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Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

By

PAT MONTLEY

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Plays on Principle (which originally included seven of the ten plays here) was premiered at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore in 2019 as part of a bicentennial celebration. The production was funded by a Creativity Grant awarded to the playwright by the Maryland State Arts Council.

CAST:

| | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Christine Demuth | Michelle Lee |
| Chris Edwards | Richard Peck |
| Flinn Leigh Eng | Vernon Rey |
| Melissa Feliciano | Molly Ruhlman |
| Layla Hodge | Owen Sahnnow |
| Timothy Johnson | Sally Wall |

PRODUCTION:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Director | Pat Montley |
| Set, Sound & Lighting Designer | Daryl Beard |
| Stage Managers | Naomi Berkenbilt, Javier Jaramillo |
| Set Crew | Jim Houston, Scott Macleod, Richard Peck, Owen Sahnnow |

For Sally
my best critic
and dearest

March!

CHARACTERS

IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT: 51, Black; an imposing presence, talented journalist and courageous anti-Jim-Crow activist.

ALICE PAUL: 28, white; chair of the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, determined, intense, idealistic, a born activist with a talent for organizing.

TIME: March 1, 1913, three days before the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson.

PLACE: Alice Paul's office in Washington, D.C.

PRODUCTION NOTE: In 1909, a group of Black civil rights activists—including Ida B. Wells-Barnett—founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For the first two-thirds of the 20th century, “colored” or “Negro” (the term championed by W.E.B. DuBois, following the lead of Booker T. Washington) were used by Black Americans to describe themselves. In 1967, Stokely Carmichael published *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, and the next 15-20 years saw the rise in usage of “Black.” In 1988, Jesse Jackson led the push toward “African American.” So while today “African American” and “Black” are considered respectful usage, in 1913—the time in which this play is set—“colored” and “Negro” would have been considered respectful.

**Question: Is it ever OK to compromise our values?
What happens when we do?**

(At lights up, ALICE PAUL sits at her desk. IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT storms in.)

IDA. I expected this—from anybody but Alice Paul!

ALICE. What makes you think you know me?

IDA. I know you're a Quaker and that Quakers were leaders in the movement to abolish slavery and—

ALICE. True. But—

IDA. And that they provided many stations on the Underground Railroad.

ALICE. I'm always impressed by someone who does her homework.

IDA. I'm a journalist. Doing homework is my job.

ALICE. Which you do with passion and power. I've read many of your stories on the horrendous lynchings you're bringing to light.

IDA. I've taken time out from that campaign to come to Washington and march for women's suffrage.

ALICE. I appreciate that, but—

IDA. And I've brought sixty other colored women from the Alpha Suffrage Club in Chicago to march with me in the Illinois delegation.

ALICE. Mrs. Wells-Barnett, you are correct, my family has always defended the rights of the Negro. But who do you think will be the spectators at tomorrow's women's march?

IDA. I suspect most of the district will turn out. And folks flooding in from all over the country for Tuesday's inauguration of Woodrow Wilson.

ALICE. Most of whom will be traveling north, singing “Dixie,” ecstatic that we’ve elected the first Southerner in sixty-four years—one who has vowed to *re-segregate* the Federal government, eliminating all the racial progress made since the Civil War, making it almost impossible for your people to get Federal jobs and work side by side with whites. We will be marching through a crowd unlikely to be sympathetic to—

IDA. I’ve been in far more dangerous situations.

ALICE. That is not my point.

IDA. Then what is?

ALICE. To keep the parade about *suffrage* and not about race.

IDA. How can the parade be about race when only—? Tell me, how many white folks will be marching?

ALICE. I’m not quite certain of—

IDA. Yes, you are. No organizing detail escapes you.

ALICE (*conceding*). About ... eight thousand.

IDA. What else is in the parade?

ALICE (*taking a deep breath*). Twenty-six floats, ten marching bands, four mounted brigades, three heralds and six chariots.

IDA. Who will lead it?

ALICE. A winged goddess in a white cape riding a white horse, carrying a banner that reads, “Forward out of error, leave behind the night, forward through the darkness, forward into light.”

IDA. How will the parade end?

ALICE. On the steps of the Treasury Department ... with a spectacular allegorical pageant. The figure of Columbia will be summoned forth to the strains of “The Star-Spangled Banner” while dancing women in white will portray American ideals of liberty, charity, justice, peace and hope.