

Lyceum drama combines stories and horror to recreate slave era

By Nicholas Allen

The Elizabeth City State University Lyceum Series presented the Atlantic-based Jomandi Productions in a moving dramatic production of "Do Lord Remember Me" on Wednesday, March 8, 1989 in Moore Hall Auditorium.

The play "Do Lord Remember Me," which takes place in 1936, in the Old Folks Home for the Colored in

Virginia, portrays the cruelty of slavery and is based on actual reports given by freed black slaves in the 1930's.

"This play showed the true aspect of slavery that you normally don't see in programs of this kind," said Tonya DeVaughn, a freshman. In one scene, a white lady put a little black girl's head under the back of her rocking chair and rocked on her face as she whipped her. The girl's face was

disfigured for life.

The cast portrayed their characters to the fullest of their abilities.

"It was obvious the actors had grown into the characters they depicted," said Ursula McMillion, a freshman. "They felt the need to convey forgotten issues to the public."

James DeJongh wrote this lyrical drama, which combines facts, folklore, horror, and superstitions to illustrate this period of interesting history.

"The turn out was great to the extent of people having to stand up to watch the play," said DeVaughn.

"The actors were willing to answer any questions from the audience," said Addie King, a freshman.

"I feel that the play was performed to give the audience a strong insight into what slavery was really like and to let them know the good and bad times blacks had during slavery," said Cheryl White, a sophomore.

The cast, in order of appearance, included Mary Hollaway, Andrea Frye, director of the play, Felix Knox, Edward W. Billups III, Michelle Benjamin, and Thomas Bryd, III.



The ECSU Lyceum committee presented Jomandi's production of "Do Lord Remember Me" March 8th in the Moore Hall auditorium. Jomandi, an Atlanta based performance company, thrilled the audience with its dramatic performance.

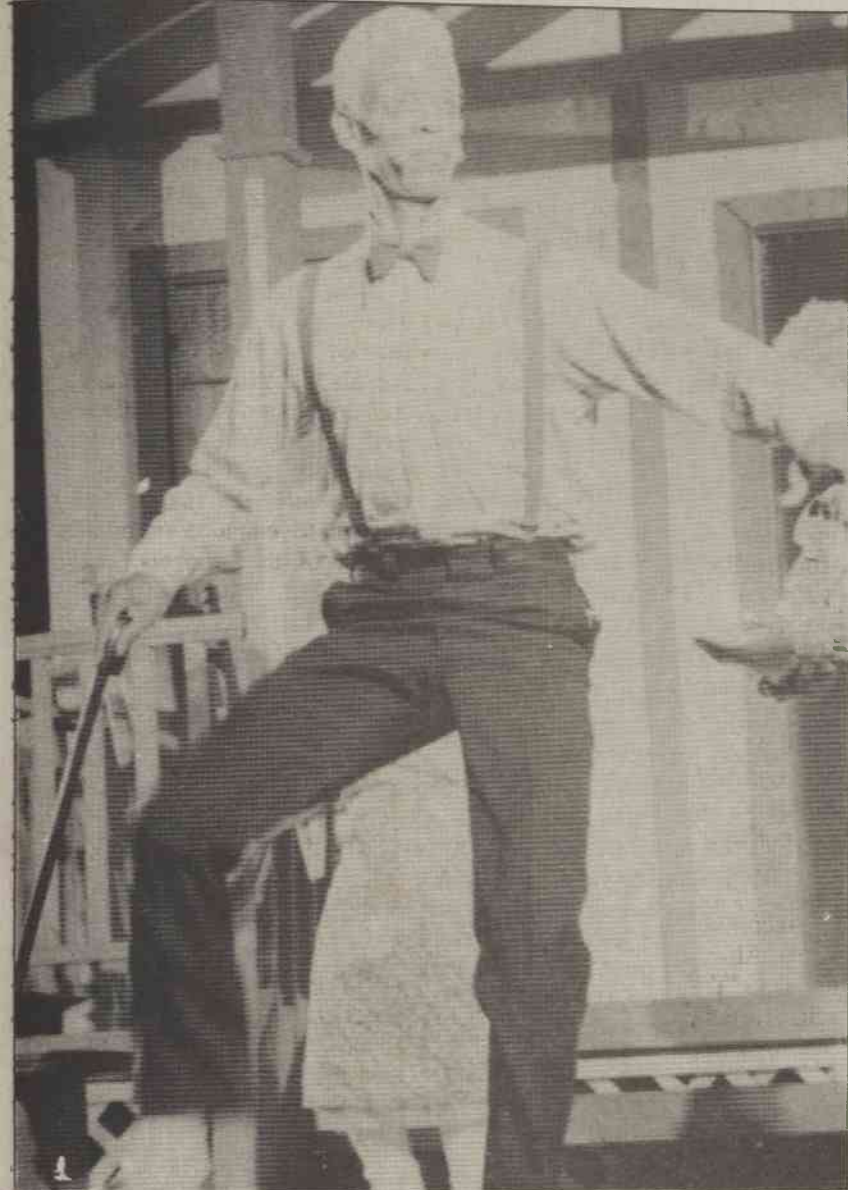


Photo by Richard McIntire

In one of the lighter scenes from "Do Lord," a character reminisces about how "he danced a jig" when he received the news that slaves had been set free. "Do Lord" is based on a collection of interviews from former slaves and their offspring.

Mississippi Burning a hard-hitting film

By Tom Williams

Mississippi Burning is a film based on the 1964 murders of three civil rights workers in Neshoba County, Mississippi and the FBI investigation that followed. Although the film is not an entirely realistic account, it is a good film with a good message.

Mississippi Burning does contain a lot of the exact details of the Neshoba killings and the FBI investigation. Still, Hollywood has to add a bit of flavoring to make an entertaining movie. In one scene, special agent Anderson, played by Gene Hackman, roughs up one of the murderers, (Clinton Pell), in a barbershop. Pell, or his real life counterpart, would have been arrogant enough to press brutality charges, especially after being indicted.

Anderson also becomes romantically involved with Pell's wife, (Frances McDormand.) It is a great

plot twist, but realistically, unlikely.

In another scene the FBI frames one of the murders as an informer by driving him through town. They pose as Klansmen threatening to kill him, and have their other men come to his "rescue." Thus they make him think he is in danger and offer protection in exchange. Again, this is barely possible, and barely probable.

Mississippi Burning offers strong performances by Gene Hackman William Defoe, and Frances McDormand. Hackman does an excellent job in his role of special agent Anderson, an experienced lawyer who grew up in Mississippi, with an excellent understanding of its institutions. He plays Anderson with toughness and sensitivity. The primary drawback of Hackman's performance is the snickering quality he has displayed before, as Lex Luther in the Superman films.

William Defoe presents a com-

mendable performance as Anderson's supervisor, Ward, a young, naive veteran of the Civil Rights struggle. Defoe plays the "do-it-by-the-book" boss. Frances McDormand plays the lonely Mrs. Pell, a woman trapped in a small town, and married to a man she does not love. Her eyes and expression reveal her pain. She and Hackman relate well together.

Mississippi Burning incorporates a lot of scenes from other films, and Director Alan Parker borrows some time-tested techniques. During the opening credits there is a scene of a black church burning. The television mini-series "Holocaust" begins with the same scene, only of a Nazi stormtroopers burning down a small wooden synagogue. When I saw this scene and thought about it I ended up comparing the Klu Klux Klan to Nazi stormtroopers.

Another scene in *Mississippi Burn-*

ing, of klansmen hanging a black man from a tree, is reminiscent of a scene in the television movie version of *The Diary of Miss Jane Pittman*. In that scene, a man hanged from a tree struggles for a long time because his neck does not break.

In *Mississippi Burning*, Alan Parker also uses the classic technique of silhouette, for dramatic effect. When Pell's wife emotionally tells her husband's doings to Anderson, the scene darkens to a silhouette.

Parker directs this film like a old television episode. In the end we see our heroes driving off toward another adventure. Along the same lines the character of Word tends to be overly philosophical, like the t.v. heroes of the past. This device makes the film too overbearing and preachy at times.

Still, *Mississippi Burning*, is a powerful, hard-hitting film that deserves to be seen.

Book traces author's search for her roots

By Dawn J. Catt

Somerset Homecoming: Recovering A Lost Heritage. By Dorothy Spruill Redford. New York, Doubleday, 263 pages. \$18.95.

"Who were my great-grandparents? Where did they come from?" These simple questions from thirteen-year-old daughter, Deborah, led Dorothy Spruill Redford to what ultimately turned into a ten-year search for her roots.

Her years of research culminated in the first slave descendant reunion which took place in August 1986 at Somerset Place, a plantation in Washington County North Carolina. World-wide publicity of the event inspired Ms. Redford to share the information which she had painstakingly uncovered. With the assistance of Michael D'Orso, *Somerset Homecoming: Recovering A Lost Heritage* was born. The book is not only a story about the Somerset Place slaves but about their descendants. It is Ms. Redford's personal account of how after years of denial she found her roots. From the time she was sent to New York to live with her aunt, she began setting herself apart.

"The worst thing you could be in New York, white or black, was a Southerner," she writes. "Southerners were slow, ignorant, shuffling country folk. And if you were a black Southerner, you were the lowest of the low." Because of this, Dorothy Redford's aunt and uncle were not from North Carolina; they were Dorothy and Fred Littlejohn from Jamaica.

Ms. Redford narrates how she became pregnant by a New York man fifteen years her senior, and lived with the child's father until after her daughter, Deborah, was born. Later, Deborah spent the summer with relatives in Portsmouth and Redford was unable to remove the child from the "cushion of warmth" provided by uncles, aunts, and cousins. She returned to the South that she had "spent her childhood ignoring" and "teenage years denying," and her "adulthood forgetting." Before the questions from her daughter, Ms. Redford was "too busy with the here and now to think about the there and then." Her search was

inspired by Alex Haley's moving story, *Roots*. As she watched the drama, her feelings of "emptiness, anger, confusion, and denial" began to surface. These feelings led Ms. Redford through her ten-year journey.

The book contains many rare photographs, maps, and a genealogical chart that traces Ms. Redford's family back to the 1700's.

Dorothy Redford is currently working to establish Somerset Place as the first national historic site to accurately portray the life of slaves. The reunion described in *Somerset Homecoming* led many individuals, both black and white, to want recover their heritage. The great-grandson of one of the original owners of Somerset Place, Josiah Collins VI, attended the event and was overwhelmed by what Ms. Redford had brought about.

This book examines her transformation from a woman ashamed of ancestors and region, to a woman proud of herself, her race, and her history; but more than that she has enabled other slave descendants to be equally as proud.

In a letter to Ms. Redford, Senator Blount wrote, "I have lived long, been many places, have seen and done much-but never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that this experience of 'discovery' and the unleashing of my roots could nor would so profoundly and positively affect me. I feel good! I feel proud!"

Dorothy Spruill Redford, now curator at Somerset Place, is a woman with great determination. What began as a quest for self-enlightenment ended as that and much more. Her desire for perfection and thirst for knowledge led her through years of unanswered correspondence and feelings of indifference from friends and family members.

The research and subsequent descendant reunion and book, *Somerset Homecoming*, reflect the faith of Dorothy Redford. This faith is explained on the dedication page of her book:

"Still yourself, hear your inner voice and vigorously pursue its dictates. When your purpose is noble-When your goals benefit man kind-All that you need to achieve them will be available to you."

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