

Using Theatre to Teach Historical Thinking

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View from the stage of the President's Box at Ford's Theatre. Photo by Maxwell MacKenzie.

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Necessary Sacrifices, by Richard Helleesen explores the two documented encounters between Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln during a period of national crisis.

During the summers of 1863 and 1864, Douglass challenges Lincoln to use his power as president to bring truth to America's founding ideal that "all men are created equal."



Craig Wallace as Frederick Douglass with (background) violinist Thomas Booker and David Selby in the Ford's Theatre world premiere production of "Necessary Sacrifices," directed by Jennifer L. Nelson. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.



David Selby as Abraham Lincoln and Craig Wallace as Frederick Douglass in the Ford's Theatre world premiere production of "Necessary Sacrifices," directed by Jennifer L. Nelson. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.



Craig Wallace as Frederick Douglass and David Selby as Abraham Lincoln in the Ford's Theatre world premiere production of "Necessary Sacrifices," directed by Jennifer L. Nelson. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.

August 12, 1863

Frederick Douglass to George L. Stearns

himself. In this I was quite successful for the President instantly upon my ceasing to speak proceeded with an earnestness and fluency of which I had not suspected him, to vindicate his policy respecting the whole slavery question and especially that in reference to employing colored troops. I need not here repeat his views. One remark, however, of his was of much significance. He said he had frequently been charged with tardiness, hesitation and the like, especially in regard to issuing his retaliatory proclamation. But had he sooner issued that proclamation such was the state of public popular prejudice that an outcry would have been raised against the measure. It would be said "Ah! We thought it would come to this. White men were to be killed for negroes. His general view was that the battles in which negroes had distinguished themselves for bravery and general good conduct was the necessary preparation of the public mind for his proclamation. But the best

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that an outcry would have been raised against the measure. It would be said “Ah! We thought it would come to this. White men were to be killed for negroes. His general view was that the battles in which negroes had distinguished themselves for bravery and general good conduct was the necessary preparation of the public mind for his proclamation. But the best thing said by the President was “I have been charged with vacillation even by so good a man as Ino. Sherman of Ohio, but” said he “I can say that having it or retreated for our assurance to policy President

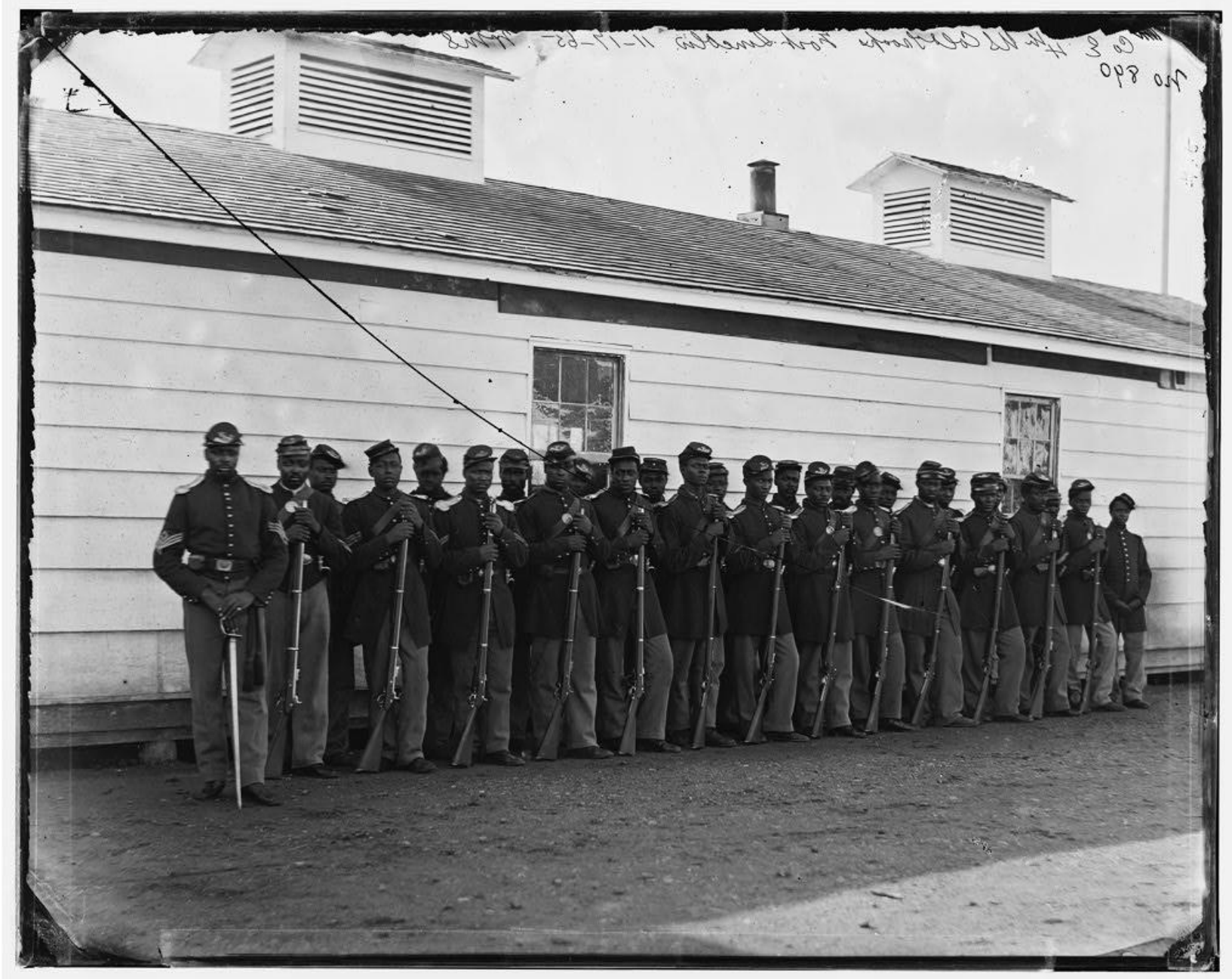
LINCOLN. It is in a democracy. *(slight pause)* Understand something; the suffering of any soldier cuts me to the core. But there can be no progress, where colored soldiers are concerned, until the country feels the same way. Awful as it is, the people need to be as moved by the suffering--and the gallantry--of Negro troops as they were by that at Antietam or Shiloh. Now, I did not send your volunteers into battle intending for them to be butchered afterwards--

DOUGLASS. But it happened!

LINCOLN. And would it were not so. But having happened; in the cause of bringing the country along, those men at Fort Wagner, and Milliken's Bend, and Port Hudson--yes, I read those reports too--they became necessary sacrifices to that end.

Primary Source Analysis

- Observe
- Reflect
- Question
- Go back and forth between the prompts. There is no correct order.



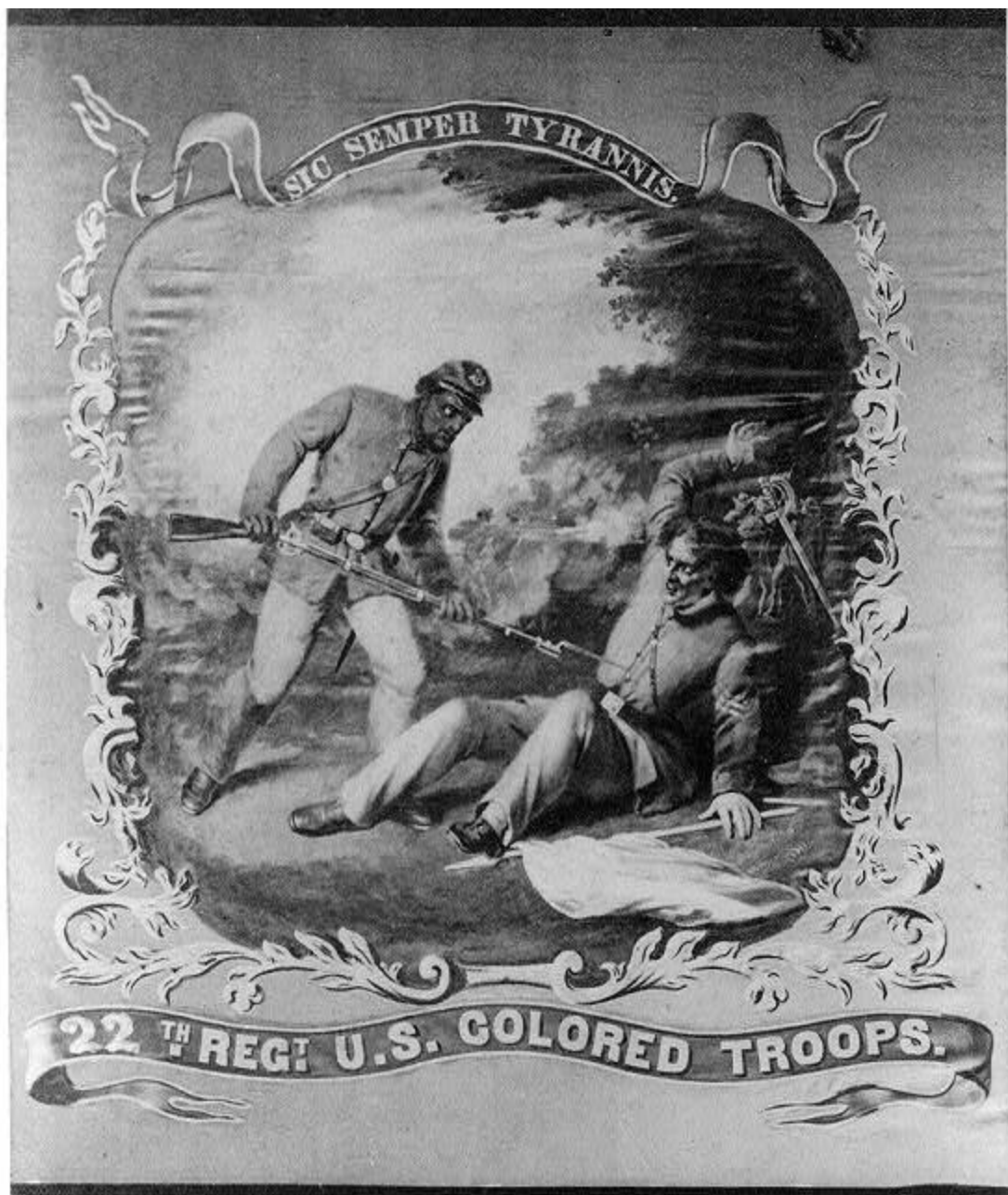


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THEATRE

WHERE LINCOLN'S
LEGACY LIVES



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THEATRE

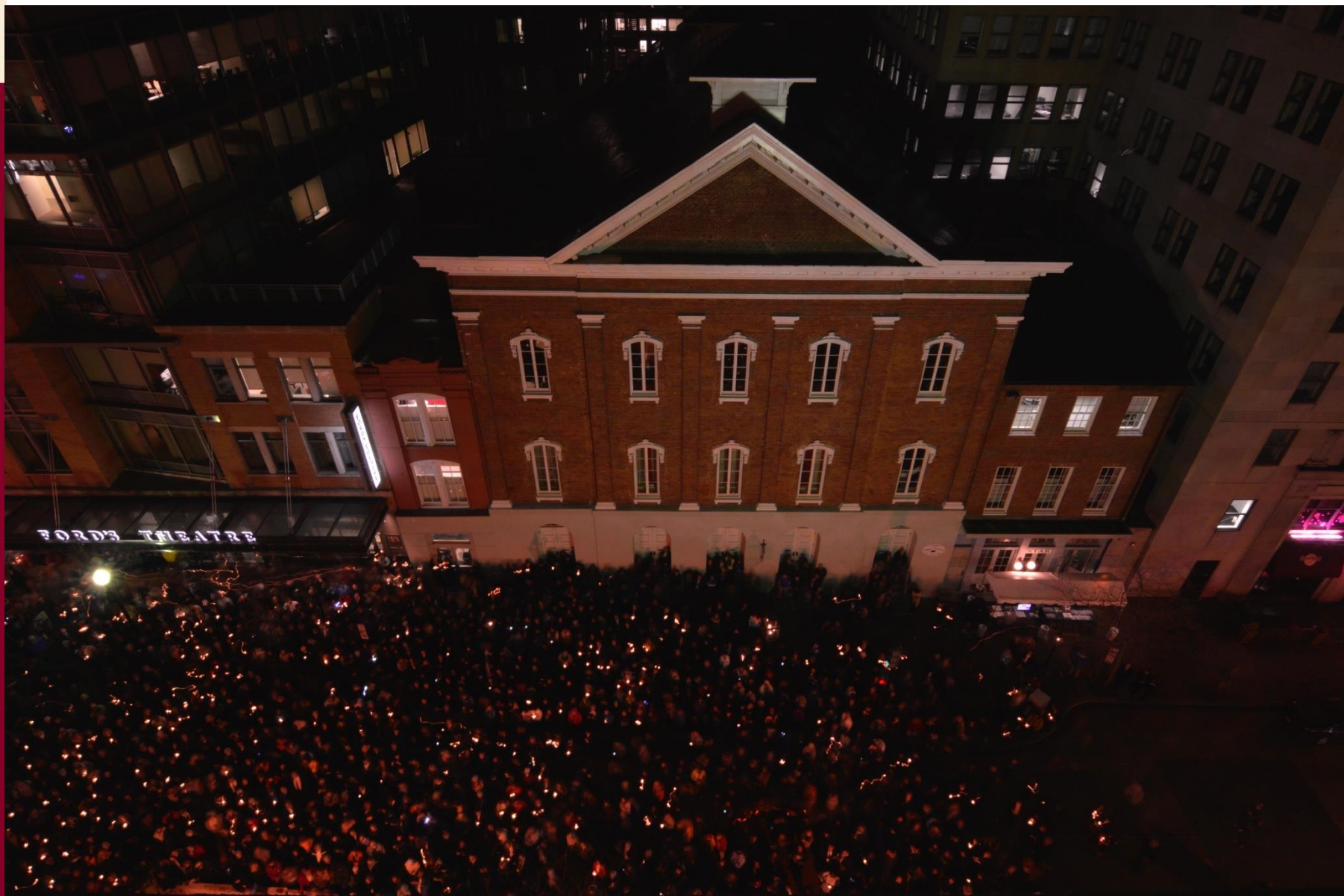
WHERE LINCOLN'S
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COME AND JOIN US BROTHERS.



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Thank You!

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