

ANGELO HERNDON

Angelo Herndon—symbol of the power of unity—born the son of a miner in Wyoming, Ohio twenty-two years ago—himself a miner at the age of 14—at the age of 19 a leader marching at the head of Atlanta's starving citizens, black and white—at the age of 22, known to millions as the personification of the heroism produced only by the working class.

A One Act Play by ELIZABETH ENGLAND

The Narrator: all around the train bearing Angelo Herndon back to the Georgia chain gang are painted four golden bars.

The Workers: foh golden bars
fouh golden bars
o lawd lawd
de train hab foh golden bars.

The Narrator: gleaming are the letters—the clean golden letters on the first pullman—naming it rotary club. A thousand miles Angelo Herndon rides—but not in the first pullman—named rotary club.

Railroad Owner: (to be read in a cold dull tone) The Official Policy of the Road—is to set aside coaches—for the use of black citizens.

A White Worker: greetings, Angelo Herndon—black citizen of the future—riding in a jim crow car.

The Narrator: anywhere Herndon's at home—for he who lives for tomorrow—makes of today a peg for his hat. A thousand miles he rides—a thousand miles to serve twenty years.

The Judge: (Slow and pompous, words in capital letters to be accented) WE THE SUPREME court of these United States DECREE that Angelo Herndon return to Georgia return to serve eighteen to twenty years for his CRIME.

The Workers: (first two lines in unison, others by individuals, last in unison)

return Angelo
return
for your crime
for your dark skin
for asking for bread
for the starving of Georgia.

The Narrator: listen, world, he catches the train in New York—of his own free will—of his own twenty-one-year-old will—a thousand miles he rides while as many mockers say—he'll jump bail he's a fool—

The Workers: for us he returns—for eighteen of us charged with him—charged with insurrection—charged with making men stand up and fight—to live like men in Georgia.

The Narrator: (to be recited in rhythm, as if pointing the scenes from the window of a train) watching America—he is awake—a thousand miles—through the window of the jim crow car he sees Jersey—stained by the Crempa-Jersey power case—he looks on the spot—where Dutch Shultz was rubbed out—his eyes are filled with dynamite Duponts Delaware—in Virginia—the only light

he sees flickers in Richmond—where Lee surrendered—and the slaves were freed. At three thirty in the morning—Herndon says—

A Voice: That damn whistle's like somebody a cryin'—for his soul—

The Workers: yes, Angelo,—it's us a-cryin', it's us a-cryin', it's us a cryin'—'cause you're our soul. . . .

The Narrator: (as before) it is coming dawn—when the train stops in Gastonia—the sun comes up hot and red—when the train is in South Carolina—through the window—Angelo Herndon sees thin blood hounds—loping along—it is scarcely dawn when the mills and the shacks stir—and knowing he hears the workers moan—and in a window—beholds a tired woman—combing her long hair.

The Workers: (continuing in the rhythm set by the Narrator) red like rust is the earth now—and in the fields of cotton aching backs curl under burlap burden—

The Narrator: looking at his country—Angelo Herndon caresses her—speaks to her.

A Voice: (for Angelo Herndon) everywhere they have taken you—America—those who built you—your factories and mills—the endless stretch of your land—are held by the wrong people if all I've done and all I do—if all I've suffered—and still must suffer—brings unity—for black and white—in mine and mill—I've not fought in vain.

The Narrator: and then he is silent—see in—he has come—to Georgia.

The Workers: (each section spoken by an individual) Georgia's soil is red brown—her mules and her men—thin and hungry—the roofs of her shacks—let in the stars and the sky—the wind and the wet and the cold.

The Narrator: and Georgia's governor holds in his right hand the motto of Georgia

The Judge: (pompously) WISDOM . . . JUSTICE . . . MODERATION.

The Narrator: and in his left hand—Georgia's governor holds a law of eighteen thirty-three.

The Judge: (The following passage must be made to sound like a chant) ANY PERSON CONVICTED

The Workers: in the south

The Judge: OF THE DEFENSE OF

The Workers: Atlanta's chamber of commerce

The Judge: OR OF AN ATTEMPT TO

The Workers: boasts Georgia's the empire state

The Judge: INCITE INSURRECTION
The Workers: Georgia's wealth consists
The Judge: OF SLAVES
The Workers: in mine, field and mill
The Judge: SHALL BE PUNISHED
The Workers: where labor produces
The Judge: WITH DEATH
The Workers: mineral, fruit 'n' textiles
The Judge: OR IF THE JURY RECOMMEND

The Workers: lumber, livestock
The Judge: TO MERCY
The Workers: 'n' fine living
The Judge: CONFINED
The Workers: for the property owners
The Judge: IN THE PENITENTIARY
The Workers: of Georgia
The Judge: FOR TERM OF NOT LESS

The Workers: for the sustenance
The Judge: THAN FIVE YEARS
The Workers: for the comfort
The Judge: OR MORE THAN
The Workers: for human life
The Judges: TWENTY YEARS ON THE CHAIN GANG

The Narrator: now the train with the four golden bars—siren screaming—shrieks to rest in Atlanta—from the jim crow car Angelo Herndon goes quickly—past the cats that fight with men—for Atlanta's garbage—past the reach of Atlanta's skyscrapers—past the pale, white farmers totin' diapered, naked young to be on Atlanta's street

finally he stands where streets are muddied alleys and familiar walls—crack walls—crack apart—and he knows those within are very hungry

and he waits until like the air stirring through broken wall his name moves softly from the doors they run to him—kissing him, touching him, laughing . . . whispering and of his name they make a song

The Workers: (while the narrator continues the Workers speak Herndon's name, at first softly)

Angelo . . . Angelo . . .
Angelo Herndon
Angelo . . . Angelo . . .
Angelo Herndon
Angelo . . . Angelo . . .
Angelo Herndon

The Narrator: into the cabin they draw him—and themselves, unfed, bring miracles of food from ever-empty shelves—

The Workers: no one can sleep nor get his fill of looking at him—who goes for us to Fulton Tower.

The Narrator: he is yours—make this night happy—search among the records—for one that is gay—light—free—

The Workers: but all are blues back—water—blues—dead-cat—blues—birmin' ham—blues—gambling—man—blues—mean—woman—blues—blues—blues—blues—blues—blueees—blueeeeeeeeeee

The Narrator: before he must go from that house he sings for them a song he learned in prison—a song that ends

The Negro Worker: every mail day . . .
mail day I got a letter
son, come home, o son, son, come home
every mail day . . . mail day I got a letter

The Workers: son, we'll bring you home o son, we'll bring you home

The Negro Worker: from mine . . . from mill I got a letter— but how can I go tell me, how can I go

The Workers: son, we'll get you out o son, son, we'll get you out

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The Negro Worker: from black . . . from white I got a letter— but how can I go tell me, how can I go

The Workers: son, we're getting together
o son, son, we're getting together—no shot gun—no pistol—can blow us down

Getting Together!

no bosses
lock you from us

Getting Together!

america's builders

Getting Together!

starving millions

GETTING TOGETHER!

break your chains

smash your cell

claim you

free you

ANGELO HERNDON!