

Rising Up

African American Firsts and Notables

A Soul stirring presentation of

Drama

Spoken Word

Music

Dance

Written & Directed by:

Angela Wilson

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Storyteller (dressed in African garb)

Welcome! We are so glad you are here. It's truly great to see all of you and thank you for coming to be a part of this experience. We call it an African American history month performance or program, but I will inform you right now that it's so much more than that. You see, it is quite often that many tell stories of our past, of our pain and of our struggles. There are many familiar faces on the landscape of what we see as African American history and we put them on pedestals, we say their names, and we memorialize their contribution to our culture in statues, museums, movies and books and we celebrate the past from whence we've come. Typically, those named few make the pages of our history books and informs others who may not know so much about the African American experience.

Once a year in the 2nd month, we focus our thoughts and attention to what African Americans have overcome and how we've made it over, but I'm here today to interrupt that once a year story-telling pattern - the annual accounts and adaptations of our experience. You see the African American experience in America is not only our history, it's America's history and it could never be just about us. So, the truth is that there are not enough pages that can be written, there are not enough hours in a day and there are not enough movies, books, museums, or presentations that can adequately express this racial existence in this country.

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Now please don't get me wrong, different cultures are unique and have their own zest and flavor and a place in the history books as well and the African American culture is by no means an exception. It is beautiful a culture that is every bit worth celebrating. Some of the smartest, talented, educated, scholarly, innovative, brilliant, artistic, courageous, honorable, principled, laudable, admirable, noble, passionate, inventive, industrious, resourceful people are a part of the African American race. Recognition of the contribution of African Americans in this country is fitting and appropriate but, we don't want it to just become a cliché or commonplace. People may feel like, oh yes, those things happened but it's old history. No, it's not old history, it is still unfolding because our past explains, illuminates, informs, and clarifies the struggles that still exist today. Our history is still being written.

Carter G. Woodson (image), known as the father of Negro History was one of the first scholars to study the black race in America. He actually did that because he realized that black people didn't even know about themselves so in February 1926, he launched the celebration of "Negro History Week" which was the precursor to Black History Month.

Today we will commemorate and celebrate a few notable African Americans but by no means is the story ever complete. We'll hear stories, poetry, songs and dramatizations but today is also about expansion, it's about reeducation, renewal, and regrowth, it's about broadening the scope of our lens so we don't view the African American experience merely through a literal colored lens but in the broad range of experiences that intertwine with every citizen in the world, whether they know it or whether they accept it. It's time to stop separating, segregating, isolating, relegating, extricating, splitting, dividing, detaching, and disconnecting. These stories cannot be told as if telling of old folklore that is severed from the present. Ladies and gentlemen, I submit to you that all of our history has significance because how can we learn from our mistakes and how can we hope for a bright future if we don't know how we got here?

So, let's sit back and learn and experience these stories and let's embrace a spirit of accord that will benefit us now and in the future and again, I say thank you for coming as we celebrate:

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Dancer

Song: Still I Rise by Yolanda Adams

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3

Storyteller

(dressed as a slave)

In 1619, Virginia was just an isolated British settlement on the Chesapeake Bay. It was sparsely populated by men trying to make money off of the land, but they faced hunger, disease and raids by Native Americans. One day, a badly damaged Dutch slave ship arrived carrying 20 kidnapped Africans and the colonists bartered food and services for the human cargo. With no model for slavery, the Africans joined poor white Europeans who worked as indentured servants. The deal was that they would earn land and freedom in exchange for 7 years of hard labor.

As, the colonies prospered and as exports grew more profitable, the colonist didn't want to lose their labor. The colonist still citizens of their own countries had certain rights. Africans, on the other hand were not subject to English common law, they were workers without rights. In 1641 slavery was legalized. Africans became chattel, personal property that could be owned for life. Slave labor enabled the colonies to become so profitable that in 1660 England's King Charles the second established the Royal African company to transport humans they called "black gold" from Africa to the Americas.

England finally outlawed it's slave trade in 1807, and America developed it's own internal slave trade. By 1860 over 1 million humans were being moved and sold in the colonies. Families were torn about. Traders and owners wanted a self reproducing labor force and they put their slave cargo into categories. Bucks and breeding wenches were sold at auctions along with prime hands to work the fields. Fancy girls were graceful light skinned women who were sold into prostitution or to be mistresses to their masters. To keep slaves under control there was legally authorized violence, whippings and public floggings. Owners were fined if they did not punish

recaptured runaway slaves. But as the slave trade grew so did the opposition and America soon became a country divided against itself.

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Excerpt from Maya Angelou's poem, Still I Rise
(spoken off stage to music, words shown on screen)

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

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5

Storyteller

What is the hope of the slave? What gave courage to the man who was beaten into submission? What gave resolve to the woman separated from her children? How on earth when faced with the constant threat of danger, punishment, dismemberment, and death can a people find within themselves the strength to rise up and say no more, to rise up and say I'm more than a slave, to rise up and say, I'll take my chances, to rise up and say although I'm nothing to you, no price will be able to purchase my worth. This spirit of saying no to the oppression, the tyranny and the domination is the spirit we are acclaiming today. Take for instance this man, many may have never heard of him. His name was Robert Smalls, listen to his story.

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6

Speaker (Robert Smalls)

(Images of Robert Smalls on the screen, and the ship, The Planter)

I was born a slave in April 1839 out in back of the big house. My mama worked inside. Nobody would say who my daddy was, said it could be the master or his son, they just knew I was

lighter than the rest. Well master did favor me a bit and Mama thought I was gettin' a little too high and to bring me down a notch or two she sent me out to the fields to work with the other slaves. Didn't like it one bit, complained about it just about everday, I guess you can say I rebelled and got into trouble. Finally, when I was 18, the master 'lowed me to go to Charleston to work as a waiter and a sailor, cuz like I said, he favored me, plus he could see I was smart. Course he took almost all of my money I made working but allowed me to keep some. Well life was okay, I got married and had a daughter too. Worked so hard cuz I wanted to buy my wife and daughter's freedom from they owner. Next thing I know we had a son. So I had me 2 chirren.

Now, when I was around 22, I was hired on the federate ship, it was called, The Planter, captained by General Roswell Ripley. We delivered weapons to the federate forts. Well I learned everything bout that ship, I mean I knew every move of Captain Ripley, knew all the signals and everything he did. I was very smart although they didn't know it. You couldn't let whites folks know how smart you was. I also knew that being owned by another man was not how I was willing to live my life, not never knowing if my family was going to stay together or if my chirren would be sold away from me. How is one human goin' to own another? Both of them are humans ain't they? I told you I was smart, and I hatched a plan. A plan to escape to freedom. People might have thought I had it good, I was on a ship not in the fields, I had a family and the master liked me. But we worked like dogs on that ship and I knew I wasn't free as long as someone considered me their property. For me it came down to 2 thangs, death or freedom.

Now you gotta understand how this thang worked. When we went to the ports to deliver the weapons, we had to let them know we was federate ships from the south and not union ships from the north. If we got caught up in union territory, we had to surrender. There was a certain whistle you had to do so they know you was part of them. I tol' my wife many times, always be ready because the day is comin' when we gettin' way from here. Well one night the captain left us in charge of the ship. It was time. I knew all the signals so I could pass through the forts, I knew how the captain stood and even how he wore his hat. So, once we

was ready, I put on that hat, told you I was smart, pretended like I was him and we set out. When we got to the first fort, I could feel the sweat from my brows runnin' down my face but, I hoisted the flags and blew the right whistle and they let us through. Then I picked up my wife and other slaves who was waitin' and kept moving. Now we were really worried about Fort Sumter, that's where the war started, and we knew if we could just make it past there we was on our way to freedom.

Everyone began to pray and as we approached Fort Sumter, my hands were shaking so badly as I pulled that whistle cord. Next thing I know, they gave us the signal we was through. We was on our way to the union ship! We were going to surrender the Planter to the Union. We had outsmarted the captain and the guards. Then we took down the federate flags and hoisted a white bed sheet in surrender and as we approached, I knew they seen our flag. As night gave way to dawn, I needed to think quickly as we got close to them – what was I gonna say, what was they gonna do when they seen a colored man? So I said to the captain of the union ship in my best voice, Good morning sir, I've brought you some of the old United States guns sir, they was for Fort Sumter sir." They was happy to see us. We was free. Told you I was smart.

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Storyteller – dressed as a freed man

Robert Smalls went on to become a sea captain for the Union Navy. After the war, he became a successful businessman and politician serving in both houses of the South Carolina legislature. But there are many stories like these, stories of daring escapes, people like Henry Box Brown, Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman, Harriet Jacobs and William and Ellen Craft. There were abolitionist and freed slaves who helped others escape this cruelty through means such as the Underground Railroad. Regrettably, not all uprisings ended in escape and many lost their lives trying to rise above the harsh reality of slavery.

(Audio Recording of the first paragraph of the Emancipation Proclamation)

Although the emancipation proclamation allowed over 4 million slaves their freedom, it didn't last long. Americans went through a period of what was called Reconstruction. This was the

reorganizing of the Southern states after the Civil War, readmitting them into the Union, and defining how whites and blacks could live together in a non-slave society. As a matter of fact, under the protection of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, there was a period where African Americans were in control of their own destinies. They were allowed to vote, actively participate in the political process, buy land, seek their own employment, use public accommodations, and create thriving communities. But the South did not welcome it, they saw Reconstruction as an embarrassment, after losing the war to the North. They resisted and white supremacy was restored across the south.

This is where we meet Jim Crow. (image) Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation. These laws existed from the post-Civil War era until about 1968. These laws affected every part of daily life. For example: segregated waiting rooms in professional offices, water fountains, restrooms, building entrances, elevators, and cemeteries. African Americans were forbidden from living in white neighborhoods. Segregation was enforced for public pools, parks, phone booths, hospitals and jails. Some states required separate textbooks for black and white students. African Americans in court were given a different Bible than whites to swear on. Marriage between whites and blacks was strictly forbidden in most southern states. There were even signs posted at town and city limits warning African Americans that they were not welcome. Black communities and individuals that attempted to defy Jim Crow laws were met with violence and even death.

So as a result, southern blacks were forced to make their living working the land due to black codes and the sharecropping system, which offered little in the way of economic freedom. The blacks in the south began to rise up and leave the south and from about 1916 to 1970, the largest immigration in history began. This was known as The Great Migration. (image) During this time, more than 6 million African Americans escaped the racial terror and degrading labor conditions of the South, moving to northern and western regions of the U.S., where they hoped sanctuary and better jobs awaited them.

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I'm Here

(Train Whistle - Black lady standing on platform with her suitcase)

It so noisy out here, I can barely hear myself think. But my cousin Bertha say this be the place. (takes a piece of paper out of her pocket) Yep, this the place and she be here to fetch me real soon. Boy I ain't never seen a building so big or heard so many cars. I feels excited and nervous all wrapped up into one. My husband Robert and my chirrens be coming later. He saved up for two years to buy my ticket North. Dis a new land. No mo' Jim Crow! No mo' Jim Crow! Say it wit me now, No mo' Jim Crow! My cousin say I can work in the factory long sides her. Say it hard work but wages is good. I ain't one to be scared of no hard work. That's all I know, if it was easy wouldn't be work I s'pose. Can't wait to see where she livin.' Says she livin' in an apartment with some other women. I wonder if she got somewhere I can plant my tomatoes and cabbage. Ain't nothing like the sweet potatoes I grew in my garden back in North Carolina. (looking around in amazement) So dis is New York City. Look at all these big buildings and fancy cars. Sho is glad Bertha sent me dis coat, cuz it is much cooler than I 'spected. (pauses, looks like she's looking at people) Well, where all these Negras off to? Dey walkin roun here like they own the world. (smiling) Humph, this right here feel like I done died and went to Negra heaven way these folks acting. I guess that what Bertha was talkin about in her last letter when she say to me, Cora Mae, you can't be up here actin' all country. I guess she want me to start struttin around like these folks. I don't know nothing bout that. But I reckon it will start growing on me. I spose all I got to do is imagine a peacock with it's chest poked out and feathers spread and head held high. Lawd that's a beautiful bird and boy do it strut. (Starts to imitate the peacock) Yessiree, I'm in a new land and I can feel the difference. It even smell different in my nostrils, it sound different, it sound like loud music with a beat that kinda make you wanna strut. I wonder what Robert gonna think when he see me again. Oh! There she is! Bertha! Bertha! Here I is, I'm here! (picks up suitcase and runs offstage)

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9

Storyteller (streetlight and saxophone player)

During the Great Migration, African Americans began to build a new place for themselves in

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public life, actively confronting racial prejudice as well as economic, political, and social challenges to create a black urban culture that would have enormous influence in the decades to come. Many new arrivals found jobs in factories, slaughterhouses and foundries, where working conditions were arduous and sometimes dangerous. There was competition for work and for living space in increasingly crowded cities. While segregation was not legalized in the North the same way it was in the South, racism and prejudice were nonetheless widespread. As a result of housing tensions, many blacks ended up creating their own cities within big cities, fostering the growth of a new urban, African-American culture. The most prominent example was Harlem in New York City, a formerly all-white neighborhood that by the 1920s housed some 200,000 African Americans.

The black experience during the Great Migration, was known as the first New Negro Movement and later as the Harlem Renaissance. It would have an enormous impact on the culture of the era.

(saxophone solo starts softly)

During the renaissance era we were introduced to great artists, they were authors, singers, poets, activists, actors, entrepreneurs, great thinkers. People like (images on screen) Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Dubois, Zora Neal Hurston, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Paul Robeson, James Weldon Johnson, Cab Calloway, Bill Bojangles Robinson, Marcus Garvey – too many to name but it definitely was a rising of the black experience.

Saxophone solo gets louder and soloist enters and sings her song

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10

Storyteller

African Americans have been excelling in many ways by this time. Another way we excelled was in sports. Like much of society, professional American sports were segregated in the first part of the 20th Century, and black athletes could not compete with white athletes. In baseball, there were established 'Negro' leagues for non-white players. The National Basketball League didn't officially integrate until 1950. While professional football started with integration from 1900s to the 1930s, the National Football League wasn't completely integrated until about

1934-1945. The degree to which these degrading segregation policies hurt black communities was felt in and outside of sports. Yet blacks excelled in many arenas. John Baxter Taylor Jr. was an American track and field athlete, notable as the first African American to win an Olympic gold medal in 1908 and Kenny Washington was a professional football player who was the first African American to sign a contract with a National Football League when he signed with the Los Angeles Rams in 1946. Even in sports, unwelcome but highly desired, blacks continued to rise.

There was one man in particular who used his natural skills to rise up and reach a certain pinnacle of success, at least for blacks at the time. He broke barriers and he broke rules and he was confident in his skills. He was black and unapologetic. I'm talking about the first African American heavy weight champion. I didn't say he was the first African American boxing champion. The first African American boxing champion was from Baltimore, MD and his name was Joe Gans. He was rated the greatest Lightweight boxer of all-time, the first African American World Boxing Champion of the 20th century. However, there was another man by the name of Jack Johnson. Take a look.

(video footage of Jack Johnson plays silently while storyteller speaks)

John Arthur Johnson, nicknamed the Galveston Giant, was an American boxer who, at the height of the Jim Crow era, became the first African American world heavyweight boxing champion. He remains a boxing legend to this day. According to the filmmaker Ken Burns, "for more than thirteen years, Jack Johnson was the most famous and the most notorious African-American on Earth". He was successful, wealthy and he lived a life of luxury and excess.

Being rich and successful didn't matter if you were a black man. Major newspapers of the time claimed that Johnson was attacked by the government because he became famous and because he was married to a white woman. He was arrested on charges of violating the Mann Act—prohibiting one to transport a woman across state lines for "immoral purposes"—a racially motivated charge that embroiled him in controversy for his relationships, including marriages, with white women. When he was sentenced to a year in prison, he fled the country and fought

boxing matches abroad for seven years until 1920 when he served his sentence at Leavenworth.

He died in a car accident in 1946 at the age of 68. Johnson was posthumously pardoned by the president in May 2018, 105 years after his conviction. He rose to great heights in the boxing profession but most of his opponents were outside of the ring.

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11

Story Teller –

Dressed in Civil Rights Era clothing

As we look past reconstruction into post war America and into the Jim Crow era, blacks began to rise up to the challenge of these outrageous laws. Blacks just wanted their rights, rights that were promised to all Americans in the Constitution of the United States, basic civil rights, rights to social and political freedom. Not only did we resist, we set out to change the laws that continued to oppress and so we started a movement; a movement for our Civil Rights! We used strategies such as civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance, marches, protests, boycotts, freedom rides, and rallies which received national attention as the media documented the struggle to end racial inequality. We challenged segregation through the courts. We were introduced to activists such as Thurgood Marshall, Roy Wilkins, Patricia Roberts Harris, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Mary Church Terrell, Robert Terrell, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Martin Luther King, Jr. and many, many others. Many celebrities lent their voices to this movement. We wanted it legally, civilly and we challenged these outrageous laws that continued to oppress. Again, we rose to the occasion as again, many lost their lives standing up and looking racism square in the face.

Spoken Word by Jalisa

As she gets louder, protestors with signs will begin to join her on stage.

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12

Power to the People

For too long, you have wielded your power over us. For too long you have systematically

oppressed us, held us down, held us back, shut us out, marginalized us, disenfranchised us, locked us out, locked us up, harassed us, brutalized us and today, today, our – power! Yes that’s right - our power, black power. Power! meaning the ability to do - and we no longer want to be hindered from doing because we are being shackled by the manacles of a white, racist society. We want and we need black power. Power to receive justice and equality in every area of life. Black power! Power to live in decent neighborhoods and to earn a fair wage and provide for our families and the power to a higher standard of living. Black power! The power to be educated and re-educated to become knowledgeable about the totality of the systems that have been designed to propagate separatism and classism. Black Power! The power to protect ourselves and our communities from unfair harassment and cruel treatment, and the power to be players in the capitalistic society, to participate in the political discourse and to create enterprise. Where the hell is our 40 acres and a mule and our slice of the American pie? We want the power to rise to the point where you can look at a black brother or a black sister and you can see yourself, a free human being worthy of the same benefits you enjoy, no longer having to fight to be considered worthy of the dream. We too want to rise and possess our power, we want black power.

Dance

13

Say it Loud, I’m black and I’m proud

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####End of Part I – Intermission####

14

Sheroes and Black Girl Magic

Hostess (in a living room-like setting hosting a girls night out)

I just love getting together with my sisters. We may not be related by blood, but we are sisters bound together by a certain understanding and familiarity. We identify with one another through our shared experiences. There’s a certain aura about a sister; how she wears her hair, how she moves, how she emanates intimidating confidence. The hair, the lips, and the hips. The pain, beautifully wrapped in a womanly bow rising, rising to achieve, rising to learn, rising

to overcome the unthinkable, creating a language all our own, with a tilt of the head or the snap of the finger – somehow, we can relate to her. I love the thought of celebrating sisters, not tearing them down but appreciating who and what they are. We celebrate sisters from our past who showed up with their beautiful melanin tones of honey, coffee, mocha and cream, who paved the way for us - the pioneering sisters, intelligent sisters, talented sisters, entertaining sisters, brave sisters, loving sisters, educated sisters, unadulterated sisters. I just love my sisters.

(Women take turns reciting short monologues about a specific woman in history)

1. Sojourner Truth was born as Isabella Baumfree, a slave in upstate New York and escaped to freedom with her infant daughter. She later changed her name and became an abolitionist and women's rights activist. Sojourner Truth's most widely known speech was called "Ain't I a Woman?" and was delivered in 1851, it was the sho nuff truth.
2. Ruby Bridges was six when she became the first African-American child to integrate a white Southern elementary school on November 14, 1960, escorted to class by her mother and U.S. marshals due to violent mobs. Bridges' bravery paved the way for continued Civil Rights action.
3. Henrietta Lacks changed history and didn't even know it. This young mother died of cancer at age 31. Tissue samples from her tumors were taken without consent during treatment and those cell samples were used by researchers to develop the polio vaccine. To this day, her cells continue to save lives.
4. Bessie Coleman is the first Black and Native American woman to hold a pilot license. Sadly, she was killed at age 34 when her plane unexpectedly went down in 1926.
5. But we didn't stop rising, engineer and physician Mae Jemison broke through cosmic barriers when she became the first Black woman to travel in space aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour in September 1992
6. Before Hidden Figures, many of us had no clue about the contributions of Katherine Johnson. A certified mathematician, it was her calculations that ensured astronauts like John Glenn and the Apollo 11 flights were successful.
7. Freedom fighter Fannie Lou Hamer endured being threatened, beaten, and shot at to secure the right to vote. She spent her life advocating for Black folks to have the right to vote while serving as the vice-chair of the Freedom Democratic Party.
8. Shirley Chisholm became the first African American congresswoman in 1968. Four years later, she became the first major-party black candidate to make a bid for the U.S. presidency.
9. Actress and radio performer Hattie McDaniel became the first African American to win an Oscar in 1940, for her supporting role as Mammy in 'Gone With the Wind.'

10. Deemed one of the finest contraltos of her time, Marian Anderson became the first African American to perform with the New York Metropolitan Opera in 1955.
11. Diahann Carroll made a number of films during her career and was nominated for an Academy Award for *Claudine* in 1974. It wasn't until she was cast as the lead in *Julia* in 1968, however, that Carroll became a bona fide celebrity. The role made her the first African American woman to star in her own TV series.
12. Born in Albany, Georgia in 1923, Alice Coachman made history at the 1948 Olympics in London when she leapt to a record-breaking height of 5 feet, 6 and 1/8 inches in the high jump finals to become the first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal.
13. Long before there was a Venus or Serena, Althea Gibson was the first African American tennis player to compete at the U.S. National Championships in 1950, and the first black player to compete at Wimbledon in 1951. Not only that, she also broke racial barriers in professional golf.
14. Serena Jameka Williams is an American professional tennis player. The Women's Tennis Association ranked her world No. 1 in singles on eight separate occasions between 2002 and 2017. My girl Serena has won the second-most singles titles (23) in women's Grand Slam tournaments of all time.
15. As America's first Black First Lady, Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama was the personification of class, elegance, and grace. Her initiatives helped changed the way kids eat, helped military families and we loved her sense of style.

Hostess

It is a good thing to be able to reflect back on those who have gone before and enjoy a wonderful pride swell as we recall their heroic and courageous achievements. Just the very thought of what our fore-sisters had to endure is inconceivable to a sister today; and yet they were able to rise to the heights that they did no matter who wanted them there. To be able to succeed in unbearable circumstances where they experienced or witnessed unimaginable cruelty. Yet sisters rose. Oh yes, from the motherland to bowels of the middle passage, to the fields and plantation houses, traded for goods and services, even sold away from loved ones specifically to reproduce and even still, our sisters rose. They were the caregivers, the nurturers, the mamas and the mammies, still able to show devotion in the face of tragic and heartbreaking circumstances. They rose to heights not even prepared for their ascension, an unwelcome elevation to the boardrooms, to the big screen, the catwalk, up the corporate ladders, into every area of business, to the skies and yes, even to the moon. The strength of

the black sister is unmatched, the intensity of her soul cannot be diluted, and the depth of her resilience can never be denied. We owe our perpetual gratitude to the Almighty for fashioning such a creation of glory and splendor whose heart is constructed to encompass a depth of love only reserved for her. (music starts playing low) We celebrate her strength because her strength is our strength and her example is ours to follow. Black Sister, white sister, red sister, yellow sister, brown sister, my sister, we will continue to rise. Times up! Times up for insanity my sister and together we too can stop the me too and ascend to new heights as we revel in the regality of our woman-ness. Yes, my sisters, we will continue...to rise.

(Women join hands and lift as Music gets louder and then fades)

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15

Storyteller (regular clothes) - Songs of Faith

The African American struggle can be heard in houses of faith worldwide through music and singing. Through the music, African Americans have chronicled their journeys of pain and sorrow as well as their hope and faith of a freedom that would be realized one day. From the tobacco, rice, and cotton fields to the secret plantation meeting places, to the very first AA churches in America until today, songs of faith are still a mainstay in the black church. From songs like the old slave spirituals such as Steal Away, Wade in the Water, We are climbing Jacob's ladder, containing heartfelt lyrics that held out hope that the slave can rise up to reach their destiny in this life or the hereafter. Unique syncopation derived from ancestry carried through the cotton fields and making the evolutionary journey to a fusion of slave songs, spirituals, blues and jazz with Christian lyrics known as gospel. There are songs of praise in the form of hymns, classically composed spirituals and up-tempo hand clappin', foot stompin' music. They all represent the story of the complexity of African American experience in a way that cannot be expressed in any other genre. These song's refrains contain the heartfelt language of a great deliverance from all suffering.

(Dance – I been buked)

(Choir enters – performs Oh Freedom, Ride on King Jesus, The Lord Be Praised)

As you travelled this journey with us today, it is our hope that were inspired by what you heard and by what you saw, that you gained new knowledge or a different perspective. Rising up is

about overcoming obstacles and challenges, its about beating the odds, it's about going high even when they go low. It's about having the courage even when you know it will be hard. Rising up is about giving opportunities to those who deserve it, and not judging someone because they are different from you. Rising up is about stretching beyond our comfort zones to understand that we all have many things in common, rising up is about getting to know someone who is different from you, has a different background, a different culture, a different way of life. This is the spirit of our ancestors, the great pioneers who were so instrumental in building this great country, as they rose, they broke down barriers, they ran, they escaped, they died, they marched, they stood, they protested, they cried, they prayed, they showed that people can rise above any circumstance or condition. Their courage is still felt today and yes, yes, we are the hope of the slave. Rising up is about standing together as one race, taking all of our beautiful differences, diverse ideas, skills, gifts and talents to make this world a place where we all can be free to rise up to our individual and collective destinies.

Choir: Lift Every Voice and Sing

Rest of cast enters as 2nd verse starts

Audience members join in on last verse

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The End

Quotes for the screen

Difficulties break some men but make others. No axe is sharp enough to cut the soul of a sinner who keeps on trying, one armed with the hope that he will rise even in the end. N. Mandela

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. Martin Luther King, Jr.