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Dramatic Publishing

FREEDOM IS MY MIDDLE NAME

by

LEE HUNKINS



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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(FREEDOM IS MY MIDDLE NAME)

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FREEDOM IS MY MIDDLE NAME

A Play in One Act
For Three Women and Three Men, Doubling

CHARACTERS

ALISA African American, high school student
LIZ white, high school student
RICHIE African American, high school student
SCOTT white, high school student
BJ African American, high school student
MS. ANDERSON African American, teacher

TIME AND PLACE: Present—Urban High School.
1858—A Plantation in Atlanta, Georgia.
1878—The New England Hospital for Women and Children
in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

NOTE ON CASTING

ALISA also plays EMMA and MARY ELIZA MAHONEY

LIZ also plays MRS. TURNER and DR. ZAK

RICHIE also plays SAMUEL and JESS

SCOTT also plays THE PATROLLER and MR. HEWITT

BJ also plays PREACHER MAN and EMMET

MS. ANDERSON also plays STAGECOACH MARY,
GRANMA and SARAH

DR. ZAK'S real name is ZAKRZEWSKA, pronounced
"ZAK-SHEF'-SKA" but she is referred to throughout the
play as DR. ZAK.

PREACHER MAN must be able to sing, and play the guitar.

Acknowledgments

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Adrienne J. Brockway Production/Business Manager
Ricky Genaro Bookings/Marketing Coordinator
Julie Kramer Administrative Assistant
Omayda Figueroa Intern

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FREEDOM IS MY MIDDLE NAME was developed through readings at The Open Eye: NEW STAGINGS in New York City with Amie Brockway, the Artistic Director. The first production was at The Open Eye: NEW STAGINGS January 16 through March 31, 1993 with the following cast and crew:

Alisa/Emma/Mary Eliza Mahoney *Stephanie Marshall*
Liz/Mrs. Turner/Dr. Zak *Mary Cushman*
Richie/Samuel/Jess *Byron Easley*
Scott/Patroller/Mr. Hewitt *John DiLeo*
BJ/Preacher Man/Emmet *Keith Johnston*
Ms. Anderson/Stagecoach Mary/Granma/Sarah
Sheryl Greene Leverett

Directed by Ernest Johns
Production Design by Adrienne J. Brockway
Rap Tape by Kyle Williams
Rap Verse by Lee Hunkins
Stage Manager Adrienne J. Brockway

FREEDOM IS MY MIDDLE NAME

AT RISE: An urban high school classroom. The present. The stage is bare except for stools, assorted pieces of wood and a framed backdrop UC. A bell rings and the sound of STUDENTS laughing and talking (ad-libs) can be heard.

ALISA (offstage). Wait for me downstairs!

*LIZ (offstage, laughing). I don't believe it! Call me later!
(Along with other props each STUDENT will enter with a textbook.)*

(ALISA and LIZ enter the classroom and take seats. ALISA applies polish to her nails. LIZ flips through a magazine and, listening to her Walkman, bobs her head to the beat of the music. RICHIE backs into the room, still talking to somebody in the hall. He flips LIZ's earphones off and she hits him with the magazine. He circles ALISA. LIZ glances at her, and they try not to laugh. RICHIE straddles a stool next to ALISA and watching her polish her nails, leans closer as if he's going to kiss her.)

ALISA (leaning away from him). Are you losing your mind?

RICHIE. Just over you, baby.

ALISA. Get outta here.

*RICHIE. I can't be hangin' around this place all afternoon.
Where's Ms. Anderson?*

ALISA. She went to the principal's office.

LIZ. Oh oh, we're in trouble again.

RICHIE. No, *you're* in trouble again.

(SCOTT and BJ enter. SCOTT is bouncing a basketball.)

BJ. I'm tellin' you, they're a heavy team for the championship.

SCOTT. They blew a sixteen point lead, BJ. They're not gonna make it!

BJ. Then put your money where your mouth is.

RICHIE *(giving BJ a "high five")*. Where you been?

BJ *(referring to SCOTT)*. Went with this joker to buy some sneakers. Talk about squeezin' a dollar.

SCOTT. I got to be careful with my money. Can't buy the first pair I see.

BJ. He tried on every sneaker in the store, and did he buy any?

RICHIE, LIZ and ALISA. No!

LIZ. Cheap cheap cheap.

SCOTT. I want to wait for a sale.

BJ. Man, those Jayhawkers were a good price. If you change your mind, I'm not goin' back with you.

SCOTT. Okay, I'll go by myself, unless one of you wants to...*(ALL get busy.)* All right, I got the message.

BJ *(tossing the ball around)*. After practice let's go check out some new video games.

RICHIE. I don't feel like it.

BJ *(ignoring him, to ALISA)*. You and Liz meet us about seven.

LIZ. I got to get home.

ALISA. I'm goin' shoppin'.

SCOTT. The arcade's no fun, count me out. *(BJ slams the ball down and SCOTT catches it.)*

BJ. Hey, I'm not askin', I'm *tellin'* you what we're gonna do!
(*Grabbing the ball from SCOTT, and facing each one.*)

Any objections?

SCOTT. No, guess I can hang around for a while.

LIZ. I can't stay too long.

ALISA. I'll meet you over there.

BJ (*stopping in front of RICHIE and roughly tossing him the ball*). What about you? (*At first it seems like RICHIE is going to stand up to him. ALL watch expectantly.*)

RICHIE (*tossing the ball back to him*). Sure...why not? (*The GROUP relaxes. The BOYS start making fake shots and throwing the ball around. While rough housing, RICHIE bumps into ALISA.*)

ALISA. Hey, watch it! Now look what you've done. I messed up my nails! (*The BOYS crowd around her, as if they're really concerned. BJ grabs her hand, trying to see the damage. She pushes him away.*)

BJ. Gettin' all polished up. Got a heavy date tonight, sweetie?

ALISA. That's my business, and don't be callin' me no sweetie.

SCOTT. Must be that guy that waits for her outside the cafeteria.

BJ. Oh yeah, gorilla face. (*BJ imitates a gorilla's stance.*)

ALISA. You been lookin' in the mirror again, BJ? (*The others laugh.*)

RICHIE. Man, she dissed you!

BJ (*tossing the ball to RICHIE*). Why don't you try it?

RICHIE (*tossing it back*). Ease up, I got no beef.

BJ (*tossing SCOTT the ball*). Go ahead, laugh some more.

SCOTT. We was just foolin' around.

LIZ. BJ, don't act up.

ALISA. You're so touchy. (*BJ walks over to ALISA menacingly, then jokingly touches her leg.*) Don't be messin' with

me. I got a black belt in karate and these nails are lethal weapons. *(BJ and the others laugh, and LIZ puts on her earphones. ALISA continues with her nails.)* Ms. Anderson better get here soon. My friends are waitin' for me.

RICHIE. The coach is gonna be steamin'.

BJ. No sweat. They can't have a game without the big three, and *we are here!* *(BJ gives RICHIE and SCOTT a "high five.")*

RICHIE. Yes!

(RICHIE throws the ball towards BJ, but he moves away, and MS. ANDERSON catches it as she enters.)

BJ. Nice catch, teach. Ought to try out for the team.

MS. ANDERSON. And you ought to be in your seat. Alisa, the nails look pretty enough. *(Tapping LIZ on the shoulder.)* Turn it off and put it away.

RICHIE. It's Friday afternoon, and I got things to do.

MS. ANDERSON. You should have thought of that before you disrupted my class.

LIZ. It wasn't just us.

ALISA. Everybody was foolin' around.

MS. ANDERSON. But you five were outstanding, so you'll complete the lesson now.

LIZ. That's not fair!

BJ. My time is valuable!

ALISA. I got to go shoppin'.

SCOTT. Give us a break.

MS. ANDERSON. Open your books to page 28, please.

SCOTT. Come to think of it, I don't even belong here. I didn't do anything.

ALISA. What? Scott, don't lie! *(They argue loudly among themselves.)*

MS. ANDERSON. The sooner we get started, the sooner you can leave.

RICHIE. What's she trippin' about? *(They grumble, but open their books.)*

MS. ANDERSON. We were talking about Mary Fields. We know she was born in Tennessee around 1832. What else do we know about her? *(They look at each other. No one wants to be the first to answer.)* Alisa?...Scott? *(No response.)* You know what makes me angry? You have good minds, but you won't use them. Don't shut me out... talk to me. What can you tell me about Stagecoach Mary?

ALISA. She worked for some nuns in Montana.

MS. ANDERSON. Right! The Ursuline nuns. They started a school for Native American girls. What else?

LIZ. She drove a stagecoach deliverin' mail.

SCOTT. She was tough too. Smoked cigars and carried a musket.

MS. ANDERSON. Richie, can you tell me anything about her?

RICHIE *(standing up)*. Yeah, she was fat, black and ugly. *(The others laugh. RICHIE takes a bow and they applaud.)*

MS. ANDERSON *(to RICHIE)*. Did you do your homework?

RICHIE. Didn't have to. I can look at this picture and tell she ought to join Weight Watchers. *(The STUDENTS snicker.)*

MS. ANDERSON. A real comedian, aren't you?

RICHIE. I do my best.

MS. ANDERSON. People like Stagecoach Mary made it possible for you to have a future.

RICHIE. What future? I'm black and my family's poor, so all that stuff you fillin' us with is a lot of bull!

MS. ANDERSON. You can do anything you set your mind to, but you have to believe in yourself. Look at Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver...

ALISA (*cutting her off*). Here we go, peanuts and sweet potatoes. If I hear about Carver one more time I'm gonna puke.

MS. ANDERSON. You can puke if you want, but he was a brilliant man.

BJ. Okay, we got a handful of folks who did somethin', so that makes them famous. The rest of this book is about white people and slaves. Liz and Scott can read about 'em, not me!

SCOTT. Hey, come on, don't make us the heavy. There were white slaves too, you know.

ALISA. How many, ten? Fifteen? Big deal!

LIZ. There were lots of them.

RICHIE. But you're not slaves now! (*ALISA and BJ join in, agreeing.*)

MS. ANDERSON. And neither are we! The fact that we're in this classroom together says a whole lot. But you're right, we give you the same people over and over again. It's time to find some new heroes. Your assignment for Monday is to...(*They cut her off with groans and protests.*)

SCOTT. Hold up! The rest of the class didn't get homework.

MS. ANDERSON. Then that makes you special. I want you to write a report on an African American who isn't famous, but did something that made a difference. Minimum 250 words.

LIZ. Is this assignment for me too?

MS. ANDERSON. Why wouldn't it be?

LIZ. Well...I'm not black.

RICHIE. Say what? You coulda fooled me.

ALISA. Don't lie, we know you're passin'.

LIZ. Very funny. I don't think it's important for me to do this report. The people that made a difference did it to help you.

SCOTT. Liz is right. It's got nothin' to do with us.

MS. ANDERSON. This isn't about black or white, it's about freedom and that's everybody's business.

LIZ. Okay, can I use Whitney Houston?

BJ. Magic Johnson!

SCOTT. Malcolm X!

RICHIE. Martin Luther King!

ALISA (*upset*). You rats! You took all the good ones, now who am I gonna use?

SCOTT. I'll give you a hint. Initials G.W.C.

BJ (*giving him a "high five"*). My man, Carver! (*They laugh and tease ALISA, who isn't amused.*)

MS. ANDERSON. You can't write about Dr. King or any of the others. I want you to choose people we've never heard of.

ALISA. And where are we supposed to find them?

MS. ANDERSON. Maybe someone in your family or a person you've read about. That's up to you. (*Gathering her things together.*) Have a good weekend. (*The STUDENTS prepare to leave and complain among themselves.*)

LIZ. Have a good weekend, that's a joke.

ALISA. Be spending it workin' on some dumb report.

SCOTT. How're we gonna get out of this one?

BJ. We don't do it, that's all. (*RICHIE gets the basketball, and they walk towards the door.*)

MS. ANDERSON. Richie, wait a minute please. (*The others stop near the door to wait for him.*) He'll meet you outside. (*The STUDENTS tease RICHIE with ad-libs about being the "teacher's pet," she likes "younger men," etc. RICHIE tosses the ball to BJ who makes a kissing sound as he and the others exit. RICHIE stands in the doorway. MS. ANDERSON motions him to take his seat. He is reluctant to do so, but she points to the seat and he strides over and angrily sits down.*) Up until last year you were a good stu-

dent, then suddenly your grades started dropping. You don't pay attention and you seem to think it's your job to keep the students amused. (*Sitting down next to him.*) Is something wrong at home? A problem you'd like to talk to me about? I'm a good listener.

RICHIE. Look, there's a big game Monday evening and I got practice today and tomorrow. I don't have time to write no report!

MS. ANDERSON. Believe it or not, there's life after basketball. My job is to see that you're prepared for it. (*RICHIE gets up and walks towards the door.*) If you don't turn in a report I'll ask the coach to suspend you from the team.

RICHIE. You can't do that!

MS. ANDERSON. Want to bet? (*MS. ANDERSON exits.*)

(The set now becomes an area outside the classroom. RICHIE is angry. He gets a plank and walking center stage, puts the plank over two stools making it a bench. ALISA runs on.)

ALISA. BJ said to tell you the coach cancelled your practice.

RICHIE. Why?

ALISA. Do I look like your secretary? He'll be back in a few minutes, ask him yourself. He took Liz and Scott to show them somebody's new car.

RICHIE (*sitting down on the bench, still angry*). How come you didn't go?

ALISA. I wanted to find out why she kept you. (*Sitting down next to him.*) What did she say?

RICHIE. Some crap about gettin' me suspended from the team.

ALISA. Can she do that?

RICHIE. I guess so. It doesn't matter. I just about made up my mind to drop out anyway.

ALISA. You only got a term to go. *(They don't speak for a few seconds.)* If you do quit, are you goin' into business with your brother? *(He gives her a dirty look.)* Wrong question, sorry.

RICHIE. It ain't no secret what he does. Nah, I can't hang with him. Don't make much sense to bail out of here, just to end up in jail.

(STAGECOACH MARY enters behind them. She's carrying a folded patchwork quilt over one shoulder. She watches them, unobserved.)

ALISA. Richie, do you think we've got a chance?...a future? I mean even if we do make it to college is it gonna change anything?

RICHIE. I don't know. I'm makin' it through today and that's about as far as I can take it. *(STAGECOACH MARY moves a little closer to them. RICHIE flips through his textbook and stops on the page with STAGECOACH MARY's picture.)* Mmmmp, Stagecoach Mary. It's because of her I got into trouble. *(STAGECOACH MARY puts her hand on her hip and gets an attitude.)*

ALISA. She didn't tell you not to do your homework. *(STAGECOACH MARY smiles at ALISA in agreement.)*

RICHIE. I just don't like her, okay?

STAGECOACH MARY. And I ain't got no sweet tooth for you either! *(ALISA and RICHIE do a slow turn. They look at her, then at the picture in the book, then at each other in amazement. They get the same idea and BOTH leap up to run, but anticipating their next move, STAGECOACH MARY grabs them by the backs of their shirts, and sits*

them back on the bench. ALISA tries to get up again, and STAGECOACH MARY roughly sits her down.)

ALISA. Ouch!

STAGECOACH MARY. You try gettin' up again and you'll really have somethin' to holler about.

ALISA. I got it! You're on your way to a costume party. Well let me tell you honey, you are lookin' good!

STAGECOACH MARY. What's a costume party?

ALISA. It's where people dress up silly...*(RICHIE nudges her.)* Not that I'm callin' you silly, but I'm so scared that you're really who I think you are that I don't know what I'm talkin' about!

RICHIE *(getting up and putting distance between them)*. You can't be Stagecoach Mary, she's dead!

STAGECOACH MARY *(stepping up on the bench)*. May I rest in peace.

RICHIE. If this is some kind of joke, I ain't laughin'...I'm not afraid of you, old lady.

STAGECOACH MARY *(getting down off the bench)*. Sit down.

RICHIE. Don't be tellin' me what to do!

STAGECOACH MARY. Boy, if you don't get in that seat... *(Crossing to him quickly.)* I'm gonna break your leg off and beat you with it! *(RICHIE leaps back to his seat.)* I got a bone to pick with you.

ALISA *(getting up)*. Then I'll just be running along.

STAGECOACH MARY *(to ALISA)*. I got one good nerve and you pinchin' it. *(ALISA smiles and slides back to her seat.)* *(To RICHIE.)* You called me fat, black and ugly.

RICHIE. I did not!

STAGECOACH MARY. Did too. *(Grabbing the book from him.)* This picture ain't flatterin', but that don't give you

the right to call me names. What you got to say for yourself?

ALISA. I think she wants you to apologize. Do it, so we can get out of here.

RICHIE. Okay, I apologize, but where did you come from? I mean, dead people just don't...don't...

ALISA. Show up!

STAGECOACH MARY. Heard you complainin' 'bout all we got is a few famous colored people, and that...

ALISA. Excuse me? We're not colored anymore.

STAGECOACH MARY. Is that so?

ALISA. That's out. We were Negroes, then black for a long time, and now we're African Americans. Some people still say black, though.

STAGECOACH MARY. Lord have mercy, the world sure ain't changed much. And it don't make sense, 'cause pride ain't dark green and courage sure ain't powder blue. It's not about color at all...it's about spirit! Don't matter what you call a person, it's what he's got inside that counts. I been watchin' you kids for a long time. You got no respect for your family, no faith in yourself and you don't believe in nothin' in this sweet life.

RICHIE. What's it to you?

STAGECOACH MARY. You need goals and dreams.

RICHIE. Come on, Alisa.

STAGECOACH MARY. You got to find love in your hearts.

ALISA. Go bug somebody else!

STAGECOACH MARY. Oh no! I'm gonna help you whether you like it or not! *(They fan her down, as they begin to walk off, talking to one another.)*

(LIZ, BJ and SCOTT enter from the opposite direction. They laugh and talk unaware of STAGECOACH MARY. BJ is bouncing the basketball.)

STAGECOACH MARY (swinging the quilt at RICHIE and ALISA with a lasso-like motion). Yah! (ALISA and RICHIE start moving in slow motion, their speech winding down, as they freeze. STAGECOACH MARY quickly swings the quilt at LIZ, SCOTT and BJ with the same lasso motion.) Yah! (They start moving in slow motion, their conversation winding down as they freeze, in different poses. BJ freezes, holding out the basketball. STAGECOACH MARY takes the ball from him.) You won't be needin' this for a while. (As STAGECOACH MARY begins the rap verse to the audience, ALISA and RICHIE exit. BJ, LIZ and SCOTT quickly bring on and strike props, then exit. STAGECOACH MARY recites rap verse to beat of the music, and moves around the stage.)

I'm gonna take you back and make the dream come
alive,
You'll meet people with the will to survive.
They ain't famous, don't have to be.
Just ordinary people like you and me.
To make it happen...to make a difference,
Don't need no special kind.
Just guts and determination, yes! and start to use your
mind.
All right...All right...we're goin' back now! *(End of
rap verse.)*

*I'm takin' you to Atlanta, Georgia, and the year is 1858!
(STAGECOACH MARY exits.)*

(The stage now represents three areas of the Turner Plantation; the north field, a cabin in the slave quarters, and a path in front of the big house. Off stage a soulful tune is played on a harmonica. It is almost sundown. EMMA enters the north field carrying a hoe. She is seven months pregnant. SAMUEL enters carrying a shovel. EMMA begins hoeing weeds, as SAMUEL loosens the dirt around a tree stump. Music stops as the PATROLLER enters. He has a rifle under his arm. He watches EMMA and SAMUEL work. SAMUEL tries to move a tree stump, but it's too heavy.)

SAMUEL *(to PATROLLER)*. Mr. Judd? *(PATROLLER crosses to SAMUEL, and leaning his rifle against a fence, helps SAMUEL move the stump.)*

(MRS. TURNER enters and looks toward the field.)

MRS. TURNER *(calling to PATROLLER)*. Judd! *(He grabs his rifle and crosses quickly to her.)* They done with the north field yet?

PATROLLER. No, ma'am. Had more brush than we figured.

MRS. TURNER. I can't make money if I can't grow cotton, and I can't grow cotton 'til that field is cleared. You understand what I'm sayin', Judd? You get them out there early tomorrow mornin', and they don't come back 'til it's finished!

PATROLLER. I could move a few from the stables to help out.

MRS. TURNER. Do what you have to, but get it done!

PATROLLER. Yes, ma'am, I'll see to it. *(He exits. MRS. TURNER sits in front of the big house, and fans herself with a lace handkerchief. EMMA bends over to move a*

plank out of the way when a sudden pain causes her to grab her stomach. SAMUEL rushes over to her.)

SAMUEL. You all right? (*EMMA nods "yes."*) Don't be bendin' like that. I'll move it for you.

(GRANMA enters, carrying a tin cup filled with water. She crosses to EMMA and gives her the cup. EMMA drinks a little.)

GRANMA. Best drink a little more, child, 'fore you pass out in this heat.

EMMA. I had enough, thank you. (*She looks around making sure no PATROLLERS are in sight.*) You know those slaves Miss Turner bought from old man Jessup? They hear 'bout some man goin' around helpin' slaves get up North.

GRANMA. Who is he?

EMMA. Don't know for sure. Folks say he comes as a peddler, or he might be a blacksmith. Seems like he keeps changin' from one thing to another.

SAMUEL. He got to do that, Emma. They offerin' a big reward to whoever catches him. Granma, if we go...we takin' you with us.

GRANMA. You got to stop talkin' 'bout runnin' away. Miss Turner got spies all over this place. They'd just as soon turn you in as look at you.

SAMUEL. We ain't animals to be sold and branded! Raping when they feel like it, whippin' when they got nothin' better to do. They feed the hounds better than they feed us.

EMMA. We can't take it no more!

GRANMA. Put your faith in the Lord and pray, children.

SAMUEL. I try, but he ain't listenin'.