

BLACKS AND WHITES

by Phillip W. Weiss

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Cast

Agnes – a white actress, mid 50s

Ellie – a black college student, early 20s

Fluffy – a white actress, early 20s

Frank – a middle-age white man, mid 50s

Jack – a white Hollywood movie executive, mid 40s

Jim – a black actor, late 30s

Mabel – a black actress, late 30s

Paula – a white woman, early 40s

Randy – a white minstrel singer, in black face, mid 30s

This is a three-act play.

Act 1 – *page 1*

Time: 1939

Place: a room

Location: Hollywood, California

Jim, Mabel, Fluffy, Jack, Randy

Act 2 – *page*

Time: the present

Place: a living room

Location: New York City

Paula, Frank, Ellie

Act 3, Scene 1 – *page*

Time: The present

Place: a bedroom

Location: New York City

Jim, Mabel, Paula, Frank

Act 3, Scene 2 – *page*

Time: The present

Place: a room

Entire cast

Credits

**“Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody”
written by Jean Schwartz
lyrics by Sam M. Lewis and Joe Young**

**“We’re Strangers to Each Other”
music and lyrics by Phillip W. Weiss**

Synopsis

Blacks and whites engage in lively and free-wheeling discussions on the status of race relations in the United States. Is racial harmony possible? Is the United States really united?

This play is a work of fiction. The characters are fictitious and their resemblance to any person living or dead is purely coincidental and entirely unintentional.

Act 1

Time: 1939

Place: a room

Location: Hollywood, California

The stage is dark. From Off Stage a song can be heard)

Rock-a bye your baby
 With a Dixie Melody,
 When you croon,
 Croon a tune, from the heart of Dixie.
 Hang that cradle mammy mine,
 Right on that Mason-Dixon line,
 And swing it from Virginia
 To Tennessee with all the soul that's in ya.
 Mammy, mammy, listen what they're playing,
 They're playing, weep no more my lady,
 Sing it for me,
 And ol' black Joe ...

(Suddenly the song is interrupted. The stage lights go on revealing a black man dressed in overalls and work shoes)

BLACK MAN
(angry)

I can't stand it any more!

He pauses, then speaks directly to the audience)

I tell ya, that song just gets me so riled up, singing about ol' black Joe. Well guess what? I'm black and my name is Jim, which is almost the same as Joe, so whenever I hear that song, I think they're singing about me. Now I know it's only a song and supposedly nobody means any harm by it, but still, as a black man I don't like it, singing about us like we have nothing better to do than listen to some joker singing about, of all places, Dixie, you know that lovely place where blacks have to pay a poll tax to vote and have to eat in segregated restaurants, use segregated bathrooms, attend segregated schools, where they treat us like we have some kind of disease.

(A large, heavy, black woman enters the stage. She is carrying a basket full of laundry. She is dressed as a maid.)

BLACK WOMAN
 Whatchya fussin' about now, Jim?

JIM

Aw, Mabel, it ain't nothin'.

MABEL

Well it gotta be something 'cause I could hear you runnin' your mouth a mile away.

JIM

It's that damn song again. It gets on my nerves.

MABEL

What are you complaining about? Aren't they singing about me too? At least somebody is singing about us.

JIM

Hush your mouth, woman!

MABEL

You're always fussin'.

JIM

Yeah. So what?

MABEL

So, nothing.

JIM

Aw, stop your gabbin'. You're just tryin' to make trouble. Who do you think you are anyway?

MABEL

Somebody who doesn't go around runnin' my mouth like a damn fool.

JIM

Who would listen to you anyway? You got nothing useful to say.

MABEL

Well ain't you the mister big shot, soundin' so high and mighty. You haven't done a good day's work in I don't know how long.

JIM

So what? You're nothing but a maid, a servant. You have no right to criticize.

MABEL

I do my work an' I get paid for it, which is more than I can say for you.

JIM

Hush up now, woman! They'd took my name, made a mockery of it, put it in song, make it sound like I'm jus' a stupid, simple fool an' now I got deal with your nonsense.

MABEL

Nonsense, nothing! I gotta put up with the same guff as you but you don't hear me complainin' and besides what good would it do?

JIM

Every time you talk that way it practically makes me want to scream! Like in that overblown movie about the "old south," your servility actually made me sick.

MABEL

Listen, boy, they paid me good to play that role, so shut your face!

JIM

Yeah, they paid you good, but you still played a loudmouthed fool and that ain't worth NO amount of money.

MABEL

If you keep on runnin' your face like that I'm gonna dump this laundry over your head!

JIM

You're all talk.

MABEL

Well, what am I supposed to do? I need the money and I would rather have money in the bank than nothing on the plate.

JIM

You wouldn't go starvin', no way.

MABEL

Why you say that?

JIM

'Cause there'd be other jobs.

MABEL

Jim, you are dumber than a mule that's jus' been kicked in the head.

JIM

No, I'm not! When you play those roles you have no idea of how you're hurting your own people.

MABEL

(baffled)

MY PEOPLE!? Watch you talkin' about now?

JIM

You know exactly what I'm talkin' about.

MABEL

Jim, if you keep on vexing me this way, I'm gonna let you have it but good.

JIM

What's the matter? Can't handle the truth?

MABEL

I can handle anything you throw at me, but not when you not makin' sense.

JIM

Now it's YOU who's being dumb.

MABEL

Oh, it's ME being dumb now? No, no, no! I'm jus' annoyed ... at YOU!

JIM

Well you wouldn't be so "annoyed" if you thought I wasn't tellin' the truth.

MABEL

Look here, mister. You don't know what ya talkin' about. I'm makin' good money, okay, an' without that money I'd be out on the street.

JIM

No, Mabel, you're upset because deep down you know that you're selling out your people for a few bucks.

MABEL

Here we go again with that "people" talk.

JIM

That's right, Mabel. They're your people whether you like it or not. You are a public figure, a symbol, an' when the public sees you on the screen they think that all black women are meant to be maids and all black men stevedores.

MABEL

Jim, you're so wrong. First, I don't represent nobody. And second, who the hell are you to lecture me on how I should make a living?

JIM

Who am I, you ask? I'm the guy who refuses to sell out. Yeah, I coulda made a bundle playin' a shuffling, mumbling Negro, like some of the other brothers do, but I told them, "screw you an' your money, I have my dignity."

MABEL

An' what did that get you?

JIM

At least I know I ain't laughed at.

MABEL

Yeah, you got that right. Nobody's laughin' and nobody's payin' you either.

JIM

That's right, Mabel, nobody's payin'.

MABEL

Oh, so it's a question of pride.

JIM

I'm sayin' no such thing and don't put words in my mouth.

MABEL

Then what exactly are you sayin'?

JIM

What I'm sayin' is this: at some point we have to make a stand, make our voices heard, demand respect and be treated as equals.

MABEL

Have you been drinking again?

JIM

No I haven't, and what I'm saying has nothing to do with whether I'm drunk. It has to do with being part of a system that perpetuates ugly racist stereotypes that keep us down.

MABEL

Don't you think I know that? Don't you think I know how those movies make me look?

JIM

Yeah, Mabel, I know you know an' that's what irks me because you know better, yet you still take the money.

MABEL

You think we're really despised, don't you.

JIM

Maybe that's a little too strong a word, but we're not liked, that's for sure.

MABEL

You got a point.

JIM

I KNOW I got a point.

MABEL

(suddenly galvanized)

Why SHOULD I be playin' a maid? For once, let 'em show some white girl pushing a mop while I'm all decked out, gallivanting around.

JIM

(laughing)

That would sure be a grand sight.

MABEL

I earned it and I would be partying, laughing, whooping it up, really enjoying myself.

JIM

I know you would, Mabel. In fact, your words now got me feeling all fired up.

MABEL

That's right, Jim. Let's show them who's the boss.

JIM

(gets up, starts pacing back and forth across the stage)

Ol' Black Joe, makin' me sound like a fool. Well I'M NO FOOL! I AM A MAN! AND I WANT WHAT'S MINE!

A young white guy, in black face, enters the scene.

WHITE GUY

Aw, stop your squawking.

JIM

(surprised)

What are you doing here, Randy? This is a private conversation, so get lost.

RANDY

Get lost yourself, bro. We're on company property so I have as much right to be here as you. Now, I don't appreciate the way you so rudely interrupted my singing. I'm a singer and I do black face and if you gotta problem with that, then too bad.

JIM

You ARE nasty, and shameless too. When you put that paint on your face, you're mocking me and every black person on this planet.

RANDY

You don't know what you're talkin' about. It's called entertainment, pal, and only an idiot would take that personally.

JIM

You callin' me an idiot?

RANDY

Yeah, I guess I am, because that's what you sound like. I make a living as a minstrel and now you're trying to take away my job, and I don't like it.

JIM

Well, what you're doing is wrong, plain wrong.

RANDY

Says you! Hey, pal, there's an audience out there for what I do and I'm not about to starve just to satisfy you. Got that?

JIM

What about me, pal? I gotta make a living too.

RANDY

Who's stopping you?

JIM

You white people are, making me take garbage roles way below what I can do.

RANDY

You are so off base, so naïve in fact, that it's laughable.

The White Guy starts laughing.

JIM

Why you laughing?

RANDY

'Cause I've heard all this crap before and let me tell you, it's just a bunch of hot air. You're lucky you're even workin'. Most of my pals are flat broke.

JIM

So I'm lucky to be working. What of it?

RANDY

You keep complaining. You think I got the one up on you because I'm white?

JIM

Yes, I do. You're singing in black face and that black face could be me.

RANDY

Ha! Show's how much you know. First, I'm not YOU! Second, I wasn't born with a spoon in my mouth. I was dirt poor, probably a lot poorer than you, and I had to bum my way to get here. Hop freight cars and the like. It wasn't easy, no siree. Nobody gave me anything. The studios wanted me to sing black face, so I took the roles. What's the problem? Meanwhile, you're getting work too because you're black.

JIM

Yeah, garbage roles that denigrate my people.

RANDY

So what? That's not your doing. It's work, so stop bein' so prideful. You're just one of the workers.

JIM

You just don't get it.

RANDY

I do get it. I understand exactly what you're talkin' about. You feel you deserve better roles but can't get them because you're black and the roles that you do get make you and your people look bad.

JIM

That's right. You're not so dumb after all.

RANDY

I could take offense at that crack but I won't. You got that chip on your shoulder and if you don't get rid of it, it's gonna bring you down, fast and hard, and you can't afford that.

JIM

Easy for you to say, being white.

RANDY

That's right, I'm white and you're black, so where's that leave us?

JIM

You tell me.

RANDY

You brought this subject up, not me, so it's your problem, not mine. I'm just trying to get by.

JIM

Would you like it if black guys started doing white face and took away your job?

RANDY

Let's see you do it. I'll even buy you the paint.

JIM

Now you're taunting me.

RANDY

Why are you people always so touchy? I'm talking to you straight. The roles we play are market driven, meaning that if there were enough people out there willing to pay to see you do white face, then you'd be doing white face and then maybe I'd be the one scrounging, but no way would I blame that on you.

JIM

(to Mabel)

Yeah, imagine me doing white face.

MABEL

(laughing)

You'd be run outta town faster than a dog with rabies, or maybe even strung up. Things like that have been known to happen in this country.

JIM

That's not exactly a laughing matter.

RANDY

Your lady friend is right. And as for you, sister, if people didn't want to see you playing maids, mammies and the like, well, you'd be plum out of luck. That's your bread and butter so deal with it. I have my bread and butter act too.

JIM

Yeah, mocking black people. All you white people are the same. Patronizing us, putting us down, making us think that we should be grateful for the crumbs you throw at us.

MABEL

You tell 'em, Jim. I ain't no maid.

RANDY

(irritated)

Listen, Jack. Those crumbs, as you put it, pay your bills. You're working and if you don't like the roles, move on! There's a hundred other brothers willing to take your place and there's a thousand other guys willing to take mine.

MABEL

Boy, you're talking so high and mighty, like you know it all, but you don't, and you can't know 'cause you're not black.

RANDY

And you're not white, so how can you understand where I'm coming from?

JIM

We don't, that's the problem. You can be whatever you want, we can't. We're labeled. We can't change the color of our skin.

RANDY

I can't change the color of my skin either so what's your point?

MABEL

(Laughs)

Boy, from what I can see, it looks like you have, but we know that's just make up. My point is, young man, is that you're white and we live in racist society and you have opportunities denied to black folk because of race. In some parts of this country we can't even drink from the same water fountain as you yet you're telling us that we have no cause to complain of unfair treatment?

RANDY

That's right. Didn't the Supreme Court rule that separate but equal is constitutional?

JIM

Yes, it did, but that don't mean it's right. Courts make mistakes too.

RANDY

Maybe they do, but right now that's the law of the land, so why don't you just get off my case already.

JIM

I'm not on your case; it's people like you who are on ours.

RANDY

You're in fantasy land. Like I said, I'm just trying to get by. I want better roles too. You think I'm happy playing a minstrel singer? I can act too but I take whatever roles I can get because I got a family to feed and this is the only way I know to make a living.

JIM

If you're looking for sympathy from me you've come to the wrong place.

RANDY

I don't want or need your sympathy, I don't want your friendship, in fact I don't even want to know you. I just want to let you know that you're way off base and that the more you complain the more you drive people away and that doesn't help your career any.

JIM

If I do, so be it. All I know is that if things were fair I'd be a major super star, there's no denying that.

RANDY

Whatever you say, pal. I now leave you to wallow in you fantasies. *(To Mabel)*. Good bye sister; maybe we'll see each other on a set.

MABEL

Yeah, but how will I recognize you if you're in black face?

(RANDY laughs and exits)

MABEL

Well, that's the kind of stupidity we got a put up with. *(pause)* You know, Jim, given the chance, you could have been the black Clark Gable.

JIM

(contemptuous)

Bigger than Gable! That's right. I'd be getting all the lead roles.

MABEL

You think so?

JIM

I KNOW so.

MABEL

I wonder what them white girls would have said about you playin' a southern gentleman?

JIM

Who cares what they'd say. All I know is that I wouldn't be taking guff from them, that's for sure.

MABEL

Hey, I know them better than you do and believe me none of them are anything to write home about.

JIM

Yeah, but some of them are pretty.

MABEL

And white ... and snobs. Ooo, what I would have liked to have said to some of those girls.

JIM

I bet you would have had a lot to say.

A young, beautiful white woman wearing a revealing dress and spiked-heel shoes enters the scene.

WHITE WOMAN

What's your problem, honey? You jealous or something?

MABEL

Look at you, prancing around like some two-bit whore. Who do you think you are?

WHITE WOMAN

My name is Fluffy and I'm the gal you'd love to be.

MABEL

No you ain't ... Fluffy ... if that's your real name.

FLUFFY

Oh, yes I am, and that is my real name, and you wouldn't be yapping so loud about girls like me if what I said weren't true.

MABEL

Gals like you are so stuck up that it sickens me.

FLUFFY

I can't help being beautiful. Now if you don't mind, I have to go to wardrobe; oh, by the way, my boyfriend owns a studio and if you don't watch what you say you may be out of a job.

MABEL

(angry)

Why you nasty, sniveling piece of

JIM

Don't say it, Mabel.

MABEL

(pauses)

You're lucky I'm a lady.

FLUFFY

You're a lady? I doubt that. You've had your way with men too. Why, you're with a man right now.

MABEL

Oooo, you have such a filthy mind.

FLUFFY

You know, I have feelings too and just because I happen to be young and beautiful and white gives you no right to rag on me.

MABEL

Girly, it's not your look that's the problem, it's your attitude.

FLUFFY

Think what you want, mammy dearest, and besides who cares what you have to say. You're a nobody.

MABEL

Watch your mouth, young lady. At least I have my self-respect and if I was your mammy, I'd be given you a whuppin' so hard that you wouldn't be able to sit for a week. Does your mother know how shameless you are?

FLUFFY

Of course she does, in fact, she's my manager and I'm her meal ticket and she's knows it.

MABEL

Good lord! Depravity knows no bounds. Next thing, you'll be telling us that your pappy is your pimp.

FLUFFY

No. Nothing like that. He left when I was eight years old, but who cares now? He's nothing but a drunk anyway. He used to beat my mom. Well, that's in the past now. I'm making money, lots of money and I live in a huge house with servants, real servants, all of 'em black, who don't mouth off, know their place and do their jobs.

MABEL

Someday you'll get your come-uppance. You can count on it.

FLUFFY

Well, that day hasn't arrived, and I'd thank you not to talk so nasty to me.

MABEL

I'll talk to you any way I want, and if you don't like it, then go ahead and tell your boyfriend.

FLUFFY
(laughs)

I like you, even if you don't like me.

MAN'S VOICE
off stage)

Oh, honey bunch, time to go. The car is running. They're waiting for you at the set.

FLUFFY

That's my boyfriend. Gotta leave now. Love you ... and stop being so judgmental. I gotta make a living too.

Fluffy stands there for a moment, looks at Mabel and Jim, then exits.

MABEL

See what I'm talking about Jim?

JIM

She seemed kinda fine to me.

MABEL

Get your mind out of the gutter! *(pause)* What I can't understand is why good lookin' guys like ... like the character Clark Gable played in that old south movie ... , a guy who could have any woman he wants, anywhere in the world, would want to waste their time going after a spoiled, self-centered floozies like Fluffy who lead them on and don't put out?

JIM

(laughs)

Now don't start tearin' down Gable too. He had enough problems in that movie.

MABEL

I've had it up to here *(points to her neck)* with those stuck up bimbos. They're nothin' but a high-faluttin', prissy-faced teases who get guys so bamboozled that soon they don't know what they're doing.

JIM

Yeah, you're right, but a lot of men are weak so they go for that type. By the way, why are you on Gable's case anyway? Did he do something bad to you?

MABEL

He wouldn't have the nerve to try and besides, what I'm saying ain't personal. I'm jus' tryin' to make a point.

JIM

Which is?

MABEL

That I'm really sick and tired of playing a maid and now I'm all messed up in my head because of you!

JIM

Because of me?!

MABEL

Yeah, because of YOU! Before I started talking to you, I was feeling fine, did not have a care in the world. Now I'm all upset and sounding like a blithering fool.

JIM

Good!

MABEL

Good?! You mean that it's okay for me to be upset and sound like a blithering fool?

JIM

Of course not! What you're now feeling is something called social consciousness. The first time you feel it, it hits you real hard, like something has grabbed you by the guts and won't let go. We all go through it.

MABEL

So this is normal?

JIM

As normal as breathing. You'll get over it real soon and after you do, you'll be a stronger and wiser person for it.

MABEL

It's kind of scary.

JIM

That's okay. Go with the feeling. Remember, you're not alone.

MABEL

(angry)

Oh them nasty thieves. I oughta go to the front office right now and give 'em a piece of my mind!

JIM

That's right, Mabel, you do that!

MABEL

(indignant)

In the past two years I've made 27 movies, playing maids, mammies, and washer women. Well, that's finished. Do you know that I went to college, majored in accounting?

JIM

You don't say?

MABEL

I do say. I know I could at least play a secretary, but you think they would ever cast me as an office worker? No! So how about you and me going to the front office and having a little talk with the boss?

JIM

You mean the two of us?

MABEL

Yeah, the two of us.

JIM

That wouldn't be a good idea.

MABEL

Why not?

JIM

'Cause they'd laugh us right off the lot.

MABEL

What's a matter? You're afraid? I thought you were a union man or something.

JIM

HUSH UP! Don't say that too loud. Somebody may hear you.

MABEL

Why you being so secretive?

JIM

Because if they even think that you're in a union they'll fire you. So we have to be careful.

MABEL

Now you're telling me this after you got me all riled up?

JIM

I wasn't trying to get you all riled up. I was jus' trying to help you better appreciate your situation.

MABEL

I don't recall ever asking you for help.

JIM

Then why are we talking?

MABEL

Because you were runnin' off at the mouth an' I came by to check on you. Don't you remember?

JIM

That didn't mean you had to talk to me.

MABEL

What was I supposed to do? Just stand there and watch you flapping your lips?

JIM

I was just blowing off some steam. It's gets so frustrating, knowing that I'm being kept down.

MABEL

I understand how you feel, Joe. I'm in the same boat as you, you know, just like we were in that musical about them white actors on that river boat steamer.

JIM

The captain was okay, it was his wife that was the problem. A real dried up prune. And cheap too, just like they all are. I remember while I was rehearsing the main song for the movie, the director was there listening to me and after I was finished he struck up a conversation with me, telling me how much he liked what he heard, and asking me how I liked being in the movie and telling me how glad he was that I was part of the cast. Since he was being so friendly, I figured I'd ask him for a pay raise, so I asked. Immediately he starts hemmin' and moanin' and groanin' about expenses and overhead and the like, you know, like he was trying to brush me off, until finally I couldn't take it anymore and blew up at him.

MABEL

You gotta be more careful.

JIM

I couldn't help myself. He was patronizing me, talking down to me.

A smartly dressed white man enters the scene.

MAN

What a minute, partner! I'm the guy you're talking about and I think you got things a little mixed up here.

JIM

Who you callin' partner, Jack?

JACK

You, and why are you being so touchy?

JIM

Because of the way you treated me when I asked for a raise. You brushed me off like I was nothing, a nobody,

JACK

That's not the way I recall it, not at all, and I'd appreciate it if you'd stop trying to make me look bad.

JIM

Me trying to make YOU look bad? I think you got things kinda mixed up there.

JACK

Oh do I? I think not.

JIM

Did I or did I not ask you for a raise?

JACK

Yes, you did ask me for a raise and yes I did say no, but what you're leaving out is why I said no.

JIM

Well, no is no.

JACK

That's right. No is no. So what's the problem?

JIM

I bet if I were white you would have sung a different tune with me.

JACK

On that you're way off base. Yes, you're black and yes, we live in a racist country but my telling you I couldn't give you a pay raise had nothing to do with race. It was a business decision.

JIM

There we go again, the usual denials, the usual smoke screen.

JACK

Call it what you want but times are tough and we're operating on a very slim profit margin and if we don't make money then we're all out of work and you wouldn't want that, would you?

JIM

Oh boy, now you're pleading poverty again, just like all you studio bosses do whenever the subject of money comes up. You have money for big houses, expensive cars and fine looking ladies but when it comes to actually paying guys like me what we're worth, it's the old "we can't afford it" routine.

JACK

Well, we can't, and that's a fact and if you think that has something to do with you being black then I don't know what else to tell you. I would love to pay you more money, but the coffers are running dry. As it is, that river boat movie almost bankrupted the studio. Yes it was a great movie and yes you were wonderful in it, but it cost a ton of money to produce and market and we didn't even make enough money to cover costs. We were lucky that we even met the payroll.

MABEL

And we're supposed to believe THAT? You and the other studios practically own this town.

JACK

You really believe all that hype? I thought you knew better than that but I guess I was wrong. We owe so much money to the banks that sometimes I'm amazed that the banks haven't foreclosed on us, but then again they know that if they did, they'd be going down with us too.

JIM

That's just a bunch of jive talk. It's the same old malarkey.

JACK

Not jive talk, real talk, honest talk, and while we're on the subject of talk, I just want to let you know that according to your contract if you say anything that is detrimental to the interests of the studio, we have the right to terminate your contract immediately.

JIM and MABEL

(shocked)

WHAT!?

JACK

That's right, section 3, clause 2, states (*Jack takes out a sheet of paper*) and I quote: "Actor agrees to refrain from making any comments that can be reasonably deemed as being detrimental to the best interests of the studio. Violations of this clause can result in immediate termination of the contract," close quote.

JIM

Let me see that.

(Jack hands Jim the paper. Jim looks at it)

JIM

I can hardly see the print.

JACK

Your signature is at the bottom.

JIM

I was hoodwinked! You never told me about this.

JACK

That's not my fault. You signed the contract. You should have read it before signing.

JIM

How could I read what I can't see? Gee, I wonder else that contract says.

MABEL

You are a snake in the grass.

JACK

No I'm not. First, that's a standard contract and second, I'm a businessman trying to make a living making movies and because of me and other studio execs like me you people have good jobs. If it weren't for us, you'd be on a farm picking cotton or working as a maid, a real maid.

JIM

Oh yeah!?! And if it weren't for US (*pointing to himself and Mabel*) you'd be hunched over a sewing machine in some disgusting smelly sweat shop in New York City, so don't you go lording over us.

JACK

Listen Jim, I'm just telling you how it is.

JIM

Jack, you are one cool customer. All of a sudden race doesn't mean anything. Okay. If race is not a factor, then I want to be cast in the lead role for your next movie.

JACK

You know I can't do that.

MABEL

And why not, pray tell?

JACK

It wouldn't sell.

JIM

How do you know that?

JACK

The public just won't buy a black man in a lead role in a major motion picture.

JIM

Based on what?

JACK

Based on what I know the public wants. Look, I know where you're going with this and I commiserate with you, but we got to be realistic and if we try to market a movie starring a black man in a lead role, we'll be put out of business. It won't sell. Further, we'd be boycotted, attacked, lambasted and possibly even prosecuted and I'm not willing to risk everything I've worked for to find out if I'm wrong.

JIM

You're pathetic. All you're doing is pandering to racism. You know I can do the job and you know that I'm the best you have, yet you won't act on it. You're just a wimp, like they all are.

JACK

You have no right to attack me. I got you top billing in some big movies and if that's not good enough for you, you can see yourself to the door.

MABEL

That's all you people are good for, hiring and firing and looking at the bottom line. The truth means nothing. So what are we supposed to do, kiss your behinds, grovel at your feet?

JACK

No. Just do your jobs and hope for the best.

JIM

That's easy for you to say, Jack, or should I say "Yassam" and shuffle on out of here?

JACK

Can the sarcasm. I'm not the problem. I Gotta go now.

(Jack exits)

JIM

Humff! He has to go now; probably to the bathroom. Him and his poverty talk, what a joke. Meanwhile nothing has changed

MABEL

You're right, but at least you've been a featured player in a major movie, which is a lot more than can be said for most black actors.

JIM

Yes, I was a featured player, but I wasn't the star and it's the stars who make the big money, and in this world without money you're nothing, which is especially true for a black man.

MABEL

Well if you WERE a star, then maybe nobody'd want to see your movies and then where would you be?

JIM

You're missin' my point.

MABEL

No, I'm not missin' your point. Do you honestly think that white people would pay to see movies starring a black man?

JIM

Yes, I do, but right now, I'm just a hired hand, meaning that I have to scrounge for an extra nickel and dime, like they're doing me some kind of favor. That's how they keep us down! But boy would people be singing a different tune if I had big bucks. Then I'd be calling the shots. Where ever I'd go it would be the red carpet treatment and first class service, and why, because money talks, as the saying goes. It trumps everything, even race. Even the most nasty, vicious, stupid, goose-stepping bigot would think twice before closing the door in my face. And that's a fact.

MABEL

Well if you think you could make money, then why don't you start your own production company? Then you'd be your own boss.

JIM

It takes money to make money. You got money to invest?

MABEL

Don't mock me, boy. You know I don't. But if I had the money, I'd give it to you, you know I would.

JIM

That's easy talk when we both know you can't deliver.

MABEL

(annoyed)

What do you want me to say?

JIM

The truth!

MABEL

I am telling the truth and truthfully I don't have the money to help you.

JIM

So much for the truth *(pause)* If I had the money I'd hire the finest black actors and make the grandest movies, musicals, comedy, drama, everything. I'd drive them white companies right out of business 'cause when we black people are given a chance to compete fair and square, then we always come out on top. Look at Joe Louis and Jesse Owens.

MABEL

Those boys are great but how many white people you'd think would go pay to see your shows?

JIM

Plenty would because quality entertainment always sells, and that's a fact. It's just a question of financing and that's where we're behind that eight ball because they have the money an' we don't and that's what gives them the power to call the shots. And being black just makes everything worse.

MABEL

That's for sure. I wanted to try out for the role of the wicked witch in that wizard movie but when I showed up at the audition, the director looked at me, started laughing and then started talking to me just like I was child. It was so humiliating.

JIM

(dismissive)

You can do better than being in junk like that. Ugh! What a silly story. Just shows what kind of fluff passes for entertainment today.

MABEL

Maybe it was fluff but that movie made a ton of money.

JIM

(surprised)

It did?

MABEL

I read that in a newspaper.

JIM

(sarcastic)

Well good for them. It's just amazing how these movie big shots manage to make so much money peddling what they try to pass off as quality entertainment. But they pay a price too because the more money they make the more decadent they become, which is what happens when you have too much money to spend and you're not working for it. Like I told Jack, I see them coming and goin' everyday, openly flaunting their wealth, with their fancy clothes, big catered meals, expensive cars and slutty bimbos, acting like they're such big shots. Sooner or later they all get into trouble, which is okay by me because to them we don't even exist. Well it's about time a black man changed all that.

MABEL

And maybe a black woman too. For instance, in that movie about the "old south," I play a freed slave who's still loyal to my old master. I think if I we're in charge I'd definitely make a few changes to that storyline. I mean, why the hell would I want to be loyal to my old master? What did he ever do for me?

JIM
(laughs)

Beats me.

MABEL

That's right. That's exactly what he did, beat you, beat US! But that's how they wrote the story because that's what the public, the white public, wanted. I wonder what people would have thought if saw me, a black mammy, coming up with money to buy the plantation? I bet black folk all over the world would have loved to see that.

JIM

I know I would have. Where would you get the money?

MABEL

Maybe I'd find it under a rock while walking through the woods.

JIM

Who'd believe that?

MABEL

Who cares? It's a movie, remember?

JIM

That's true. In movie land ANYTHING is possible.

MABEL

It's no stranger than some of the other fluff that Hollywood tries to pass off as quality entertainment. An' besides, doesn't a mammy deserve a little bit of luck?

JIM

Now that you mention it, she sure does, and so do the rest of us too.

MABEL

And after I bought the farm I'd become a lady of leisure.

JIM

While still playin' a maid?.

MABEL

Of course not, you fool. I'd be a lady of property. But of course that would never happen in the movies because people are used to seeing black women playing maids and other low roles. I wonder how people would feel seeing movies with pretty white gals doing laundry all day, washing the dishes and moping the floor? I don't think they'd be too happy with that.

JIM

You won't get any argument from me on that point. That's just what I've been saying. We're expected to take the demeaning roles for one reason only, because we're black.

MABEL

Jim, all that's true, and now I'm so mad I could take this laundry an' dump in the street, but I know if I do that, I'd just be making a mess and besides it would do no good.

A stout, middle age white woman enters the scene.

WHITE WOMAN

(speaks with a thick Irish brogue)

Oh, stop your bitchin' already!

MABEL

(stares at woman)

Who are you?

WHITE WOMAN

My name is Agnes and I've played in over two hundred movies.

MABEL

Well, what do you want?

AGNES

Just to tell you that things haven't been fun and games for me either. I've played so many dumb ethnic roles that sometimes I think I don't know who I am anymore.

MABEL

Good lord, you're one of those white actors who think you have it worse than us blacks, aren't you?

AGNES

Listen, toots, I've played Irish maids, Italian washer women, Jewish mommas and even a Chinese hooker, so you don't have to tell me what it's like to play roles far below my capabilities.

MABEL

Have you done black face?

AGNES

(indignant)

Have I done black face? Of course I have. What white actor hasn't? It's the rage of the country. You gotta problem with that?

MABEL

I sure do. You are white.

AGNES

And honey, you are black, and let me tell you, playing you ain't fun.

MABEL

Sweetie, when they have me doin' white face, then you come on back and we can compare notes. Now get outta here.

AGNES

Not so fast! I ain't through talking. You think you got it rough bein' black. Well, look at me! I show up for auditions and the next thing I know they're handing me a mop and a pail and a brush and telling me to report to some set, and guess what? I don't say no! And why? Because I need the money. But that don't mean I gotta like it.

MABEL

Then you should know how I feel when the same thing happens to me.

AGNES

But there's a difference. You're black.

JIM

Oh, good lord!

MABEL

What do you mean by that?

AGNES

'Cause those are jobs for blacks, so when they see you playing a maid, that's normal, but when a white woman is playing the same role, well, it's just plain demeaning, and when I complain to my agent, he just laughs like it's a big joke, but it ain't funny.

MABEL

Well, I'm not laughing either.

AGNES

Glad you feel that way.

MABEL

What are you so glad about? You're nothing but a racist and what's worse, you're an idiot too.

AGNES

Why are you insulting me? What have I done to you?

MABEL

You barge into my conversation with Jim, insult us and now you're acting like you said nothing wrong.

JIM

Lady, I think it's best that you leave.

AGNES

I said something wrong? Me? Whoever heard of a white mammy?

MABEL

Do you really believe that every black woman is a maid?

JIM

Or that every black man is a janitor?

AGNES

Well, aren't they? I travel a lot by train and all the porters are black. I stay in hotels and all the maids and housekeepers are black. That's just the way it is. White people don't do that kind of servant work. After all, you are descended from slaves, right?

MABEL

Honey, I'm beginning to lose my patience with you.

AGNES

(perplexed)
Now what?

MABEL

You see, Jim, what we have to deal with. I don't know if it's ignorance, meanness or just plain stupidity.

AGNES

Hey, who you callin' stupid?

MABEL

You, that's who.

AGNES

Hey, watch how you talk to me.

MABEL

(getting excited)

Calling me a slave. I oughta tan your butt right now.

AGNES

(getting excited)

What nerve! So uppity! No wonder you can't get any good roles.

(Mabel and Agnes stare at each other, silent)

JIM

Okay ladies, just calm down. *(to Agnes)*. Look, Agnes, why don't leave.

AGNES

You're lucky your boyfriend's here, otherwise I'd have you arrested for agitation; you're nothing but a foul-mouthed troublemaker.

MABEL

First, he's not my boyfriend and second, if anyone's lucky, it's you! Lucky that you're white; lucky that you can go wherever you want, do whatever you want and be whatever you want.

AGNES

Hey toots, you're all wet. Nobody's stopping you either; you're stopping yourself. *(pause)* He's not your boyfriend? Then why's he here? *(pause)*. Oh, I get it, he's your long lost cousin and all you're doin' is catchin' up on family business.

JIM

Why you talking so mean to us?

MABEL

Don't pay any mind to her. She don't know any better.

AGNES

With an attitude like yours I'm surprised they even let you on the set.

MABEL

Aw, why don't you just hush up now.

AGNES

What's the matter, sweetheart? Can't take the truth?

MABEL

The truth is that you're a fool. You see, Jim, this is the kind of racist garbage that keeps us down.

AGNES

Oh my, here we go again. All white people are racist and all black people are victims. I've heard that before.

MABEL

Well, it's the truth.

AGNES

Believe what you want, sister. All I know is that I get treated as shabbily as you and I'm white, so the next time you and your friend Jim start running off at the mouth, just remember that other people are struggling to get by too. Okay? *(a whistle is heard in the distance)* Oh, I gotta get back to studio six. I'm playin' a washerwoman in this Cagney movie and I even have a couple of lines.

(Agnes exits the stage)

MABEL

Oh, that woman just got me so upset.

JIM

I know, Mabel. Listening to that garbage talk is depressing. But what makes it's even more frustrating is that we don't have the tools to even begin to better ourselves.

MABEL

That's true.

JIM

To make real change you gotta have organization and money. .

MABEL

Yeah, talk is fine but if you can't back it up then what good is it? You speak up and what do you get? Grief!

JIM

Maybe that's the price we gotta pay to make some real change, bring fairness to the workplace and earn a little respect.

MABEL

But that's a big price to pay, especially if you're on your own. No sense in fighting if you can't win.

JIM

What makes you think we can't win?

MABEL

After listening to Agnes, if white actors are being treated like dirt, then what can WE do?

JIM

We can do a whole lot, if we go about it carefully.

MABEL

What do you have in mind?

JIM

I've been thinking about sending out a flyer to all the other black actors calling for a meeting to discuss what we've been talking about.

MABEL

I thought that you didn't want anyone to think that you're a union man! Now you want to contact other black actors.

JIM

I know exactly what I said, but this has nothing to do with organizing. I just want to bring some of us together for mutual support. Going at it alone would be a waste of time. But if we hang in together, then maybe we could get our point across.

MABEL

Yeah, we have a right to assemble and even to speak out, but that don't mean they'll listen.

JIM

Well, they BETTER listen or else!

MABEL

Or else what, Jim? Watcha gonna do? Give 'em a nasty stare? Give 'em the finger? (pause) Even white workers are getting bashed down. Look what happened at that Ford plant in Detroit. The workers not only got fired, they got run out of the factory by the police. Or what about those two Jewish fellas who got tossed off the track team in Germany at the Berlin Olympics.

JIM

What about those fellas?

MABEL

I read that the coach dropped them because he didn't want to offend Hitler, so he replaced them with two blacks. Can you believe that?

JIM

Sure I can believe that. We're the best runners in the world. At least SOMEWHERE we're appreciated.

MABEL

Yeah ... in Nazi Germany. Anyway, white people are getting pushed around too.

JIM

But they're also in charge and even if they're down if they can still work their way up without doors being closed in their faces while we're denied the same opportunity, except I guess at the Olympic games where it's okay for blacks to jump high and run fast without getting in trouble.

MABEL

Yes, a strong pair of legs and a good set of track shoes can certainly come in handy, especially if you're being chased by the police. But if you stay out of trouble, then nobody cares.

JIM

The problem is, being able to stay out of trouble. The police have it in for us, just waiting to run us in on the slightest pretext. That's why the jails are always packed with blacks. I mean, all of us can't be criminals!

MABEL

We're not all criminals, but like you've said, we gotta be careful 'cause they have the power.

JIM

Yeah, that's right but sometimes a man has a do what a man has do. Just like when our parents were slaves. If it weren't for guys like Frederick Douglas or Nat Turner, we'd still be slaves today.

MABEL

We still ARE slaves, wage slaves. The workplace is our plantation, the production assistants and cast directors our overseers. Because without money, we are nothing, in fact LESS than nothing, lower than the low, and the bosses know it too because a lot of them were once workers too.

JIM

They actually worked? Are you for real?

MABEL

Yeah, I'm for real. A lot of them came to this country plum broke but made it big. How about that Jewish guy who heads that big movie studio on the other side of town? I heard that he came to this country from Russia with nothing and now look at him.

JIM

That don't mean nothin'. He's white so he came to this country with a big advantage over us. Our people came here in chains and we're never allowed to forget it. What bugs me is that you have all kinds of people coming to this country and making big bucks while we blacks, who were here from the start, are kept down, made to grovel and scrounge, and are treated like we count for nothing ... NOTHING!

MABEL

That's not entirely so, Jim. Look at all the progress we've made since we'd been freed.

JIM

What progress? We work, pay taxes, do all kinda stuff, but for what? We're still not treated as equals an' that's a fact. If we were, they wouldn't be making fun of us like they do in the movies.

MABEL

We're not the only ones who get poked fun at. What about all those white comics, like Laurel and Hardy for instance. You don't hear white people complaining about them.

JIM

That's different. It's one thing for white people to laugh at themselves, 'cause they take it as joke but when they start in with us there's an edge to their so-called humor that's meant to put us down, keep us in our place and make us feel that we count for nothing. Like for instance this morning I heard on the radio this white comedian telling all kind of nasty jokes and a lot of these jokes were about black men, making it sound like we're nothing but a bunch of stupid thugs, drunks, and the like, you know, as if we're nothing but a bunch of idiots. I could hear the audience laughing, yeah, they sure loved it, but I wasn't laughing, not one bit. Once again the black man was being reduced to the level of a joke, a thing, not to be taken seriously. It's pure racism masquerading as humor and all it does is set people against us.

MABEL

I never seen it that way before, but now that I come to think of it, a couple of days ago I was talking to this white guy and he started cracking all these jokes about Polish people and the Irish. At the time I thought they were hilarious and we were both laughing up a storm, but after listening to you, I can see that jokes like those can be really mean and cruel and meant to keep people down. *(pause)* Well, as far as I'm concerned we DO count for something, which is why we gotta keep on goin' and not give up.

JIM

That's all I ever hear nowadays. Just hang in there, just stay the course, keep on the safe track, we'll get to that promised-land soon enough. Well, damn it, I'm tired of it! I can't wait any longer! I want my share of the pie!

MABEL

Don't you think I'm hungry for my slice too? We all feel this way.

JIM

I don't know how we all feel, but this is how I feel and if every black in America felt the same way, then NOTHING could stop us! We'd get what's ours. We built this country ... from nothing ... for nothing, and now it's time for payback, time to cash in and live the good life.

MABEL

Well before you start sending out your letters, think about what's happening to the Jews in Germany.

JIM

What about them?

MABEL

They're being treated worse than we are, and they're white.

JIM

That's just further proof that we gotta do something fast to protect ourselves because if that's the way white people treat other white people, then there's no telling what they'd do to us if they had the chance. Look what Germany and Russia did to Poland. They obliterated an entire country and the Poles are white! And what about what happened to those Italians who were lynched in New Orleans in 1891 and the Jews who were pelted with garbage in New York in 1901, during a funeral procession no less? After that incident, the Jews said nobody ever treated them like that, not even in Russia where they're hated.

MABEL

If the Jews can be bullied around, and they supposedly control EVERYTHING, then what chance do we have against the system here?

JIM

Right now, none. We're not united. You have some brothers who say "no problem, everything is jus' fine." Then you have others who say "we have problems but let's not rock the boat." I don't know what planet they're operating from. And then there's those who are angry, want to change things but don't know what to. They're the ones that get into trouble.

MABEL

I wish I could have told that prissy lady in that “old south” movie what I really thought about her.

JIM

Someday you may have that chance, especially if somebody makes a sequel. But unfortunately for now you have to bide your time until we get organized.

MABEL

Who’s gonna help us out?

JIM

Right now nobody and that’s why I want to bring together other blacks.

MABEL

But what good would they do? They’re just as bad off as we are.

JIM

Then I’ll contact some white actors too. Maybe some of them would be willing to join us.

MABEL

Yeah, right. I can just imagine Fluffy and Agnes getting a letter asking them to help us. Boy, would that be a laugh. No, Jim, I don’t think that would be a good idea. And besides, if being black in the United States is a problem for us, then aren't we the ones who should deal with it?

JIM

Of course, but they’d be our back up. Don't you get it? We can't go at this alone.

MABEL

You’re dreaming. There is no way that any white people are gonna stick their necks out to help us. That’s a little bit of a stretch.

JIM

That's not true. There are white people out there who would help us out.

MABEL

You mean guys like Randy who do blackface and make us look and sound like jerks?

JIM

Don't get me wrong. That burns me up too.

MABEL

And sing those stupid songs reminiscing about the old south, you know, when we were slaves?

JIM

Like Rock a bye your baby? Now you know why I can't stand that song.

MABEL

(laughs)

But for white people, those were the good ol' days.

JIM

Not for us, though. We did the picking while they made the money.

MABEL

To tell you the truth, this whole subject starting to give me a real bad headache.

JIM

Like I said before, that's the price you have to pay for using your mind. It's like exercising a muscle that you never used before. At first you're sore but gradually the pain disappears as you use it more and make it stronger. It's the same way with the mind.

MABEL

I never knew you were so smart.

JIM

I'm just a simple country boy who just wants what's mine.

MABEL

You are so modest. No wonder that that young white gal in that river boat movie took a shining to you.

JIM

Me and her were just friends, nothing more.

MABEL

I remember when I was growing up I had a lot friends, black and white, and we'd be playing all the time but then one day something happened to one of the white gals and the next thing all the white folks are storming down the street beating up on every black they could find. It was terrible.

JIM

That's why we have to careful dealing with white people. They can turn on you anytime.

MABEL

But that don't stop you from dealing with them.

JIM

No, it don't, because we have no choice in the matter. They're around, whether we like it or not, so we have to deal with them, but like I said, you gotta be careful with them because they can't stand us.

MABEL

As a black woman, I know what you're saying but I've met some white people who are really nice.

JIM

Of course some white people are nice, but even the nice ones look down on us.

MABEL

I'm with you there, my boy. What about those Jim Crow laws? You go down South and what do you see? This is for colored folk, that's for white folk only, colored not allowed here, colored not allowed there. It's as if the South won the Civil War.

JIM

That's why we gotta do something about this situation because it just isn't fair. I served in the war, saw action in Europe, got shot at and got a medal for it, but do you think that counted for anything? NO! When I got back to the states I was told, "you can't live here" and "You can't work here" until finally I decided to go to Hollywood because I heard they were hiring black actors but once I got there I soon found out that I was in competition with white actors lining up for black roles. You know, doing black face. At that point I became desperate. Finally some white talent agent, who served in the war too, took pity on me and helped me land that role in that river boat movie and if it weren't for him, I'd be in real bad shape.

MABEL

You think that's bad? I'm a black woman in a white gal's world, so I had it really rough. I couldn't find work. I must have answered a hundred ads. Luckily I met some people who knew this casting director who was looking for black women to play maids, so that's how I wound up here in Hollywood.

JIM

What burns me up is that we didn't ask to come to this country, we were brought here, like cattle, but we're not animals. It's amazing that we even survived.

MABEL

But we have to survive, no matter how crappy things are we and we gotta have hope because without hope there's no point to living and if we start getting down on ourselves then they'll win because that is exactly how they want us to feel.

JIM

It's just so frustrating. I did some reading about some famous black folk, you know, like Jack Johnson, Dred Scott and the like and what they had to put up with was just awful. Talented, gifted people with so much to offer, yet they were subjected to indignity after indignity. Did you know that the first American to die in the revolutionary war was a black man, Crispus Attucks?

MABEL

I didn't know that.

JIM

None of this is taught in school. It's like we're being denied access to our own history.

MABEL

It says in the Bible that the Jewish people were slaves too, just like us.

JIM

But I don't think they were working on plantations, and remember, their leader, Moses, was a prince of Egypt. We didn't have any Moses. The closest we came to having a Moses was Abraham Lincoln and look what happened to him.

MABEL

What happened to Lincoln was horrible.

JIM

Lincoln deserves a lot of credit for issuing that emancipation proclamation, but we fought for our freedom. Did you know that 150,000 blacks fought in the civil war and that if it weren't for them, the North may not have won and we'd still be slaves? None of this is common knowledge.

MABEL

Where did you learn all this?

JIM

Just like you went to school, I went to school too. Meanwhile, here we are, two educated people who happen to be black, you playing servants, me playing deck hands. It's ridiculous. It's insulting. Makes you wonder why the civil war was fought at all.

MABEL

One day there's gonna be a whole lot of black movie stars. They can't keep us down forever.

JIM

That's future talk. I'm more concerned with the here and now.

MABEL

I am too, but boys like Joe Louis are proof that good times are acomin', maybe not fast, but they are acomin' and when they do come we'll be sitting on the top of the world, as that song says.

JIM

I know the guy who sings that song, his name is Jolson. He's a white man but sings with real soul. He's the only white man I know who does justice to black face. Did you see him in *The Jazz Singer*? My, oh my, you would think he's actually black, that's how good he is, and when he's singing *My Mammy*, he does it with respect.

MABEL

That must be a special movie for you to say that, especially about a white actor.

JIM

The problem is that he's the exception, not the rule. Like for instance, in that river boat movie, you know the black guy who plays the janitor? In real life he's an attorney who specializes in international law. But in Hollywood he rates playing a janitor, and why, because he's black.

MABEL

At least he got the role. Maybe he wasn't doing too well as a lawyer.

JIM

Come to think of it, I never heard of a black man being a lawyer. Why is that?

MABEL

A lot of lawyers are Jews. When I got into a little spat with my landlord a few years ago, I got myself a good Jewish lawyer to defend me. He did a great job too and was so nice to me. He even wanted to take me out to dinner, but I told him no.

JIM

Why did you tell him no?

MABEL

I was seeing a gentleman at the time.

JIM

That's no reason not to go out with a guy. It's not like you were married.

MABEL

Well, me and this gentleman were rather close, and if he had caught me with another man, there would have been all hell to pay.

JIM

Did he ever hit you?

MABEL

No. Actually he was quite nice but I didn't want to take any chances.

JIM

You did the right thing. I remember when I was married I came home from work and found my wife with another man. Boy, were they surprised! The guy ran out of there faster than a race horse and my wife was crying, carrying like there was no tomorrow. But she was putting on an act, so I told her to get out and peddle her butt on the street. I'd rather live alone than share a bed with a two - timing slut, even if she's hot.

MABEL

You men can be so mean.

JIM

I was not being mean. She was cheating on ME!

MABEL

So what? Maybe you weren't paying enough attention to her.

JIM

Yeah, right. All you women think the same.

MABEL

Hey, watch it with "all you women stuff"! (*pause*) You really believe that we're all the same?

JIM

Yeah, I believe it.

MABEL

Wait a minute, Jim. Do you realize what we've just done?

JIM

Now what are you talking about?

MABEL

We just put each other down, the same way that blacks are put down. This is how the problems start. Don't you see that?

JIM

No, I don't see that.

MABEL

Jim, don't you get it? I said to you "All men can be so mean" and you said "All women think the same." That's stereotyping and this what drives people apart, just like what's happened between blacks and whites in this country.

JIM

What are you driving at?

MABEL

That the demand for equal treatment is not a one sided thing. In order to get, we gotta be prepared to give. What I'm really trying to say is that no matter how condescendingly they may treat us, we have to rise above that and must not hate.

JIM

Hey, look. I don't hate anyone. All I want is to be treated with dignity and respect. But to achieve that in this country will require struggle because I can change my name but can't change the color of my skin.

MABEL

It all comes down to a question of changing attitudes, both theirs and ours.

JIM

True. But no matter what,, we still gotta speak up, speak out and make ourselves heard otherwise we'll be overtaken, pushed aside and declared expendable.

MABEL

I wouldn't want THAT to happen.

JIM

Well it can happen. I remember when I was in New York I took a ferry boat to the Statue of Liberty and on that statue was a poem about how America welcomes all who are yearning to be free. Well, WE'RE yearning to be free! We want to LIVE the American dream, not just dream it. One day someone will show up with a message of hope for all us black folk and when that day comes it will be like another emancipation proclamation, but this time it won't be coming from a white man but from a black man, and people will listen.

MABEL

I sure would love to live to see that day.

JIM

Maybe you will, Mabel, maybe you will.

End of Act 1

Act 2

Time: The present

Place: a living room in an apartment in New York City

A man in his late 50s and a woman around 40 years of age are watching the movie "The Jazz Singer" on television. From offstage can be heard Al Jolson singing "My Mammy." Finally the song ends. The man shuts of the television.

THE MAN

What a great movie, Paula. A real classic. (pause) Get it? A "reel" classic?

PAULA

Very cute, Frank. Yes, the movie does have its moments, but it seems so outdated.

FRANK

Outdated!? Okay, some of the plot is corny and the acting stagy, but the basic theme is timeless. Couldn't you just feel the tension when Jack had to choose between his job and his faith?

PAULA

That scene was so contrived that it almost made me laugh.

FRANK

There was nothing laughable about that scene.

PAULA

I must beg to differ with you

FRANK

What was the problem?

PAULA

Wasn't it obvious?

FRANK
(becoming annoyed)

Get to the point.

PAULA

Al Jolson being in black face. It was as if the movie was mocking blacks and I don't think that's right.

FRANK

What was wrong with that? He was playing a minstrel and at that time that was very popular form of entertainment and I don't think many blacks objected to that.

PAULA

I don't know about that. All I know is that I think it's kind of weird that Hollywood would make movies featuring white actors performing in black face. It showed an insensitivity that I think was indefensible.

FRANK

Oh boy here we go again, white people being the bad guys again.

PAULA

I didn't say that. What I AM saying is that what we saw in The Jazz Singer was the perpetuation of racial stereotyping at the expense of an entire group of people and that's simply not fair.

FRANK
(defensive)

I thought it was a great movie! It's a classic. People love it but you think it's UNFAIR?

PAULA

The movie IS a classic and Jolson WAS a great entertainer but still, the movie represents a parody of black people and to me that's wrong.

FRANK

It's only a movie; it's not meant to be taken seriously.

PAULA

But there I must beg to differ with you. Movies ARE taken seriously, even cartoons, and they send messages that shape the attitudes of millions of people.

FRANK

First, The Jazz Singer is not a parody of black people. It's about a Jewish entertainer who has to deal with issues relevant to his experience as a Jew and second, when Jolson is in black face, his performance is dignified, respectable and above all great entertainment. His rendition of My Mammy is considered one of the great songs of all time. So I think you're way off base regarding your criticisms.

PAULA

No, I think I'm quite on base. Though it's true that the movie does not outright mock black people, that the main character is in black face to me could be seen as an affront to blacks. How would you like it if I black actor did a take off on, let's say, an Italian? Wouldn't you find that offensive?

FRANK

Before I can answer that I'd have to see the movie.

PAULA

That answer is a cop out. With that Italian flag tattooed on your arm, I bet you wouldn't like it one bit.

FRANK

Don't tell me what I would like and wouldn't like.

PAULA

Looks like I've struck a raw nerve.

FRANK

You're imagining things.

PAULA

No I'm not. But since we're on the subject, don't you think that the country would be better off if there were less racial and ethnic stereotyping? I mean, do we really need all that crap?

FRANK

It's just innocent entertainment, that's all. Look at all the TV sitcoms featuring black actors. They sure don't seem to mind it.

PAULA

That's because they want to work and these are the roles that are offered to them and don't forget that these tv shows are financed and sponsored by big corporations who want to sell their products.

FRANK

What you're saying is simply untrue. Those shows are responding what the audience wants and if the audience wants to watch black sitcoms, then this what the networks will produce.

PAULA

I have no problem with black actors being in sitcoms. They absolutely have a right to earn a living, but let's not fool ourselves. Attitudes have not changed. We're still divided along racial lines, no matter how much the situation seems to have improved.

FRANK

Hey, whenever blacks object to a program it gets pulled. Look what happened with Amos and Andy. That was a really great show, very funny, totally unoffensive, yet the networks bowed to pressure and boom, no more Amos and Andy. What a shame. It was a really great show. I remember watching that show when I was a kid. Everybody loved it. Nobody ever complained.

PAULA

That's because when you were a kid, everyone you knew, everyone you went to school with, your neighborhood, everything, was white and for them Amos and Andy was harmless fun, but at some one else's expense.

FRANK

C'mon now! It was a COMEDY. It was supposed to make people laugh and it did. You didn't hear Indians complaining about Tonto, did you?

PAULA

As a matter of fact, some did, and if they didn't I'm sure they didn't like it anyway.

FRANK

What was there not to like?

PAULA

The blatantly racist stereotyping, making Tonto sound like a child, which in turn created the impression that EVERY Native American is child-like.

FRANK

I think you're being a little bit too harsh. Tonto was also a loyal and trusted friend who helped the Lone Ranger bring criminals to justice.

PAULA

That's right, he was, but when one thinks of Tonto, one first thinks of a man who is friendly but cannot be taken seriously.

FRANK

But that show was on years ago. Things have changed.

PAULA

No, they haven't. Schools are still segregated, whole cities are now almost entirely nonwhite, and the O J Simpson trial showed the whole world that we have a long way to go to bridging the racial gap that divides us.

FRANK

OJ Simpson was **GUILTY!** He got off only because the jury was almost all black. If he has been tried where the crime had occurred, it would have been a completely different story, but the DA there bowed to political pressure and had the case moved to a place where OJ could beat the rap, and he did. What a disgrace. The jury had already decided that O J would walk.

PAULA

Do you know what you're saying? Did you actually hear yourself talking? This is exactly what I'm talking about. You're saying that a black jury acquitted because OJ was black while a white jury would have convicted him because he was black.

FRANK

No way! That black jury was prejudiced, period, and they talk about white people being biased.

PAULA

I watched that case on TV and, Frank, you may not like what I'm going to say, but I would have found him not guilty too.

FRANK

ARE YOU FOR REAL!? That trial was a travesty of justice!

PAULA

Not really. Evidence wasn't properly handled. One of the detectives was caught in a lie. The glove didn't fit. Don't you think that may have given the jury sufficient grounds for reasonable doubt?

FRANK

Those were minor errors which in no way negated the ton of evidence pointing directly to Simpson. They chose to ignore that, like none of that mattered.

PAULA

What about reasonable doubt, Frank, reasonable doubt?

FRANK

Well, they got their way, but at least Simpson is behind bars now.

PAULA

I read somewhere that something like two-thirds of prisoners in jails are African-American

FRANK

Well, they commit the crimes so they have to do the time. If they didn't break the law, then they wouldn't be in trouble.

PAULA

And you really think things have changed?

FRANK

For them, yes! C'mon, didn't the election of our current president prove that?

PAULA

Yes, his election was a huge landmark in American history but still the problem of race persists. It's like an irritant that never goes away. Sometimes it recedes into the background but then comes roaring back to torment us.

FRANK

Your pessimism is beginning to disturb me.

PAULA

Don't you mean my realism? I mean, do you think white people still accept blacks as equal? We live in the United States but are we really united?

FRANK

There were plenty of blacks in the military when I served. You have black politicians in positions of political leadership. You have black movie stars winning the biggest awards and must I mention to you black athletes? So what is the problem?

PAULA

I'm not denying that there has been progress over the years, but it seems that whenever we're just about ready to close that racial divide, something happens to drive us apart.

FRANK

Well, if anyone is driving us apart it's THEM, not us. I believe in live and let live, but whenever something bad happens to them they immediately start crying racism, racism, like when a black person is arrested by the police and the guy is a little roughed up, they think it's because of his race when maybe it's just because the guy was refusing to cooperate.

PAULA

Yes, but Frank, how come such cases again and again involve black men and not white? Don't you think that's more than just a coincidence?

FRANK

No, it's not more than just a coincidence because they're doing something to attract the attention of the police, and not because they're being targeted.

PAULA

So what you're saying is that blacks commit crimes and whites don't?

FRANK

Don't be cute with me. I didn't say that. Of course white people commit crimes but you don't hear THEM screaming racism, do you?

PAULA

Now don't you be cute with ME! Please show me a case where a white person was incarcerated because he is white! *(pause)* Racism is insidious. It's something that takes different forms. Sometimes it's hard to detect but it's there.

FRANK

You're sounding a little paranoid and you're not even black. I mean, are you black?

PAULA

No, I'm not black and what does that have to do with anything anyway?

FRANK

You're sounding more and more like one of these white liberals who are on some kind of guilt trip over the alleged mistreatment of blacks and racial minorities, as if white people never had it rough.

PAULA

I'm just trying to explain why I think racism is still a huge problem in this country.

FRANK

Everything would be alright if everybody would just stop complaining and just live and let live.

PAULA

That's easy to say when you're not being profiled and labeled or stereotyped, but try being in the other guy or gal's shoes and you might start singing a different song.

FRANK

I'm Italian and Italians have been discriminated against too but you don't hear me complaining, do you? I mean, look at the movies. We're portrayed as gangsters, shakedown artists, con men and murderers, the scum of the earth.

PAULA

But being stereotyped is worse for racial minorities.

FRANK

Worse!? From what I can see, most blacks seem to be doing quite well, at least as good as me and for many a lot better.

PAULA

But that doesn't mean their immune from the effects of racism.

FRANK

What racism? They can buy houses wherever they want, work wherever they want, and what about affirmative action? Didn't that open up a lot of doors from them?

PAULA

It did but that doesn't mean the problem has been solved. All it means is that some of the more glaring inequalities are finally being eliminated to a certain extent and a lot of that depends on the strength of the economy. But no matter what, blacks are still viewed differently than other groups, even though they're more prosperous now than in the past.

FRANK

Why do you keep sticking up for them?

PAULA

Because I believe in the American creed of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but for all not just for some. Remember, this country was built by slaves who were brought here against their will and now we have to deal with the legacy of three centuries of injustice. It's like with Germany and the Jews. People say that the war ended a long time ago and ask why the subject of the Holocaust still needs to be discussed, but that's just a way to avoid dealing with the problem of anti-semitism.

FRANK

I agree that there's still a gulf between whites and blacks in this country but I really believe that you're overstating the situation.

PAULA

Am I? If anything I'm understating it. Racial bigotry is alive and well. Maybe we don't hear about lynchings any more but oppression can occur in other ways, like the idea of last hired, first fired or being associated with certain diseases or the prevalence out of wedlock births or being subjected to racial profiling like that college professor was in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Do you think the police would have arrested him if he had been white?

FRANK

Well, I never had any problems dealing with blacks. In fact I've had lots of black friends.

PAULA

Where I they now?

FRANK

I lost touch with them over the years. I remember when I was going to college I became friendly with a young black girl, a student at the school. We used to go for lunch together during class breaks and I really enjoyed her company. I was thinking about asking her out on a date but I didn't. Then the following semester our class schedules changed and we stopped running across each other. I lost touch with her and sometimes wonder what ever happened to her.

A young, pretty black woman enters the scene.

FRANK

Ellie, hi. I was thinking of you.

ELLIE

I hope they were nice thoughts.

FRANK

About you they could only be nice. Have you studied for tomorrow's exam?

ELLIE

I've done some studying. How about you?

FRANK

Well, I hate to admit this, but I haven't even looked at my class notes.

ELLIE

So how do expect to pass?

FRANK

(laughs)

To tell you the truth, I don't know.

ELLIE

Didn't you tell me you needed to pass this class to graduate?

FRANK

Yeah, I know but I've been having a hard time concentrating lately.

ELLIE

What's the problem?

FRANK

Aw, nothing much. Forget that I even mentioned it.

ELLIE

No, Frank, tell me. I want to know.

FRANK

(hesitant)

Okay. *(pause)* You know, ever since we've started meeting in-between classes, I've really gotten to like you.

ELLIE

(pleasantly surprised)

Frank, I didn't know that.

FRANK

And I've been wanting to ask you out for a date.

ELLIE

So why haven't you?

FRANK

Because I didn't know what you would say.

ELLIE

(places her hand on Frank's arm)

Of course you wouldn't know, silly, because you never asked.

FRANK

I know all this sounds ridiculous coming from me, being mister macho man.

ELLIE

Look, Frank, I'd love to go out with you.

FRANK

You would!?

ELLIE

Of course, I like you, a lot.

FRANK

Even though I'm white?

ELLIE
(surprised)

I don't care about that.

FRANK
(surprised)

I mean, that's okay with you?

ELLIE

It's no problem for me, but it sounds like it's a problem for you.

FRANK
(defensive)

Don't get me wrong, Ellie, I really do like you but ... you know ... what will other people say?

ELLIE
(starting to get irritated)

Who cares what other people will say?

FRANK
(dubious)

Maybe you're right.

ELLIE

(removes hand from Frank's arm)

"Maybe" I'm right? Frank, I'm black and that's all there is to it and if you can't accept that, then I don't know what else I can say.

FRANK
(distressed)

Ellie, really I do like you. It's just that I don't know what to do.

ELLIE

Oh brother, you DO have a problem and it's not me.

FRANK

I can't help the way I feel. I never went out with a black girl before.

ELLIE
(angry)

Now you're making it sound like I'm some kind of freak. All you see is my skin color and a chance for some easy action. Well, honey, you are barking up the wrong tree!

FRANK

That's not true!

ELLIE
(angry)

It IS true! All you white people are the same! We try to be nice and look what happens! You ruined EVERYTHING! I told my girl friends about you and they warned me to look out but I told them you were different. Wow, was I wrong!

FRANK

Please, let me explain.

ELLIE

(screaming)

You've said enough! I'm out of here!

Ellie runs off the stage.

FRANK

(yells)

Ellie! Ellie! Come back!

PAULA

You never told me about this before. It's too bad though because it seems that you liked her. Did she being black have anything to do with you not asking her out on a date?

FRANK

It probably did. At the time if I had brought home a black girl my mother would have fainted and my friends would have been shocked. But that's the way I was conditioned and I never tested the waters and have been single ever since.

PAULA

What a shame. We all have stories like that, lost opportunities that come back to haunt us. I told you about the guy I was engaged to for four years. My parents didn't like that he wasn't Jewish and put a lot a pressure on me to end the relationship and after four years that's exactly what happened. It may have made my parents happy but it left me with a huge, gapping emotional donut hole that I just can't fill.

FRANK

It's terrible what we do to ourselves.

PAULA

Yes it is. It's like in the movie *West Side Story* when Tony and Maria fall in love and look what happens to them, tragedy. That's what racism does. It kills. And there the characters aren't even black. But the result is the same. Ugh.

FRANK

But life does go on and we gotta make the best of it.

PAULA

I know you're trying to be nice, but what you're saying is pure clap-trap, a mere platitude. Of course we have to go on, but it still hurts, and if this is how I feel then I can hardly imagine how a black person, any black person, must feel living in a society that so cruelly divides and alienates people. Sometimes I try to imagine myself being black. I wonder if people would treat me the same. I wonder if YOU would still treat me the same.

FRANK

C'mon now, Paula, this is all speculation.

PAULA

I know, but let's say I was black. How would you feel about that?

FRANK

It wouldn't bother me a bit.

PAULA

Yeah, right. Yet with that girl you met in school it did bother you so why would it be any different now?

FRANK

Because maybe I'm a little bit older and a little bit wiser.

PAULA

More platitudes; racism is a feeling, not something that just disappears with time.

FRANK

So, what do you want me to say? Everything I say is wrong, so why even bother asking me?

PAULA

Because I'm trying to make a point.

FRANK

Which is?

PAULA

That racism is so deeply ingrained in us that no matter what we do we can't get out from under it.

FRANK

First, speak for yourself. Second, you better move to another subject because you're beginning to depress me and yourself.

PAULA

(starts crying)

Frank, what did I do? How could I ever let him go? I really CARED about him! CARED! I wanted to marry him, have children with him but everybody said no, don't do it, you'll be miserable, and I believed them. What an idiot I was, AN IDIOT!

(Paula is now weeping inconsolably)

FRANK

(alarmed)

Paula I want you to calm down. *(Frank puts his arm around Paula and holds her tight. Paula is crying on his shoulder)*

I know the feeling because I've been there myself. It's horrible.

(Frank is stroking Paula's hair and is kissing her lightly on her cheek. Paula starts to regain control.)

PAULA

(speaking in between sniffles)

This is what racism does to you, what it did to me. It devastated me. My family thought they were doing right but all they were doing was projecting their bigotry through me. They would say, "Paula you know he's not Jewish" and "Paula, he's okay but he is a goy" and "Paula, we want you to meet a nice Jewish man, a doctor or lawyer, not someone like HIM! He's not good enough for you." You see, racism is not just about skin color. *(pause)* Do you know that I haven't spoken to my mother in six months?

FRANK

Why?

PAULA

Because we're estranged; I can't talk to her because whenever I call her all I hear are complaints ... about me and I couldn't take it anymore.

FRANK

I really don't know what to tell you.

PAULA

(becoming aroused)

**Don't tell me anything. Just hold me, be with me and love me.
Really LOVE ME! I don't want to be alone – ever!**

(Frank and Paula embrace and kiss passionately as the lights fade.)

End of Act 2

Act 3, Scene 1

Time: The present

Place: a bed room

FRANK and PAULA are in bed sleeping together. JIM and MABEL are standing on either side of the bed. They are apparitions, who can be seen and heard only by the audience.

JIM

I didn't know white people could get so emotional.

MABEL

You know better than that. I think they're nice, especially the lady.

JIM

I can't feel too sorry for them. It's their own attitudes that got them into trouble. So, good for them and I hoped they learned a lesson.

MABEL

That's so mean. Why are being so hard on them? You're sounding just like a preacher. Who are you anyway to be judgmental? You never made mistakes?

JIM

I made plenty of mistakes but I never got all worked up over them like they did.

MABEL

Well, maybe you should have gotten worked up; might have done you some good.

JIM

Don't trifle with me.

MABEL

Stop being so prideful; that's how all these problems start, people thinking they're better than they actually are.

JIM

I don't think I'm better than anybody.

MABEL

Don't make me laugh. I've seen you strutting around like a big tom turkey, trying to impress people. Well, you don't impress me.

JIM

Who says I want to impress you? I'm just a regular guy who enjoys the simple things in life. Not like these folks here (*points to Frank and Paula*). (*pause*) White people, I just can't figure them out.

MABEL

Yeah, and that's what they say about us. I would have thought that things would have been different by now.

JIM

Things ARE different. Look at all the black movie stars, athletes and politicians. They're famous, admired and making millions of dollars. People respect them. No more being second-class citizens. Now, WE'RE in charge!

MABEL

They're just tokens put out there to pacify us, to make us think that we're really accepted, but it's all a charade. The system wants to survive and will make whatever accommodations it must to keep on going. You watch; if our current president screws up just one time, he'll be chased out of town so fast that he won't even have time to pack his bags, and it won't matter that he's the president. All people will think is, "He's just another black man in trouble." It's that ol' double standard.

JIM

Screw your double standard. The fact is that we made it to the big time and now can cash in and live that American dream.

MABEL

Everything is money with you. Don't you know when you're being bought off?

JIM

If they're willing to pay I'll take the money. No problem.

MABEL

And you think things have changed. You are pathetic.

JIM

Well, what am I supposed to think? Seventy years ago we were being treated like dirt AND getting paid peanuts. At least now we're getting paid more money.

MABEL

But that money just buys you headaches because sooner or later you screw up and then the money means nothing and people say, "You see, give them money, give them everything they want, and they still can't cut it!" That's racism.

JIM

No it's not. That's just acting stupid.

MABEL

Look, Jim, remember when you said that one day a black man would issue another emancipation proclamation, well that man arrived and looked what happened to him. He was shot, just like Lincoln. And what about that man in Los Angeles when the police pulled him over for some traffic infraction, then beat him, with clubs, and kicked him, viciously. You think that wasn't racism?

JIM

I know, Mabel, because we were there watching it and I hated what I saw and there was nothing we could do to help, NOTHING!

MABEL

I know. So things really haven't changed all that much, but still there's hope.

JIM

How can you still believe that?

MABEL

Because when I see these two good people and millions more just like them all across this country struggling with the same issues that we're struggling with, wanting to make our country a better place in which to live, I can believe that better days are yet to come.

JIM and MABEL exit.

PAULA wakes up and then wakes up FRANK. FRANK kisses PAULA

.

FRANK

What is it, babe?

PAULA

I have the strangest feeling that somebody was in this room.

FRANK

You must have been dreaming.

PAULA

I guess you're right. *(pause)* Frank.

FRANK

What is it?

PAULA

I just want to let you know that I love you.

FRANK

And I love you too.

PAULA and FRANK hug each other tightly. JIM and MABEL reappear and stand next to the bed observing PAULA and FRANK.

JIM

(quoting from the Bible)

For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be laid low and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground.

MABEL

Where's that from?

JIM

It's from the Bible. The Book of Baruch, chapter 5, lines 1 to 9.

MABEL

What does it mean?

JIM

It means that there's still hope. Hallelujeh!

MABEL

And Hallelujah to you!

Lights go out.

End of Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 2

Time: The present

Place: a room

Lights go on. The entire cast is standing, facing the audience. They sing:

**We're strangers to each other
But sometimes lovers too,
We're all part of a rainbow
With colors bright and true.**

**We're people going places,
While time is rushing by,
We gotta go on living,
We laugh and sometimes cry.**

**We get upset and angry,
And sometimes even fight,
That's just a waste of effort
In the thing that we call life.**

**We're strangers to each other
But sometimes lovers too,
We're all part of a rainbow
With colors bright and true.**

They laugh, hug and embrace each other. Then they step forward and shout:

**PAULA, AGNES and FLUFFY
No more injustice!**

**MABEL and ELLIE
No more strife!**

**JIM and FRANK
No more sexism!**

**RANDY and JACK
No more racism!**

Then, still facing the audience, in unison they shout:

AMERICA! ONE COUNTRY! ONE LAND! ONE PEOPLE! UNITED!

Lights go out.

The End.