

THE MOTION OF HISTORY

AND OTHER PLAYS

by AMIRI BARAKA
(LeRoi Jones)

WILLIAM MORROW AND COMPANY, INC.

NEW YORK 1978



CAST

SPEAKING PARTS

AFRICAN SLAVES—VOICES OF AFRICAN SLAVES

1st Man (Prayer—Husband of Dademi) 2nd Man (Curser) 3rd Man (Struggler)

1st Woman (Prayer)
2nd Woman (Screamer—Attacked)
3rd Woman (With Child)

Dancers Musicians

Children
Voices and bodies in the slave ship

Old Tom Slave New Tom (Preacher)

WHITE MEN—VOICES OF WHITE MEN

Captain
Sailor
Plantation Owner—"Eternal Oppressor"

PROPS

Smell effects: incense . . . dirt/filth smells/bodies

Heavy chains

Drums (African bata drums, and bass and snare)
Rattles and tambourines
Banjo music for plantation atmosphere

Ship noises
Ship bells
Rocking and splashing of sea

Guns and cartridges

Whips/whip sounds

Whole theater In darkness. Dark. For a long time. Just dark. Occasional sound, like ship groaning, squeaking, rocking. Sea smells. In the dark. Keep the people in the dark, and gradually the odors of the sea, and the sounds of the sea, and sounds of the ship, creep up. Burn incense, but make a significant, almost stifling, smell come up. Pee. Shit. Death. Life processes going on anyway. Eating. These smells and cries, the shash and tear of the lash, in a total atmosfeeling, gotten some way.

African Drums like the worship of some Orisha. Obatala. Mbwanga rattles of the priests. BamBamBamBamBoom BoomBoom BamBam.

Rocking of the slave ship, in darkness, without sound. But smells. Then sound. Now slowly, out of blackness with smells and drums staccato, the hideous screams. All the women together, scream. AAAAAIIIEEEEEEEEEE Drums come up again, rocking, rocking; black darkness of the slave ship. Smells. Drums on up high. Stop. Scream. AAAAAIIIEEEEEEEEE. Drums. Black darkness with smells.

Chains, the lash, and people moaning. Listen to the sounds come up out of the actors. Sounds thrown down into the hold. AAAAIIIEEEEEEEE. Of people, dropped down in the darkness, frightened, angry, mashed together in common terror. The bells of the ship. White Men's voices, on top, ready to set sail.



SLAVE SHIP

A HISTORICAL PAGEANT

1967

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VOICE 1. OK, let's gol A good cargo of black gold. Let's gol We head West! We head West. (Long laughter) Black gold in the West. We got our full cargo.

VOICE 2. Aye, Aye, Cap'n. We're on our way. Riches be ours, by God.

VOICE 1. Aye, riches, riches be ours. We're on our way. America! (Laughter)

(There is just dim light at top of the set, to indicate where voices are...)
(African Drums. With the swiftness of dance, but running into the heaviness the dark enforces. The drums slow. The beat beat of the darkness. "Where are we, God?" The mumble murmur rattle below. The drone of terror. The voices begin to beat against the dark.)

WOMAN I. O000000000, Obatala!

WOMAN 2. Shango!

WOMAN I. O000000000, Obatala . . .

(Children's crying in the hold, and the women trying to comfort them Trying to keep their sanity, too)

WOMAN 3. Moshake, chile, calm, calm, be you. Moshake chile. O calm Orisha, save us!

WOMAN 2. AAAIIIEEEEEE

MAN 1. Quiet woman! Quiet! Save your strength for your child.

WOMAN 2. AAAIIIIEEEEEEE

MAN 1. Quiet, foolish woman! Be quiet!

WOMAN3. Moshake, baby, chile, be calm, be calm, it give you, 0000000.

MAN 1. Shango, Obatala, make your lightning, beat the inside bright with paths for your people. Beat. Beat.

(Drums come up, but they are walls and floors being beaten. Chains rattled. Chains rattled. Drag the chains.)

(We get the feeling of many people jammed together, men, women, children, aching in the darkness. The chains. The whips, magnify the chains and whips. The dragging together. The pain. The terror. Women begin to moan and chant songs, "African Sorrow Song," with scraping of floor and chains for accompaniment)

MAN 2. Fukwididila! Fukwididila! Fukwididila! Fuck you, Orisha! God! Where you be? Where you now, Black God? Help me. I be a strong warrior, and no woman. And I strain against these chains! But you must help me, Orisha. Obatala!

MAN 3. Quiet, you fool, you frighten the women!

(Women still chanting, mooning. Children now crying. Mothers trying to comfort them. Feeling of people moving around, tumbling over each other. Screaming as they try to find a "place" in the bottom of the boat, and then the long stream of different wills, articulated as screams, grunts, cries, songs, et cetera)

MAN 3. Pull, pull break them . . . Pull

WOMAN 1. Oh, Obatalai

WOMAN 3. Oh, chile...my chile, please, please get away...you crush...!

MAN 3. Break . . . Break . . .

ALL. Uhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, OOOOOOOOOOOOO.

WOMEN. AAAAAIIIIIIEEEEEEE.

ALL. Uhhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, OOOOOOOOOOO.

WOMEN. AAAIIIIEEEEEEE.

(Drums down low, like tapping, turn to beating floor, walls, rottling, dragging chains, percussive sounds people make in the hold of a ship. The moans and pushed-together agony. Children crying incessantly. The mothers trying to calm them. More than one child. Young girls afraid they may be violated. Men trying to break out, or turning into frightened children. Families separated for the first time)

WOMAN 2. Ifanami, Ifanami...where you?? Where you?? Ifanami.

(Cries)

Please, oh, God.

MAN I. Obata . . .

MAN 3. Devils! Devils! White ! casts! Shit eaters! Beasts! (They beat the walls, and try to tear the chains out of the walls) White shit eaters.

WOMAN I. She strangled herself with the chain. Choked the child. Oh, Shango! Help us, Lord. Oh, please.

WOMAN 2. Why you leave us, Lord?

MAN 1. Dademi, Dademi . . . she dead, she dead . . . Dademi . . . (Hear man wracked with death cries, screams)

Dademi, Dademi!

WOMAN 2. Oh, please, please don't touch me . . . Please . . . (Frantic)

Ifanami, where you?

(Screams at someone's touch in the dark, grabbing her, trying to drag her in the darkness, press her down against the floor)
Akiyele...please...please...don't, don't touch me...please, Isanami, where you? Please, help me...Go...

MAN 1. What you doing? Get away from that woman. That's not your woman. You turn into a beast, too.

(Scuffle of two men turning in the darkness trying to kill each other. Lights show white men laughing silently, dangling their whips, in pantomime, still pointing)

MAN 3. Devils. Devils. Cold walking shit. (All mad sounds together.)

(Humming begins again. Bells of ship. Silence, and moans, and humming, and movement in the dark of people. Sliding back and forth. Trying to stay alive, and now, over it, the constant crazy laughter of the sailors)

MAN 3. I kill you, devils. I break these chains.

(Sound of men struggling against heavy chains)

I tear your face off. Crush your throat. Devils.

WOMAN I. Oh, Oh, God, she dead . . . and the child.

(SILENCE/Sound of the sea . . . fades)

(Lights on suddenly, show a shuffling "Negro." Lights off... drums of ancient African warriors come up... hero-warriors. Lights blink back on, show shuffling black man, hat in his hand, scratching his head. Lights off. Drums again. Black dancing in the dark, with bells, as if free, dancing wild old dances. Bam Boom Bam Booma Bimbam boomame boom beem bam. Dancing in the darkness... Yoruba Dance. Light: flash on briefly, spot on, off the dance. Then off. Then on, to show The Slave, raggedy ass, raggedy hat in hand, shuffling toward the audience shuffling, scratching his head and butt. Shaking his head up and down agreeing with massa, agreeing, and agreeing, while the whips snap Lights off, flash on, and the sailors, with hats changed to show them a plantation owners, are still laughing; no sound, but laughing and point ing, holding their sides, and they laugh and point)

SLAVE. (In darkness)

Yassa, boss, yassa Massa Tim, yassa, boss.

(Lights up)

I'se happy as a brand new monkey ass, yassa, boss, yassa, Massa Tim, yassa, Massa Booboo, I's so happy I jus don't know what to do. Yass, massa, boss, you'se so han'some and good and youse hip, too, yass, I's so happy I jus' stan' and scratch my ol' nigger haid. (Lights flash on Slave doing an old-new dance for the boss; when he finishes he bows and scratches.)

WOMAN 3. (Whispering after death)

WOMAN 2. AIEEEEEEEEEEEEFF

(Silence)

(Soft at first, then rising. Banjos of the plantation)

SLAVE 1. Reverend what we gon' do when massa come? (He sounds afraid)

SLAVE 2. We gon' cut his fuckin' throat!

(Banjos)

(Humming . . . Hummmmmmmmmmm)

SLAVE 1. Reverend, what we gon' do when the white man come?

SLAVE 2. We gon' cut his fuckin' throat.

SLAVE 3. Devil. Beast. Murderer of women and children. Soulless shit eater!

SLAVE 1. Reverend Turner, sir, what we gon' do when the massa come?

SLAVE 2. Cut his godless throat.

(Lights flash up on same Tomish slave, still scratching his head, but now apparently talking to a white man)

SLAVE. Uhh, dass right, Massa Tim . . . dey gon' 'volt.

WHITE VOICE. What? Vote? Are you crazy?

SLAVE. Nawsaw . . . I said 'volt . . . uhhhh . . . revolt.

(Laughter, now . . . rising behind the dialogue)

WHITE VOICE. When, boy?

SLAVE. Ahhh, t'night, boss, t'night... '> / say they gon'... 'scuse de 'spression... cut you... uhh fuckin'... uhh throat...

WHITE VOICE. (Laughs)
And who's in charge of this "'volt"?

SLAVE. Uhh . . . Reverend Turner . . . suh . . .

WHITE VOICE. What?

SLAVE. Uhh...dass right...Reverend Turner...suh...Now can I have dat extra chop you promised me?

SLAVE SHIP

(Screams now, as soon as the lights go down AIEEEEEEEEIEIEIEIEIE Gunshots, combination of slave ship and break up of the revolt. Voices of master and slaves in combat)

WHITE VOICE. I kill you, niggahs. You black savages.

BLACK VOICE. White Beasts. Devil from hell.

(Drums of Africa, and the screams of Black and White in combat.)
(Lights flash on Tom, cringing as if he hiding from combat, gnawing on pork chop. Voice of white man laughing in triumph. Another chop comes sailing out of the darkness. Tom grabs it and scoffs it down, grinning, and doing the deadape shuffle, humming while he eats)

WOMAN 3. (Dead whispered voice)

Moshake, Moshake...chile...calm calm...we be all right, nowMoshake, be calm...

MAN 1. White beasts!

ALL. Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh, Uhhh
(As if pulling a tremendous weight)
Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh. Uhhh. Uhhh.

WOMAN I. Ifanami . . .

MAN 1. Dademi . . . Dademi.

WOMAN 2. Akiyele . . . Akiyele . . . Lord, husband, where you . . . help me . . .

MAN. ... touch my hand ... woman ...

WOMAN 2. Ifanami!

WOMAN 3. Moshake!

(Now the same voices, as if transported is time to the slave farms, call names, English slaves names)

ALL. (Alternating man and woman losing mate in death, or through slave sale, or the aura of constant fear of separation . . .)

Luke. Oh my God.

MAN. Sarah.

WOMAN. John.

WOMAN 2. Everett. My God, they killed him.

ALL. Mama, Mama... Nana. Nana. Willie. Ohhh, Lord... They done.

ALL. Uhh. Uhh. Uhh. Obatala. Obatala. Save us. Lord. Shango. Lord of forests. Give us back our strength.

(Chains. Chains. Dragging and grunting of people pushed against each other)

(The sound of a spiritual. "Oh, Lord, Deliver Me, Oh Lord." And now cries of "JESUS, LORD, JESUS... HELP US, JESUS...")

MAN 1. Ogun. Give me weapons. Give me iron. My spear. My bone and muscle make them tight with tension of combat. Ogun, give me fire and death to give to these beasts. Sarava! Sarava! Ogun!

(Drums of fire and blood, briefly loud and smashing against the dark, but now calming, dying down, till only the moans, and then the same patient humming...of women, now, no men, only the women... strains of "The Old Rugged Cross"... and only the women and the humming... the time passing in the darkness, soft, soft, mournful weeping "Jesus... Jesus... Jesus...

(Now lights flash on, and preacher in modern business suit stands with hat in his hand. He is the same Tom as before. He stands at first talking to his congregation: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." Then, with

a big grin, speaking in the pseudo-intelligent patter he uses for the boss. He tries to be, in fact, assumes he is, dignified, trying to hold his shoulders straight, but only succeeds in giving his body an odd slant like a diseased coal chute)

PREACHER. Yasss, we understand... the problem. And, personally, I think some agreement can be reached. We will be nonviolenk... to the last... because we understand the dignity of Pruty McBonk and the Greasy Ghost. Of course diddy rip to bink, of vout juice. And penguins would do the same. I have a trauma that the gold sewers won't integrate. Present fink. I have an enema... a trauma, on the coaster with your wife bird shit.

WOMAN 3. (Black woman's voice screaming for her child again)
Moshake! Moshake! beeba...beeba...Wafwa ko wafwa ko fukwididila

(Screams . . . moans . . . drums . . . mournful death-tone . . . The preacher looks, head turned just slightly, as if embarrassed, trying still to talk to the white man. Then, one of the black men, out of the darkness, comes and sits before the Tom, a wrapped-up bloody corpse of a dead burned baby as if they had just taken the body from a blown-up church, sets corpse in front of preacher. Preacher stops. Looks up at "person" he's Tomming before, then, with his foot, tries to push baby's body behind him, grinning, and jeffing, all the time, showing teeth, and being "dignified")

PREACHER. Uhhherr...as I was sayin'...Mas' uh...Mister Tasty-slop....We Kneegrows are ready to integrate... the blippy rump of stomach bat has corrinked a lip to push the thimble. Yass. Yass...

(In background, while preacher is frozen in his "Jeff" position, high hard sound of saxophone, backed up by drums. New-sound saxophone tearing up the darkness. At height of screaming saxophone, instruments and drums come voices screaming...)

MAN. Beasts! Beasts! Ogun. Give me spear and iron. Let me kill . . .

(Lights down. Ommmm sound, mixed vi 1 sounds of slave ship, sax-ophone and drums. Sounds of people thrown against each other, now as if trying, all, to rise, pick up. Sounds of people picking up. Like dead people rising. And against that, the same sounds of slave ship. White laughter over all of it. White laughter. Song begins to build with the saxophone and drums. First chanted)

ALL.

Rise, Rise, Rise Cut these ties, Black Man Rise We gon' be the thing we are . . . (Now all sing "When We Gonna Rise") When we gonna rise up, brother When we gonna rise above the sun I mean, when we gonna lift our heads and voices When we gonna show the world who we really are When we gonna rise up, brother When we gonna take our own place, brother Like the world had just begun I mean, when we gonna lift our heads and voices Show the world who we really are Warriors-Gods, and lovers, The First Men to walk this star Yes, oh, yes, the first Men to walk this star How far, how long will it be When the world belongs to you and me When we gonna rise up, brother When we gonna rise above the sun When we gonna take our own place, brother Like the world had just begun?

(Drum-new sax-voice arrangement)

SLAVE SHIP

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(Bodies dragging up, in darkness)

(Lights on the preacher in one part of the stage. He stands still, jabbering senselessly to the white man. And the white man's laughter is heard trying to drown out the music, but the music is rising) (Preacher turns to look into the darkness at the people dragging up behind him, embarrassed at first, then beginning to get frightened. The laughter, too, takes on a less arrogant tone.)

WOMAN 3. Moshake. Moshake.

MAN. Ogun, give me steel.

ALL. Uhh. Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh. Uhhh.

(Humming rising, too, behind. Still singing "When We Gonna Rise." Preacher squirms, turns to see, and suddenly his eyes begin to open very wide, lights are coming up very, very slowly, almost imperceptibly at first. Now, singing is beginning to be heard, mixed with old African drums, and voices, cries, pushing screams, of the slave ship. Preacher begins to fidget, as if he does not want to be where he is. He looks to boss for help. Voice is breaking, as lights come up and we see all the people in the slave ship in Miracles'/Temptations' dancing line. Some doing African dance. Some doing new Boogaloo, but all moving toward preacher, and toward voice. It is a new-old dance, Boogalooyoruba line, women, children all moving, popping fingers, all singing, and drummers, beating out old and new, and moving, all moving. Finally, the preacher begins to cringe and plead for help from the white voice.)

PREACHER. Please, boss, these niggers goin' crazy; please, boss, throw yo' lightnin' at 'em, white Jesus boss, white light god, they goin crazy! Help!

VOICE. (Coughing, as if choking on something, trying to laugh because the sight of preacher is funny... still managing to laugh at preacher) Fool. Fool.

PREACHER. Please, boss, please . . . I do anything for you . . . you know that, boss . . . Please . . . Please . . .

(All group merge on him and kill him daid. Then they turn in the direction of where the voice is coming from. Dancing, Singing, right on toward the now pleading voice)

VOICE. HaaHaaHaaHaa

(Laugh gets stuck in his throat)

Uhh... now what... you haha can't touch me... you scared of me, niggers. I'm God. You cain't kill white Jesus God. I got long blond blowhair. I don't even need to wear a wig. You love the way I look. You want to look like me. You love me. You want me. Please. I'm good. I'm kind. I'll give you anything you want. I'm white Jesus savior right god pay you money nigger me is good god be please... please don't...

(Lights begin to fade . . . drums and voices of old slave ship come back)

VOICE. AWHAWHAEHAHWAWHWHAHW

(All players fixed in half light, at the movement of the act. Then lights go down. Black)

(Lights come up abruptly, and people on stage begin to dance, same hip Boogalooyoruba, fingerpop, skate, monkey, dog... Enter audience; get members of audience to dance. To same music Rise Up. Turns into an actual party. When the party reaches some loose improvisation, et cetera, audience relaxed, somebody throws the preacher's head into center of floor, that is, after dancing starts for real. Then black)



PROGRAM NOTES FIRST PERFORMANCES OF SLAVE SHIP

Slave Ship was first presented by The Spirit House Movers in Newark, New Jersey, in March, 1967

THE COMPANY CONSISTED OF:

Sylvia Jones

Yusef Iman

Doris Iman

Justice Iman

Malaika Iman

Ife Iman

Oba Iman

Olugabala Iman

Barry Wynn

Lubaba Lateef

Clarence Reed, Jr.

Damu

Aminifu

Ben Caldwell

Directed by LEROI JONES

Slave Ship was presented at Theatre-in-the-Church at Washington Square, New York City, in November, 1969

THE COMPANY

FRANK ADU (Atowoda, Auctioneer) **GWEND. ANDERSON** (Tawa) **PRESTON BRADLEY** (Akoowa, Modern Day Preacher) **LEE CHAMBERLIN** (Oyalosa [Tsia]) BILLDUKE (Akano) **PHYLLIS ESPINOSA** (Adule) RALPHESPINOSA (Oiala) **BARRY FRAZIER** (Salako, Reverend Turner) **MAXINE GRIFFTIH** (Dademi) TIM PELT (Lalu, Piantation Tom) C. ROBERT SCOTT (Sailor) SERET SCOTT (Noliwe) SYLVIA SOARES (Segilola) **MARILYN THOMAS** (Imani) **REETA WHITE** (Oyo)

and

LEOPOLDO FLEMING (congas), CHARLES DAVIS (soprano saxophone), RICHARD FELLS (bass), BEAVER HARRIS (drums), BOB RALSTON (saxophone), MICHAEL RIDLEY (trumpet).

Produced by OLIVER REA (a Chelsea Theatre Center Production) in association with WOODIE KING
Directed by GILBERT MOSES



GLOSSARY OF YORUBA TERMS

OYO MAA BO, OYA KALO OYA—IF YOU ARE READY FOR A FIGHT, COME ALONG.

MASE (ma-shay)—don't DURO (doo-row)-stop ORO-O-O-cry of pain ORUN (oh-oh-roon)-it smells KABIYESI (Ka-bee-ay-see)—oh my Lord OBATALA—name of the arch divinity SANGO (Shango)—a deity, god of thunder and lightning ORISA (Or-ee-sha)—name of the supreme deity IFA (Ec-fa)—deity-wisdom RAN WA LOWO (rahn-wah-lowo)—help us OLUWA (oh-lou-wah)-oh Lord BENI (beh-a-nee)—yes BEKO (bay-a-ko)-no RARA O (rah-rah-oh)-it can't be SE SURU (shay-sou-rou)—patience DAKE (da-kay)-be quiet or o-shut up, hush, quict PANUMO (O TI (oh-tee)-o

GBADURA (bah-dur-rah)-pray L'AGBARA (ag-bwah-rah)—have strength AGBARA (ag-bwah-rah)-strength FUN WA (fung-wah)—give us BABA OMO-father of us all NIBO L'AWA? (Nee-bo lah-wah)—Where are we? LU (lou)—beat JOWO (dah-koon)—please DAKUN IGBE (eeg-bay)-shit O O LE SE BAYI FUN MI-You can't do this to me SE ALAFIA NI? (shay allah-fee-ah-nee?)—How are you? ALAFIA NI, MO DUPE (allah-fee-ah-nee mo dou-pay)-I am fine, thank you ILE NKO? (ee-lay en-do)—And your family? O DABO (oh-dah-bow)-goodbye O DARO (oh-dah-row)-goodnight E KARO (ch kah-row)—good morning E KASAN (eh kah-san)-good afternoon E KUROLE (eh kou-role-ay)—good evening (before dark) E KALE (ch kah-lay)—good evening (after dark) MINI MINI POKAN (meany meany pokahn) etc.—Yoruba nurse MINI MINI POKAN K'AIYE WON O TORO BI OMI A F-ORO-PON-May their lives be clear and pure like water drawn early in the morning