BACKSTORY

BY THOMAS GIBBONS

A House With No Walls





Your behind-the-scenes look at TimeLine productions

YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

TimeLine Theatre Company

From Artistic Director PJ Powers

a message

Dear Friends,

Following closely on the heels of Gore Vidal's *Weekend*, we are delighted to bring you another new play — the Chicago premiere of *A House With No Walls* by Thomas Gibbons. You might already be familiar with Gibbons' *Permanent Collection* and *Bee-luther-hatchee*, which were produced in recent seasons at Northlight Theatre in Skokie. *A House With No Walls* joins them to conclude his trilogy of plays dealing with race in America.

A House With No Walls is inspired by a recent event in Philadelphia when the new Liberty Bell Center was to be built near the site of President George Washington's house — a plot of land that included slave quarters. A heated debate erupted in that community (and expanded nationally) about how a museum celebrating American liberty and freedom should acknowledge and, perhaps, honor the slaves who lived there.

Gibbons, a Philadelphian himself, crafted this play to explore not only that debate but also the struggle of two of the slaves who lived and worked on this plot of land in 1796.

A House With No Walls ignites a discussion that people are normally too timid to talk about in public. Or even in private. A discussion I admit we've had too rarely in this theater.

I write this in mid-September, just days after the first rehearsal for our production. As I told the cast and production team, one of the many reasons TimeLine was drawn to *A House With No Walls* is because it ignites a discussion that people are normally too timid to talk about in public. Or even in private. A discussion I admit we've had too rarely in this theater.

For a company devoted to exploring history, we regret that we haven't spent enough time tackling aspects of history that can be easier to avoid than to address head on. Race relations — good, bad and, at times, quite ugly — are part of the social fabric of America. Just in the last year on the highly visible stage of a presidential election, the best and worst of biases and behaviors have been on display in our 24-hour news cycle and YouTube'd society.

We first read this play nearly a year ago and decided in early January to produce it. At the time (pre-Iowa Caucus) it seemed unlikely that an African-American presidential candidate would make a historic rise and have a chance to become our nation's leader. (I realize that many of you are reading this after Election Day so my apologies for not yet knowing how the story plays out.)

And on a day last March (coincidentally in Philadelphia), that presidential candidate gave an attention-grabbing speech, reminding us of the work of our founders in that city of liberty. He noted that, "The answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution — a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised

its people liberty and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time. And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part — through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk — to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time."

These words are deeply relevant to Gibbons' play. His characters — representing two generations 200 years apart — aim to do their part (often against opposing points of view) to narrow the gap between the promise of ideals and the reality of their time.

In an interview with Gibbons (included in this issue of *Backstory*), he said: "I'm always happy when someone tells me that after seeing one of my plays, they went for coffee and argued for two hours. I feel like I've given them their money's worth."

That is also our intent at TimeLine, and we hope that Gibbons, and our cast and production team, have given you plenty of fodder for a prolonged discussion.

Best,

PJ

Special Events and Resources

the conversation

At TimeLine we look forward to the chance to engage our audience in conversations inspired by our productions. We hope you will join us for these special events during the run of *A House With No Walls*:

Sunday Scholars Series

After the show on **Sunday, Nov. 16** is our Sunday Scholars Series, a one-hour panel discussion featuring experts talking about the themes and issues of the play. Moderated by TimeLine Board member Peter H. Kuntz, **admission to this event is free.** Visit our Web site at timelinetheatre.com to learn more.

Company Member Discussion

The heart of TimeLine is our Company members, who shape the artistic vision and choose the programming. On **Sunday, Dec. 7,** join them for an informal post-show discussion about how *A House With No Walls* came to TimeLine's stage.

Post-Show Discussions

On **Thurdays, Nov. 6, 13 and 20; Sundays, Nov. 23 and 30** and **Wednesday, Dec. 10**, stay for **free post-show discussions** moderated by a TimeLine Company member and featuring members of the production staff and cast.

Other Resources

Historical lobby displays, a **study guide** and much more are available online at **timelinetheatre.com**.

The "Hell of Slavery" and the "Heaven of Liberty"

What began as an effort to correct the historical record erupted into a controversy about how the story of slavery in America should be told.

In 2000, construction began on the Liberty Bell Center in Philadelphia. Part of a $300 million redesign of Independence Mall, the building would become the new home of the Liberty Bell. The center is part of Independence National Historic Park, which is administered by the National Park Service.

The Liberty Bell was forged in 1751 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of William Penn's Charter of Privileges, which was Pennsylvania's original constitution. This enduring symbol of America's freedom was adopted by abolitionists as their symbol as they worked to end slavery. Originally referred to as the "State House" bell, the abolitionists first began calling it the Liberty Bell in the mid 1830s. In 2002, the Liberty Bell would again be juxtaposed against slavery.

Rediscovery of the President's House

For 10 years, beginning in 1790, Philadelphia was the nation's capital while construction was completed on Washington, D.C. Robert Morris, a merchant known as the "Financier of the American Revolution," volunteered his house to President George Washington. It was here, in what became known as the President's House, that Washington would create the modern presidency.

And it was to this house that he would bring nine slaves.

In 1951, the last remaining walls of the President's House were torn down during the creation of Independence Mall. No one recognized the historical significance of the walls, and the exact location of the President's House faded from memory.

Independent historian Edward Lawler, Jr. rediscovered the location of the President's House in January 2002, locating it squarely on the mall of the new Liberty Bell Center. Lawler's research indicated that the site included a smokehouse converted for use as slave quarters. Ironically, the site of the slave quarters is just a few feet from the entrance to the center.

Historians and Activists Converge

Despite the urging of Lawler and other historians, the National Park Service declined to mark the footprint of the President's House, believing it would create design confusion.

The fact that there were once slave quarters on the site caught the attention of black citizens and activists. Gary Nash, a history professor at the University of California at Los Angeles said in a radio interview that "Millions of visitors are going to go into the Liberty Bell [Center] not knowing they are walking over the site of Washington's executive mansion, indeed walking over the slave quarters he built at the rear of the house. ... We have here a conjunction of liberty and slavery on the same site!"

"We have here a conjunction of liberty and slavery on the same site!"

While the memorial at the Liberty Center will be the first national memorial commemorating the lives of slaves, other groups have erected markers such as this one at Mount Vernon. When erected, this was thought to be the first memorial of its kind in the United States.

As public awareness of the slave quarters grew, many began to feel that the National Park Service was deliberately suppressing the existence of slavery on the site in order to present a positive picture of Washington and American history. The park service also resisted a request for an archeological excavation of the site.

Phil Sheridan, a spokesman for Independence National Historic Park, denied they were ignoring slavery: "We are in vehement agreement that you must interpret slavery at this site. But does that require a structure or grid in the pavement? ... The question is, if you dug down and found a few bricks [representing where slaves lived], which we would argue you're not going to find, would that add to the story of slavery?"

In May 2002 it appeared there might be an end to the controversy. The park service agreed that it would rework "the interpretive ideas for the Liberty Bell Center to include a fuller discussion of slavery."

Some historians and activists worried that this would be no more than a small plaque barely noticed by visitors. They argued for a full archeological excavation and a proper memorial for the nine slaves.

As the debate continued in the Philadelphia papers, some claimed that the center was being hijacked by "multiculturalists" and was "another instance of grievance politics attempting to trump beneficent and innocent designs."

The important fact is not that Washington had slaves, they argued, but that he freed his slaves.

Organized Protest and a Government Mandate

Michael Coard, an attorney in Philadelphia, founded Avenging The Ancestors Coalition (ATAC) around June 2002. On June 11, ATAC held its first protest at the Liberty Bell site. Coard was determined that visitors would know that in order to walk into the "heaven of liberty" at the center, they first had to cross the "hell of slavery."

In July, the House Appropriations Committee passed an amendment instructing the National Park Service to commemorate the existence of the first executive mansion and the slaves who worked in it. The design of that commemoration would continue to cause debate.

The National Park Service unveiled its preliminary design at a contentious public meeting in January 2003. Frustrating many, the park service did not mark the quarters because it said there was no conclusive historical evidence that the smokehouse existed or was indeed used to house slaves.

ATAC and other groups continued their protests as a way to focus attention

A conceptual sketch showing how the slave quarters might be commemorated.

on the controversy. Finally, in late October 2004, the superintendent of Independence National Historic Park agreed that the spot in front of the center should be marked as the site where some of Washington's slaves had lived. The converted smokehouse would be officially recognized as "slave quarters."

Funding and Design of the Project

Now that an agreement had been reached, the question of funding came to the fore: The original appropriation for the center included no funds for this new commemoration.

The estimated cost for the design that had been rejected in January 2003 was $4.5 million. Philadelphia Mayor John Street pledged $1.5 million of city funds, but there was still a significant shortfall. September 2005 brought the announcement of a federal grant of about $3.5 million to fund the President's House project.

In January 2006, the National Park Service agreed to carry out an archeological excavation prior to the construction of the memorial, determining that there was a "low to moderate potential of recovering artifacts and information relating to the period of presidential occupancy."

A new oversight committee held a call for proposals in which each design for the site was required to clearly indicate the boundaries of the President's House and the footprint of the slave quarters.

In February 2007, a design by Kelly/Maiello Architects & Planners was selected. Its vision featured a house with no walls: The perimeter of the President's House was marked with brick and free-standing doors and windows rose into the air, suggesting the full outline of the house. The new design, including the cost of archeological research, would require a budget of $8.8 million. While work could begin with the city and federal funds, more fund-raising would be required.

From March 2007 through July 2007, archeologists carefully uncovered the foundation of the President's House. Among their discoveries were the remains of a tunnel used by servants and slaves to move easily in and out of the main house.

A house with no walls: A model of the winning Kelly/Maiello design for the President's House memorial.

The exposure of the foundations inspired a surprising amount of public interest. Editorials in the Philadelphia papers suggested that the best commemoration of the site would be to leave the physical foundations in view. The public interest was strong enough that the Kelly/Maiello design was altered to include a glass structure through which visitors can see the actual bricks of the President's House and the outline of the slave quarters.

A Closing Ceremony

On July 31, 2007, the dig ended and the foundations were temporarily covered with earth to protect them from the elements. ATAC members honored the nine slaves by pouring libations on the site, an African tradition that is both a prayer and used to mark an important event.

After five years, historians and activists would get what they had fought for: a preservation of the footprint of the President's House and a detailed portrayal of slavery juxtaposed with a celebration of liberty.

Fundraising continues for the memorial, which is expected to open in 2009 or 2010. When completed, it will be the first national site commemorating the lives of slaves.

The Basis of Black Conservatism
the politics

What is a black conservative?

The liberal/conservative spectrum skews a little differently for black Americans than for Americans in general, according to Shelby Steele, a prominent black conservative and a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, a think tank at Stanford University in California.

A black "Republican or free-market libertarian or religious fundamentalist, pro-lifer, trickle-down economist, or neocon" is not necessarily a black conservative, he writes in *The Loneliness of the Black Conservative* (1999).

Steele contends that a black Republican still can be a strong supporter of affirmative action. While politically he is conservative, his support of affirmative action makes him liberal under his racial identity.

What, then, is the shibboleth for conservative versus liberal within the black community?

Black conservatives dissent from black group authority because they reject the idea that victimization is a complete explanation of black fate.

"Victimization became so rich a vein of black power — even if it was only the power to 'extract' reforms (with their illusion of deliverance) from the larger society — that it was allowed not only to explain black fate but to explain it totally," Steele writes.

Martin Kilson, a research professor of political science at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., writes in *Anatomy of Black Conservatism* (1999) that black conservatives hold that advances in the federal courts and civil-rights legislation since the 1960s have successfully created a color-blind America, "making it counterproductive for

Black conservatives argue the black community has been so busy trying to win concessions from their perceived oppressors that they have failed to actually improve their own community.

blacks to persist in viewing themselves as victims of racism and so in need of unique public policies."

Black conservatives claim the failure to recognize the end of America's racist legacy has hampered the ability to create strategies of uplift. In other words, they argue the black community has been so busy trying to win concessions from their perceived oppressors that they have failed to actually improve their own community.

Deborah Toler, a senior research analyst at the Institute for Food and Development Policy in Oakland, Calif., explains the liberal/conservative divide differently.

She writes in *Black Conservatives* (1993) that black liberals believe that primary focus should be put on a "new America" — i.e., removing racial barriers to advancement.

She contends that black conservatives, in the tradition of Booker T. Washington, focus on creating a "new Negro." Washington was a former slave who became a prominent leader in the early 1900s, focusing on African-Americans and cooperating with sympathetic whites. Toler argues that black conservatives see "African-Americans as a somehow 'unfinished' product of slavery, still needing to prove ourselves worthy of the rights of other American citizens."

Steele, also writing in *Black Conservatives*, supports this assertion: "Though [the Emancipation Proclamation] delivered greater freedom, it did not deliver the skills and attitudes that are required to thrive in freedom. ... These values ... were muted and destabilized by the negative conditioning of [our] oppression. I believe that since the mid-sixties our weakness in this area has been a far greater detriment to our advancement than any remaining racial discrimination."

Steele and other black conservatives hold that strengthening these skills and attitudes within the black community is more important than continuing a stance of victimization and winning concessions from the majority.

In addition to a belief in a color-blind America, Toler lays out in *Black Conservatives* four other points of black conservative thought:

- African-American demands for equal opportunity during civil rights are now perversely demanding equal outcomes. Our free capitalist society does not ensure equal outcomes.
- Issues of race relations and Black poverty cannot be fixed solely through government policy. Social programs damage Black families by undercutting independence.
- Affirmative action lowers Black self-esteem because whites will always assume that high-achieving Blacks were rewarded for their skin color rather than their skill.
- African Americans are best served by a focus on self-help. The first step is to de-emphasize racial identity and loyalty in favor of an American identity.

The black conservative belief that the historic legacy of racism is not wholly to blame for the white/black achievement gap places them at odds with the majority of the black community. This opposition can exact a punishing personal price.

"A public 'black conservative' will surely meet a stunning amount of animus, demonization, misunderstanding, and flat-out, undifferentiated contempt," Steele writes in *The Loneliness of a Black Conservative*.

Black conservatives languish outside the protection of the group to a point where "even politically correct whites (who normally repress criticism of blacks) can show contempt for them," he continues.

One only need look at the public comments on an innocuous YouTube interview of Amy Holmes, a black conservative pundit, to see examples of this vitriol. In the comments, Holmes is called an Uncle Tom and is subjected to comments about her intellect and sexuality that are not fit for print.

Steele argues that this ostracism is an attempt by mainstream black leadership to protect power gained from the victimization stance. As a result, he sees black conservatives as noble dissenters against the established power structures. Black liberals, on the other hand, appear to see these conservatives as turncoats who have traded their responsibility to their community for power in the white establishment.

As Toler writes in *Black Conservatives*, "The principal complaint of most African Americans against Black conservatives ... is that they provide cover for policies that do grievous harm to Black people."

While black conservative thought has been a part of American culture since the days of Booker T. Washington, black conservatives came to widespread public attention during the 1980s and early '90s, particularly around the time of Clarence Thomas' confirmation hearings after his nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Today, the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama may have the potential to cut across the liberal/conservative divide in the black community. While Obama would not be called a conservative, his emphasis on transcending the divisive racial politics of the past and his belief in the meritocracy of America does overlap the conservative call to move beyond victimization.

Does Obama's campaign to become the president of the United States undercut the argument that institutionalized racism presents the greatest obstacle to black achievement? As his historic candidacy alters the discussion of race in America, perhaps black conservatives will have the opportunity to reconnect with the black community that — depending on your point of view — they have either abandoned or been ostracized from.

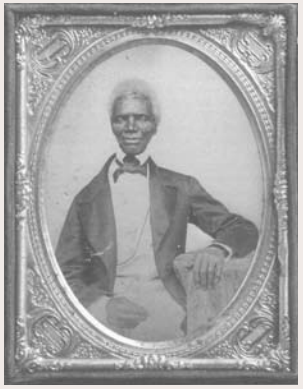
Black liberals, on the other hand, appear to see these conservatives as turncoats who have traded their responsibility to their community for power in the white establishment.

the history

In May or June of 1796, Oney Judge (also known as Ona Judge) ran away from her master's house in Philadelphia. In evading capture, Oney became one of the thousands of slaves who risked their lives to win freedom. She also became the first slave to escape from the home of George Washington, president of the newly founded republic.

Oney was born around 1773 to a seamstress named Betty and a white indentured servant named Andrew Judge. Oney was a "dower slave." She belonged to Martha Washington's first husband, Daniel Parke Custis. After his death, Martha received lifetime use of one-third of the estate's assets, including one-third of the slaves Custis had owned. Martha did not technically own the slaves: She and George Washington held them in trust, and after her death, ownership would pass to her son Jacky. Jacky died before Martha, and so legal ownership of the slaves would pass to her grandchildren after her death.

When she was about 10, Oney may have been designated a playmate for one of Martha's granddaughters.



This photograph of a man named Tom is the only known portrait of a former Washington slave.

She was brought into the manor house and became an expert at needlework. A "perfect Mistress of her needle" is how Washington once described her. Oney eventually became Martha's attendant, responsible for the care of her clothes and hair.

She was chosen to accompany the family when the Washingtons relocated to New York City from Mount Vernon; she also came with them to Philadelphia. She was selected for her skills and her appearance. A light-skinned young woman, she possessed traits that enabled her to accompany the First Lady on official visits.

In 1796, Martha's eldest granddaughter, Elizabeth Custis, married. Martha told Oney she would be bequeathed to Elizabeth. One historian speculates that Martha may have believed Oney would be delighted at the news. Oney, though, knew that her hopes of being freed at her mistress' death had been dashed. "I knew that if I went back to Virginia," Oney said in a later interview, "I never should get my liberty."

In spring 1796, the household began packing for a return to Mount Vernon. Oney packed her things, too, but this went unnoticed amid all the preparations. She related in an 1845 interview: "I had friends among the colored people of Philadelphia, had my things carried there before hand, and left while [the Washingtons] were eating dinner."

Oney gained passage on a ship piloted by Capt. John Bowles and sailed to Portsmouth, N.H. It is unclear if Bowles knew Martha Washington's slave was a passenger. Oney, however, tried to protect Bowles from harm. "I never told his name till after he died, a few years since," she said, "lest they should punish him for bringing me away."

Oney's quest for freedom did not end in Portsmouth. While there, she was spotted by Elizabeth Langdon, a friend of the Washingtons. Word reached Washington about the location of the runaway slave. He communicated with Oliver Wolcott, secretary of the treasury, who in turn sent Joseph Whipple, his Portsmouth collector, to recover Oney. These actions were illegal: Washington was using the federal government to recover private property. He also violated the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act, which he had signed: He failed to appear before a magistrate to prove ownership before attempting to recover a fugitive slave.

Through Whipple, Oney attempted to bargain with Washington. She promised return if she was guaranteed her freedom at a later date. Washington, however, berated Whipple for negotiating with a slave and failing to recover Oney.

Oney continued her life in Portsmouth. She met and married John Staines, a sailor. In 1798, Oney gave birth to a daughter.

In July 1799, Martha's nephew Burwell Bassett, Jr. was visiting Portsmouth. He was entertained by the Langdons, the same family that had recognized Oney two years earlier. Over dinner Bassett revealed that he was there to recover Oney and should she resist, he had "orders to bring her and her infant child by force."

Sen. John Langdon was appalled. He relayed Bassett's intentions to Oney via the family cook. Oney quickly packed a few items and hired a wagon to take her to Greenland, N.H., where she hid with the Warners, a family of free blacks.

Edward Savage's portrait of George Washington and his family includes an unidentified slave.

Washington died December 14, 1799. In an 1845 interview, Oney said "they never troubled me anymore after he was gone."

But because of the Fugitive Slave Act, Oney lived the rest of her life as a fugitive. Martha's heirs had legal claim to her. As noted in an 1846 article, Oney had been given "verbally, if not legally, by Mrs. Washington, to Eliza Custis, her granddaughter."

Oney had three children with Staines; all died before her. Outliving her children by 15 years, Oney became destitute in her old age. She was supported by the residents of Greenland until her death on February 25, 1848.

She once was asked if she regretted leaving the Washingtons, as it could be argued that her life was more difficult than it would have been had she remained a slave in the finest house in Philadelphia.

Oney replied "No, I am free, and have, I trust, been made a child of God by the means."

the interview

Recently, TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers (PJP) had the opportunity to interview *A House With No Walls* playwright Thomas Gibbons (TG).

(PJP) *A House With No Walls* was inspired by events in your hometown of Philadelphia [described earlier in this *Backstory*]. I'm curious — at what point did you start to think that you wanted to write a play about the controversy?

(TG) I knew as soon as the controversy became public. It seemed to me to be the logical extension, even the culmination, of themes I've been writing about for years — the weight of the past on the present; how we acknowledge, or fail to acknowledge, the central role of race in our history; the stories we tell ourselves as a society. And it was happening under my nose: I can see the Liberty Bell pavilion from the window of my office.

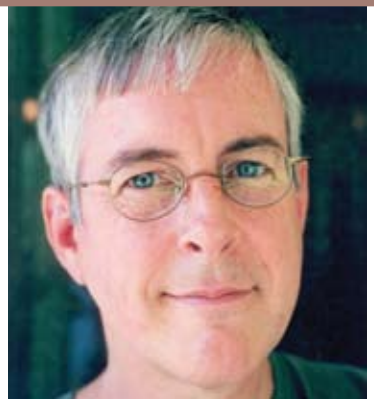
(PJP) This isn't the first time you've written a play based on real-life events. Do you ever feel inhibited by a need to remain true to the original story?

(TG) All of my plays are drawn from either historical or contemporary events — or, like *A House With No Walls*, both. But they're not history, and they are not journalism. My ambition is to color in the journey of my characters as vividly and imaginatively as I can, without straying outside the lines of historical fact.

(PJP) One of the things that I love most about this play — and something that makes it ideal for TimeLine — is how you transcend time and explore both the contemporary argument over the Liberty Bell Center and the life of Oney Judge in 1796. Did you set out to write both stories or did one spring from the other?

(TG) I knew that both strands were integral to the play. One thing that struck me early on was the fact that to enter the Liberty Bell pavilion, you walk on the spot where the Washingtons' slaves were housed. Having the present and the past on stage simultaneously is a technique I've used in other plays, but here it seemed to go beyond metaphor into literal truth. This eight-foot-square patch of earth holds both our history and our present.

(PJP) The play had a "rolling world premiere" at four theaters. Can you explain that and what that experience was like for you?



(TG) The National New Play Network — of which InterAct Theatre, where I'm a playwright in residence, is a member — has a program called the Continued Life of New Plays Fund. Three or more member theaters (and sometimes theaters outside the network) commit to producing a new play, before the first production and the first reviews. In other words, you can't back out if the reviews are bad, and you can't jump in if they're good. These are not co-productions: Each production has its own director, designers and cast. *A House With No Walls* is the second of my plays to go through this process, and one of the great advantages is that it allows the playwright to continue working on the script, discovering new things with each production and incorporating them.

(PJP) All three of your plays that have been seen in Chicago — *Bee-luther-hatchee, Permanent Collection* and now *A House With No Walls* — deal with race in this country and the African-American experience, in particular. I imagine that I'm not the first person to ask you this, but I'm curious why you, a Caucasian, have written so extensively on this and how people have responded to your focus on this topic?

(TG) This is usually the first question I'm asked. Several years ago I wrote a documentary play about the MOVE bombing in Philadelphia — the police dropped a bomb on the house of a radical African-American group, starting a fire that killed 11 of the group's members and destroyed an entire city block. During rehearsals, which were frequently tense and confrontational, it became clear that the African-American and white actors had startlingly divergent perspectives about the events and people depicted in the play. That chasm between African-American and white interpretations of our shared experience has been my subject in this trilogy of plays. In the first two, the conflict is between an African-American and a white character. In *House*, the central characters are African-American; the white characters, while important, are secondary. As for people's responses — some are intrigued, some angered, some do a double-take when they meet me.

(PJP) One of the many reasons TimeLine was attracted to this play is because it inspires adult discussion about things that we're normally too afraid to talk about. My hunch is that you're someone who loves a hearty debate, and you use your platform of playwriting to prompt more of it?

(TG) I do enjoy sparking a debate, particularly when I can sit quietly in a corner and watch. The great national conversation about race, which we're frequently told is necessary if we're to "move forward," somehow never quite happens. I think it's because people sense that such an "official" context would invite not honesty but pretense, not truth but a series of approved poses. A discussion in a theater is easier: We're not talking about ourselves, we're talking about the people on stage, our stand-ins. I'm always happy when someone tells me that after seeing one of my plays, they went for coffee and argued for two hours. I feel I've given them their money's worth.

(PJP) I'm curious if your thoughts about this play have changed in light of the fact that we have seen an African-American running for president. Or, perhaps the better question is whether or not the characters of Cadence or Salif would have new things to say in light of recent events?

(TG) In the play, an older African-American activist who identifies racism as the main impediment to black progress is challenged by a younger one for whom racism is just one of several obstacles, some self-created. That generational divide also seems to be in play around Barack Obama's candidacy. Salif and Cadence are intensely verbal characters; they would certainly have new things to say about this election, but I'm not sure they would say anything different.

(PJP) What's next for you?

(TG) I'm working on two projects at the moment: an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's great and neglected book *Sakhalin Island*, about his journey to the penal colony off the coast of Siberia, and *Silverhill*, a play drawing on the history of the Oneida Community [in New York], a 19th Century communal religious society.

Event Recap: The History Makers Celebration

More than 25 TimeLine artists and members of the History Makers gathered in a private room at The Tasting Room at Randolph Wine Cellars on Tuesday, October 7, to enjoy our annual History Makers event. Guests were treated to premium wines, gourmet appetizers and an enlightening conversation featuring the Company Members of TimeLine Theatre.

The Company shared stories from behind-the-scenes at TimeLine, talking about the early days of the company, the season planning process and the unique environment that makes TimeLine an enjoyable and inspiring place to make theater.

The History Makers Society is the major giving society at TimeLine Theatre. Donors giving $1,000 or more annually receive membership in the society and enjoy expanded donor benefits.

To join the History Makers Society, or for more information on making a donation to TimeLine Theatre, please contact Lindsey Becker at (773) 281-8463 x26 or email lindsey@timelinetheatre.com.

Clockwise from above (from left): Board member Peter Kuntz with Company members PJ Powers, Janet Ulrich Brooks and David Parkes; Board member Marti DeGraaf and Powers; Board members Gloria Friedman and Cindy Giacchetti; History Maker Laurence Saviers with Company member Juliet Hart; History Maker Barbara French with Parkes; and Powers with History Makers Susan and Jim Colletti.

Help us make history. Donate today!

Donations are vital to the success of TimeLine Theatre, and we understand that every gift we receive is an investment in the success of our organization. If you are inspired by the engaging work on our stage, help us make history with a gift in support of TimeLine Theatre. Your donation will go directly to support the artistic programming at TimeLine Theatre, including the four productions of our all-premiere 2008-09 season.

Now is the perfect time to make your year-end donation and get tax-deductibility for 2008. Here are three easy ways to make a gift now:

Make your donation by phone:
Call Lindsey Becker at (773) 281-8463 x26

Make your donation online:
Visit us at timelinetheatre.com/donate

Mail your donation to us: TimeLine Theatre Company
ATTN: Development Manager
615 W. Wellington Avenue
Chicago, IL 60657

Remember, all donations made to TimeLine are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. We appreciate your support — thank you!

Upcoming Donor Events

DESSERT ON STAGE
December 3, 2008, following the 7:30pm performance
Invitations for this event are extended exclusively to donors giving $250 or more.

Donors giving $250 or more are invited to join the cast of *A House with No Walls* onstage after the 7:30pm performance on December 3, 2008 for champagne and some sweet treats. FlexPass subscribers are encouraged to reserve their tickets for this performance. To purchase or reserve your tickets call the Box Office at (773) 281-8463 x24. This event is expected to sell out, so please make your reservation today.

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy & Historical Research by Aaron Carter

Written by Aaron Carter, PJ Powers & Lindsey Becker

Edited by Karen A. Callaway & Lara Goetsch

Photography and Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

A House With No Walls *Cover Photo by* Ryan Robinson

Backstory is published four times each season.

Pictured on front cover (from left): Actor Amber Starr Friendly; actor A.C. Smith; director Louis Contey with scenic designer Collette Pollard; dramaturg Aaron Carter; and actor Steve O'Connell.

Pictured on back cover (from left): Actor Leslie Ann Sheppard; costume designer Alex Wren Meadows; actor Eric Sherman Christ; early set model by scenic designer Collette Pollard; lighting designer Diane D. Fairchild; actor Amber Starr Friendly; and director Louis Contey.

Our Mission:
TimeLine Theatre presents stories **inspired by history** that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative artistic team produces provocative theatre that engages, educates, entertains and enlightens.

the play







November 1 - December 21, 2008

previews 10/29 - 10/31

by **THOMAS GIBBONS**

directed by **LOUIS CONTEY**

Philadelphia wants to build its new American Museum of Liberty on the grounds of George Washington's home and slave quarters. Soon a conservative academic star and a liberal political activist are confronting each other with polarizing questions of African-American legacy and identity. Elegantly juxtaposed with this conflict is the true story of one of Washington's slaves as she contemplates escape. The result is a thought-provoking drama that asks vital questions about race in America, both where we've been and where we go next.

Running Time

Approximately 2 hours and 10 minutes, including one intermission.

The Cast

(*in order of speaking*)

Leslie Ann Sheppard: *Oney Judge*

Amber Starr Friendly: *Cadence Lane*

A.C. Smith*: *Salif Camara*

Steve O'Connell: *Allen Rosen, Tobias Humphreys*

Mark Richard: *Park Ranger, Steven Gardner, George Washington*

Eric Sherman Christ: *Austin Judge, Jacob Easton*

** Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.*

The Production Team

Collette Pollard: *Scenic Designer*

Alex Wren Meadows: *Costume Designer*

Diane D. Fairchild, U.S.A.: *Lighting Designer*

Andrew Hansen: *Original Music & Sound Designer*

Mike Tutaj: *Projections Designer*

Ann Meilahn: *Properties Designer*

Aaron Carter: *Dramaturg*

Jo Ann Flores-Deter: *Stage Manager*

Kristopher McDowell: *Production Manager*

Those designers and scenic artists identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local 829, AFL-CIO.

OCTOBER 2008

SU	M	T	W	TH	F
26	27	28	29	30	31

NOVEMBER 2008

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

DECEMBER 2008

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21						

Regular Performance

Preview Performance

Opening Night ***Sold Out***

Post-Show Discussion with cast & production crew ***Free***

Sunday Scholars a one-hour post-show panel discussion with experts on the themes and issues of the play ***Free***

Company Member Discussion a conversation with TimeLine's Company members ***Free***

SHOW TIMES

PREVIEWS 8 PM

OPENING NIGHT 7 PM

WEDNESDAYS & THURSDAYS 7:30 PM

FRIDAYS 8 PM *(also 4 PM on 11/28)*

SATURDAYS 4 PM & 8 PM

SUNDAYS 2 PM