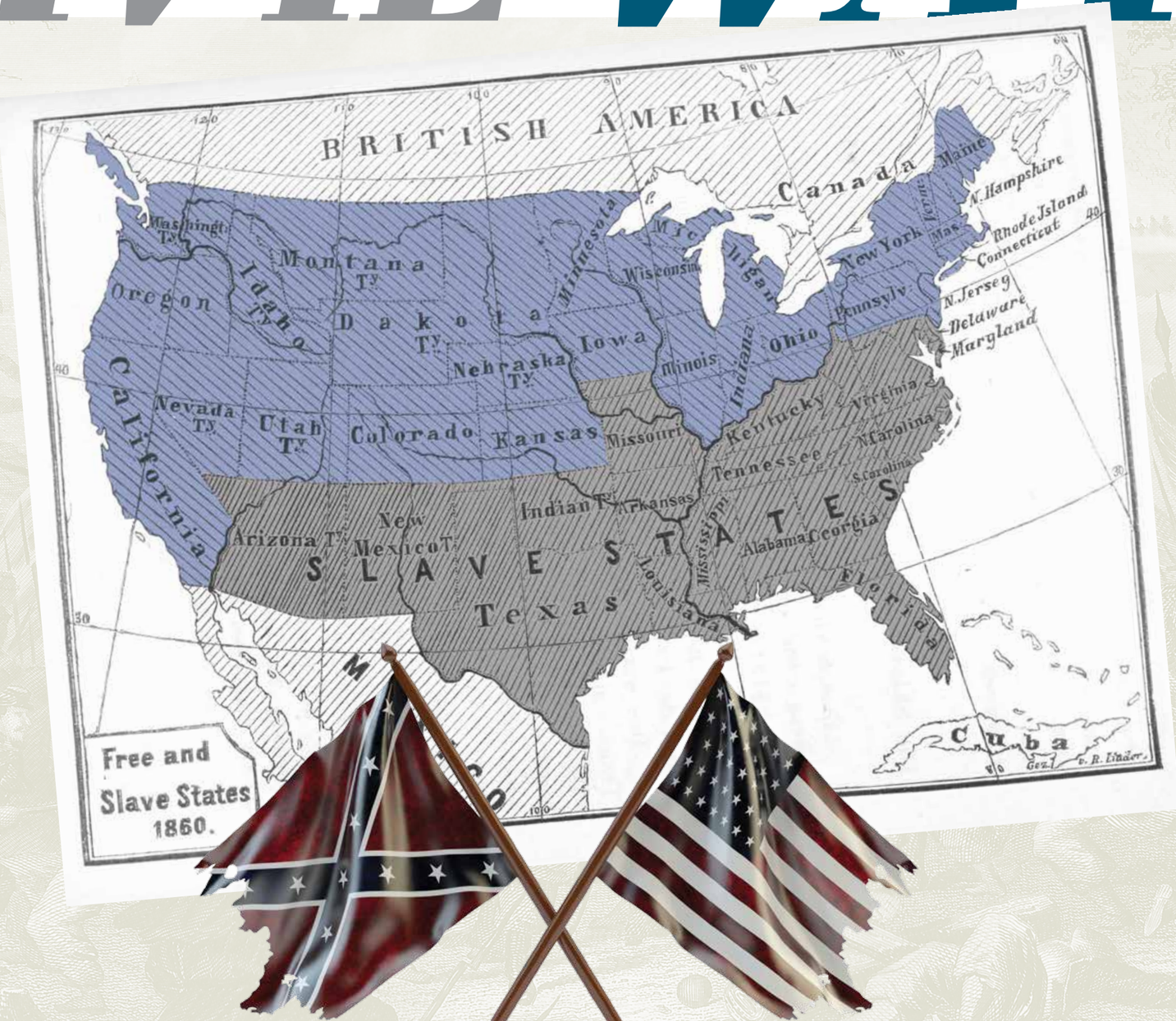
From 1861–1865, the nation would be ripped apart as Americans fought Americans in a bloody Civil War.

Violent battles would devastate cities like Atlanta, Georgia and Vicksburg, Mississippi and claim the lives of 620,000 soldiers. The conflict centered on core issues not solved when the nation was founded. States' rights—who has the power to make decisions: the individual states or the federal government? And would America continue to exist as a slaveholding nation?

The war had been brewing for decades. Every new state added to the nation inflamed the divisions about slavery—would that state be a free or slave state?

When Abraham Lincoln was elected president in November 1860, seven Southern slave states seceded from the Union. These states thought that Lincoln was going to abolish slavery, destroying the economy and culture of the South. The rebel states formed the Confederate States of America with Jefferson Davis as their president. A year later, when the fighting began at Fort Sumter, four more slave states seceded and joined the Confederacy.

The shooting began on April 12, 1861, when South Carolina took over Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay. President Lincoln deployed the Union militia to suppress the insurrection.



Army of the Confederacy

The Army of the Confederacy wore gray uniforms. They carried the Confederate flag—the Stars and Bars. They were called the Jebs or Rebs. General Robert E. Lee was the commander of the Confederate Army. Lee would surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, ending the war.

Army of the Union

Union soldiers dressed in blue and carried the American flag—the Stars and Stripes. They were called Yankees. General Ulysses S. Grant led the Union Army during the later years of the Civil War and became the 18th president of The United States.

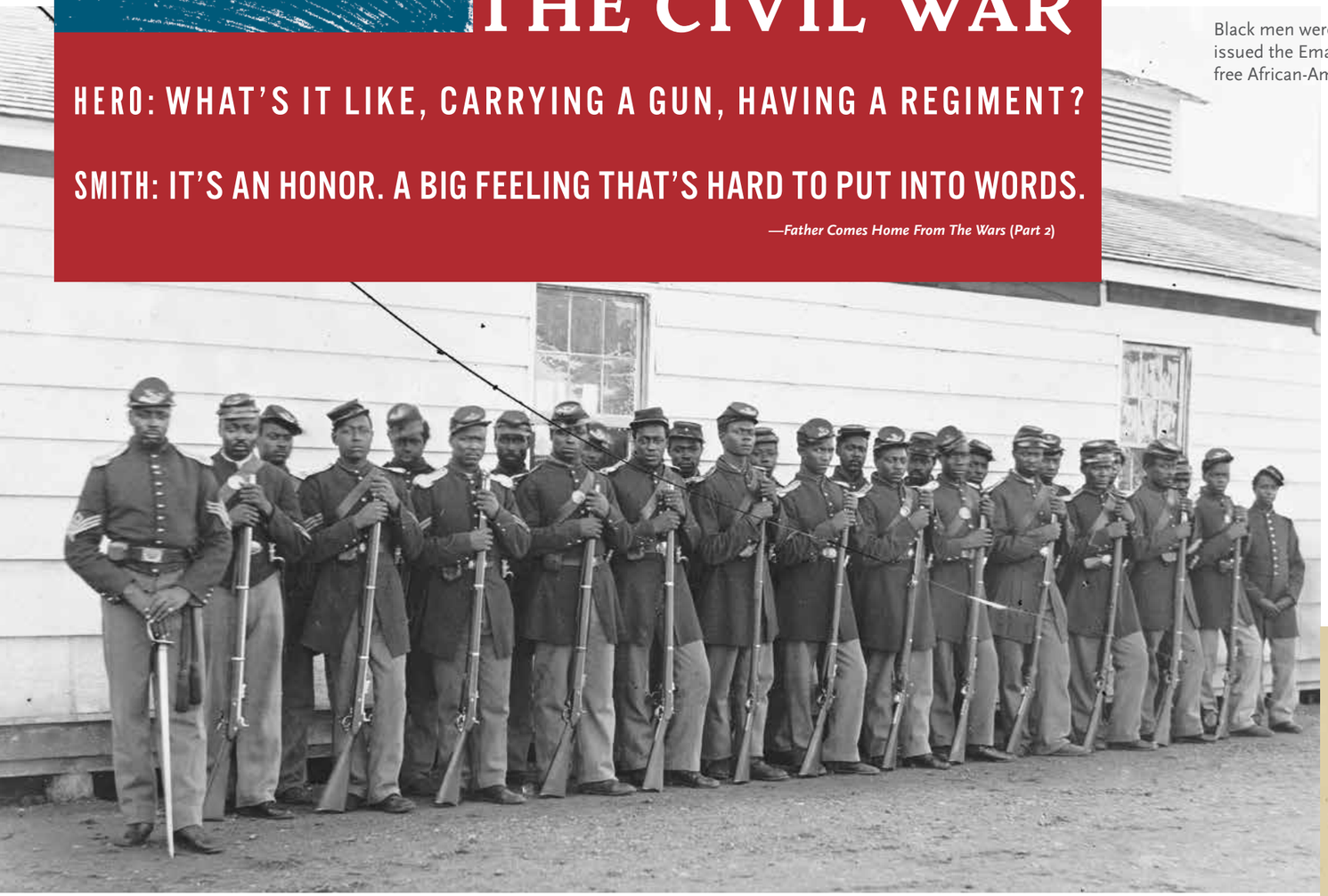
> "The blueprint of the America we know was drawn up then, and whether we know it or not, we are still walking around in the shadow of that war."
>
> —Ken Burns' *The Civil War*

★★★AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR

HERO: WHAT'S IT LIKE, CARRYING A GUN, HAVING A REGIMENT?

SMITH: IT'S AN HONOR. A BIG FEELING THAT'S HARD TO PUT INTO WORDS.

—Father Comes Home From The Wars (Part 2)



Company E, 4th United States Colored Infantry.
Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University

When the war broke out, African-American men desperately wanted to join the military.

They knew that the war would decide the fate of millions in slavery. They wanted the opportunity to fight to free their people, but they were prohibited from enlisting by federal law. President Lincoln feared that if he authorized black recruitment, border states would secede from the Union.

Black men were finally permitted to enlist when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Both Northern free African-Americans and runaway slaves from the South signed up to fight. They served in segregated units commanded by white officers. Their jobs in the military ranged from infantry soldiers and crews of navy vessels to non-combative supportive roles. Black Americans also served as spies for the Union Army collecting information about the Confederacy. Fighting for the North held extreme risk. Black soldiers could expect to be shot or lynched if captured by the enemy. By the time the war ended, some 200,000 black men had served in the Union.

First Kansas Colored Infantry

The First Kansas Colored Infantry was the first black regiment to be organized in a Northern state and the first black unit to see combat during the Civil War.

The First Kansas formation came about in a remarkable way. Union General James L. Lane, an anti-slavery senator from Kansas and a recruiting commissioner, was frustrated by Lincoln's ambivalence about allowing African-American men to fight. So Lane went against federal and Army regulations and organized the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment in 1862. Many of his troops were newly freed slaves whom Lane helped escape from Arkansas and Missouri.

The First Kansas Colored Infantry's initial battle was at Mount Island in Bates County, Missouri. The battle drew national attention. The First Kansas' bravery and fine fighting dispelled many racist notions that Blacks were not capable of being effective soldiers. When the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in January 1863, the First Kansas was officially recognized.

Their commander, Colonel James M. Williams, wrote, *"I never saw such fighting as was done by the Negro regiment....The question that Negroes will fight is settled; besides they make better solders in every respect than any troops I have ever had under my command."*

Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University

African-Americans in the Confederacy

African-Americans also served in the Confederate Army. They were not soldiers. They were not permitted to fight. They were there as a slave labor force. They were brought to war by their masters to tend to the master's needs in camp. In some cases, these slaves were entrusted with a master's personal effects if he was killed and returned them to his family.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Emancipation Proclamation

"I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper. If my name ever goes into history it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it."

—Abraham Lincoln

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation was the first step in righting the wrongs of slavery that had been present since our nation's founding. The Emancipation Proclamation did not free all slaves in the United States. Rather, it declared free only those slaves living in states not under Union control. The intention of the Proclamation was to signal the end of slavery. The Proclamation allowed African-American men to join the military and fight for their freedom. The Emancipation Proclamation transformed the aims of the Civil War from a war to reunify the nation to a war of liberation.

Thirteenth Amendment

The intention of the Emancipation Proclamation was fulfilled in 1865, when the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified. The 13th Amendment declared slavery illegal in the newly restored United States. All Americans across the nation were free.

Juneteenth

Slavery ended in Texas on June 19, 1865 when U.S. General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston. He announced the immediate emancipation of approximately a quarter-million African-Americans in Texas. Today, this event is known as "Juneteenth" and has been an observed state holiday since 1979.

Freedom

In *Father Comes Home From The Wars* freedom is dangled, promised, debated, dreamed about, longed for, feared, unimaginable.

Hero is promised freedom if he will go with his Master to serve with the Confederate Army, who are fighting to make sure he and millions of other slaves will not be free. Hero decides to go to war for the "wrong side" in the hope that his Master's promise will be kept.

Homer and Smith believe that you need to steal your freedom, take your freedom at any cost. The Chorus of Runaways have already taken this step, running toward an unknown future fueled only by a vision of freedom.

Even as they move toward it, the characters don't know what life will be like when they are free. They are inspired by the promise, even though they don't know what freedom will be.

- **Imagine you have been in bondage your whole life and were suddenly free. Would you embrace freedom, would you fear freedom? What would you do once you were free?**
- **What does it mean to be free? What does freedom promise? What should it promise?**
- **Is there a person, a place, or an activity where you feel the most free?**

"THE PLACE I'M GOING NOW IS FREEDOM

But where is Freedom, really? Will the air smell sweet? Will the streets be paved with gold? Will all in Freedomville welcome me with open arms?"

—Father Comes Home From The Wars (Part 3)

Suzan-Lori Parks.
PHOTO BY STEPHANIE DIANI.

A Conversation with Playwright
Suzan-Lori Parks
and Center Theatre Group Teaching Artist Marcos Nájera

Marcos Nájera: Ms. Parks, what would you say is your job? Your J-O-B.

Suzan-Lori Parks: My job. Like my, you mean—hmm. You mean my day job or my mission in life?

MN: Both. (Laughs.)

SLP: In the theatre, the playwright is the person who writes the play. And it's spelled "W-R-I-G-H-T" not "W-R-I-T-E" because the focus is on the craft. Like someone who makes something. So I'm the maker of the play.

I see myself as an architect, so what I do is basically draw up the plan out of nothing. In the theatre, everybody starts with something. The actors have the text, the director has the script, the designers have something to work on. The playwright starts with a blank piece of paper or a blank computer screen. A void. And she or he, the architect, creates something in the void that everybody can live in. And hopefully if we build it right, it will last for a long time and be sturdy like a good house or a cool apartment building or a great bicycle. It's high-quality craftsperson-ship.

I work closely in the first production with the actors, the director, and the designers to create stuff so my blueprint gets changed and rearranged and added to and subtracted from a lot before we turn on the lights and invite you in to see the show.

MN: What's guiding you as your fingers float across a keyboard? Or do you prefer to pre-plan the writing?

SLP: It's weird. It's actually a combination. I'm an architect. I'm gonna plan. But this is what a lot of people don't understand. They don't understand how planning can actually create freedom. A good plan can be an excellent foundation for fantastic inspiration. They think "##$*, if I plan, if I outline—it's gonna kill it!" What I do is I create a roadmap and then I allow myself to be surprised.

I'm an architect. I'm gonna plan. But this is what a lot of people don't understand. They don't understand how planning can actually create freedom.

My great mission in life as a writer—well, I write a lot. I write for TV, I write for film, I write songs, I have a band, I write essays, and I'm working on a second novel. As a writer I think my job is to tell the truth and have fun. Bring joy. And, you know, encourage people to fess up! Be real. Be real by pretending! Isn't that funny?! (Laughs.) But sometimes that's the best way to be real.

MN: In the PBS documentary about you, *The Topdog Diaries*, you told students to explore what you call "the mind beyond the mind." I thought that was a very cool idea. Can you talk about that?

SLP: Most people these days are on automatic pilot. They're not really thinking about what they are doing. We've all been there at one time or another. You find yourself mindlessly watching television, flippin' through some online article that's making you feel bad, cruisin' through Facebook and wondering why you don't get any work done. You know, like that!

So that's your mind. But what I'm interested in is the "mind beyond the mind." The thing that is really you. The greater good that we all have a part in creating. That deep river of mystery that runs through us all—that's where I write from—the collective unconscious.

It's the bigger picture. We all know what that is. You know, you wake up in the morning and you listen to the birds. The moments of awareness when you are awake. It's those moments. I encourage people to visit that place often. Just be on to your own stuff.

MN: What's the biggest block for students when you are encourage them to go visit their "mind beyond the mind" and just be on to their own stuff?

SLP: Everyday life. It's your biggest block AND it's your biggest source of liberation. It's the best crowbar—but it can get in the way.

I do a lot of yoga. *Yoga chitta vritti nirodha*—yoga calms the fluctuations of the mind [from The Yoga Sutras]. Those fluctuations of the mind, they make it difficult to hear what the spiritual masters call that small, still voice within.

I suggest to my students that if you don't have a meditation practice, start one. Five minutes a day, sitting quietly, first thing in the morning. Set your timer, sit there, breathe, close your eyes. That's all you need to do and then grow it!

MN: I took a meditation class last night. The instructor held up a glitter snow globe and shook it. She said the glitter flakes swirling around inside show what our minds often look like. But the glitter soon settled to the bottom and the water became clear and still again. She said, "That is meditation." I said, "It calms down the glitter!"

SLP: Yes! It doesn't wipe the glitter away. It doesn't say, "Bad glitter, bad glitter"—it doesn't scold the glitter! Doesn't say, "Dump the glitter." Nothing like that. It just says, "Chill glitter, glitter chill—so I can see clearly today."

Oh! Today is Topdog Day, B-T-W! On this day in history, 1999, on the sixth of January I started writing *Topdog/Underdog*! I finished it less than three days later. Boom, I was done. Every year I celebrate by saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you for sending me the wonderful play *Topdog/Underdog*."

MN: Happy Topdog Day! January 6 is also what we call in the Latino community "Día de Los Reyes" or "King's Day." So with all this royalty and celebration of today, it makes me think of your favorite James Baldwin quote about putting the crown on your head.

SLP: (Laughs.) Oh what a great teacher he was, and that's his saying, "Your crown is bought and paid for, all you have to do is put it on your head." Man, I've had such great teachers. James Baldwin was a great teacher. The blank page is a great teacher. *Kung Fu Panda* is a great teacher—Pixar movies, the good ones! Good boyfriends. Bad boyfriends! Friends. I encourage my students to seek good teachers everywhere.

MN: Was your father a teacher for you in some way?

SLP: Oh yes, my dad—Donald Parks—was a career Army officer. He joined the Army ROTC in college—it was one of the few places in this country where an African-American person could join, get a job, and have some kind of guarantee of fair treatment. To become a colonel in the army from where he grew up [in Chicago] was a big deal. He's buried in Arlington National Cemetery and the Bronze Star was the big medal that he got.

Father Comes Home From The Wars is inspired by my dad. It was not inspired by *The Odyssey*. *The Odyssey* is in our drinking water. So you get bits and pieces and shards and shrapnel of a lot of things. *The Odyssey* is a big thing you get. It's a big thing that people latch on to and think I'm doing a retelling of *The Odyssey*. No, I'm not. That's not where I'm coming from. It's *Star Wars*! It's Ulysses S. Grant.

MN: So in the war of our daily lives, we get hit by all this information and it is stuck inside of us. And it comes back out when we want to tell a story. Is that what you mean?

SLP: Right! Right! Right! Exactly. [This play] was inspired by my dad coming home from war a lot. He did a tour in Korea and two tours in Vietnam. Or coming home from having practiced being at war. I always remember it being in the spring, because it was around my birthday. And people would say, "Where's your dad?" "He's in the field," I'd say. His 9-to-5 was he'd go out into the field and practice being at war and then he'd come home for dinner!

MN: I noticed in that PBS documentary that you have a pink Post-It note above your desk that says: "Vomit!"

SLP: Ha, ha! That was several incarnations of houses ago, but that means "Get it out! Clean it up later!"

MN: And with this play, how does music help you "get it out?"

SLP: See that's the thing. I've been playing and writing music for as long as I've been writing plays. And this one—it sings. There was music in there from the very beginning. I could hear the music. My favorite song, "Bronze Star," which I wrote for my dad, was the beginning. It appears to us in Parts 1, 2, and 3 as underscore. You don't hear the whole song. We are going to hear it later in Part 9, I think.

As a writer I think my job is to tell the truth and have fun. Bring joy. And, you know, encourage people to fess up! Be real. Be real by pretending! Isn't that funny?! But sometimes that's the best way to be real.

I always seem to be writing operas, spoken operas, if that makes any sense. It's just the river on which these words float. The music is the river for me.

The music is more old-timey. It's Americana. But the language is a mash-up and that's on purpose. It's contemporary language in a historical context. I've been writing plays about history for a long time. Its like the [William] Faulkner quote, "History is not was, it is." History is now, so let's celebrate it.

MN: Well, happy Topdog Day and King's Day. You've earned your crown.

SLP: Thanks! I'm going to go pick up my son, Durham, now. He was named after my grandfather.

MN: Oh cool, was your grandfather a veteran too?

SLP: No, he laid the sidewalks in West Texas, in the black part of town, of course. He was like a businessman, the black part of town didn't have sidewalks so you know.

MN: That's poetic when you create a road for other people to follow. I think it runs in the family.

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Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

Education and Community Partnerships
Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions, and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination, and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue, and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

Center Theatre Group's education and community partnership programs advance the organization's mission in three key ways:

Audiences: Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives;

Artists: Investing in the training, support, and development of emerging young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and

Arts Education Leadership: Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.

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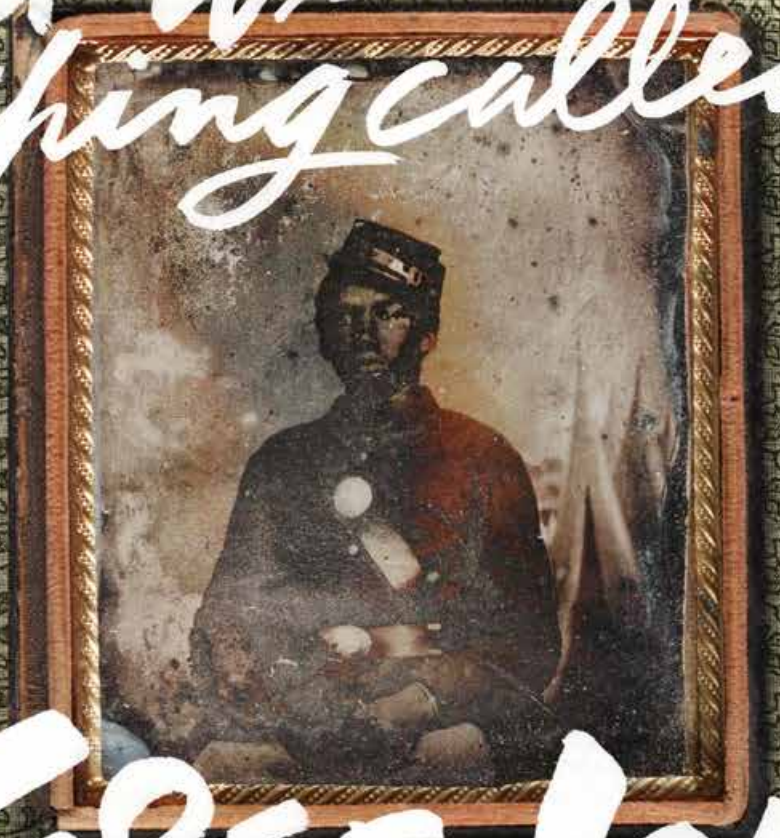
A wild thing called FREEDOM is calling.



—Father Comes Home from the Wars (Part 3)

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