A NEW MUSICAL FROM THE CREATORS OF
CHICAGO AND
CABARET

music and
lyrics by
JOHN
KANDER
and
FRED
EBB
book by
DAVID
THOMPSON
direction and
choreography by
SUSAN
STROMAN

ENTERTAIN THE TRUTH

STUDY GUIDE

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LYCEUM THEATRE • 149 WEST 45TH ST. (BETWEEN 6TH & 7TH AVE.)
Synopsis

The Scottsboro Boys dramatizes the story of the real life Scottsboro Boys, a group of nine black youths falsely accused and convicted of rape on a train passing through Scottsboro, Ala., in 1931. Set as a minstrel show by the legendary musical theater duo John Kander and Fred Ebb, this show continues their exploration of the moral quandaries of humanity. Here, however, it is not with a wink and a nod to corruption, as in Chicago, or with lascivious fascination of the decadent Weimar Berlin, as with Cabaret, but rather as a collective artitic catharsis for America’s racial injustices. An example of one of the greatest miscarriages of American justice, The Scottsboro Boys offers to audiences on stage that which the real Scottsboro Boys never had in life – truth.

As the train slows to a stop in Scottsboro, the sheriff (played by Mr. Bones), a stock minstrel character, enters the train and accuses the nine Scottsboro Boys of instigating a fight with a group of white boys on the train. While searching the train, the sheriff's deputy (played by Mr. Tanbo, another stock minstrel character) discovers Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, two "faded" women, and threatens to take them to jail for prostitution. Rather than face jail time, the girls, led by Victoria, falsely accuse the nine black youths of rape. Almost instantly the sheriffs’ attitudes toward the women change. They are no longer common whores but delicate flowers of the American South, victimized by animalistic black men. The Scottsboro Boys are hauled to jail, and the first show trial is swiftly concluded with nine guilty verdicts and nine death sentences.

As the boys wait in prison for their execution by electric chair, they are informed by the prison guards (Tambo and Bones) that they will be getting a new trial. By now they have developed some camaraderie, and the illiterate Haywood Patterson has learned to read and write. The boys have attracted a lot of attention, and they have a new northern lawyer, Samuel Leibowitz (portrayed as a self-righteous northerner to further highlight the tension between the North and South.) Though racism was rampant across the United States, and even the North was de facto segregated, the de jure segregation of the Jim Crow South was particularly offensive to many Northern liberals who made the Scottsboro Boys a cause célèbre. In addition to the northern liberals and the NAACP, the case attracted the attention of the communists, whose legal arm, the International Labor Defense, secured Leibowitz’s services. At the beginning of the new trial, Ruby Bates admits to the lawyers and the jury that she and Victoria lied about the rape. Despite this, the jury once again convicts the boys. In the next scene, the boys are on a chain gang, and Haywood Patterson attempts to escape to see his dying mother; he is caught and thrown into solitary confinement. The Scottsboro case drag on for nearly nine years and, with each passing year, each passing trial and each guilty verdict, the boys continue to languish in prison for a crime they did not commit. Through a deal struck with the prosecutors, Leibowitz is able to secure the freedom of four of the Scottsboro boys – Eugene Williams, Willie Roberson, Olen Montgomery and Roy Wright. “It’s a raw deal,” he tells the remaining boys, “but for the moment, it’s the best we can do.” Haywood Patterson refuses to lie to the governor of Alabama for his release and as a result is kept in prison. In real life, Patterson escaped to Detroit, but ended up back in prison after killing someone in a barroom brawl. He died of cancer in 1952, two years after he published Scottsboro Boy, a true to life memoir of the Scottsboro case. “I wrote it all down in a book,” Haywood tells us at the end of the play. “I told the truth.”

This play guide will be periodically updated with additional information. Study Guide last updated October 4, 2010.
March 10, 2010

Michael Kuchwara, "'The Scottsboro Boys' examines racial injustice," Associated Press, March 10, 2010


Brendan Lemon, "Legal History: the musical," Financial Times, March 11, 2010

The Scottsboro Boys is a staggeringly inventive piece of musical theater. Its intentions are serious, its execution pretty much pitch perfect, and its entertainment value—featuring what is the final score by John Kander and Fred Ebb—of the highest order.

Yet the show could not have found a more somber, real-life subject to musicalize: the story of nine young black men accused of raping two white women in Alabama in the early 1930s. And their tale of justice repeatedly delayed and denied is framed in the most provocative manner possible. It's told as a minstrel show, that 19th and early 20th century form of entertainment which often featured performers in blackface trading in the most blatant of stereotypes.

You could call "The Scottsboro Boys" a concept musical, much like such Kander and Ebb classics as "Cabaret," set in the cakewalk world of a '30s Berlin nightclub, or "Chicago," whose musical numbers are performed in the style of 1920s vaudeville. …

What makes "The Scottsboro Boys" so intriguing is the dichotomy between its supereffortful score and the tragic if sometimes convoluted tale the musical is telling. Kander and Ebb know how to make a song work in the theater—propelling the plot or revealing character—that immediately engages an audience.

Kander's melodies are effortless, pouring out in a variety of styles: cakewalk, jazz, ragtime. Kander, Ebb and Thompson avoid the cakewalk world of other musicals about Southern racial violence (Parade, for example) in favour of an approach combining acidity with sweetness. The evening's framework—a reverse minstrel show, in which two jiving clowns … and an Interlocutor … host the story—bolsters the comedy.

In Chicago, Kander and Ebb also used a vaudeville-celebrity approach to a story about egregious interwar American injustice. And in Cabaret, the duo used showtime routines to mock the horrors of a nation's persecution of social groups. The Scottsboro Boys may not be the equal of those two shows, but it has two or three numbers as dazzling as any in town.

In fact, if there's anything around right now that's more startling than "Electric Chair," in which prisoners tap-dance the horrors of capital punishment, I don't know of it.

The Scottsboro Boys is an astounding production. In the guise of a minstrel show, it tells the tragic story of nine black men falsely charged with raping two white women in Alabama in 1931. Tantamount to a legal lynching, the outcome, in the Jim Crow South, was inevitable. That miscarriage of justice is recounted … in a smart, provocative way. The music and lyrics are by John Kander and Fred Ebb, book by David Thompson; all have employed the minstrel convention to great effect—revealing prejudice against the defendants as well as their fanned lawyer Samuel S. Leibowitz, who argued in both Alabama and the Supreme Court to reverse the guilty verdicts. …

The show employs Southern patter, heartfelt exchanges and caricature to underscore the cruelty and injustice the defendants endure. The score adroitly mines jazz, blues and gospel music, which perfectly encapsulates the Depression-era atmosphere. …

Susan Stroman, who directed The Producers with panache, has used her considerable skills to illustrate more with less. The set is almost Brechtian bare, save for a few chairs that double as a prison cell. She gets the pacing right and moving performances from her cast. "The Scottsboro Boys" is the final score by John Kander and Fred Ebb, book by David Thompson; all have employed the minstrel convention to great effect—revealing prejudice against the defendants as well as their fanned lawyer Samuel S. Leibowitz, who argued in both Alabama and the Supreme Court to reverse the guilty verdicts. …

ThE SCoTTSBoRo BoyleS

T he music effectively evokes early 20th-century American song and dance styles: cakewalk, jazz, ragtime. Kander, Ebb and Thompson avoid the caricatured style of other musicals about Southern racial violence (Parade, for example) in favour of an approach combining acidity with sweetness. The evening's framework—a reverse minstrel show, in which two jiving clowns … and an Interlocutor … host the story—bolsters the comedy.

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Susan Stroman, who directed The Producers with panache, has used her considerable skills to illustrate more with less. The set is almost Brechtian bare, save for a few chairs that double as a prison cell. She gets the pacing right and moving performances from her cast. For almost 15 years, including the book for Steel Pier and script adaptations for the current revival of Chicago on Broadway and Off-Broadway productions of And the World Goes 'Round and Reno, the Red Menace, for which he wrote a new book. He also wrote the book for Thom Shultz Nie, based on Emilie Zola's Thérèse Raquin, collaborating with Harry Connick Jr. who wrote the music and lyrics.

He adapted Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol for the McCarter Theatre, where it is now in its 20th year of annual performance. Mr Thompson's work extends to the small screen as well. He has written for "Sondheim — A Celebration at Carnegie Hall," the PBS specials "Razzle Dazzle," "Bernstein on Broadway," "Jerry Herman and the Pops," "The Music of Richard Rodgers" and Great Performances "My Favorite Broadway."

His work has received numerous awards and nominations, including a Tony Award nomination for Best Book for Steel Pier.
COMMENTS ON KANDER AND EBB

KANDER AND EBB ON KANDER AND EBB

And though Mr. Kander said he wouldn’t recognize a Kander and Ebb tune if it slapped him in the face, many other people would, especially the adamentine anthems that Mr. Kander calls "scramblers": "All That Jazz," "Cabaret," "New York, New York." Driven by irresistible riffs, these songs just barely suppress, beneath an apparent grace of girt and survival, the magma of despair and disaster.

Constant to their themes and to each other, Kander and Ebb were among the most successful songwriting partners in musical theater, and among the longest lasting. Most of the great composers and lyricists either hooked up serially (Rodgers with Hart then Hammerstein) or were, like Cole Porter, professionally celibate. But from "Flora, the Red Menace" in 1965 through "Steel Pier" in 1997, and for a few years on either side, Kander and Ebb, who seldom socialized with each other, wrote almost nothing with anyone else. (Mr. Ebb even declined an offer to work with Rodgers, post-Hammerstein, on "Rez." ) In all, 11 Kander and Ebb musicals appeared on Broadway; when Mr. Ebb died, as 78, another four were waiting in the wings. …

"My feeling was that I was the uninitiated member of this duo," (John Kander) said over lunch after a rehearsal in Los Angeles. "I felt inadequate. Fred seemed so much more in control than me."

Ebb chuckled and went on: "We wrote a play together, a Shakespearean original from the actor's grave. I've never heard of a lyricist who could work that way. I can't. And a lot of what I think people mean when they say they recognize a Kander and Ebb song, came from him. The angels, that's Fred-- an energizing, sort of arc toward the surface, that brought out something in me I would not otherwise have developed."

"I think when we're at our best, we sound like one person."

John Kander and Fred Ebb, colored Light: Forty Years of Work and Music, Show Biz Collaboration, and All That Jazz, by John Kander and Fred Ebb with Greg Lawrence, New York: Faber & Tavner, 2004

EBB: I think the reason for that effortless confidence is that we feel confident when we've written something that you will prophesy it and that I will like the song when you've finished. We know how to please each other musically and the collaboration work on the basis of that kind of mutual support, which we agree neither of us would necessarily have if we were to sit in a room and try to write with someone else.

KANDER: I think when we're at our best, we sound like one person.

John Kander and Fred Ebb, colored Light: Forty Years of Work and Music, Show Biz Collaboration, and All That Jazz, by John Kander and Fred Ebb with Greg Lawrence, New York: Faber & Taver, 2004

EVERY once in a while, if you're a really lucky composer, you'll write "an of course" song, meaning that it sounds like OF COURSE it was written and it's probably been around forever. "Love and Love Alone" from The Visit and A Quiet Thing from Flora the Red Menace fulfilled our intentions as completely as possible and still make me very content when I hear them. Hearing our songs can be strange. After we finish writing a show, after a song has been performed exactly as we intended it and it's kind of "out there," it seems as if somebody else wrote it. When I hear the tarp to "New York, New York," I no longer relate to it myself. It's a piece that I know but no longer a part of me. Regarding the way we write, I'm very much for simplicity -- not much for padding. There is such a thing as fake music, which is hard to define but doesn't interest me. You know what's horrible? When you write something that's not very good and people love it. That's really confusing!

> John Kander

I'm always uncomfortable [picking a favorite song] because I'm afraid it'll sound like bragging. However, I happen to like "Love and Love Alone" from The Visit. If you ask me, and you have, I think it's the very best melody John's ever written. My lyric? Ehh! But his work is quite wonderful on that song. I like "Marry Me" from The Rink because it's so simple and it accomplishes what it starts out to say.

> Fred Ebb


OTHERS ON KANDER AND EBB

There is something incredibly optimistic and youthful about their work. They are not cynical fellows. They have verve and innocence and energy, and I think of these as common to great American theater composers.

Harold Prince, foreword to Colored Lights: Forty Years of Work and Music, Show Biz Collaboration, and All That Jazz, by John Kander and Fred Ebb with Greg Lawrence, New York: Faber & Taver, 2004

I first knew about John Kander and Fred Ebb in 1965. I heard a friend of mine named Carmen Zapata singing a song called "If I Were In Your Shoes, I'd Dance." I loved it and said, "My God, who wrote that song?" With Kander and Ebb, I heard my feelings stated exactly as I felt them, in the kind of language that I thought was so marvelously straightforward and in the moment. In that song... these two songwriters caught envy and regret and a lost chance, and yet without self-pity, because the feelings were stated in such a positive way and with such passion.

Liza Minnelli, introduction to Colored Lights: Forty Years of Work and Music, Show Biz Collaboration, and All That Jazz, by John Kander and Fred Ebb with Greg Lawrence, New York: Faber & Taver, 2004

I got to do Sally in Cabaret with Billy Crystal quite a few years ago and I was thrilled that they put "Maybe This Time" into the production. It tells you so much about the characters – which is, of course, what a theater song needs to do. "Maybe This Time" tells the audience about Sally's past, about what she thinks of herself, and about her yearning for a second chance. The humanity of the character shines through with such a sense of hope. That makes it even more touching. Sally realizes that she doesn't have to "hang back with the spats," as Tennessee William's said. The music is very torturous but I don't feel it's a sad song. "All the odds are in my favor, something's bound to happen." If that's not optimistic, I don't know what it is!


With a presence on Broadway for nearly 40 years and through a dozen different musicals, Mr. Kander and Mr. Ebb had one of the longest-running collaborations in the history of the American musical theater. From their Broadway debut in 1965, with "Flora, the Red Menace," starring a teenage Liza Minnelli, to the current long- running revival of "Chicago," Mr. Kander and Mr. Ebb were known for their sometimes saucy, sometimes sincere subject matter, their often pointed political undertones, and more than anything their uncanny ability to fuse sharp lyrics and catchy melodies into hummable, quotable musical theater.

Much of the team's comic sensibility came from Mr. Ebb, whose hangdog expression and deadpan personal manner belied an effusive passion for a well-turned phrase.

Jesse McKinley, "Fred Ebb, Lyricist Behind ‘Cabaret’ and Other Hits, Dies," New York Times, September 13, 2004

THE AUTHORS

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF KANDER AND EBB

MUSICALS

• Flora, the Red Menace (1965)
• Cabaret (1966)
• Do I Fly? (1968), an industrial musical for General Electric
• The Happy Time (1960)
• Zorba (1968)
• Zorba, Jr. (1971)
• The Act (1970)
• Women of the Year (1981)
• The Rink (1984)
• And the World Goes Round (1993)
• Kiss of the Spider Woman (1990)
• Steel Pier (1997)
• Fosse (1999)
• Over And Over a.k.a. All About Us (a.k.a. The Skin of Our Teeth) (1998)
• The Visit (2001)
• Liza's Book (2002)
• Curtains (2006)
• The Scottsboro Boys (2010)

FILMS

• Cabaret (1972)
• Funny Lady (1975)
• New York, New York (1977)
• Chicago (2002)

THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS STUDY GUIDE

www.scottssboromusical.com

THE AUTHORS
**ORIGIN OF THE STORY**

At 10:20 a.m., Wednesday, March 25, 1931, somewhat behind schedule, a Southern Railroad freight train left Chattanooga, Tennessee, bound for Memphis. Among the illicit passengers were Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, who were returning to Scottsboro, Alabama, after failing to find work in Chattanooga’s textile mills. Price was 21 years old and Bates 17. Each was white. Four friends who living in Chatanooga scrabbling on the train: 18-year-old Haywood Patterson; brothers Andy (age 19) and Roy (13) Wright; and Eugene Williams (13). They did not know the five other young men from Georgia who were on board, nor were those five acquainted with each other. Charlie Weems, the eldest, was 20. Clarence Norris was 18; Olen Montgomery 17; Willie Robinson 15; and Ozie Powell 15. The nine youths – soon to be known as the Scottsboro Boys – were all black.


The Grand Jury of Jackson County charge that before the finding of this indictment

the Grand Jury of Jackson County, Indictment, March 31, 1931

in Chattanooga

**ON THE SETTING OF THE TRIAL**

Scottsboro, the county seat of Jackson County in northern Alabama, is a charming southern village with some 2,000 inhabitants situated in the midst of pleasant rolling hills. Nest, well-tended farms lie all around, the deep red of their soil making a striking contrast with the rich green of the hills. The cottages of the town stand back on soft lawns, shaded with handsome trees. A feeling of peace and leisure is in the air. The people on the streets have easy kind faces and greet strangers as well as each other cordially. In the Courthouse Square in the center of town, the village celebrities, such as the mayor, the sheriff, the lawyers, lounge and chat democratically with the town eccentrics and plain citizens.

They said that all Negroes were brutes and had to be held down by stern repressive measures or the number of rapes on white women would be larger than it is. Their point seemed to be that it was only by ruthless oppression of the Negro that any white woman was able to escape raping at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro at Negro hands.

Hollace Ransdall, “Report on the Scottsboro, Ala. case to the American Civil Liberties Union, May 27, 1931”

**SOUTHERN ATTITUDES ON RACE**

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**ON THE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AFFECTING VICTORIA PRICE AND RUBY BATES**

The distinction between wife and “whore,” as the alternative is commonly known in Huntsville, is not strictly drawn. A mill woman is quite likely to be both if she gets the chance as living is too precarious and money is scarce to miss any kind of chance to get it. Promiscuity means little where economic oppression is great.

Hollace Ransdall, “Report on the Scottsboro, Ala. case to the American Civil Liberties Union, May 27, 1931”

SOUTHERN ATTITUDES ON RACE

They said that all Negroes were brutes and had to be held down by stern repressive measures or the number of rapes on white women would be larger than it is. Their point seemed to be that it was only by ruthless oppression of the Negro that any white woman was able to escape raping at Negro hands. Starting with this notion, it followed that they could not conceive that two white girls found riding with a crowd of Negroes could possibly have escaped raping. A Negro will always, in their opinion, rape a white woman if he gets the chance. These nine Negroes were riding alone with two white girls on a freight car. Therefore, there was no question that they raped them, or wanted to rape them, or were present while the other Negroes raped them – all of which amounts to very much the same thing in southern eyes – and calls for the immediate death of the Negroes regardless of these shades of difference. As one southerner in Scottsboro put it, “We white people just couldn’t afford to let these Negroes get off because of the effect it would have on other Negroes.”

ON THE SETTING OF THE TRIAL

Scottsboro, the county seat of Jackson County in northern Alabama, is a charming southern village with some 2,000 inhabitants situated in the midst of pleasant rolling hills. Nest, well-tended farms lie all around, the deep red of their soil making a striking contrast with the rich green of the hills. The cottages of the town stand back on soft lawns, shaded with handsome trees. A feeling of peace and leisure is in the air. The people on the streets have easy kind faces and greet strangers as well as each other cordially. In the Courthouse Square in the center of town, the village celebrities, such as the mayor, the sheriff, the lawyers, lounge and chat democratically with the town eccentrics and plain citizens.

Hollace Ransdall’s Report to the ACLU

Editor’s note: In 1931, the American Civil Liberties Union sent a young teacher and social activist, Hollace Ransdall, to the South to report on the Scottsboro case. The report is an illuminating portrait of the complex issues of race and regionalism that affected the fate of the Scottsboro Boys. Excerpts from this report are included here. If you wish to access the whole report, please visit: http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scottsboro/sb_hrrep.html

Why, just lots of these women are nothing but prostitutes. They just about have to be, I reckon, for nobody could live on the wages they make, and that’s the only other way of making money open to them.

Social worker to Hollace Ransdall, 1931.

**THE SCOTTSBORO CASE: MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE**

**That is how the Scottsboro case began … with a white foot on my black hand.**

- Haywood Patterson, Scottsboro Boy

Now you can take your B and C
And you can take your Santa Fe
And you can take your Old Rock Island Line
And throw them all away!
And if the Pennsylvania calls
Just say you want your money back
And if the New York Central’s on the phone
Tell ’em they’re way off the track
Commencing in Chattanooga
On the Southern Railroad Line.

**“Commencing in Chattanooga” from The Scottsboro Boys**

NINE NEGRO MEN RAPE TWO WHITE GIRLS, THROW WHITE BOYS FROM FREIGHT TRAIN AND HOLD WHITE GIRLS PRISONER UNTIL CAPTURED BY POSSE

ALL NEGROES POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED BY GIRLS AND ONE WHITE BOY WHO WAS HELD PRISONER WITH PISTOLS AND KNIVES WHILE NINE BLACK FIENDS COMMITTED REVOLTING CRIME.

Headline from Jackson County Sentinel, March 25, 1931.
Olen Montgomery was riding alone toward the back of the train when the alleged crime occurred, and though he was tried and convicted of rape, by 1937 everyone involved in the case agreed that he had nothing to do with anything, including the fight with the white boys that set the whole tragic event in motion. He was released in 1937 as part of a deal struck by Samuel Leibowitz. Montgomery was a frequent latter writer and often wrote to friends and supporters seeking money to buy musical instruments, or to pay for prostitutes in prison. On his release, he traveled the country with Ray Wright speaking in defense of the remaining Scottsboro Boys. He eventually resettled in his native Georgia.

CLARENCE NORRIS, the last of the Scottsboro Boys (also the name as his 1979 autobiography), died in New York City in 1989. The son of Georgia sharecroppers, he only had a second grade education. From age 7 he worked in the cotton fields and in a Goodyear rubber plant prior to hitchhiking on the Southern Railroad, which led to his arrest for raping Ruby Bates and Victoria Price. Norris was allegedly involved in the fight with a group of white boys on the train; he was so frightened for his life after a beating in jail that he testified at the first Scottsboro trial that every other one of the Boys had perpetrated the rape, but that he alone was innocent.

His second conviction was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark case, which found that the systematic exclusion of black people from Alabama juries was unconstitutional.

Convicted of rape for a third time in 1937, Norris received the death sentence, which was commuted to life imprisonment by the governor of Alabama. He was first paroled in 1944 and again in 1946. He was subsequently convicted of rape for a fourth time in 1947, and again in 1937. He was paroled in 1943. Weems only had a fifth grade education. In 1934 he was found reading Communist literature in prison and had a difficult childhood. His mother died when he was four years old, and Weems only had a fifth grade education.

In New York, Leibowitz had planned to place the boys in vocational schools, but offers from vaudeville proved too tempting. Thomas S. Harten, a minister, offered to manage the four released young men and presented them at Harlem’s famous Apollo Theater. Harten’s management style did not translate into good wages for the four, though. Leaving their manager, Montgomery and Ray Wright agreed to a national tour to raise money for their five incarcerated friends.

WILLIE ROBERSON was 15 when he was arrested for raping Ruby Bates on the railroad. He was also an active epileptic, which would have made him extremely uncomfortable due to the stress on his genitals. He was also unable to walk without the aid of a cane, which undermined the prosecution's accusation that he leapt from the railroad car to escape apprehension. He did not receive any medical treatment for this painful and progressively degenerative disease until 1939.

He worked as a busboy in Georgia and went to Chattanooga to look for work. Finding none, he hopped the train headed to Memphis. Throughout the ordeal, Roberson steadfastly claimed that he had neither participated in nor seen any alleged rape – and was one of the four released in Leibowitz’s deal with prosecutors in 1937.

In December 1950 Patterson was involved in a barroom brawl that resulted in the death of the other man. Arrested again and convicted of manslaughter, Patterson died of cancer in prison in 1952.

Ozie Powell was one of the nine Negro defendants in the Scottsboro case, was shot in the head and critically injured in the back of a jail cell after an apparent attempt to escape, after Judge W.W. Callahan had sentenced Haywood Patterson to seventy-five years’ imprisonment and adjourned the rest of the trials indefinitely. Powell was shot while handcuffed to two other prisoners, Roy Wright and Clarence Norris. In an automobile driven by Sheriff J. Street of Morgan County, who was taking them back to the Jefferson County jail in Birmingham. The attempted escape occurred after Powell allegedly slashed the neck of Edgar Blalock, a deputy sheriff, with a knife which was snatched from him during his stay in the local jail. The attempted escape was staged on the downgrade of Laco Mountain, about twelve miles this side of Cullman, Alabama. Powell’s attempt was less than an hour after the nine Negroes left Decatur in three automobiles escorted by two carloads of State highway patrolmen. According to Patterson, about 2:30 P.M., he was struck in the head by a bullet and fell to the floor. His escape was reported by S. Harten, a minister, who was listening to a radio broadcast of the trial. Harten called a minister, who was listening to a radio broadcast of the trial. Harten called him, and asked him to return to Decatur as soon as possible. He was arrested by three police officers and taken to the Decatur police station. The following day, he was released on bond and returned to Decatur to join in the defense of the Negro defendants.

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EUGENE WILLIAMS was only 13 at the time of his arrest in 1931, and had worked as a dishwasher in Chattanooga prior to hitchhiking along the Southern Railroad. After his conviction, the Alabama Supreme Court struck down his conviction due to his youth. He remained in jail until 1937 when he was released as part of the deal struck by Leibowitz with the prosecution. He eventually settled in St. Louis, where he had relatives, and briefly pursued a vaudeville career.

ANDY WRIGHT, 19 at the time of his arrest, was Roy Wright’s older brother. With Haywood Patterson, his brother and Eugene Williams, Wright boarded the train in Chattanooga and ended up accused of rape with the other boys. Wright had a sixth grade education and drove a truck after leaving school.

After the Scottsboro trials, in which Wright was convicted multiple times of rape, he was paroled in 1944, but left Alabama in 1946 in violation of his parole, which led to his re-imprisonment. He spent the next several years in an out of Alabama prisons until he was freed in 1950. He was the last of the Scottsboro Boys to be freed from Alabama prisons.

He moved to New York State upon his release.

ROY WRIGHT, age 13 when arrested, was the youngest of the Scottsboro Boys. He was arrested with his older brother Andy, traveling with Haywood Patterson and Eugene Williams en route to Memphis from Chattanooga on the Southern Railroad. His first trial ended in a mistrial when 11 jurors voted to sentence him to life imprisonment, due to his youth, while one held out for the death penalty. At the first trial he testified that he saw the other defendants rape Bates and Price. This testimony was coerced from law enforcement, which beat him until he agreed to testify.

Wright was freed in 1937 along with the others in the Leibowitz deal. After touring the country in support of the other Scottsboro Boys, he served in the army, married and then joined the merchant marine. In a fit of jealous rage in 1959, he shot his wife and then killed himself.

Sources: The University of Missouri – Kansas City Law School and PBS’ “American Experience: Scottsboro, An American Tragedy”

VICTORIA PRICE AND RUBY BATES

Editor’s Note: Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, the two accusers in the Scottsboro cases, both came from the mill town of Huntsville, Ala., and both were quite poor. Victoria Price especially was well-known as a ‘fallen woman’ – according to Hollace Ramsdell’s report for the ACLU, a deputy sheriff in Huntsville claimed that she supplemented her low income from the mills with prostitution. When she accused the Scottsboro Boys of rape, she had already been married three times.

Ruby Bates was the quieter of the two girls, always allowing Price to take the lead in their claims against the boys. Initially, she also claimed that they had been raped on the train. Later, however, Bates retracted her initial testimony, and in Haywood Patterson’s 1933 trial she was a surprise witness for the defense, testifying that there was never any rape, and that physical evidence suggesting sexual intercourse was from the night before, when they had both had sex with their boyfriends.

After testifying for the defense, Bates left Alabama, married Elmer Schur, and took the name Lucille. Ruby Bates died in 1976, one week before Clarence Norris received his official pardon from the governor of Alabama.

Both girls are daughters of Huntsville widows. Both are in poor financial circumstances and had caught a “free” ride to Chattanooga the day before hoping to obtain employment of some nature in the larger city.

Huntsville Daily Times, March 26, 1931

H[e] [prosecutor Melvin C. Hutson] warned the jurors that when they had rendered their verdict and gone home they would have to face their neighbors. His voice rose to a crescendo as he choked back a sob evoked by his own eloquence in lauding the martyrdom of Victoria Price.

“She fights for the rights of the womanhood of Alabama,” he shouted.


The sympathetic portrayal of Price and Bates in Huntsville newspapers contrasted starkly with how they were portrayed in the Daily Worker. As the trial loomed, the Communist Party publication slammed the “fake charge” lodged against “the nine young Negro workers,” of raping “two white girls bumming a ride on a freight train.” The article emphasized that a “prominent county official admitted to [an] investigator that the two girls supposed to have been attacked are notorious prostitutes.”


You have brought sunshine into my gloomy heart at the needy times. You have been a God fairy to me of which makes you my Earthly Sunshine.

Letter from Andy Wright to Mrs. Hester G. Huntington of Montgomery, Alabama, March 15, 1940

Even the dumbest cop on the [New York City] force would have spotted those two as tramps and liars. You know damn well they lied that day at the Paint Rock station and the Price girl has been lying ever since. Now you want me to plead three or four of the boys guilty of something they never did. The State of Alabama finally realizes that it has made a horrible mistake. You want me to pull your chestnuts out of the fire. You want a chance to save face. Tom, you ought to know me better than that.

Samuel Leibowitz to prosecutor Thomas Knight, on a proposed compromise, December 1936

Huntsville Daily Times, March 26, 1931

Huntsville Daily Times, March 26, 1931

Huntsville Daily Times, March 26, 1931

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Victoria Price, however, never changed her story and testified consistently for the prosecution until 1937, when the last of the trials concluded. She faded from public view, and when Dan T. Carter published his book Scopes: Tragedy of the American South in 1969, he wrote that he thought both Bates and Price to be dead.

Neither were dead, and Price resurfaced when she filed a defamation lawsuit against NBC for their television movie, Judge Horton and the Scottsboro Boys, in 1982. The case was dismissed. Price, who had married twice since the Second World War and lived in Tennessee under the name Katherine Judge Horton, died in 1982.

Editor's Note: This is the text of a letter obtained by the International Labor Defense in which Ruby Bates, writing to a boyfriend, claims that the Scottsboro Boys are innocent. The letter is rambling and full of grammatical inaccuracies, but in it she nonetheless admits that she lied under pressure from police.

Dear Earl, I want to make a statement to you Mary Sanders is a goddam lie … I wish those Negroes are not Burnt on account of me it is those white boys I hope you will believe me the law don’t … I was drunk at the time and did not know what I was doing I know it was wrong too let those Negroes die on account of me … I wish those Negroes are not Burnt on account of me it is those white boys fault that is my statement … I hope you tell the law hope you will answer. [Signed] Ruby Bates

Ruby Bates to her boyfriend, January 1933

While sitting alone in prison I thought I’ll express [sic] you a few lines to let you here [sic] from us boys. We are all well and hoping to be free soon and also hoping you all will remain in fighting for us boys.

Mr. Engdahl I am ask you a question … Have you all got Mr. Darrow fighting for us boys. The reasons why I ask you … I heard that Mr. Clarence Darrow [sic] was going to [be] fighting for us boys, and I would like to know if possible because [sic] I am innocent, as innocent as the tiniest mite of life just beginning to stir beneath my heart. Honest, Mr. Engdahl, I haven’t did [sic] anything to be imprisonment like this. And all of the boys send their best regards to you all and best wishes. So I would appreciate an interview at your earliest convenience.

Letter from Haywood Patterson to J. Louis Engdahl, National Secretary of the International Labor Defense, December 10, 1931

Clarence Darrow and Arthur Garfield Hays of New York were here today preparing to take the defense of the eight Negroes convicted and sentenced to death at Scottsboro on a charge of attacking two white girls on March 25.

Mr. Darrow said that he and Mr. Hays had been retained by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. They will send a day or two in Birmingham consulting local lawyers connected with the trial and then will return to New York.


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turned to a frenzy by the eloquence of Samuel S. Leibowitz, who promised he would not give up his legal battle in defense of the nine Negroes in the Scottsboro case even if he had to “sell his house and home, a congregation of more than 4,000 persons hailed the lawyer as “our leader” and “a new Moses” yesterday afternoon at a meeting in the Salem Methodist Episcopal Church, 129th street and Seventh Avenue.

“I promise you citizens of Harlem,” he said, “that I will fight with every drop of blood in my body and with the help of God that those Scottsboro boys shall be free.”

“Leibowitz in Harlem stirs 4,000 by plea: Promises to fight with ‘Every drop of blood’ in his body,” The New York Times, April 12, 1933

The Communists are more of an issue than are the FACTS of the case.

Julia A. Eriksson, 1931

Precisely because the Scottsboro Case is an expression of the horrible national oppression of the Negro masses, any real fight … must necessarily take the character of a struggle against the whole brutal system of landlord robbery and imperialist national oppression of the Negro people.

From the Communist Party newspaper, Daily Worker, January 31, 1933

The International Labor Defense, through William L. Patterson, its national secretary, labeled the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for its statement of Monday to the effect that the injection of communism into the trial affected the verdict in the Patterson case.

“Director of the N.A.A.C.P. have seen fit to go over the death verdict against Heywood Patterson,” said the defense secretary. “They take the occasion of this verdict to bring forward a ridiculous claim that had they been in the case the verdict would have been different.”

“They say that’s ‘racial prejudice closed the eyes of the jurors’ and at the same time that the injection of communism into the case brought about the death verdict.”

“The national aid at negro’s trial,” The New York Times, April 12, 1933

I was amazed to find many Negro schools and colleges a year after the arrest and conviction of the Scottsboro boys, that a great many teachers and students knew nothing of it, or if they did the official attitude would be, “Why bring that up?” I asked at Tuskegee, one few hours from Scottsboro, who from there had been to the trial. Not a soul had been so far as I could discover. And with demonstrations in every capital in the civilized world for the freedom of the Scottsboro boys, so far as I knew not one Alabama Negro school until now held even a protest meeting.

Langston Hughes, “Cowards in the Colleges,” The Crisis, 41, 1934
T he NAACP’s initial efforts in behalf of the boys were nullified by the intervention of the Communists. The latter, seeking to exploit the matter for their own ideological purposes, misappropriated the NAACP ... and persuaded the boys to abandon the NAACP-provided counsel, which included Clarence Darrow and Arthur Garfield Hayes.


If the 9 Scottsboro Boys die the South ought to be ashamed of itself but the 12 million Negroes in America ought to be more ashamed than the South. ... The 9 boys in Kilkee [sic] prison are Americans. 12 million Negroes are Americans too. (And many of them far too light to be called Negroes except by liars.) The judge and jury at Scottsboro, and the governor of Alabama, are Americans.

Langston Hughes, “Southern Gentlemen, White Privilege, Mill Owners, and Negroes,” first published in Contempo on December 1, 1931

T he Communist Party may or may not be villainous, but there is no evidence of its villainy in the Scottsboro cases. On the contrary, it saved the lives of nine young boys and opened new avenues of protest to Negroes.


Editor’s Note: Langston Hughes (1902-67), a poet, playwright, essayist and novelist, is perhaps one of the best known African American writers of the 20th century. He is closely associated with the “Harlem Renaissance,” a period of great flourishing of African American arts and letters in the 1920s and 1930s, though he later described this period of time as merely being “in vogue.”

Hughes was a well-known liberal thinker and artist in his time. He spoke early and often about the Scottsboro trials, and though he initially supported the involvement of the International Labor Defense (ILD), the legal arm of the Communist Party of the United States, he later condemned the involvement of the Communists for compromising the stellal legal defense team of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which withdrew from the case in 1932.

Hughes wrote the poem “Christ in Alabama” in response to the Scottsboro trials in 1931. Initially published in the “little magazine” Contempo at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, the poem captures the complex realities of the segregated South and the anger and resentment the initial verdict aroused. By invoking Christian imagery in a Southern racist context, Hughes makes it abundantly clear that the Scottsboro Boys are being sacrificed on the “cross of the South” to perpetuate racial injustice. The poem notably offers no subsequent tale of Christ-like redemption.

Christ is a Nigger, Beaten and black – 0, have your back
Mary is His Mother, Massacre of the South, Silence your mouth
God’s His Father – White Master above Grant us your love.
Most holy bastard Of the bleeding mouth: Nigger Christ On the cross of the South
Langston Hughes, “Christ in Alabama,” first published in Contempo on December 1, 1931

Editor’s Note: Samuel Leibowitz was born in 1893 to Roman-Jewish parents and grew up in New York City. A graduate of Cornell University Law School, he chose to practice criminal law at a time when most of the brilliant legal minds of his generation were opting for civil affairs and corporate law.

T he International Labor Defense (ILD) obtained Leibowitz’s representation pro bono. “Your organization and I are not in agreement in our political and economic views,” he wrote to the ILD when they sought his counsel, but he decided to take the case to “defend the basic rights of man.” By 1937, Leibowitz had secured the release of four of the boys; four were convicted of rape and One Powell pled guilty to assaulting a sheriff’s deputy. On his return to New York City, he became a judge. He died in 1978.

Samuel Leibowitz, the New York criminal lawyer defending the Negroes, whose original conviction and sentence of death were reversed by the United States Supreme Court in a decision which received little publicity in Alabama, expects the cross-examination of the State’s star witness to consume the better part of a full court session.

That he intends to delve deeply into her past was indicated during his examination of prospective jurymen, when asked if they would take into consideration in weighing the credibility of a witness the kind of life that witness had led, even if it happened to be a woman.

Attorney General Knight also expects Mr. Leibowitz to use all his skill as a cross-examiner in questioning Mrs. Price.

The lawyer’s questioning of talesmen on Friday also brought to light the significant but hitherto scarcely known fact that Ruby Bates formerly lived here. One of the veniremen, in responding to the New York lawyer’s questions said he had known the Bates girl when she lived here nine years ago.

“Make a note of that,” Mr. Leibowitz said to one of his assistants with an expression of surprise.

“Observe how Scanty the trial,” New York Times, April 3, 1933

If you ever saw those creatures, those bigots whose mouths are slits in their faces, whose eyes popped at you like frogs, whose chins dripped tobacco juice, bewhiskered and filthy, you would not ask how they could do it.

Samuel Leibowitz, commenting on the case verdict in Alabama v. Patterson, 1933

For a map with detailed information on the Scottsboro chronology, please visit http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/scottsboro/maps/map_text.html.
The Scottsboro Boys: The Whos and the Time, unlike the other players. If suits were unavailable, interlocutors him and his ability to command his troupe. This caused him to develop respective seats just as the song ended.

137). The performers faked confusion and chaos until they reached their wings during a song and “a more or less elaborate drill back and forth together.” This had the effect of keeping the audience in an upstate, by their grimming While the balladists were performing, by their own comic songs sung to the accompaniment of various clever or grotesque dance steps, which sometimes became indecorous excitements, and by their rapid-fire jokes.”

In many ways, their instruments became separate from the orchestra because they were generally only used to accent punch lines in jokes. One magazine writer commented, “The crowd likes nothing better than to see a half-wit get the better of a pompous intellectual” (Wittke, 139). The audience relishing in the antics of the endmen more than any other aspect of the minstrel show caused the gradual increase of involvement and number of endmen in the show.

Though they cackled and distracted during other acts, the endmen formed their own characters and sang their own songs during the first part. They came off as street characters and were accustomed to sing about the “joys of slavery” and the “gud old South.” Because most of the men in minstrel shows before the Civil War were urban white Northerners, their characters were based on impressions and generalized stereotypes, which were especially true of the audiences these stereotypes engendered. One such character that became emblematic of racism in America is Jim Crow, an immensely popular character in minstrel shows. After this lively first part, the second part, or else began. Some think that this part is what eventually broke off into vaudeville, as the structure was so similar. The interlocutor would introduce each act, which had its own separate costumes and sets. While some were still done in blackface and stereotyped in later years, Stars of the stage would appear for an act, while company members generally performed scenes with ballads or comic songs. Generally the storylines followed ones created by known as the “Old South,” glorifying plantation life far beyond reality. Once again, the African American characters were greatly exaggerated and generalized into stereotypes. As fads changed in the U.S., troupes began incorporating more operettas and burlesque into the shows to keep up, though the popularity of these forms eventually decreased the audiences for minstrel shows after the turn of the 20th century.

Incorporated into this show, usually in the second part, was a cakewalk. This tradition began on old plantations where the masters and mistresses would have their slaves dress in their clothes and perform in a circular song and dance. Oftentimes the winner of this dance contest was given a cake from the mistress. While it served as entertainment for the slave owners, the cakewalk became a symbol of black pride for the slaves. Instead of performing their traditional African dances seriously for the slave owners, the slaves participated ironically, performing but protecting their traditions by mimicking and exaggerating traditionally white dances (Seymour Stark, Men in Blackface, 2000: 144). In the minstrel show, it stayed a walk-around, sometimes combined with the ending hoedown, where the minstrels stood once again in a semicircle and each took their turn singing, dancing and clapping along in the center. The hoedown was generally the finale in the pre-Civil War touring days of minstrelsy. With the cakewalk included after the Civil War in place of the hoedown, the members moved in a circle and performed a showy competitive dance, sometimes dressed in the “old South” costumes reminiscent of the cakewalk’s beginnings and sometimes arrived in costumes seemingly seen in the show that night. Regardless of the costumes, troupes included at least some traditional African dances. This gave an opportunity to employ African Americans, and it grew in popularity after the Civil War when minstrel companies hired former slaves to perform in blackface rather than white Northwestern. Many of the dances became more exaggerated as their popularity grew. Regardless, audiences saw the cakewalk as providing an enthusiastic, energy driven finale for the show.

For more information about minstrel shows, please refer to Tanbo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage, by Carl Wittke, from which the above quotations are taken.
MINSTRELSY'S DAMAGING AND LASTING EFFECTS IN FILM
Editors Note: In the excerpt below, John Strausbaugh discusses how blackface images and African American actors segued into early Hollywood, restricted to certain roles and characteristics drawn from minstrelsy. Sometimes blackface was used, and sometimes it was not, but the impulses behind it from minstrelsy greatly impacted African Americans in early film.

BACKFACE made an effortless leap from the stage to the movie screen virtually the moment the moving picture was invented. No medium is more American than movies. So it should be no surprise that American movies have often been obsessed with matters of race and images of Blackness. … For almost a century, since the cameras were almost always in the hands of White people, those images were almost always of Blacks, and others, as White people saw them. … Donald Bogle, one of the most influential and dyspeptic of Black film historians, sees Black film caricatures falling into five archetypes. … Toms and mammyes are obvious – they’re the kindly-older Negro house servants, Uncle Tom, Uncle Remus, Uncle Mose, Uncle Ben, Aunt Chloe, Aunt Jemima. We may call them uncles and aunts, but they’re really the nation’s grandparents, the granddads and grandmas we all wish we had but only wealthy folks could afford to buy. Coons are the shuffling black clowns like Stepin Fretch. Mulattos and mulattas are the light-skinned, Caucasian-looking hunkies and horsties. … The buck is the big, dangerous, sexual male. … At the same times all those white vaudevillians were preserving minstrelsy on film in the 1930s and 1940s, many Black performers from the vaudeville and minstrel stages were making their way to Hollywood. The new Jewish-run studios were hungry for Black talent – there were far more Black aces on the big screen than blackface ones. Part of the impetus was the introduction of sound in 1927. With their “natural” singing and dancing talents, Blacks were thought to be uniquely suited to the new technology. Before World War II, the roles Blacks were offered in Hollywood were almost all restricted to Bogle’s stereotypes. Black actors played maids, crooks and maestros; kindly old Toms and Jennisies; sleepy, shuffling coons, pickaninnies, gullahogs, and Topjips. They often danced and sang; just as often they donned leopard-print loincloths and carried spears through fake jungles; and one in a great while they got to play a romantic lead, or even God. Filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles sums up his view of the era succinctly. Before the war, he has declared, “if you were a Black actor in Hollywood, that meant you tossed a spear, cooked somebody for dinner, or took a bullet. Or you brought a drink, or carried a crape.”

VIEWs ON minstrelsy
In minstrelsy, the Negro type … always was distinguished by an unusually large mouth and a peculiar kind of broad grin; he dressed in gaudy colors and in a flashy style; he usually consumed more gin than he couple properly held; and he loved chicken so much that he could not pass a chicken-coop without falling into temptation. In minstrelsy, moreover, the Negro’s alleged love for the grand manner led him to use words so long that he not only did not understand their meaning, but twisted the syllables in the most ludicrous fashion in his futile effort to pronounce them. This, in the main, was the Negro joke-book tradition and more especially of the minstrel tradition, and undoubtedly he was a somewhat different individual from the one to be found in real life in the Southern states. But it was this type of darky that the white minstrels strove to imitate or, better states perhaps, created and perpetuated. 


It was no accident that the incredible popularity of minstrelsy coincided with public concern about slavery and the proper position of Negroes in America. Precisely because people could always laugh off the performance, viewers did not have to take the show seriously, minstrelsy people could always laugh off the performance, because minstrelsy coincided with public concern about slavery and underlying the sociological congruency between city and frontier was the endless evocation of the old South.

The northern, urban audiences could work out their feelings on minstrelsy.