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Dramatic Publishing

I AIN'T YO' UNCLE

The New Jack Revisionist "Uncle Tom's Cabin"

by

ROBERT ALEXANDER

From the stage adaptation by

GEORGE AIKEN

of the novel by

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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ROBERT ALEXANDER

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(I AIN'T YO' UNCLE)

Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-647-0

I AIN'T YO' UNCLE was originally co-produced by the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, October, 1990. Daniel Chumley, Director; Joan Holden, Dramaturg; Stanley Williams, Producer/Artistic Director; Quentin Easter, Managing Director and the following cast:

Harriet Beecher Stowe	Sharon Lockwood
Eliza Harris	B.W. Gonzalez
George Harris	Michael Sullivan
Topsy	Edris Cooper
Uncle Tom	Lonnie Ford
Shelby	Paul F. Killam
Haley	Jim Griffiths
Aunt Chloe	Edris Cooper
Phineas	Elliot Kavee
Marks	Sharon Lockwood
Loker	Guy Totaro
Marie St. Clare	Keiko Shimosato
St. Clare	Paul F. Killam
Little Eva	Greta R. Bart
Miss Ophelia	Sharon Lockwood
Jane	B.W. Gonzalez
A doctor	Dred Scott
Skeggs	Elliot Kavee
Mann	Guy Totaro
Emmeline	Keiko Shimosato
Simon Legree	Jim Griffiths
Sambo	Dan Hart
Cassy	B.W. Gonzalez
Young Shelby	Paul F. Killam
Musicians	Dred Scott, Elliot Kavee, Dan Hart Jim Griffiths, Keiko Shimosato

Revised version co-produced by the Mime Troupe and San Diego Repertory Theatre, October, 1991. Directed by Daniel Chumley; Joan Holden, Dramaturg; Sam Woodhouse, Producer.

Revival production by the Hartford Stage Company, November 17, 1995. Directed by Reggie Montgomery; Producer/Dramaturg, Kim Euell; Mark Lamos, Artistic Director; Steve Albert, Managing Director.

I AIN'T YO' UNCLE

A Play in Two Acts
For 4 Women and 5 Men, extras optional
(most actors will play multiple roles)

CHARACTERS

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE	abolitionist novelist
ELIZA HARRIS	mullato slave
GEORGE HARRIS	runaway slave
TOPSY	slave urchin
LITTLE EVA	a dying liberal
SIMON LEGREE	a racist slave owner
UNCLE TOM	a man with an image problem
SHELBY	a Kentucky slave owner
HALEY	a slave trader
AUNT CHLOE	Tom's wife
PHINEAS	a reformed character
MARKS	a shyster
LOKER	a slave catcher
MARIE ST. CLARE	a New Orleans belle
AUGUSTINE ST. CLARE	her husband
MISS OPHELIA	St. Clare's cousin
JANE	a slave
A DOCTOR	the St. Clare family physician
SKEGGS	an auctioneer
MANN	a slave speculator
EMMELINE	a slave
SAMBO	a slave
CASSY	a slave, Legree's bed wench
YOUNG SHELBY	son of Shelby, a young slave owner

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

AT RISE: *We hear the angry voices of the cast offstage.*

GEORGE (*off*). Bring in the accused!

(GEORGE HARRIS enters first, followed quickly by TOPSY and ELIZA HARRIS as they drag on HARRIET BEECHER STOWE against her will.)

GEORGE. Bring in the accused!

HARRIET. What am I accused of?

GEORGE. Shut up and we'll read the charges. Sit down!

ELIZA. Don't hurt her.

TOPSY. Missy here is accused of creatin' stereotypes—

HARRIET. I did no such—

TOPSY (*gets in HARRIET's face*). And making me talk like a damn fool pickanniny!

GEORGE. We've been stuck with these stupid bug-eyed images you made up for a hundred and fifty years!

HARRIET. I did my research...I visited plantations. I met dozens of girls like Topsy. I did not make you up!

TOPSY. But all I did was dance in your novel!

HARRIET. Dancing is wonderful, especially the way you dance. If I could dance like you, Topsy, I would dance all the time.

(A spotlight shines on UNCLE TOM, as he enters through the audience, like a shuffling janitor, with a handkerchief in his hand, he wipes the arms of the theatre chairs.)

TOM. Excuse me, y'all...pardon me, ma'am...excuse me, suh...I ain't seen ya since you sold my Mama.

GEORGE. See? This is the crap I'm talking about! *(To BAND.)* Stop playing that song! Who let him in here? This is the last shuffling stereotype we need to see.

TOM. 'Evenin', George.

GEORGE. Get him out of here, Harriet!

TOPSY. We thought Uncle Tom was dead and long buried.

TOM. Ain't I de one everybody come to see?! Don't y'all want to see me stoop, shuffle and bend over backwards with a smile for every white person I meet?!

TOPSY. No!

ELIZA. Nobody wants to see you. We're just trying to get on with our new lives. George is an executive now—with Clorox!

TOM. You too, Eliza? What's y'all's beef with me?

TOPSY. You loved every master...you ever had.

GEORGE. You took every whipping like you got off on it!

TOM. I did?

HARRIET. There seems to be some confusion as to who's on trial here. I'm glad you've come back, Uncle Tom. I know you'll defend me. Tell them how my book helped emancipate your race.

TOM *(straightens up)*. Let's get a few things straight, Ms. Stowe. First of all, I ain't yo' uncle!

TOPSY. I heard that!

TOM. Yeah, your book turned some folks against slavery, but it created a big image problem for me. "Uncle Tom," that's what they call that new feller on the Supreme Court—ain't

it? Why did you give me that cross to carry? Why did you paint me like Jesus, instead of painting me like a man...a whole man?

HARRIET. I wrote what you showed me.

TOM. You wrote what you wanted to see!

ELIZA. No...wait! I loved Harriet's book. Used to. I cried every time I got to the part—

TOPSY. This child is tragic! It's the "black thang" we're mad about, "Lemon Drop"!

GEORGE. I find the accused—GUILTY!! ...of writing stuff she couldn't possibly know about. A slave's experience. The black experience...my life here in America. (*Other respond, "Yeah!"*)

HARRIET. We try our best and it's never enough. What is it that YOU PEOPLE want?

TOM. I wants to git paid! (*Group reacts with affirmations.*)

HARRIET. Paid, Tom?

TOM. Money!

TOPSY (*pounding her palms*). Forty acres and a mule!

HARRIET. Look, we have integration, we have equal opportunity...we've had every kind of social program. I'm sorry, but I'm tired of being guilty and I'm tired of being the accused. I'm sick of black anger and I'm even beginning to question Affirmative Action! (*TOPSY must be restrained by GEORGE.*) If I get waited on before you, it's discrimination. If I bump you on the streetcar, I'm oppressing you, and if I want to study Aristotle, I'm a racist!

TOPSY. Let's off this broad, right now!

TOM. No! Tonight...let's do our version.

TOPSY. Aw, man...I ain't with that. (*Other protest.*)

TOM. I said we're doing this play! Wid new dialogue...and scenes YOU left out! Scenes that show me in a new light. A true light. I want to git paid my proper respect, espe-

cially from the brothuhs and sistuhs who turn their backs. None of y'all would be here if it wasn't for me. I stayed behind so y'all could git ahead. So tonight—let me lift my voice and sing, 'til the earth and heavens ring...ring with the harmony of my New Jack Swing.

ALL. Go Tom, Go Tom...

TOPSY. Yeah, I'm housin' up some of my shit too.

TOM. I said places, Topsy!

HARRIET. What's the point, Tom? How much could you possibly change? You can't re-write history!

TOM. But I can change who writes it. So places, Harriet! Let's kick it! (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: *A plain chamber. GEORGE is discovered. Enter ELIZA with little Harry.*

ELIZA. Ah, George. I'm so glad you've come. (*GEORGE regards her mournfully.*) Why don't you smile, and ask after our Harry?

GEORGE. I wish he'd never been born! I wish I'd never been born myself!

ELIZA. George! I know how you feel...losing your place in the factory, and that man torments you so, but try to be patient.

GEORGE. Patient! Haven't I been patient? Did I say a word when he stole credit for my invention? And then he came and took me away—for no reason. He got every cent I ever made.

ELIZA. It's not right. Why, your skin is as fair as his! But after all, he is your master.

GEORGE. My master! Right! And who made this pecker-wood my master?! What right does he have to me? I'm as good a man as he is. Maybe better. He says, even though I don't say anything, he can see I got the devil in me, and he's gonna bring it out. He keeps pushing me, one of these days it's gonna come out all right! He's gonna find out I'm one whipping can't tame!

ELIZA. George! Don't do anything wicked; trust in heaven and try to do right.

GEORGE. He's been saying he was a fool to let me marry off the place—and he says he won't let me come here anymore, that I have to take another wife and settle down on his place.

ELIZA. I don't *think* so! You were married to me by the minister, right in Mistress' parlor, as much as if you'd been a white man!

GEORGE. Don't you know you can't be my wife if either of our masters chooses to part us?

ELIZA. Oh, but my master is so kind.

GEORGE. But he could die, and then Harry could be sold to anybody!

ELIZA. Never!

GEORGE. Eliza, my girl, bear up now, and good-bye—I'm going.

ELIZA. Going! Going where?

GEORGE. To Ohio—to the Quakers, and then...to Canada; and when I'm there, I'll buy you and the boy—that's all the hope that's left us.

ELIZA. But you could be caught!

GEORGE. I won't be caught, Eliza—I'll die first. I will never be taken down the river alive.

ELIZA. Go, but be careful—I can't bear the thought of you dying.

GEORGE. My preparations are made. One last look at Harry, and then good-bye.

ELIZA. Heaven grant it not be forever. (*Exeunt. Lights fade.*)

SCENE TWO

AT RISE: *A dining room. Tables and chairs. Dessert, wine, etc., on the table. SHELBY and HALEY discovered at table.*

HALEY. I can't trade dat way. I positively can't, Mr. Shelby. (*Drinks.*) Give me Tom and one of them critters I've seen running around here and dat will clear your debt fair and square.

SHELBY. My debt totals eight hundred dollars. I can get twice that for Tom. He's loyal, capable...honest.

HALEY. You mean honest as niggers go.

SHELBY. No! He's truly honest. He got religion at a camp meeting four years ago and I've trusted him with running everything ever since. He manages my money, my house, my horses. He comes and goes just like a free man, and I've always found him to be true and square in every way. He's got the fear of God in him.

HALEY. The fear of God in a nigger is a valuable thing.

SHELBY. And Tom's got the genuine article. Why just last fall I let him go to Cincinnati to take care of my business matters, and he came straight back with five hundred dollars for me. Some low fellows tried to encourage Tom to make tracks for Canada. But Tom said, "My Master trusted me and I couldn't." Now if you were a man with any kind

of conscience, you would let Tom cover the entire balance of my debt.

HALEY. I've got as much conscience as any decent business man...None.

(HALEY pours more wine as ELIZA enters. HALEY takes notice of her right away.)

HALEY. But, I tell you what—you throw in dat yeller wench right there, you'll be out of hock and I'll be out of your hair. *(Offers his hand.)* Care to shake on dat deal? *(ELIZA starts clearing the dishes. HALEY pats her bottom)*

SHELBY. No way I can shake on that kind of deal. My wife wouldn't part with her for all her weight in gold.

HALEY. Women always say such things. 'Cause they hain't no sort of calculation. But show 'em how many feathers and trinkets dat weight in gold will buy—

SHELBY. I tell you, Haley, this is not to be spoken of.

HALEY. Well, then—dat smart little critter I seen running 'round here. You know the one I played catch with.

SHELBY. You mean Eliza's boy...Harry? Why, what can you want with the child?

HALEY. Why, I've got a friend dat's going into this yer branch of the business—wants to buy up handsome boys to raise for the market.

ELIZA *(aside)*. Oh, no! Not my Harry. *(Exits.)*

HALEY. Your debt has gathered up quite a bit of interest. Might as well own up to it, I'm determined to leave here with more than just Tom...So what's it gonna be...the wench or the critter?

SHELBY. Come by this evening 'round seven and you shall have my answer.

HALEY. See you at seven. *(Exits.)*

SHELBY (*pours himself another drink*). Maybe the answer lies at the bottom of this bottle. (*Lights slowly fade to black.*)