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*Dramatic Publishing*

# FROM THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

A Dramatic Biography

by

ENDESHA IDA MAE HOLLAND, Ph.D.



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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*From the Mississippi Delta* premiered off-Broadway at the Circle in the Square Theatre in Manhattan, November 1991 to May 1992. The original cast was as follows:

Woman One . . . . . SYBIL WALKER  
Woman Two . . . . . JACQUELINE WILLIAMS  
Woman Three . . . . . CHERYL LYNN BRUCE

Note: TEMPESTT BLEDSOE, formerly of “The Cosby Show” replaced Walker as Woman One in March 1992.

Set and Costume Design . . . . . EDUARDO SICANGO  
Lighting Design . . . . . ALLEN LEE HUGHES  
Sound Design . . . . . ROB MILBURN and DAVID BUDRIES  
Executive Producers . . . . SUSAN GALLIN, CALVIN SKAGGS,  
SUSAN WEXLER, OPRAH WINFREY, JUDITH REZNICK

# **FROM THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA**

A Dramatic Biography in Eleven Scenes  
For 3 Women

## **CHARACTERS**

WOMAN ONE

WOMAN TWO

WOMAN THREE

Each character will play multiple roles: young/old, male/female, and black/white.

## **SCENES**

1. Memories
2. Aint Baby
3. Calm, Balmy Days
4. Second Doctor Lady
5. The Water Meter
6. The Delta Queen
7. The Whole Town's Talking
8. The Funeral
9. From the Mississippi Delta
10. A Permit to Parade
11. Letter to Alice Walker:  
    A Request From the Mississippi Delta

Scenes 1-8 take place in the South. Scenes 9-11 take place in the Midwest.

Language is a key factor in this drama and must be spoken exactly as written. The time spans the period from the early 1940s to the mid-1980s.

*(Lights change with selected music.)*

### **SCENE SIX: The Delta Queen**

*(Lights up on WOMAN TWO and WOMAN THREE putting the finishing touches on the tent that is set for to-night's minstrel show.)*

WOMAN ONE. The summer after I became a woman, I decided that I wanted to get out of the Delta. I plotted and planned and tried to make me a chance. When the Silas Green and Rabbit Foot Minstrel shows came to town, I went, with all due speed to the playground where their tents was set. I told them that I wanted to travel with them as a member of the show and that I wouldn't cause them no trouble. The manager listened to me sing.

WOMAN THREE *(as MANAGER)*. Is this here the girl?

WOMAN TWO *(as ASSISTANT)*. Arv, aint you the one that say you want a new opening act?

WOMAN THREE (*as MANAGER*). Kin she sing; I ask you—kin she sing?

WOMAN TWO (*as ASSISTANT*). Shoots! I don't know—but maybe she's the one.

WOMAN THREE (*as MANAGER*). Go head, girl—show me your stuff—I'm waiting.

WOMAN ONE (*attitude and bearing showing her true age as she sings and gyrates*). "I'm a little teapot, short and stout, here's my handle, here's my spout. When I get all steamed up, hear me shout, just tip me over and pour me out!"

*(WOMAN THREE [as MANAGER] stalks from the audition in disgust, and WOMAN TWO [as ASSISTANT] trails after him.)*

WOMAN ONE. Afterwards, he wouldn't even talk to me. I didn't know then that I stood a better chance if I had told jokes or even stories. Well, I got tired of standing round begging to see him, so I wandered back to my shotgun house—dismayed, but not hopeless. Then the fair came to town. I made my way to the fairgrounds. I wasn't interested in dipping the ducks, tossing pennies or breaking the balloons; for the first time, the snake woman, the elephant man, nor the fat dwarf—didn't hold my interest.

*(Jukehouse music, perhaps the "Honkytonk" denotes the tent of the dancing women. WOMAN THREE and WOMAN TWO are LOCAL MEN watching the show and urging the dancer on with gestures.)*



WOMAN ONE (*cont'd*). I made my way to the tent where all the menfolks was laughing and shouting and just plain having fun. It was the tent of the dancing women. That's where I found Miss Candy Quick. Miss Candy was the featured dancer. She danced two times each night—at eight and leven o'clock. Upside of the tent they had a bigger-than-life-size painting, all in color, of Miss Candy Quick. She was the first famous colored woman I ever saw.

WOMAN THREE (*as LOCAL MAN*). Go, Candy, go! Lawd, have mercy—gone, gurl, go.

WOMAN TWO (*as LOCAL MAN*). Oh, Lawd, I know I'm in heaben. I'm gone marry her!

WOMAN ONE. I dug down deep into my pedal-pusher pants pocket and came up with the fifty cents that I needed to git in. I went on inside and Miss Candy was doing some kinda dancing.

WOMAN TWO (*as LOCAL MAN*). Whoo-wee, looka there, man; whoo-wee! Send for the preacher—cause I'm gone marry Candy!

WOMAN THREE (*as LOCAL MAN*). Jest call the undertaker for me; go, Candy, go!

WOMAN ONE. Soon I saw why the mens was chanting her name. Oh, if only I could be as great. I'll give anything to be able to create this frenzy in the menfolks—who was watching with their undivided attention. I could just hear Ole Mae Liza and Purlie, my friends, talking bout my good fortune—in becoming so great. I waited outside the tent till Miss Candy came out.

*(WOMAN THREE [as MISS CANDY QUICK] prances with a sexy gait across the fairground. WOMAN TWO*

*[as THE BOSS MAN] follows behind her, discreetly but pompously.)*

WOMAN ONE (*cont'd*). A big crowd of mens was walking alongside of her, hanging onto her every word and grinning and talking loud. I ran over and begged her to let me join up with the fair. I even cut a step or two so as to let her know I could really dance.

WOMAN THREE (*as MISS CANDY QUICK*). Shoo yourself on home and forget this place.

WOMAN ONE. But I dogged her every footstep, pleading and begging and lying bout my age. Finally, the white man who was walking kinda behind us; he musta been the boss man—well, he spoke up for me.

WOMAN TWO (*as THE BOSS MAN*). Aw, Candy, give her a chance.

WOMAN THREE (*as MISS CANDY QUICK*). But she's just a baby, and...

WOMAN TWO (*as THE BOSS MAN*). Now, now, Candy... (*He winks and nudges MISS CANDY QUICK.*)

WOMAN ONE. Finally, my night to dance rolled round. It was the last night, Saddity, that the fair was to be in town. I had packed my pasteboard suitcase in a hurry and I entered the fairground with it bumping clumsily gainst my leg. I was to dance the leven o'clock show but I was ready for em. Maybe, they would paint my picture upside of the next tent in the next town. I was some kinda ready. I had used up a whole package of Camel cigarettes practicing. A lot of the menfolks wouldn't come to the leven o'clock show, when they heard that Miss Candy wouldn't be dancing.

WOMAN THREE (*as LOCAL MAN*). Did ya hear de news, man?

WOMAN TWO (*as LOCAL MAN*). Naw, what?

WOMAN THREE. Man—Candy ain't dancing.

WOMAN TWO (*as LOCAL MAN*). What??? Well, I'll be a...

WOMAN THREE (*as LOCAL MAN, speaks to audience*). I guess yall done heard—dey got somebody dey call de Delta Queen. Yall ever heard o her?

WOMAN ONE. The barker (*WOMAN THREE as BARKER*), he was walking back and forth in front of the tent, tole the mens that they was in luck, cause at the last minute—Miss Delta Queen, the famous dancer from Chicago, had arrived; and she would surely give them a show that they could tell their grandsons bout. A few of the menfolks came on inside—kinda hesitant at first—and more curious then they cared to admit. Mr. Cornell, the shoemaker, was one of the first to venture inside. Finally, the tent was half-full and the boss man gave me my cue to begin.

WOMAN THREE. As she danced round the roped-off square, her eyes met Mr. Cornell's; she couldn't read his expression for which she was grateful. Bro Pastor, Mr. Elroy and Reverend Sam and all the other menfolks from the town was astonished. But dey didn't bat an eye as she danced ever so beautifully. Then, just as Miss Candy had taught her, she knelt down on the earth floor and took out a Camel cigarette from underneath the pretty scarf. Then, ever so gently—she pushed the cigarette twixt her wide-spread thighs; she laid here on de grassy mat and blew smoke rings outa her vagina dat Miss Candy wished she could blow! (*AS LOCAL MAN.*)

Lawdy, Lawdy, Lawd—gone Delta, Delta Queen, Delta Queen, gone Delta.

WOMAN TWO (*as LOCAL MAN*). God, I'm dying! Go, Delta, go! Man, ya see dat?

WOMAN ONE. I knew at that very moment I wanted a career on the stage. Their cheers made me feel so good that I especially contracted my stomach muscles and the smoke billowed out like it was coming from a chimney.

WOMAN TWO (*as LOCAL MAN*). Whoo-wee! I'm gone marry dat Delta Queen!

WOMAN THREE (*as LOCAL MAN*). Aw man, you was gone marry Candy Quick—you can't marry em all.

WOMAN ONE. Mr. Cornell went and tole my mama and the next thing I knew, my brothers, drunk and armed with their razors, came to the fairground. The boss wouldn't let me sign the contract. He thoed my five-dollar bill at my footes and walked away. I knew that white man wasn't fraid of my brothers; maybe dey didn't want me round—cause I had outsmoked Miss Candy Quick. The fair left town without the Delta Queen.

*(Lights change with selected music.)*

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