

**STAGE MANAGER** -- Good evening Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Social Action Theater. We are a streetcorner theater, a vacant lot theater, a theater just for you. We are a part of the Freedom Movement -- the movement that is taking place all over this country -- in Birmingham, Alabama; in New York City; in Georgia; and in Massachusetts -- wherever Negroes don't have equal rights -- we are there.

Our plays are about you and me and about the problems we have right here on this street and all the other streets just like this one all over the country.

Our plays are about problems, and injustice and Jim Crow in the north and in the South -- but our plays are also about freedom and equality -- and also about how we work together to get them.

Tonight's play is about the schools in this community and the problems Negro children have in the schools here in Boston. Are they good schools or bad schools? Are they segregated schools or not? Tonight we'll see.

Now for the Play!

(Two People (Children?) unroll a large banner across the front of the stage area it reads "Tonight's play is sponsored by the Boston Action Group" -- The Stage Manager ducks beneath the banner and reads it aloud).

Tonight's play is sponsored by the Boston Action Group -- that's just fine. Now if you'll let us begin, please.

(The banner goes offstage)

Now for the Play!

I am the stage manager -- that means I help the actors and give them the props they need, help them with their parts, and direct the play.

One other thing I should tell you, if some of our actors look white, ignore it because tonight at least, they are really colored, because tonight's play is about Negroes and one of the problems we have in Boston.

The scene is on a street in Roxbury -- a street just like this one, and it is summer. Children are playing in the street (off stage noises -- "throw it here 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, etc) -- there, do you hear them? They are playing jump rope, and hide and seek, and in the middle of the street some boys are playing ball -- (Two boys come across stage behind S.M. playing catch)



A lady is walking down the street coming home from the store.

(Enter lady walking slowly stage left.)

The lady doesn't see the boys playing ball, and one of the boys misses and the ball hits the lady and knocks her down.

(Lady gets hit by ball and falls)

The boys are afraid and run. That is how our play begins.

(Enter man in old work clothes. He walks over to the lady who is beginning to sit up. The man bends over.)

1st Man -- Are you alright miss?

Lady (holding her head) Yes, -- yes, I think so.

1st Man -- Here let me help you up (He helps the lady to stand and bends to pick up her packages and shopping bag).

Lady -- (Still holding her head and shaking head) Where, where am I? I don't remember --

1st Man -- (Looking up as he puts packages in shopping bag) Don't you know lady? You're in hell -- that's where you are.

Lady (surprised) In hell? What do you mean in hell -- a couple of minutes ago I was in Boston.

1st Man -- You still are in Boston, but you're also in hell.  
(He hands shopping bag to her)

Lady -- How can that be?

1st Man -- Lady, you are colored aren't you?

Lady -- Yes, but --

1st Man -- Then you are in hell -- if you're colored you're in hell and that's that.

Lady -- Well maybe if I lived in Mississippi -- I would be.

1st Man -- (laughing) That doesn't make the least bit of difference. Mississippi or Massachusetts, Birmingham or Boston -- if you're colored, you're in hell.



Lady (indignantly) How do you know?

1st Man - Well, I'm right here with you, ain't I. I been here a long time too - burning on the coals, being unhappy, singing the blues, out of work, hungry and hanging out on the streets - Lady I know where I'm at and I know where you're at.

Lady - (turning to walk away) You, you're crazy or drunk, or somethings wrong with you --

1st Man - (Grabbing her arm and standing in front of her) Please Miss, wait a minute, I'm telling you the truth - I'm not drunk or crazy - Lord knows, I should be, the way I've been treated, but I'm not - I'm telling you the truth.

Lady - (Attempting to shrug man off) Take your hands off me, or I'll --

1st Man - (Dropping his hands) Please miss, please listen to me - you gotta help me.

Lady - Help you? How can I help you?

1st Man - You can help me get out of hell. (The woman attempts to walk away again) Hey wait just a minute. (She stops) Let me explain - I mean it - I've been trying to escape for the longest time now, and I just can't do it alone. But if we all get together - all of us who are locked up in hell together - well, then, maybe we can all get out.

Lady - Look, mister, you keep telling me that I'm in hell because I'm colored, but how do I know you're telling me the truth.

1st Man - I can prove it to you if you'll listen - will you miss, please?

Lady - Well -- all right, but I don't want no more foolishness out of you.

1st Man - Okay lady, okay. Now you are colored and I am colored, - is that right?

Lady - Any fool can see that.

1st Man - Right! Now what happens when we -- us, two colored people -- get tired of living in a house where theres holes, and the roof leaks when it rains, and its hot in the summer, but cold in the winter, and the rats chew on our little children like they're hambones.

Lady - We move out, and get a new place to live.

1st Man - Sure, thats right, you get a new place - but



where is it - in Allston, or Brookline or Wellesley.

Lady - Well, no - mostly I've lived right around here.

1st Man - Where all you have is new rats, and new roaches and you still pay more rent than you should.

Lady - That's true - you're right there - rents are mighty high around here.

1st Man - And you can't live in Brighton or any, of those other places because they don't want no colored. You know that don't you?

Lady - Yes - I guess you're right.

1st Man - And that's only part of it lady - now take jobs that's a real big problem too if you're colored.

Second Man - Excuse me, excuse me, Just a minute. To nights play is about schools - remember - (aside to audience - "We'll have other plays about jobs and housing, but to nights is about how bad the schools are here.") - now if you can't do it right we'll get somebody else out here to do it.

1st Man - Okay man, okay - (Turns to lady) Look lady, with just what I told you, you can't see it ain't heaven can't you.

Lady - I never said it was heaven - but it still doesn't seem like its hell neither.

1st Man (to S.M.) Can't I just say something about jobs now: I've gotta convince this lady if I ever wants to get out of here.

S.M. - Oh, okay - but make it short, make it short.

1st Man - Thank you. (To lady) When you go downtown for a job and you're colored, then its the old story.

Lady - What old story?

1st Man - If you're white, you're right. If you're brown stick around. But if you're black get back. Get back, get back, Some of 'em just tell you plain out, and some of em say that they just hired somebody for the job five minutes before you came in, and either way its hard times for you.

Lady - Well I got a job.

1st Man - Some folks get jobs sure. But when you get one or you don't hardly get a raise, and you never get promoted, and you get the dirty jobs and the lowest pay.



Its hard to eat on what they pay.

Lady - That's true brother, thats true.

1st Man - An' you never know when somebody gonna insult you - call you boy; when you 40 years old- or when some cop is going to whip your head for no reason except you black and He's mean.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

S.M. - The Schools; don't forget about the schools.

1st Man - I ain't forget (to S.M.) - (To Lady) now when you live with rats, and you can't get jobs, or enough pay to feed your family, get put down and called names; and get your head whipped everytime. You don't smile and say yes sir then that's hell.

S.M. - (Tapping man on shoulder) The schools, the schools.

1st Man - Well of course. Now lady, the schools is the root of the whole problem - they are the root. I'm telling you they is no good.

Lady - Well you got your points about them other things But the schools? - I don't see nothin' wrong with them--

1st Man - The schools are so old they're gonna fall down some night an' --

Lady - You got kids that go to school here?

1st Man - No I got no children.

Lady - Then what do you know?

1st Man - I went to them-- I know about 'em. They no good, not as good as schools in other places. Them School people spend less money on colored children - they don't buy books not as many; not as good - like they buy in West Roxbury or downtown, and they segregated.

Lady - How do I know you ain't lying to me.

1st Man - It is true lady, you gotta believe me.

Lady - Me, done lied to me all my life.

1st Man. (dejected) Well I don't know how I can prove it to right here, lady - thats one of the worse things about this kind of hell, its awful hard to prove.

Lady - I ain't gonna believe what you can't prove mister (starting away) - I don't know you.

S.M. (Stopping woman) Maybe I can help miss.

LADY - How can you help? Do you have the facts?



S.M. - Well no, but maybe I can get the School Committee to answer your questions.

1st Man - Would you believe them Lady?

Lady - You mean the people who run the schools;

S.M. - Yes

Lady - Could I ask them questions:

S.M. Certainly, Shall I call them?

(Lady nods and S.M. goes to the Prop Box, takes out phone and dials.)

S.M. - Hello- hello, is this upstairs: This is S.M. right - I'd like the School Committee over here (pause) Oh I see, uh-huh, - just a minute - (to man & lady) The School Committee can't come, but the people upstairs say that they can send over three people that talk like the school committee - would that be alright

1st Man. - Would they be official - from downtown:

Lady - Would they have the facts?

S.M. - They would talk just like the School Committee --entirely official, exactly the same.

Lady - Well it would be alright with me then.

1st Man. - Me too.

S.M. (in phone) Good --send them over. (S.M. hangs up)

(1st man, Lady, S. M. group in center stage for "whispered conversation") Stagehands come out behind them and tack up flames on set and place three chairs in a row stage rear)

Three men enter from stage right unnoticed by others. They are well dressed and each has a devils mask on a stick held in front of his face - one mask is red, one green, one blue)

Red Devil (R.D.) -- Clears his throat) Harumph- well, we're here:  
(S. M. turns)

S.M. - Oh, here they are - are you the ones from downtown?

Blue Devil (B.D.) Thats right.

Lady - Can you talk for the School Committee?

Green Devil (G.D.) We talk just like them.



1st Man - Okay lady? (Turns to devils) Do you know that most of the schools around here are almost all Negro?

G.D. - That's not our fault. That just because almost all Negroes live here - it's not our fault.

R.D. - We don't keep records on whether the children are colored.

B.D. - That's right - we do our best.

Lady - This man said you spend less money on our school is that true?

B.D. Madame, this is a very complicated question - we do our best.

1st Man - Do you spend less money here or not - yes or no?

G.D. - Well, maybe a little less.

1st Man. - A little less for each child, and a little less for books, and a little less for health services.

R.D. Yes, yes, yes - but it's not our fault we only get so much money.

B.D. We do our best, we do our best.

1st Man - (To lady) Ask them about the teachers.

Lady - Are there more teachers in our schools that are temporary or substitutes?

G.D. - That's not our fault either - we like colored people, but our good teachers don't want to teach here.

1st Man - Because the schools are so bad? Because they're so old and because they're overcrowded?

R.D. - Yes, that's right, that's right.

Lady - Why is that?

1st Man - Yes, why are there classes with 45 children and only one teacher - why do some classes meet in the basement right next to the bathrooms.

B.D. - It's not our fault - it's not - we try - we aren't prejudiced -

G.D. - We do our best, we really do.

1st Man - Is that why so many kids drop out of school and then can't get jobs?



Lady - Do more of our children drop-out of school than in other schools in Boston - is this man telling me the truth:

B.D. We don't keep records on that and -

Lady - Is it true - do more colored children drop-out tell me, I have a right to know.

R.D. We uh, I mean, well, uh, uh, uh,--

1st Man - Tell the lady -

R.D. Well uh, uh, - yes.

B.D. (to red Devil) But its not our fault, is it?

R.D. - No, of course not, of course not.

G.D. - Thats just the way things are - they don't want to learn.

B.D. - Thats it - they don't want to learn - what can we do?

1st Man - I wanted to learn - but I dropped out. How could I learn to read when the teacher had so many other children in our class that she couldn't teach?

G.D. - We uh, we try -

1st Man - Isn't it right that there shouldnt be more than 20 or 25 children in a class?

B.D. - That's what the experts say, but they don't understand our problems here.

Lady - And it doesnt sound like you understand our problems here. (To Man) Maybe you're right.

1st Man. Sure I Am - but listen, theres more.

R.D. - I dont know why you're accusing us - we try our hardest - its not our fault if your children don't want to learn.

1st man. We know we have some special problems here, but do you, do you gives us special reading teachers for our overcrowded classes, or guidance counselors that are interested in us.

B.D. We dont have money for everything.

1st Man. And what about Negro History, or Negroes in the textbooks. We had a part in this country too.

Lady - We did other things besides being slaves.

G.D. -We have Negro History Week every year Dont we?



1st Man - Yes, one week every year. But we worked for this country for 300 years, everyday. All year around.

Lady - Thats right, we died for this country in all the wars, and put our sweat into it and invented things to help make it run.

1st Man - But the only thing they teach us about ourselves is that we were slaves - except for one week when we hear about negro heroes.

Lady - Then you forget about us again.

R.D. Thats not fair - we do our best for you people.

1st Man. Sure you do - keep us in segregated neighborhoods, and segregated schools where we can't get a good education because they're overcrowded and old, and most of the teachers do not care.

B.D. (Jumping up) We do our best - I mean the schools are not segregated, thats not true - its a lie - they aren't segregated

G.D. - (also jumping up) It's a lie -- a lie --

Red devil - It not our fault, you can't blame us - they're not segregated.

2nd Man (calling from rear of audience) Hold it, stop, just a minute.

(All action on stage stops as he walks through audience to stage - he is quietly dressed in a suit & tie)

I'M a lawyer and I grew up in this neighborhood and went to these schools.

G.D. See, see, the schools can't be bad - he went to them, and he's a lawyer.

Lawyer - I was just lucky - most of the kids I grew up with weren't as lucky as me - most of them are in prison or out of work or taking dope or pushing it or working at jobs where they don't make enough to eat. That's what your education did for them.

R.D. - (blustering) We won't be insulted like that.

Lawyer - Thats not the point - the point is, the schools ARE segregated.

B.D. (loudly indignantly) They are not - thats a lie.

G.D. - A lie, you want to make us look bad.

1st Man - Most colored children go to almost all negro Schools Don't they?



B.D. Thats because negroes live together in certain neighborhoods.

B. D. And its not our fault, I tell you.

Lawyer - There are seven school districts where more than 90% of students are negroes - isn't that true?

G.D. - That's true, of course its true, but they are not segregated. -

R.D. - We don't have any laws that make colored children go to those schools.

Lawyer - According to the Supreme Court all segregated schools are bad - and if the schools are 90% negro thats segregated.

B.D. - But its only because of the neighborhoods.

Lady - segregated is segregated.

Lawyer - She's right - the schools in Boston are segregated de facto segregated - segregated in fact, that means

1st Man - They sure are segregated in fact - thats a fact.

R.D. We can't help it if negroes live in certain neighborhoods.

Lawyer. But can help it if the schools are segregated.

1st Man - In other cities they've done something about it.

Lady - Why not in Boston - Why not here?

B.D. (Screaming and jumping up and down) the schools are not segregated, - they are not - they are not - and you can't make us say they are.

B. D. We refuse to admit it.

R. D. That's our last word.

Lady (to S.M.) Can't you make them admit it?

S.M. Nothing I can do - I told you they would talk like the school Committee, and thats just how they talk.

Lady - Well what can we do about it.

1st Man - We got to do SOMETHING about it.

Lady - I'd like to bend my umbrella over their heads.  
(She steps towards the 3 devils)

S.M. (Stopping her) Wait a minute, I have an idea.  
(He goes to prop box and brings back a handful of darts)



Here let's throw darts at them, and let some of the hot air out.

Lady, Good, good.

1st Man -- That will show them.

Lawyer -- (Who has been in deep thought) No, no that's not the best way -- they'd just get some more just like these three. We've got to get rid of them for good.

Lady -- How can we do that?

Lawyer -- We can vote them out of office in the next election.

1st Man -- That's right -- we can vote new people into office -- people who care about us.  
(devils sneak off stage)

Lawyer -- People who understand our problems and are ready to help.

Lady -- That's right if we can all work together we we can get out of hell.

1st Man. We can help each other.

Lawyer -- That's the only way we can do it too.

They join arms and walk off stage)  
all

All in unison      We'll/work together  
We three and many more as well  
And we'll beat the hell out of the  
devil  
Or beat the devil out of hell.

"THE END"