

# TWELVE

For Tamir Rice

A Short Stage Play

By Vincent Terrell Durham

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## CAST:

WEST AFRICAN WOMAN - Black, mid to late 20's.

SLAVE WOMAN - Black, mid to late 20's.

SHARECROPPER WOMAN - Black, mid to late 20's.

CHICAGO WOMAN - Black, mid to late 20's

TODAY'S WOMAN - Black, mid to late 20's..

FADE UP:

*(Four women stand on stage. WEST AFRICAN WOMAN,  
SLAVE WOMAN, SHARECROPPER WOMAN,  
CHICAGO WOMAN.)*

WEST AFRICAN WOMAN

They have taken my son. Twelve years old. The stories were true. Mothers shooin' their children from the hut and never seeing them again. It was me who told him to leave that day. Go out into the sun. Go from this hut and play. You are always underfoot. There was cooking and mending to be done. That boy was always in the way. Mother this and mother that. Go son. Go to the river. I say. Go splash in the water. Be a child because manhood is on its way. In three years time you will no longer be a child. Enjoy it while you can. Night time falls and he's no where to be found. Several of the boys have gone missing. Three days pass. Four days pass. One full moon. None come home. They are gone. My son is gone. The son that I shoosed away from our hut for being under foot and in the way. What I wouldn't do for him to be under foot and in the way. In three years time I will not know this child has become a man. For the rest of my life, I will not know.

SLAVE WOMAN

I thought I had fixed my heart. I had twelve years to fix it. From the moment that boy come into the world screaming. Big Sally say, "Set your heart against it. Fix your heart not to love that boy. He come out you but he ain't yours. The quicker you know that.

## SLAVE WOMAN (cont'd)

The easier it gonna be.” How you fix your heart against your own blood? How you fix your face not to smile when he first find his toes? How you fix your body not to laugh when he first taste something bitter? “Fix your heart,” she say. I don’t know no mother capable of that. I come out the field and see my boy. He sitting on the back of a wagon. Hands tied. Feet tied. I know right then I ain’t fixed my heart. I start running. Massah send somebody to grab me up before I get to him. My son see his mama and throw himself towards me-- up off of that wagon. Hoping I could catch him and run him on away from here. Run us both on away from here. Why I ain’t never thought to do that before? Hating myself for not thinking on it. What must be his new Massah come pick him up from the ground. Throw him like a bale of hay back into that wagon. Rode off with ‘em. Ain’t never seen him since.

## SHARECROPPER WOMAN

My boy know how to add. So my husband take him with him. Seem every year we bring in more and more tobacco but we always owing more than we bringing in. Mr. Tillery say the cost of us living in his cabin go up. The cost of us using his farming tools go up. The cost of us buying cloth, flour, salt, and supplies from his store go up. If he could Mr. Tillery tell us the cost of breathing his air go up. This year my husband look at our son. He say, “We gonna put that boy’s learning to use.” My husband come back home just as proud. Junior caught three and four and five mistakes Mr. Tillery made in his record keeping books. This the first year we come out square. This the first year we don’t owe nothing to Mr. Tillery.

### SHARECROPPER WOMAN (cont'd)

My husband say, "If Junior had more time with them books he probably find Mr. Tillery owing us something. How a twelve year old boy adding and subtracting better than a grown man?" I say, "They probably adding and subtracting about the same. Junior just honest about it." Three days later the school house burned down. Really won't much more than a room. Twenty-five or thirty Negro children be squeeze up in it. Families hoping they get some learning. Let they parents be the last ones pulling tobacco. My husband found Junior inside. They had nailed his hands down onto the teacher's desk. I hope they killed my boy before they set fire to him.

### CHICAGO WOMAN

My sister Telma couldn't have no babies. So when my boy come along. I said, "We're just going to have to share him." It made her happy. Her husband took to the idea just as well. The first eight years of that boy's life he had so much loving on him. But then my husband found work up in Chicago. Telma and her husband wasn't about to leave nobody's Mississippi. So every summer I would send the boy that we shared back down to them. Back down south. Back to where he come from. Fresh air, swimming holes, catching frogs, playing in the Mississippi sun. He would leave out of Chicago a high yella thing and come back to us black as a berry. Two days after they celebrated his twelfth birthday, Telma called me up. Said there had been some trouble. A white lady was claiming something. A misunderstanding but the sheriff was going to smooth everything out. Me and my husband started for Mississippi that evening. It's a surprise we didn't get pulled over and thrown in jail for speeding.

## CHICAGO WOMAN (cont'd)

We got to Mississippi in eight hours. They lynched the boy that we shared two hours before. He hadn't been there long enough for his color to change. He was still high yella.

*(Three gun shots ring out. TODAY'S WOMAN runs onto the stage.)*

## TODAY'S WOMAN

He was twelve years old. Where else he supposed to play? This park is for children, ain't it? Ain't twelve years old still a child? Ain't this park where he's supposed to be free? Where he's suppose to use his imagination. Be allowed to be whatever it is he wants to be?. Don't most boys play with guns? Never met a boy who didn't asked for a toy gun. Wanting it for Christmas, his birthday, or just asking to be asking for something. Didn't they even make a movie about? You gonna shoot your eye out. Is what the mother kept saying. It was a toy gun. It was a twelve year old boy. It was a park for children to play in. A park for children to pretend to be what they wanted to be. My boy wasn't pretending to be nothing bad. He wasn't pretending to be nothing wrong. Look what he got on his chest. Look what he wearing pin to his chest. He drew it and I cut it out from one of my dresses. It's big and yellow and sheriff is spelled out in black magic marker. Didn't them policemen see that? Didn't them policemen see he was pretending to be one of them? Didn't they see he was playing inside a park? Didn't they see he was a twelve year-old boy?

*(The other women cross to TODAY'S WOMAN and wrap  
her up in their collective grief.)*

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY