

## Appendix E Playwright's Notes

### Preface

The following notes were assembled to share with the Director my thoughts on the play, *The Fort Pillow Massacre*.

- Note 1** I have known of this obscure historical event for a very, very long time. (I was 15 years old when I first read the Congressional Report). It wasn't until I realized that there was a 'controversy' about what actually happened that I became absorbed with portraying that controversy. I decided a stage play was the best forum to do that.
- Note 2** I decided that this play **The Fort Pillow Massacre** should be written only using the exact language found in the 1864 Congressional Report. I did not edit it. Also, I did not alter the statements of the modern day authors that I quote juxtapose the transcript of the congressional hearing. The only original words are those of the **NARRATOR** who directs the play and of the **MODERATOR** who asks the Questions of the modern day authors.
- Note 3** I want to make it clear that I did not write *The Fort Pillow Massacre* in order to make a socio-political statement, or to spin a historical event that might get read during Black History month each year. I believe the Fort Pillow Massacre fits in with what actor Morgan Freeman said during the making of the acclaimed movie "*Glory*": This is part of American History, not Black History.
- Note 4** I have biased the presentations of the authors' work. I selected those sections that challenged the context of the 1864 Congressional Report – which argues a massacre did in fact occur. This was done purposely to contrast what was written in 1864 to describe the 'alleged' massacre, against what writers and historian have learned. Essentially, I've tried to present two positions. I have also tried not to draw a conclusion and point out which one is correct. I want to leave that up to each person in the audience. ... And I challenge the director(s) of this play to do the same. Resist introducing your own convictions as to the 'truth' in the telling of *The Fort Pillow Massacre*.
- Note 5** At some point it occurred to me that technically the **NARRATOR** and **MODERATOR** might be played off-stage by the same actor. While that is feasible, it wasn't done. I feel the voices of the two roles need to be quite distinctive as they are often delivered congruently. The **NARRATOR**'s lines are purposefully very objective factual statements to hold together and move the play along. They could be spoken in almost monotone. The **MODERATOR**'s lines are more conversational. They are speaking not to the audience, but to the **WRITER** they are interviewing – I visualize a male tenor, or female alto voice, in a relaxed informal manner.
- Note 6** I am guilty of taking a writer's words 'out-of-context'. It is unavoidable. It happens for a couple of reasons. The first and most frequent violation is removing text that has been stated before. For example, virtually every

statement by a writer on the Fort Pillow Massacre begins with a statement about the population counts; the number of white and black soldiers, the number of dead, etc. Once the point is made by one writer I remove it from the subsequent writers' remarks which could make their lines sound harsher than when heard in full context. Secondly, if there is a powerful remark, typically at the close of a paragraph, I may separate it from the logic building up to the remark by inserting a line from the **MODERATOR** prompting for the remark to be made to isolate it and add emphasis. ... If I have one nagging concern, it's that I am clearly taking words out-of-context. With two noted exception, all the authors whose writings I use in Forrest's 'defense' concluded that a massacre did take place – and Forrest had some culpability. ... I don't know how to relate that to the audience. I don't think I can in the play.

**Note 7** I need to comment on the **MODERATOR**'s lines: As you would imagine, the **MODERATOR**'s question is created *after* I find a particular remark by a writer that needs to be heard. The **MODERATOR**'s lines are to 'solicit' that remark in the most natural and conversational manner I can create.

**Note 8** I struggled with the formatting style for this script. The recommended standard format just wasn't working. It was this line in the '**Dramatists Guild Resource Directory**' that gave me the courage to create the structure you'll find: "Admittedly, not all stories or styles of writing will work within a standard format. Therefore, use your better judgment in deciding the architecture of the page."

Here are a couple of reasons for the formatting style I've created:

1. There is no action in the play – little or no direction is ever given;
2. All the dialogue is between just two characters, never more;
3. Half the dialogue is derived from a given testimony where the format is to list **Q** (the question) followed by **A** (the answer). What I've done is substitute character's names for who's asking the **Q** and who's giving the **A**;
4. The other half of the dialogue is very similar to **Q & A** testimony. A moderator is asking a writer to read from their book.

Lastly (which I'll cover in another note) I fully intend to allow changes to the dialogue. The formatting style I've created is designed to make it easier to alter the script.

**Note 9** This play is an '**Evolving Work**' by the playwright and the directors ... What I mean is, I fully expect (and hope) directors will suggest changes in the dialogue and/or sequence of the appearance of characters.

1. As I said in an earlier note, the dialogue of the 1864 investigator and witnesses and the quotes from the writers' books CAN NOT be altered. However, the lines of the **NARRATOR** and the **MODERATOR** are open to revision – within reason. As the author of the play, I have final approval of any and all revisions from the original draft and ownership of any revisions;
2. The appearance of characters and placement / sequence of their dialogue will be considered for revision;

3. Deleting dialogue of witnesses and of author's quotes will be considered for revision;
4. Adding dialogue of witnesses will be considered for revision – a separate **Appendix D** containing **Extra Dialogue** is available;
5. Adding quotes from author's books will be considered for revision – a separate **Appendix D** containing **Extra Dialogue** is available.

I plan to make these 'variations' in the original 'basic' draft available to subsequent productions. Hopefully, in time, the 'best' variations will surface and the need to make major revisions will come to an end.

- Note 10** I am not a professional dramatist. I just wanted to tell this specific story and a stage play seemed like the best medium. Consequently, I want to enable the true artists of the theater to freely work with what I have begun, so I have prepared **Creative License** guidelines (see **Appendix A**) for this purpose. I try to set out the ground rules for the '**Evolving Work**' model mentioned earlier.
- Note 11** The '**Evolving Work**' model also includes the notion that I intend to continue my research into The Fort Pillow Massacre for some time to come. As I translate actual 1864 testimony into script dialogue, or uncover new insightful quotes from author's books, I will either add it to the future 'basic' scripts, or into **Appendix D** containing **Extra Dialogue**.
- Note 12** I envision a split stage with both the 1864 Witness scene and the modern day Writers set scene set-up on the stage at all times throughout the entire performance. Only lighting switches from one scene to the other.
- Note 13** At last count, depending on the director's decision, there can be **7 to 24** actors. However, I can't image how there could be more that **6** actors on the stage at the same time - and that assumes both scene sets are on the stage at the same time. That is the **Investigator** with a witness, and the next witness, on stage; and the **Moderator** with two writers on stage – one group in light, the other in dark.
- Note 14** There are four Acts with two scenes each in the play. Scene One is the Testimony of the Witnesses and Scene Two is the commentary of Writers reading directly from their Books. Here is a task I have yet to complete before the play can professionally be produced and performed. I need to secure permission from the publishers of the books I have extracted excerpts from. Virtually every book contains this notice: "*All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portion thereof in any form or by any means... without permission in writing from the publisher.*"
- Note 15** I need to research and add more books and authors to my "Writers Roster" [see **Appendix C**]. I stopped researching and adding books in 2009.
- Note 16** There is fairly substantial evidence that General Nathan Bedford Forrest was a member (if not a founding member) of the **Ku Klux Klan** – though he always denied his leadership role. I believe I need to find a way of revealing this to the audience in some manner – but I fear prejudicing his case in the Fort Pillow Massacre when I do. The 'fairness' difficulty is that the KKK happened after the war. Nevertheless, many in the audience will know something of his involvement and not to mention it would greatly add to their anxiety – it would mine. ... That is my dilemma.

**Note 17** Perhaps the published program for the performance given to the audience could be the vehicle to: (1) acknowledge that many of the book authors' comments are taking out-of-context in order to present a strong contrast to the admittedly biased view expressed in the 1864 Congressional Report. With two noted exception, all the authors whose writings were use in Forrest's 'defense' concluded that a massacre did take place – and Forrest had some culpability; (2) make the audience aware of General Nathan Bedford Forrest's 'alleged' (but denied) post war involvement in the Ku Klux Klan.

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