

# **BATTLE CRY TOM JEFFERSON**

**By Jerold London**

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jlondon@deepweaversfaith.com**



## **BATTLE CRY TOM JEFFERSON**

### **SCENE 1 – FRENCH DEFENSE**

#### TIME and PLACE

Nineteenth Century. Monticello (Virginia). A room with books, a writing desk and chair. The desk is long enough for the body of the Scene 2 soldier to lie upon.

#### CHARACTERS

JEFFERSON enters at the rise. Freely moving about the stage.

**Center stage:** A black CHESS BOX, tall and wide enough to hold a black female actor inside, comfortably. On top of the box is a large chessboard and set, White pieces toward downstage, Black pieces, toward upstage. A large screen, **upstage and elevated**, shows the audience the moves, as they are being made.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

**JEFFERSON**

[entering] I have white today; and I begin ... pawn to King 4.

**Moves the White King's pawn accordingly.**

**CHESS BOX**

Pawn to King 3.

**JEFFERSON**

Pawn to Queen 4.

**CHESS BOX**

Pawn to Queen 4.

**Jefferson moves the pawns according.**



**JEFFERSON**

The French Defense. Appropriate, I suppose....  
Knight to Queen Bishop 3.

**Moves the White Queen's Knight accordingly.**

**CHESS BOX**

Pawn to Queen Bishop 4.

**JEFFERSON**

[beat] Knight to Bishop 3.

**Jefferson moves the Black pawn and  
White Knight according.**



**CHES BOX**

It occurs to me, Mr. Jefferson ... underneath it all, *you're a fraud.*

**JEFFERSON**

I most certainly am not. What makes you say that?

**CHES BOX**

You have no idea what love is. You sleep with a woman who is not your wife.

**JEFFERSON**

That's none of your business, Box. But as you have chosen to raise the issue, we are forbidden to marry, no matter how much we love each other.

**CHES BOX**

It follows, then, that you must secrete yourselves as master and slave?

**JEFFERSON**

Yes. But it was her choice as much as mine. Sally came to me in Paris, a widower. I was lonely, overwhelmed with grief over my Martha's death, hiding in my way, and Sally and I fell in love. They had the same father you know, Martha and Sally.

**CHES BOX**

And how is it that a slave girl had a choice in the matter?

**JEFFERSON**

She knew if she stayed in France she would be a free woman.  
Her brother was there; and he became a free man.  
But Sally also knew how heartbroken her sister's death had left me.  
How I'd promised Martha forever to wear a lock of her hair,  
in a pendant about my neck. And she chose the voluntary slavery of love for me.

**CHES BOX**

You're a strange man, Jefferson. Tell me more about your wife.

**JEFFERSON**

[*touching the pendant*] Martha was 23 when we married, and 33 when she died.  
And those early years were some of the happiest of my life.  
We were young, and filled with energy, hope, and expectation.  
She read as avidly as I, and was a gifted pianist.  
We played duets together, myself on the violin or the cello.  
We had six children; but only Patsy's still alive....  
After Martha died, I remember weeks of relentless riding on secluded roads,  
with Patsy a solitary witness to bursts of grief. But haven't I told you this?

### CHESSEX BOX

I like to hear it. And besides, who else can you share these memories with?

### JEFFERSON

Who else, indeed, Box? Some say I'm as sensitive as a woman.

Some say as shy as a school girl, sometimes.

That I'm no orator. That my preference is to *write* what I think, to remain silent in the face of criticism, and to spend most of my time alone with my loved ones.

### CHESSEX BOX

Knight to Queen Bishop 3.

**Jefferson moves the Black Queen's Knight according.**



## JEFFERSON

Let me point one thing out to you, Box: I served with Washington *and* Franklin, and never heard either one of them speak ten minutes at a time....

I admit, some close friends have accused me of being overly desirous of applause. That I limit friends to those with whom I can have an interesting correspondence. And that in matters of opinion and politics I'm often uncomfortably bigoted.

Pawn takes Queen pawn.

## CHESS BOX

King pawn takes pawn.

**Jefferson makes the captures according.**





**JEFFERSON**

[beat] Bishop to King 2.

**CHESS BOX**

Knight to Bishop 3.

**Jefferson moves the White Bishop and the Black Knight according.**

**CHESS BOX**

I seem to recall your telling me that some have accused you of allowing your most sacred principle to drop into silence the moment it experiences conflict with popular opinion. Is that true?



## JEFFERSON

Which principle are you talking about?... I castle.

### Castles.

## CHESS BOX

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal.  
That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.  
That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. *That* principle.

Bishop to King 2.

**Jefferson moves the Black King's Bishop according.**



## JEFFERSON

[beat] Bishop to King Knight 5.

## CHESS BOX

Castle.

## JEFFERSON

A supremely moral statement. A battle cry, of a sort. But more ... *aspirational*.  
Pawn takes pawn.

**Jefferson accordingly moves the White Queen's Bishop, castles for Black, and makes the pawn capture.**



## CHES BOX

*Aspirational??* Do you even know what aspirational means, my friend? Do you really even know what slavery means? To your slave? For life? Being the slave-owner you are.

Bishop to King 3.

## JEFFERSON

[beat] Knight to Queen 4.

**Jefferson moves the Black Queen's Bishop and the White King's Knight according.**



## CHES BOX

Bishop takes pawn.

## JEFFERSON

[beat] Knight takes Bishop.

## CHES BOX

Pawn takes Knight.

**Jefferson makes the captures accordingly.**



## JEFFERSON

I know what slavery means as well as you do.  
It means trouble for master and slave alike.  
Body and soul. Blood and spirit. Hope and future.  
And I have always felt that way.

Bishop to Knight 4.

## CHESS BOX

So why keep so many slaves? When you could voluntarily free *some* of them?

Queen to Queen 3.

**Jefferson moves the White King's  
Bishop and the Black Queen accordingly.**



## JEFFERSON

Several times I introduced bills to limit slavery, or abolish it altogether. My own property included. Unfortunately, they never became law. And I abide by the law. You can't expect me to go out on my own, can you? Especially when popular opinion is so profoundly against releasing slaves.

Bishop to Rook 3.

## CHESS BOX

Queen Rook to King 1.

**Jefferson moves the White Bishop and the Black Queen's Rook accordingly.**



### CHESS BOX

What about your lover? What about Sally Hemings?

### JEFFERSON

She was free. In France. I told you. And would only return with me if I promised to free our children at age 31. Which promise I made and shall keep.

Queen to Queen 2.

### CHESS BOX

Bishop to Knight 5.

**Jefferson moves the White Queen and the Black Bishop accordingly.**





### CHES BOX

In the meantime, how do you think it makes your lover and children feel?

### JEFFERSON

In the meantime, it's society. It's society's way of life. What is, will be.  
They live with me here, being trained. Properly. And to play chess, properly.

Bishop takes Knight.

### CHES BOX

Rook takes Bishop.

**Jefferson makes the captures accordingly.**



## CHES BOX

Where does Sally sleep?

## JEFFERSON

What a question!... In her own quarters, of course! Under the South terrace.

Queen Rook to Queen 1.

## CHES BOX

Queen to Bishop 4.

**Jefferson moves White's Queen Rook and the Black Queen accordingly.**



**CHESS BOX**

You are a strange man, Jefferson. As I have said. And you two are a strange pair.

**JEFFERSON**

Why? Why do you say that?

Society would haunt us to our deaths otherwise.

Or imprison us. This is the only way our love can be.

Sally and I each know that. We could never live this life in the open.

**CHESS BOX**

And you still believe that all men are created equal? And women, too?

**JEFFERSON**

Women are not excluded. Of course not. Not by nature. But ....

**CHESS BOX**

[*beat*] But what? What excludes women from the same rights as men?

**JEFFERSON**

One thing:

It takes time for the common laws of morality to mature in men's minds.

**CHESS BOX**

How long? How long does it take men's minds to mature?

**JEFFERSON**

I don't know. Maybe two hundred years. It's not for me to say.

I have long since given up the hope of seeing these things change in my lifetime.

**CHESS BOX**

How does a government of men *ever* rid itself of slavery? for that matter.

**JEFFERSON**

My plan was that you start with the young.

All slaves born after a certain date would continue with their parents for awhile, and then be brought up to tillage, arts, or sciences, according to their aptitudes.

Females at 18, and males at 21, would then be colonized to a place, outside the United States, suitable for the circumstances. Sent out with arms, implements, household wares, feeds, pairs of useful animals, and so forth.

Declared a free and independent people.

Protected by us until they can acquire their own strength and independence.

In the interim, we would send vessels to other parts of the world, to induce an equal number of white people to migrate here for the vacancies.

**CHESS BOX**

Children ripped from parents and grandparents, and sent abroad?  
Why not keep the blacks at home, and incorporate them into society?

**JEFFERSON**

The answer rests in human nature. Which I suspect you can scarcely understand. Deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites; resentment by blacks, fueled by ten thousand degrading offenses suffered; plus other circumstances; all would divide us, and likely not end before the extermination of their race, or ours.

**CHESS BOX**

What "other circumstance"?

**JEFFERSON**

Fundamental differences.

**CHESS BOX**

What "fundamental differences"?

**JEFFERSON**

Color is one.

Whether Negro color resides in the reticular membrane between skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself, the difference is fixed in nature.

And that is the foundation of each race's beauty.

Are not the fine mixtures of red and white preferable to that eternal monotony?

That implacable veil of black which covers all the emotions of their race?

**CHESS BOX**

You're a racist as well as a fraud. Talking about black life like it's from a hothouse. What you're saying is that all men are created equal only when all men are white.

**JEFFERSON**

It is not just the color of the skin. In memory, blacks appear equal to whites.

But in reason and imagination, far inferior.

Not an elementary trait of painting or sculpture in them. No poetry.

**CHESS BOX**

And none of that is due to how slaves are forced to live?

**JEFFERSON**

I concede it could be.... If they were given equal cultivation for a few generations.

**CHESS BOX**

How generous of you! And those "aspirational" words of yours?

Were they ever *your words*? Or did you copy them from someplace else?

## JEFFERSON

Whether I garnered my ideas from reading or reflection I cannot say.  
But they *are* mine. One hundred percent mine. I can assure you of that.  
And I promise you that I turned to no book or other writing to compose them.  
They were simply intended to be an expression of the American mind of the time.

Queen to King 2.

## CHESS BOX

Bishop takes Knight.

**Jefferson moves the White Queen and makes the capture accordingly.**



**JEFFERSON**

Pawn takes Bishop.

**CHESS BOX**

Queen takes Queen Bishop pawn.

**JEFFERSON**

Rook takes pawn.

**Jefferson makes the captures accordingly, and pauses over the board to study the position.**



**CHES BOX**

Knigh to Queen 5.

**Jefferson moves the Black Knight accordingly.**

**JEFFERSON**

[pause] Queen to Rook 5.

**Moves the White Queen accordingly.**

**CHES BOX**

Queen Rook to King Bishop 1.

**Jefferson moves Black's Queen Rook accordingly.**



**CHESS BOX**

You're fond of *reading*, aren't you?

**JEFFERSON**

I couldn't live without it. I respect books as much as anything in life.

**CHESS BOX**

What about the Bible?

**JEFFERSON**

What about it?

**CHESS BOX**

Do you like reading *that* book?

Do you respect *that* book as much as anything in life?

**JEFFERSON**

What are you getting at?

I respect the Bible, like I respect the common man. The yeoman farmer.

But I have reservations. Just as I distrust large cities and an outspoken clergy.

**CHESS BOX**

Oh? How so?

**JEFFERSON**

When clergy become as dictators, it is the duty of the faithful to call out the truth.

**CHESS BOX**

What truth?

**JEFFERSON**

There are two fundamental Jeffersonian truths about faith:

First is the complete freedom of one to find his own faith. No one does it better.

Second is that our Maker has given us all an internal monitor to aid us.

The early settlers in Virginia made it a crime to be a Quaker.

Made it a crime for Christians to deny the Trinity or the divine origin of the Bible.

Made it a crime for parents to refuse to have their children baptized.

In 1776 Virginia declared that the exercise of religion is a free and natural right, and repealed all laws criminalizing independent religious thought.

My hand in that is one of my most cherished accomplishments in life.... *There!*

**CHESS BOX**

Your church is politics?



**JEFFERSON**

I am a Christian in the only sense in which Jesus wished anyone to be.  
Sincerely attached to his doctrines. Ascribing to him every human excellence.  
Believing he never claimed anything greater.  
And believing that God's word has not yet been heard to the final chapter.

**CHESS BOX**

And?

**JEFFERSON**

God is God. And Jesus is Jesus. And the two are not the same.  
Millions of innocent men *and* women have been burnt, tortured, fined, or  
imprisoned in the name of Christian uniformity for thinking things like that.  
And to what effect? To make half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites.

**CHESS BOX**

And?

**JEFFERSON**

There are legions of corruptions in the Bible to the genuine teachings of Jesus.  
He had no Xenophon, like Socrates, to record his life.  
And dying young as he did, the moral system he left was unavoidably incomplete.  
In addition, since the learned men of his time were opposed to his precepts,  
it fell upon unlettered and ignorant men to relate what had happened.  
From their memory, and word of mouth. Long years after the fact.  
With their own axes to grind.  
Telling us that Jesus preached peace and love, but embellishing the story.  
And perverting his simple doctrines for *their* purposes.

**CHESS BOX**

So? What have you done about it?

**JEFFERSON**

**Holds up a book lying on his writing desk.**

I have never shown you this.  
I have extracted from the Bible, and organized, the rich and true fragments.  
A veritable rebirth of the Gospels, after elimination of all supernatural passages.  
A more just notion of Jesus, and God, and ethics I have never seen.  
It shows that *I* am a real Christian, very different from fearmongering preachers,  
hostile to liberty of person and thought, who call me an infidel and themselves  
Christians, drawing their dogmas from what Jesus never said and never saw.

[beat] Rook to King 5.

## CHES BOX

Rook to Rook 3.

**Jefferson puts the book down and makes the Rook moves accordingly.**

## JEFFERSON

[beat] Queen to Knight 5.

## CHES BOX

Rook takes Bishop.

**Jefferson moves the White Queen and makes the Black capture accordingly.**



**JEFFERSON**

I gather you don't subscribe to the general conviction, do you?  
About how intelligent I am.

**CHESS BOX**

You were clever enough to invent me.

**JEFFERSON**

Rook to Queen Bishop 5.

**CHESS BOX**

Queen to King Knight 6.

**Jefferson makes the White Rook and  
Black Queen moves, but as he does, he  
stares at the board in astonishment.**



## JEFFERSON

What in God's name is that?  
That's not a proper move.  
It's obscene. It's impossible.  
Into a nest of pawns?  
I've never seen anything in the world like it.  
Is this a dream? Can this really be happening?

Queen takes Queen.

**Makes the capture accordingly.**



## CHES BOX

You were checkmated, otherwise.

Knight to King 7, check.

## JEFFERSON

King to Rook 1.

**Jefferson moves the Black Knight and White King accordingly.**

## CHES BOX

Knight takes Queen, check.

**Jefferson makes the capture.**



**JEFFERSON**

King to Knight 1.

**CHESS BOX**

Knight to King 7, check.

**JEFFERSON**

King to Rook 1.

**Jefferson makes the Black Knight and White King moves accordingly.**



### CHES BOX

Have you written any educational books lately?  
On chess, perhaps? When to resign?

### JEFFERSON

You're rude, Box. Downright rude.  
You know, don't you? how keenly I believe in education. I've said it enough.  
That freedom to education is where true freedom lies.  
That a stable society owes it to itself to provide public schools.  
*I* am the one who founded and built the University of Virginia, for God's sake.

### CHES BOX

Rook to Rook 6.

**Jefferson moves the Black Rook across  
the board, accordingly.**



**JEFFERSON**

I built this house, too. In case you forgot.  
Monticello. My “Little Mountain.”  
Designed it from the Greek and Roman.  
Built the library. Probably the finest private collection in America.  
The lion’s share of which I intend to leave to the University of Virginia.  
Because I am a writer. And a reader. And a lawyer. And a statesman.  
I am a diplomat. A philosopher. An architect. And a builder.  
And a chess player, too. Although maybe not so great a one as I thought.  
And I am having serious doubts about ever having built you.

**CHESS BOX**

Let me ask you, Master of all of what you have said,  
do you sometimes lie with Sally and forget?

**JEFFERSON**

[*beat*] Yes. It *has happened*. I confess it.

**CHESS BOX**

And how does it make you feel?

**JEFFERSON**

It makes me feel asleep. For in sleep there *is* no slavery, nor taint of skin....

[*beat*] I said all those things, but above them all, I’m a planter.  
I love my home and living here. Where are my friends, my relations,  
and the sweetest affections and recollections of my life. Where I am free,  
at my pleasure, to write letters, ride the plantation, relax by my fireside,  
and enjoy family, fine weather and gardens. And then President Washington  
surprises me, with a request that I be his Secretary of State. Dear God!  
I told him my wish was to return to Paris, to see the Revolution to its end.  
And then I meant to return to Monticello, to withdraw entirely from political life,  
into which I had been impressed by the circumstances of the times.  
To sink into family and friends, and devote myself to more congenial studies.  
But, as you can see, I went with duty, over desire.  
With reluctance I became Secretary of State.  
And then, President. Two terms. And *finally*, home.  
Experienced, and debt-ridden.  
With a chess automaton who’s driving me mad.

Rook to Queen Knight 5.



**JEFFERSON moves the White Rook accordingly.**

**CHESS BOX**

Pawn to Queen Knight 3.

**Jefferson moves the Black pawn accordingly.**

**JEFFERSON**

Rook to Knight 2.

**Moves the White Rook accordingly.**



## CHES BOX

Knight to Bishop 6.

**Jefferson moves the Black Knight accordingly.**

## JEFFERSON

Rook to Knight 3.

**Moves the White Rook accordingly.**

## CHES BOX

Rook takes Rook.

**Jefferson makes the capture accordingly.**



**JEFFERSON**

Rook pawn takes Rook.

**CHESS BOX**

Rook to Queen 1.

**Jefferson makes the capture, and moves the Black Rook accordingly.**

**JEFFERSON**

Pawn to Bishop 3.

**Moves the White pawn accordingly.**



## CHES BOX

Rook to Queen 7.

**Jefferson moves the Black Rook accordingly.**

## JEFFERSON

[beat] Rook to Bishop 1.

## CHES BOX

Knight to King 7.

**Jefferson moves the White Rook and the Black Knight accordingly.**



**JEFFERSON**

Rook to Rook 1.

**CHESS BOX**

Rook takes pawn.

**Jefferson moves the White Rook and makes the capture accordingly.**

**JEFFERSON**

Pawn to Knight 3.

**Moves the White pawn accordingly.**



## CHES BOX

Rook to Bishop 8, check.

**Jefferson moves the Black Rook accordingly.**

## JEFFERSON

Rook takes Rook.

## CHES BOX

Knight takes Rook.

**Jefferson makes the captures accordingly.**



**JEFFERSON**

Pawn to Queen Knight 4.

**CHESS BOX**

Pawn to Queen Rook 4.

**Jefferson makes the pawn moves accordingly.**

**JEFFERSON**

Pawn takes pawn.

**Makes the capture accordingly.**



## CHES BOX

Pawn takes pawn.

**Jefferson makes the capture accordingly.**

## JEFFERSON

King to Knight 2.

## CHES BOX

Pawn to Rook 5.

**Jefferson moves the White King and the Black pawn accordingly.**





**JEFFERSON**

What *are* you?

**CHESS BOX**

What *are you*?

**JEFFERSON**

I'm a man. I'm a sensitive man. Affectionate. And, in my way, heroic.

**CHESS BOX**

What do others say, of you?

**JEFFERSON**

Adams, my great friend,  
my one-time adversary,  
called himself obnoxious, suspected, and unpopular,  
and me, very much otherwise.  
And ten times the better writer.

**CHESS BOX**

You have a brilliant mind.  
No question about it.  
But clouded by assumptions.

**JEFFERSON**

Like what?

**CHESS BOX**

I don't know.  
You used to complain bitterly about conspiracies,  
headed by Adams and Hamilton, to turn America into a monarchy.

**JEFFERSON**

The Federalists. Alexander Hamilton's massive public debt.  
We needed an alliance to defeat him. One that would rally the citizenry to defend  
democracy against the corrupting influence of banks and moneyed interests.  
Annihilating the Federalist Party without bloodshed was one of my greatest  
achievements, as President.

**CHESS BOX**

Any other great achievements of yours?  
As President?

## JEFFERSON

Well not to brag, but I sent Livingston and Monroe to France to buy New Orleans. And they came back with a signed agreement for the entire Louisiana Purchase. I doubled the size of our country faster than history could chronicle it as the single most formative peaceful act in history. And the Lewis and Clark Expedition I sent out. And the United States military academy at West Point I established.

King to Bishop 2.

## CHESS BOX

Pawn to Rook 6.

## JEFFERSON

King to King 3.

**Jefferson makes the White and Black moves accordingly.**



**CHES BOX**

Pawn to Rook 7. Ready to give up?

**Jefferson moves the Black pawn.**

**JEFFERSON**

Are you going to give a man a fighting chance? King to Queen 2.

**Moves the White King accordingly.**

**CHES BOX**

Pawn to Rook 8, promoting to a Queen.

**Jefferson promotes the Black pawn.**



## CHess BOX

Really ... it's time. Don't you think?...

Were there any things during your Presidency worse than this chess game?

## JEFFERSON

The slaying of Alexander Hamilton, by Aaron Burr in 1804, I suppose.

And the 1807 Embargo Act against England. It was a disaster.

I couldn't foresee the harm it would bring to our nation....

I was too idealistic, maybe, and not practical enough.

King to Bishop 2.

**Moves the White King accordingly.**



**CHES BOX**

Queen Rook 6.

**JEFFERSON**

King to Knight 1.

**CHES BOX**

Queen to Bishop 6.

**Jefferson moves the Black Queen and White King accordingly.**



**CHESS BOX**

When were you the loneliest?

**JEFFERSON**

After my wife died.

**CHESS BOX**

And the next loneliness?

**JEFFERSON**

Have I mentioned to you about my father? I don't think I have.  
How he died when I was 14? And how I met Dr. William Small three years later,  
when I entered William and Mary?

**CHESS BOX**

No.... He was like a father to you?

**JEFFERSON**

He probably fixed my life's destiny.  
He was a profound man in most of the useful branches of science, with a happy  
talent of lively conversation and a sweet friendship with island Madeira wine.  
We became daily companions; and he showed me the *system* of things on Earth.  
He was my Sensei, and I owe him more than I can ever say. Seems long ago....

[*beat*] Those years and our conversations were my golden years.  
Before he sailed back to England....  
On occasion I picture myself returning to scenes like that, more tranquil,  
less burdened by the heartaches life pleases itself to afflict us with.  
And I ask myself: Is my country all the better off for my having lived?  
I'm not sure it is. I've been the instrument of doing things. Granted.  
But they would have been done by others, if not me.  
Perhaps, a little better in some cases.... Like this dreadful chess game.  
With a chance to start over again, would I?  
Back to times when youth and health make happiness out of the least of things?  
I'll tell you: I would gladly put aside memories of past power.  
Gladly eschew the theatre of public life on which I've acted.  
Although I *have* received a fair share of gratitude and approval from my country.  
That *does* matter, doesn't it? And I've defrauded no one. I've oppressed no one.  
Received no bribe from any hand. And, love it or leave it, created you, my friend.

**CHESS BOX**

There's no starting over. Sadly.  
Play on, Mr. President.

**JEFFERSON**

Pawn to Bishop 4.

**Moves the White pawn accordingly.**

**CHESS BOX**

Knight to Queen 6.

**Jefferson moves the Black Knight accordingly.**

**JEFFERSON**

King to Rook 2.

**Moves the White King accordingly.**



## JEFFERSON

I think that's enough for me.  
I resign.

## CHESS BOX

Save your breath.  
Queen to Knight 7. Mate.



**Jefferson sweeps the pieces from the board. Then pauses to look at the room, the floor, and the Chess Box.**



**JEFFERSON**

A nightmare....

[*beat*] Maybe all men aren't created equal.  
Not on a chessboard. That's for certain.

**JEFFERSON walks off the stage.**

## SCENE 2 – SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT

### PLACE and TIME

A Civil War battlefield, with a hospital tent **center stage**. The writing desk of Scene 1 serves, appropriately covered, as a battlefield hospital bed. Also inside the tent, to the side, is the black box of Scene 1; and on its top is the chessboard. As members of the GOSPEL CHOIR enter, one by one, they each place chess pieces on it, in their classic starting positions. Over the duration of Scene 2 the large screen, **upstage and elevated**, replays the entire chess game of Scene 1, move-by-move. Between that screen and the tent there is a riser, in front of which is a scrim. The VOICES of Scene 2 are seen, indistinctly, on the riser, behind the scrim.

Outside the tent, **stage left**, the ground is mud, everywhere.

### CHARACTERS

A young, black SOLDIER, lying wounded, **stage left**. Non-speaking part.

A GOSPEL CHOIR.

The FEMALE VOICE of a black female actor, who can be seen, indistinctly, behind the scrim.

The MALE VOICE of a black male actor, who can be seen, indistinctly, behind the scrim.

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (may be doubled with JEFFERSON with costume and/or mask change).

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

**At the rise, in darkness, there is an explosive gunshot. Lights. The SOLDIER, unconscious, is lifted onto a stretcher, carried into the tent, and laid upon the hospital bed. Covered in mud, his body is cleaned, head to foot.**

**The FEMALE VOICE, first, and later the MALE VOICE enter behind the scrim.**

**FEMALE VOICE**

[*enters*] Shot...

In the back of his head....

And unconscious.

He's dying.

His body will be taken, by train, across America.

A fallen hero for all to witness.

A captain.... *My* captain.

**LINCOLN (offstage)**

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives, that that nation might live.

It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us:

That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion.

That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.

That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

**MALE VOICE**

[*enters*] What happened? What just happened?

I can't see.

**FEMALE VOICE**

You were shot.  
In the back of the head.  
Your body will be taken by train across America.  
A fallen hero for all to see.

**MALE VOICE**

Why? Why has this happened to me?  
What did *I* do to deserve this? I'm nothing. I'm no sinner.  
I'm only a poor soldier in a war between Heaven and Hell.  
A black pawn.

**FEMALE VOICE**

It's for the freedom of our people.

**MALE VOICE**

What? My death?

**FEMALE VOICE**

You could say that.

**MALE VOICE**

If you're telling the truth, where are our people going to go?  
Are we to lead them to the Promised Land? With whose help?

**FEMALE VOICE**

Truth is in the beholder's eye.

**MALE VOICE**

That's no answer.

[*beat*] If you're taking my life, you owe me one last thing.

The truth:

*Are all men created equal?*

**FEMALE VOICE**

President Lincoln says so.  
But some of the Founding Fathers might disagree.  
Some might say, if all men are created equal there would be no slaves.

**Members of the GOSPEL CHOIR begin entering, one-by-one, placing chess pieces on the chessboard like pebbles on a gravestone, and then standing, reverently, by the bed of the fallen SOLDIER. They continue to enter in that manner, for most of Scene 2, until all are assembled by his bed. JEFFERSON enters, to stand off by himself stage left.**

**JEFFERSON**

We, the people of Virginia, do declare these, the inalienable rights of our State:

That when we confederated and won independence from Great Britain, from that moment on we became free and independent. Authorized by our Creator to constitute our own government, in such form as thought best.

We subsequently entered into a compact, called the Constitution of the United States of America, by which we agreed to unite in a single government as to our relations with each other, and with foreign nations, and as to certain other articles particularly specified, retaining to ourselves all other rights of independence.

To this compact the Commonwealth of Virginia does religiously and affectionately adhere, opposing, with equal fidelity and firmness, the usurpation of either government's lawful powers by the other. Which the federal government is now in the process of doing, to the impermissible diminishment of what has been retained to the States.

**MALE VOICE**

What is Jefferson saying? I don't understand him.

**FEMALE VOICE**

Listen.

**JEFFERSON**

While we thus declare the rights retained by the States to be exclusively ours, which we will never voluntarily yield, we do not mean to raise the banner of succession over it. We value the union too highly to consider every infraction a ground for immediate rupture.

However, rupture of our union is not the greatest calamity. There is one greater. Submission to a government of unlimited power. It is only when the hope of avoiding such a plight becomes desperate that further forbearance will cease. In the meanwhile, we will be patient, and suffer much. We owe every effort to ourselves, and to the world at large, to pursue this great experiment of self-rule.

**MALE VOICE**

Is he saying that if his people don't like things they can attack? The capitol?

**FEMALE VOICE**

If it gets too bad, States have the right to secede from the Union.

**MALE VOICE**

Is he serious? How could that not start war?

**FEMALE VOICE**

It *has* started a war.

**MALE VOICE**

What right does a common soldier have, in all of this?

Am I here, in this place, wounded, because of some mutherfucking Founding Father? Who couldn't solve the problem of slavery in his own time?

**JEFFERSON**

You are missing the point, Sir. It is not a matter of slavery. It is a question of law. It is a question to what extent may one generation *lawfully* bind the next?

Let me start with what is self-evident.

That the Earth belongs to the current generation. Having said, let me point out that a person's right to the use of the land is not a natural right, but one granted, perennially, by the laws of his state.

No man may bind the land unto generations to come.

Nor may any government of men bind governments to come.

Hence, no society can make a perpetual law.

And no society can make a perpetual constitution.

Only insofar as there is mutual consent and compromise, every constitution, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years.

That's my 19-year rule. The Jeffersonian 19-year rule against perpetuities.

**MALE VOICE**

Let me start with what *is* self-evident.

And it's not a 19-year rule dictated by some slave-owner.

Slavery blinds intelligent minds. Yours as well, Mr. Jefferson.

Slavery defies solution when it is allowed to become a wolf, by the ear, which a country cannot hold and cannot let go of.

When it is feared like the French Revolution, or the French Defense.

When it leads to the death of soldiers, like me, who had no say in the matter.

**JEFFERSON**

You do not know what you are talking about.

No country can preserve its liberties if its government can never be warned by the people that they reserve the right of forcible resistance.

Let citizens take arms when their leaders' pride brooks no limit on their power.

What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed, from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

**MALE VOICE**

I'm no tyrant, so I guess I'm a patriot in your book.

**FEMALE VOICE**

How many patriots are going to lose their lives in this War?

**MALE VOICE**

I see 620,000 soldiers dead. 51,000 at Gettysburg alone. Tell me, Mr. Jefferson. Can you hear me, Mr. Jefferson? How's that for refreshing the tree of liberty?

**FEMALE VOICE**

How does it feel, Soldier? Your being a patriot?

**MALE VOICE**

Like nothing I've ever felt, or lost.  
Are you my nurse? My wound has left me somewhat sightless.

**FEMALE VOICE & GOSPEL CHOIR THEN PRESENT**

We are.

**MALE VOICE**

Are you angels of mercy, then, come to carry me across the River Jordan?

**FEMALE VOICE & GOSPEL CHOIR THEN PRESENT**

We are.

**MALE VOICE**

My country called for patriots to suppress rebellion. Who is right in this?

**JEFFERSON exits. LINCOLN enters to the same spot, stage left.**

**LINCOLN**

"We, the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

That's what our Constitution says.

Let me repeat: "to secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves *and* our Posterity."

No Jeffersonian term limit to it.

As President I had no choice. I had taken an oath:

To preserve, protect and defend the Constitution, to the best of my ability.

When our country was faced with an armed rebellion too powerful to be handled by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings, I had to fight.

If even with my bare hands, alone.

**MALE VOICE**

How's that? We the people were *forced* to fight. Weren't we?

**LINCOLN**

Only if you loved country and soul, and found your President's case a just case.  
Which you did. And I trust your voice.  
The voice of the common man is the next best thing to the voice of God.

**MALE VOICE**

Presidents are hypocrites.  
How were we supposed to know?

**LINCOLN**

It's enough to know that you fight for the safety and survival of your nation.  
The same nation patriots before you laid their lives down for.  
For it is every citizen's duty to protect his native land.

**MALE VOICE**

It is every person's duty to protect his native soul.

**LINCOLN**

Every citizen's soul is his own.

**MALE VOICE**

Every citizen's soul is his own. That's what I just said.

**LINCOLN**

Breathes there a man with soul so dead,  
who never to himself has said?  
This is my own, my native land.

*My own conscience* would shriek like a harpy, had I chosen not to fight.

**MALE VOICE**

A man needs more than a country to give his life for.  
A man needs to have a wife.  
A man needs to have a family.  
A man needs to have a cause, beyond his naked country.

**LINCOLN**

"All men are created equal" is as worthy a cause as God gives us. To love your country because *it is* your country, but even more because it is a *free* country.

**MALE VOICE**

That's what I keep asking you: *Are* all man created equal? Black and white equal?



**LINCOLN**

Our Founding Fathers said so.

**MALE VOICE**

Did *your father* teach you that? Honest Abe?

**LINCOLN**

My father, as I recall, was never in favor of the social and political equality of the white and black races. He never wanted blacks to vote, or serve on juries, or hold public office, or intermarry.

**MALE VOICE**

That's why I say: Presidents are hypocrites.  
It's okay for us to fight and die for you, but not vote or live with you.

**LINCOLN**

What *I* believe is that blacks, and all other men, are equal in having the right to improve their condition in life, and in having the right to enjoy the fruits of their own labor. Slavery ... *and* racism stink like the corpse of injustice they are.

**MALE VOICE**

Mr. Lincoln? Do you know who I am?

**LINCOLN**

Who? Willie? My dead, little boy? No. What was I thinking? Or dreaming?  
In sleep there is no slavery, nor taint of skin....

Are all men created equal? Is *that* what you're asking?  
Of course they are. But of course they're not. There's no answer.

**MALE VOICE**

It's a question lacking single moral rectitude. Right?

**LINCOLN**

I am unalterably opposed to slavery. And to landslides. And to war.  
They are uncontrollable. And how we struggle to get out from under them.  
How? Born in a land where slavery was as widespread as religion. And cancer.  
I'm a politician. Not a dictator. War is not my strength.  
I deal with men's decisions, not military strategy.  
I did all I could politically to avert it. But people were not listening to me.  
The cure had to be gradual. I knew that, and I promised that. Like Jefferson did.  
A step-by-step emancipation. Political *and* logical. Not some fell swoop Jericho.  
Otherwise, a greater evil would befall us, even to the cause of human liberty itself.  
Otherwise, I knew there would be blood.

**MALE VOICE**

Yes. I see. Let those already in the pot of slavery stew.  
Until a white neo-Confederacy comes along to find the next best thing for blacks.

**LINCOLN**

Enough! Hush! All I wanted was to mark slavery as the evil it is.  
An ulcer for me to stop from spreading further.

**MALE VOICE**

I confess: I have thought wrongly about you, Mr. Lincoln.  
I always heard that you opposed slavery so much you would do away with it.

**LINCOLN**

I *do* oppose slavery. And I'll tell you why.  
I cannot but hate every element of it.  
It's a sin for which our nation is doomed to be punished.  
I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself.  
I hate it for enabling the enemies of free institutions to taunt us as hypocrites.  
I hate it because it forces so many good men amongst ourselves to open war  
with the fundamental principles of the Declaration of Independence.  
But we live in a country where what one man hates, even if he's President,  
does not make the law. What makes laws is patience and consensus.  
I always believed that the agitation of slavery would produce its gradual atrophy,  
over time. Which my efforts would neither materially hasten nor impede.  
All that was needed, I prayed, was for me to hold fast by my principle that slavery  
shall not be allowed to spread further.  
And no one would be killed. Surely not 620,000 men on the battlefields.  
I never imagined it could be *this* bad, and could last *this* long.

**MALE VOICE**

I guess that political mind of yours miscalculated.

**LINCOLN**

I didn't think Southerners would act so brashly and so thoughtlessly.  
If I knew, I wouldn't have run for President the way I did.  
But they couldn't hear us declare the patience we had over the din of propaganda.  
For everything we said, they scarcely know there was such a Lincoln alive.  
In no way was black insurrection a goal of mine.  
Face it. How could there be a slave insurrection in the United States?  
The indispensable concert of action and communication could never be attained.  
The slaves had no incendiary freemen, black or white, to supply it.  
The explosive materials were everywhere in parcels. No connecting trains.  
Nor could such a plot have been kept secret before someone would divulge it.

**MALE VOICE**

What about Harper's Ferry?

**LINCOLN**

What about Harper's Ferry?

John Brown's effort was not a black insurrection.

It was an attempt by white men to get up a revolt among slaves,  
in which the slaves refused to participate.

A fanatic like Brown is not politically shrewd.

He broods over the oppression of a people,

till he fancies himself commissioned by God to liberate them.

He then ventures an attempt, which ends in little else than his own execution.

It was no slave insurrection that brought you to this place, my poor lad.

You were brought here to defend against rebelling citizens, instigated by whom?

A less than five percent minority of the Southern population.

The white privileged slave-owners, who would destroy our nation over slavery.

**MALE VOICE**

You blame the South for this?

**LINCOLN**

I blame some who controlled the South. Yes.

I understood the quagmire we were all in.

I understood when Southerners told us they were no more responsible than we  
for the origin of slavery in America. I acknowledged that.

I didn't blame them for not doing what I should not know how to do myself.

My first impulse would be to free the slaves, and ship them to Liberia.

But a moment's reflection would convince me that that wouldn't work.

If they were all landed there in a year, they would all perish in the next ten.

What then? Free them all, and keep them among us as underlings?

Is it quite certain that this betters their condition?

What else? Free them, and make them politically and socially our equals?

White America's feelings will not admit of this.

The fact that I want all black women freed of slavery doesn't mean that I want any  
one of them as a dance partner.

**FEMALE VOICE**

No equality, then, at the Inauguration Ball?

**MALE VOICE**

What is the solution?

**LINCOLN**

This war, I suppose. This Hell come to Earth. This God's punishment.  
When men's actions fail to accord with God's justice long enough, the sky will fall.  
How can we make slaves our equals? Society will not allow it.  
A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, cannot be safely disregarded.

**MALE VOICE**

When you say a nation, conceived in liberty,  
and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal?  
Doesn't that want to make you puke?

**LINCOLN**

This blood-soaked land of carnage is what makes me want to vomit.

**MALE VOICE**

I mean, it's all bullshit what white American Presidents say.  
It's whites who demean blacks. Not blacks. We didn't sow the wind.  
We'd be your equals if we were in ancient Rome.

**LINCOLN**

You argue the point better than I.

**MALE VOICE**

I wish I'd heard you earlier, man. I might be more alive today.

**LINCOLN**

[*pause*] What you say might, in fact, be true. *We have sown* the wind.  
He, and she, who were in shackles when this War began shall be set free.  
And God save us from the wrath and consequences.  
The prideful have proved they cannot be trusted.  
It is the humble whom we must trust. And I must accept it for what it is.  
Maybe, someday, someone will stand by my grave, and say, "Here rests the man,  
Abraham Lincoln, who set us on the road to true freedom and equality." I can  
only hope and pray. In the meantime it is my nightmare that claims the field.

**MALE VOICE**

Why did you do it? Because you could? Because others weren't as clever as you?

**LINCOLN**

I did it from duty and guilt more than anything else. For my mother. For Ann.  
For Mary. For our sons. For you. For all my sons and brothers.  
For believing in the practical extermination of slavery over time.  
For believing time. That's the crux of it. I was buying time until time bought me.  
And now I grieve every son's death in this War as I would grieve him as my own.

## FEMALE VOICE

And?

### LINCOLN

Hindsight shows the truth of events we could only guess at before.  
Slavery in this country was destined not to cease until it was brought to a crisis.  
We were recklessly living in a house of cards, fated to fall. Along racial fault lines.  
And this is the fall. Pray that we can endure it.  
Fanaticism filled the minds of many in the South.  
There was barely an impartial voice in the crowd.  
Believing that citizenship and dignity were denied by color.  
Things had the earmarks of mob mentality.  
Surrendering to them would have been surrendering our nation's freedom.  
Because freedom does not mean liberty and the pursuit of happiness alone.  
Freedom means living correctly, and living to correct social injustice.

## MALE VOICE

Freedom means war.

### LINCOLN

I would hope that's not always so. What democracy can last if that were true?  
No. Freedom means a government *of* the people and *by* the people,  
which studies and deliberates, and then does the right thing *for* the people.  
For *all* the people. Not just the elite. What went wrong I have searched for.  
In logic. In debate. In history. And finally, in the Bible.  
And I have concluded that there can be but one answer:  
The single greatest truth that governs our lives is that God is in charge. And when  
offences of slavery's magnitude come into the world, woe be it to the people.

## MALE VOICE

You blame *God* for what's happening to us?

### LINCOLN

Face it. Either it's God who's doing this, or we ourselves designing these tortures.  
Either way our country has to face punishment for its sins of slavery.  
But the punishment's proving nearly unbearable for me. I'm broken and desolate.

## MALE VOICE

When slaves sacrifice every hope of ever choosing their paths in life.  
When they give up loving anything dear to them for fear it will be stripped away.  
When they sometimes even take the lives of their own, beloved children,  
to spare them the hands of inhuman slave masters....  
What makes you think *you* have it so bad?

**LINCOLN**

[*pause*] When I was a young man I was friends with a family called Rutledge. They had a boarding house in New Salem, where I stayed when I first arrived. Their daughter, Ann, took sick. She had flowing blond hair, large blue eyes, a quick intellect, and an angel's grace. I visited her often as she lay in her bed in the family cabin. Call it love. Call it lost. When she died, it was more than I could bear, thinking of cold rain falling on her grave. I had to leave. If not the place, then into the woods with my gun alone. Into my mind, alone, where I've existed in melancholy for months on end during much of my life. Sometimes with suicidal thoughts, to the concern of my friends.

**FEMALE VOICE**

She died of God's will.

**LINCOLN**

Yes. I now accept that.  
Just as I have survived of God's will, to witness and oversee this slaughterhouse.  
Just as it was God's will for me to issue, at last, the Emancipation Proclamation.  
Just as it's God's will when this will finally end, and unquiet graves be stilled.  
When I first took office as President,  
all eyes were anxiously directed to the impending civil war.  
Both sides should have done everything in their power to avert it.  
But one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive.  
And the other would accept war rather than let the nation perish. And war came.  
And each side looked to justice, and God, and to the same Bible for victory.

**MALE VOICE**

I'm dying because people of your skin color made people of my skin color slaves.

**LINCOLN**

It seems nigh unbelievable to me that this must be so.  
And yet, it is.  
And even stranger that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance,  
in wringing their profit from the sweat of other men's brows.  
God blessed us with an Eden; and we found a second Cain.  
God gave us freedom; and we corrupted it.  
Because God detests slavery. And we should have known, but never knew.  
What person who commanded spiritual knowledge of the Bible ever told us?  
No one, other than Moses. We had to learn the hard way.  
We had to make our own plagues to learn God's will.  
Because we failed to grasp what Moses grasped,  
that enslaved peoples are God's chosen people.

**MALE VOICE**

So I'm dying because I'm one of God's chosen people?  
I don't like this ending.

**LINCOLN**

The Almighty has His own purposes; and you and I are two of them.  
I can see that.  
As I can see that *I* may be soon the next to die.  
I have almost daily premonitions.  
We are in the living grip of His destiny.  
Our prayers should be for forgiveness.  
With malice toward none, with charity for all.  
With firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right,  
our prayers should be for a just and lasting peace for all.  
Our prayers should be that this almighty scourge not be ordained to continue  
until all the wealth piled by two hundred fifty years of unrequited toil be sunk,  
and every drop of blood drawn with the lash be paid for by another drawn with  
the sword.

**FEMALE VOICE**

Let us pray.

**The GOSPEL CHOIR having now  
completely assembled sings, a cappella,  
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.**

## SCENE 3 – DREAMS

### TIME and PLACE

1963. The room of Scene 1 with books, a writing desk and chair. Also, to the side, is the black box, now converted into a speaker's lectern. On the **upstage and elevated** screen, pictures from the Civil Rights Movement.

**Stage right** stand the assembled GOSPEL CHOIR.

### CHARACTERS

MARTIN LUTHER KING.

King's SECRETARY, female and black.

GOSPEL CHOIR.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

**The GOSPEL CHOIR sings We Shall Overcome; and as they are singing, KING and his SECRETARY enter. She sits at the table, and readies herself to take dictation. He stands behind the lectern.**

### KING

Abraham Lincoln lost his life,  
on Good Friday, 1865.  
It was yet another disaster,  
for a nation reeling from civil war....

[*gently to his SECRETARY*] No! No! Not yet.  
I'm just getting warmed up.  
Getting my thoughts together.  
I'll tell you when.

### SECRETARY

Okay.

**She puts down her pen.**



**KING**

Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on Good Friday, 1865.  
At Ford's Theatre, in Washington, D.C.  
For a nation reeling in civil war, it was yet another disaster.  
No one organized a rescue.  
No one saved his life.  
He died inside the nightmare inside his brain.  
Alone.

Lincoln was no abolitionist.  
Yet, by his hand, he accomplished more in a moment  
than all the abolitionists of all time.

**Pause.**

**SECTERARY**

Shall I start now?

**KING**

Not yet.

**An explosive gunshot, and pause.**

**KING**

As he fell, Lincoln's worst fears came back into his mind.  
Slaves rioting throughout the South. Gathering in gangs and groups.  
Some armed with field implements, clubs, and rocks.  
Some with firearms they stole.  
And the next chapter in Civil War bloodshed would commence.  
Confederate soldiers, where they could, attempting to end the rampage,  
killing every black who came into sight.  
In the midst of the massacre, freed slaves, running helter skelter,  
hiding for their lives.  
Border states deluged with desperate black refugees.  
And precious few accommodations.  
It would be a time close to national mass hysteria.  
To what end? Seventy, eighty percent of the black population of the South,  
either killed, or fled from the land and their homes.  
The remainder eking out an existence in squalor, unemployment, and sickness.  
Confronted daily with malice, hatred, and fear, everywhere.  
*That* picture, the one that slowly crept out of Lincoln's mind as he died.

**Pause.**

## SECTERARY

Now?

## KING

Just a few more moments....

[*beat*] But it never happened that way, did it?  
No Roman slave rebellion on this continent. No Spartacus.  
Against all the doomsday predictions, the freed black slaves remained civilized....  
Why?... Why was that?  
That's the question of the ages, isn't it?  
Why do whites declare, "Give me liberty, or give me death," and not Negroes?  
Is a black man so different?  
Has he not eyes to see the racial divide in this country?  
Has he not hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions like a white?  
Is he not hurt with the same weapons,  
subject to the same diseases,  
healed by the same means,  
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a white man is?  
If you prick him, does he not bleed?  
If you tickle him, does he not laugh?  
If you poison him, does he not die?  
And if you wrong him, will he not revenge?

Lincoln, if he had lived, would have lived to witness a miracle.  
A miracle he lived to start.  
His whole life was a calculation of the forces of cause and effect.  
But this one he could only have put into the category of miracles.  
The incalculable patience and miracle of the long-suffering black race.

Worn down in body and spirits in his final days, his nightmares must have raged.  
Soldiers' deaths on the battlefields. The specter of slave rebellions in the South....  
I shall not meet this brave and troubled soul until we meet in Heaven,  
but I feel his pain and fears in my own dreams. In my own dreams.  
Here in this place rests the spirit of Abraham Lincoln,  
a man who set us on the road to true freedom and equality. Jefferson's battle cry.

I dream. I *do* dream. I dream of no more discrimination against the black man.  
Because in dreams there *is* no discrimination.  
In dreams there *is* no racism. No taint of skin.  
In dreams there is freedom. Freedom to pursue equality....

**Pause.**

**KING**

It's going to be one of the greatest demonstrations for freedom in world history. And we shall stand in the reflection of one of the greatest American Presidents. One hundred years to the day when he signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

[to his SECRETARY] You may start now.

**SECTERARY**

Yes, Dr. King.

**KING**

The Emancipation Proclamation was a beacon light of hope, to millions of Negro slaves. A joyous daybreak to the end of their captivity. Yet ....

One hundred years later, are we really free?

Hobbled by shackles of segregation and manacles of discrimination.

One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of the white man's sea of prosperity.

One hundred years later the Negro still languishes in the corners of American society, finding himself no less than an exile in his own country.

This is shameful.

This is a shameful breach of faith by a nation who promised all men the freedom of equality.

This is a shameful default by a nation who guaranteed all people equal justice and the blessings of liberty.

But I refuse to believe it.

I refuse to believe those promises of democracy have been aborted.

I refuse to believe, in a prosperous nation like this, that all Abraham Lincoln lived for, and fought for, and died for has fallen into bankruptcy.

I refuse to believe the heart of this nation actually refuses to make justice a reality for all God's children. The time to act is *now*.

*Now* is the time we must oppose unjust laws that degrade human beings.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America unless the Negro is granted his full citizenship rights. Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever.

Lincoln knew that.

Abraham Lincoln had a dream. A nightmare to his soul.

One I shall not tell you of, it was so disturbing.

One of an impending doom, to shake the foundations of this nation....

I have a dream. A different dream.

I have a dream that we walk not alone through this valley of the shadow of death.

I have a dream of the end of persecution and police brutality.

**KING**

I have a dream, deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed:

That we hold these truths to be self-evident. That all men *are* created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down at a table prepared before them in brotherhood.

And ....

And that Mississippi will be transformed into a wellspring of freedom and justice.

And Alabama will see young blacks and whites singing together, hand in hand.

From the hilltops of New Hampshire,

from the mountains of New York,

from the Alleghenies of Pennsylvania,

from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

from the slopes of California,

from Stone Mountain, Georgia,

from Lookout Mountain, Tennessee,

from every hill of Mississippi, let freedom ring.

**Pause.**

[*to his* SECRETARY] What do you think?

**SECRETARY**

[*beat*] What? It's over?

**KING**

Does it need something?

I think I've said all I should.

**SECRETARY**

I *really* like it. It stirs the blood....

**KING**

But what?

**SECRETARY**

Maybe it needs a loop.

Or a song.

What about a song at the end, we could all sing together?

**KING**

[*pause*] Free At Last?

**SECRETARY**

Free At Last. Yes. Yes!

**The GOSPEL CHOIR sings Free At Last.**

**KING**

From every mountainside, let freedom ring.  
And when we allow freedom to ring, in every state and every city,  
we will speed the day when all God's children, black and white,  
Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands,  
and join in singing together the words of the old Negro spiritual:  
"Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

**The SECRETARY drops her pen and  
claps (or cries, or both).**

**KING**

Thank you.

**SECRETARY**

[*beat*] Just ....

**KING**

Yes?

**SECRETARY**

What *does* it mean?

**KING**

What does what mean?

**SECRETARY**

What does it mean when you say: All men are created equal?

**KING**

[*pause*] Equal in human respect.  
Equal in the privilege of experiencing all the joys and tribulations of life, love,  
and God.  
Equal in never being treated inferior.  
Equal in not being haunted by fears in the night of being black.  
Equal in imagining the love, hidden in the corners of the human heart.  
Equal in the opportunity of living honorably, and honoring our promises.  
Equal in our duty to protect and care for our loved ones, and this country.  
Equal in answering our call in life:  
To carry the gospel of truth, and freedom, and love as far as all over this land.

**A moment of silence; and then the  
GOSPEL CHOIR sings the Hammer Song  
("If I had a hammer").**

**All exit.**

## SCENE 4 – THE FINAL DANCE

### TIME and PLACE

Nineteenth Century. The room of Scene 1, including the black box, chessboard, and chess set.

### CHARACTERS

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

SALLY HEMINGS, late 30's to early 40's and black.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

**SALLY and JEFFERSON enter.**

**SALLY**

Do your famous words mean *we* are equal?

**JEFFERSON**

Are Mozart, Beethoven, and Yankee Doodle equal?

**SALLY**

Not that it's all that important. Just wondering. What they mean.

**JEFFERSON**

All men are equally in the image of God. It is God, who's not created equal.

**SALLY**

And that's the Tom Jefferson truth?

**JEFFERSON**

In truth, God is in us, all. All of us. Together. In us. Being us.  
And the voice of the common man is the next best thing to the voice of God.  
Black, red, white, brown, and all.  
Voice, mind, conscience, and spirit.  
And if we leave without learning that, I'm afraid God might just leave, too.

**SALLY**

What's going to happen?

**JEFFERSON**

With slavery?  
It will disappear.  
On its own.  
Slavery has its faults.  
And most grievously will the country, North and South, answer them.  
Yet slavery has given rise to the noblest virtues.  
It gave us, us, didn't it?  
And when the last bell tolls, let its faults and virtues be buried alike forever....  
Life can be darkness. And in the dark our fortunes meet us.

**JEFFERSON takes SALLY into his arms.**

**SALLY**

What are you doing?

**JEFFERSON**

I am dancing with you, my Dearest Friend. My Love.

**They dance; then stop, still in each other's arms.**

**SALLY**

You're acting foolish, Tom Jefferson.

**JEFFERSON**

No one will see....  
Your skin.  
Your hair.  
Your eyes.  
Being here with you.  
There's a depth to my being I never suspected.  
Never dared to dream possible.  
And it comforts me like nothing else.  
Can you understand?

**SALLY**

Am I allowed to?  
Can someone who is owned ever dream of loving her master as I love you?

**JEFFERSON**

I can make love with you, three times a day,  
give you my heart as freely as you give me yours,  
and still it's not allowed.



**SALLY**

Why?

**JEFFERSON**

I'm too old, and you're too young to ever understand.  
I'll go the rest of my lifetime, never breathing a word of this to anyone.  
You are the only one I can confess to.  
You, and the hidden compartments of my heart.

**SALLY**

Do you care to know how I feel?

**JEFFERSON**

Of course, Sally.

**SALLY**

Like water.  
Like all this is water I desperately want to cling to.  
But, in time, you, and it, will go, slipping away through my hands.  
Can you understand?

**JEFFERSON**

My body has spoken, how deeply I love you.  
My mind and soul are right behind.  
And someday ....

**SALLY**

[*beat*] We are writing a hidden history that time will conceal.  
But you have written a pledge.  
Not a truism. A pledge. To the world.  
Of course not all people are created alike. Not all loves are created equal.  
But hope is, and hope may be, that your words will become a battle cry.  
A battle cry, Tom Jefferson, for a future in this land where we *could* be lovers.  
Openly. A call to all lovers to see the mountains, and the valleys,  
and the beauty of all the people.

**JEFFERSON**

Maybe I was happier when I was younger. I doubt it.  
Things like that can't be compared across bridges of time.  
But one thing is clear to me.  
You are the rope, Sally Hemings, that holds my old life and my new life together.  
I can't imagine living now without you.  
God forgive me that I cannot tell the world.

**SALLY**

Possibly you are being a bit too emotional.

**JEFFERSON**

Maybe.

But let me make a prediction:

If the words do grow into fact,

it will be a black who sees them to reality, not a white man.

**They commence dancing again.**

**JEFFERSON**

Life goes on, doesn't it?

Long after the thrill of President is gone....

What? What are you thinking?

**SALLY**

Of Presidents to come.

And the South giving up slavery....

**JEFFERSON**

Yes?

**SALLY**

And I know it's not going to happen soon.

But if it does....

He wouldn't be President, would he?

If it weren't for you.

**JEFFERSON**

[*beat*] No. I see your point. He wouldn't.

He'd have to see, as I do, that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

And he'll have to have what I haven't ...

the will to do something about it.

**SALLY**

Without people being thrown into poverty.

A strange way for slavery to end:

People freed, but starving to death. Or dying from illness.

Remember the deplorable conditions of the peasants we saw in France?

**JEFFERSON**

It's healthier not to be poor.

It's healthier, for that matter, not to be always in debt the way I've been.

**SALLY**

There are no answers, are there?

**JEFFERSON**

Have we talked enough?

I'm about out of breath.

**SALLY**

The future has its dark clouds, for this country of ours.

**JEFFERSON**

Things will change.

And there is little, really, we can do about that.

We ought never be so proud as to claim to have control over events.

**SALLY**

So? Are we equal now?

**JEFFERSON**

Let's play some chess....

Do you know the French Defense?

**SALLY**

No.

**JEFFERSON**

Good.

**They walk over to the black box, hand in hand, and begin playing chess, standing.**

**END\***

**\* Chess imaging courtesy of CardGames.io. The game, courtesy of Stefen Levitsky vs. Frank Marshall. Breslaw, Poland, 1912. The "gold coin" game.**