# Freedom Riders

*By Tom Quinn*

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## DEDICATION

*For Susan*

## SYNOPSIS

*Freedom Riders* is set in 1961 as two young women from Harvard try to decide if they should join the Freedom Rides of the 1960s. As you travel along you will meet Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Bobby Kennedy, Theodore Roosevelt, W.E.B. Dubois and many others who fought both for and against our nation's struggle for Civil Rights. Experience sit-ins and lunch counters and the dark days of Jim Crow. Learn the history as four performers bring this struggle alive though the words of historical figures, song, and recreations. The struggle for Freedom is the struggle of all Americans to accept our differences and celebrate the triumph of freedom. The Freedom Riders helped show America the way and can inspire young people today to see the value of freedom and the courage it takes to make a difference. A Study guide for this drama is included at the end of the script. About 70 minutes.

## CAST

*(2m, 2f,+ extras playing 18 roles.)*

**ACTOR 1**: A White male. Walnut, Actor, Earl, Teddy Roosevelt, Bus Driver, George Wallace, Andrew Goodman, and Robert Kennedy.

**ACTOR 2**: An African-American male. Actor, Steven, W.E.B. Dubois, Harry Briggs, Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Ossie Davis.

**ACTOR 3**: An African-American female. Tiffany, Diane, Linda Brown, and Rosa Parks.

**ACTOR 4**: A White female Jennifer, Suzy.

The four actors will fill in when appropriate in a number of other roles as the play will dictate. If preferred you may cast each character separately.

## CASTING NOTE

The following play should be performed with four actors. They should be an African-American male and female and a white male and female to adequately portray the racial issues of this text. The roles should be divided in the following way.

## SET DESIGN

Placards can be used on the side of the stage to indicate the event or time period being discussed to orient students and audience members. The stage directions indicated are simply the choices of the first production.

## ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

*Freedom Riders* was first produced by the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, PA as part of their outreach program. It was directed by Bill Van Horn and had its premier in January of 2001.

Cast:
Actor 1: Drew Eberly
Actor 2: Michael Moore
Actor 3: Kimberly Anne Hall
Actor 4: Jackie Turner

**FREEDOM RIDERS**

*(Musical note: MUSIC is vital to any play about the Civil Rights era. Pre-show music can be used such as Tracy Chapman's Freedom Now or music from the era. Be sure to obtain rights to do so.)*

WALNUT ACTORS: *(This curtain speech can be broken up in such a way as to introduce all four actors to the audience.)* Good morning/afternoon. We're proud to give you a taste of what "live" performance is like. How many of you have ever been to a live theater performance?

*Allow for audience response*.

Good. Those of you who haven't keep in mind how different we are from the actor's you'll see in a movie or on TV. We are "live" which means we can see and hear you. We appreciate your attention, welcome your applause and certainly invite you to think and experience the emotion of the show, but keep in mind we need your best attention so that we can give you our best performance.

You've probably heard the term civil rights before. If you haven't, civil rights means human rights. Today's performance will tell just a few of the stories from humanity's struggle to look beyond race and color. Today will concentrate on the African-American struggle for freedom. It is not a case of black and white or black vs. white. Civil rights means all of our rights. As long as one person is in bondage no one can ever truly be free. Our play takes place mostly in the 1950s and 60's, but you will encounter people and events from all over the 20th century in America. Today we take you back to a time where even the simplest forms of equality between black and white were a struggle. We take you back to a time of great courage and bravery. Great hope and possibility. We hope you enjoy our production of Freedom Riders.

*(CURTAIN. A single ACTOR walks across the stage. He begins to sing a Tracy Chapman song softly as he glances out to the audience. He sings furtively as if afraid someone will catch him singing the words.)*

ACTOR: Let us all be free, free, free, free. Everybody sing we're free, free, free, free!

*(HE exits. Enter two ACTORS enter obviously frustrated with each other.)*

TIFFANY: You want me to do what?
JENNIFER: I want you to come with us to Alabama.
TIFFANY: You want me, a black woman from Massachusetts, to get on a bus with a white girl from the suburbs like yourself and take a ride into Alabama in 1961?
JENNIFER: Yes. We have got to join in! Take a stand! We can't sit on the sidelines while our fellow man is faced with such hate and oppression.
TIFFANY: You sound like a commercial for the Peace Corps! What exactly is the 'stand' we are taking?
JENNIFER: Twelve of us, black and white, are going to ride a bus down into the south all the way into Alabama and show the world the we are united to end racism and hatred.
TIFFANY: You are going to end racism by riding a bus?
JENNIFER: It's the symbol we need! It's a Freedom Ride to end hate and ignorance!
TIFFANY: I can see it now "Everybody hop on the 'Let's End Racism Bus!'" It's not that easy. You're not the one faced with hate and oppression. I am!
JENNIFER: We are all faced with that hatred! It's the 1960s! Now is the time to show that integration is the future! Black and white should live together! Not this separate, but equal nonsense. We can show the world that desegregation is the only truly fair way to live.
TIFFANY: I think it's great that you want to get involved, but you really don't know what you are talking about.

## End of Freeview

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