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(ii) Quick Note

If a writer begins with "how to read" something, you should generally run - but maybe this is an exception.

This play is meant for internet video. Each scene is quite short, no more than a few minutes at most. The line-breaks are in place to help the actors find the internal music of the dialogue. In the same way, you will likely enjoy it more if you read aloud - but, while reading, simply ignore the line-breaks, reading from punctuation to punctuation as you normally would, and let the rhyme and rhythm of the language emerge.

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(iii) Characters

FLOYD MANN, Director of Alabama Department of Public Safety
JOHN PATTERSON, Governor of Alabama
GEORGE WALLACE, politician
JOE REED, student at Alabama State College
DR LAWRENCE REDDICK, professor at Alabama State College
POLICE OFFICER
PROTESTERS, non-speaking

PATTERSON VS REED

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1. (Alabama governor's office.)

P - Patterson, M - Mann (to enter)

M (entering): He's got'em
hot and
rotten
about the boycottin',
says we should a shot'em
all when they left the cotton
plantations.
The man's a danger to the nation,
I swear.
Isn't that just how Hitler got to be
started over there?
gettin' the angry entitled
riled
and ridin'
it to the end of democracy
and the broken glass nights?

P: Who now? What?

M: Wallace and his whites,
out there at the sit-ins
spittin'
and kickin'
like the trash they are and pickin'
fights
with the blacks
who just sit there simpl-
y keeping their temper and
don't fight back -
so tell me, who's really a Southern Gentleman
when you look at that?

P: You're sermonizing clergy.
But I heard he's
got half of dixie
for 63,
so we can only hope and see.
Still, if a man like Wallace
gets in power
then all the S-
outh's hour
of loathing

is begun -
if not already -
he's one
for only goading
and getting
what he wants
and loading
poor white minds
with the supposed
taunts
and crimes
of their black neighbors.

M: And you say the same things he does!

P: I say what I must to get the votes.
And you'll note
that I trammel
things in law and time
and clamor
that catharts
the angry minds
and hearts
of the mob away from true violence.
I give them a tea kettle whistling
so they don't notice the silence
of the fire fizzling
out underneath,
and by the time they do the pressure's released.
But Wallace would stopper it
and fire it
and prop it up
with the vilest
goading
of wounded Southern ego
until each white man
was exploding
at each Negro
like a blind
landmine,
so long as he - Wallace - could sit where I'm
sitting
or where Kennedy's getting
so comfortable.

M: You say it like Kennedy's the one to trouble
us.
But Wallace is monstrous.

P: But that's only his mouth.
You see, a Wallace
needs a Kennedy

because without
an enemy
all his s-
capegoating
goes floating
away timidly
into the dark forgotten past.
He's a little
dog barking full blast
to get the bigger dogs riled
but if Kennedy would just go past
and smile
and let Alabama alone a while
then men like Wallace
would do us all a f-
avor and wear themselves out
and realize at last
there's
only dead air
about
them listening now
to their
attacks.

M: Tell that to the blacks.

P: Ugh. Sometimes I think
if I had any real spine
I'd go and drink
with them in the dine-
rs and line
up beside'
em and I'd spit
on this fix
of a mess
called Alabama politcs
and I'd go make the best
of myself
somewhere else.

M: Maybe you should.

P: Maybe I should, Mann,
but can you understand?
They set fire to my father's law office
and then when they saw this
only toughened his resolve
against them
they shot him in the street like a dog
without a single instance
of warning -
a born easy

gentleman,
a veteran whose middle name was Love -
they killed him and called themselves tough,
and went around bragging rough-
ly in their ranks
that now it made them the real gangs-
ters and thugs
of the South.
And they were.
Sure.
Undoubtedly,
they turned parts of Alabama into hell on Ear-
th and routed the
decent people from their homes
until we, the politicians, drove them out of these
parts to leave folks alone.
They killed my father, Mann,
and I'll be damned
if I let them scheme
behind the scenes
of Civil Rights like a smokescreen
to get even a toe-hold here again.
I say any one of those thugs who comes near here
will bleed.

M: I say you may be damned, indeed.

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2. (Alabama governor's office.)

P - Patterson, M - Mann, W - Wallace (to enter)

W (entering): Good day, gentlemen.
How's our simple and
hallowed temple
of the South -
our Alabama -
so proud
and true
that I'm honored I am a-
mong the few
who
still take her
sacred
purview
of racial propriety
as bedrock of all my piety.

M: Mr Wallace, sir, do you have business here?

W: Well, that I fear
depends
on if we're
friends
with clear
intent-
ions for the fate
of our great
State.
I must confess
that late-
ly I grow less
believing,
less convinced,
that our governor's not a race-trait-
or deceiving
us for political ends.
I dare to guess
that almost every inst-
ance
of his public elocution
is meant
for diffusion
of racial tens-
ion, through high heady words
but too little action.

In fact if
I have heard
right, in a recent transaction
with our nigger-loving president -
and her husband -
when Kennedy said to him,
"Make sure
a bus full
of uppity-actin'
Northerners make Jackson
safely,"
our governor
instead of facing
up to that pompous Jack and Jacqueline
and tacklin'
their rude imposition
with fire and brimstone
had his assistant
say on-
ly he was off
playing golf.
Now that tea's too sweet even for me.
So, again
I nee-
d to ask if we
are friends?

P: Mr Wallace, we are most certainly not friends.
And if you have no business
then this is
neither an auspicious
nor fortuitious
time for the two of us
to talk.
It's such a nice day, sir - why not go for a walk?

W: What, does a white man
have no right then
to bring his governor
a piece of frightenin'
news from the county
courthouse
just a few blocks over and south
from here?
We got nine niggers sittin' down in
clear-
ly segregated sections
and now the police are arrestin'
em and pressin'
em into hold-
in' cells below
the buildin'.

P (exiting): You sonofa-

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P: Mann!

M (exiting): On it sir!

P (shouting after him): And tell those officers
they shall not turn
a single inch of black skin blue!
And keep the names a secret too!
Do not tell the press!

W: Well now, less and less...
like I said,
our governor instead
of protecting our blessed
traditions
is privately
a spinelessly
bending man of submission.
But I was righteously
prepared for your your shame -
I already got the names.

P: You what?

W: That's why I came
with a friendly warnin'
all the names'
I'll be in every paper in the mornin'.
Freedom of the press ain't no sin.

P: Wallace, you realize you just killed nine men?

W: Now, I ain't pull no trigger
and I ain't tell no nigger
to go sit in no chair
or counter-front
where
he ain't want-
ed.
But you're askin' do I care,
well, I'll be hon-
est.
They could lynch'em at the Lincoln Mon-
ument.
They could lynch'em at the Ritz.
Won't bother me an inch
I'll be yawnin,
forgotten it.
'f I was right there watchin' it
I wouldn't even itch.

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3. (Holding cell under the county courthouse.)

R - Reed, O - Police Officer (to enter), S - other protesters with Reed, non-speaking

R: My God, I've never been so frightened.
I'm tightened
to my toes and fingertips
and my mind
goes white as lightning
and I can feel my lips
crawling
and biting
with an ache to just start bawling
on the floor
and writhing
and begging for
my life.
I'm made of electric wires
and knife-
edges
and fires
and I fear I might babble
mys a liar s-
o long as I might stay alive.
O God, I am a coward!
I've
no power, d-
oughtiness
or striv-
ing hope within me for this hour
of my trials
and I'm sure that I will
shame myself.
O God, what help
is there for me in You!
What can You do?
I've heard it all too
many times,
the crimes
and killing,
and lawcourts willing
such dark affairs
as black men's blood spilling
down their stairs
so that recourse, prayers,
hopes -
are lynched

with bodies by the ropes
in white men's
hands.
I can barely stand!
And what good are plans
and courage
anyways?
Does one with them flourish,
or see any better days
than others?
Is not plain luck the surest
mother
and ruler of every minute?
no matter what says
the jurist,
the tyrant, the preacher of the Infinite?
No matter how you spin it
everything is chance,
and bravery
and knavery
and gritting it out
and quitting in doubt
and sitting about
and even my driveling loud
self-pitying bout
here behind my bars are all the same to
circumstance,
to happenstance,
to fate,
to what happens and
how the future is no mate
to now
nor to anything that man can do
but simply a cloud
come into view
for us to cast our proud
and self-deceiving shapes into.
It doesn't tru-
ly matter
if I drop down on my knees and beg
and flatter
and kiss the guard's shoe
and grab his
leg
and babble,
"Please, just let me go!"
except that he might show
me mercy
and throw
me into the street
before anyone hurts me
or lynches me.

I might live for a century,
and just living is no small thing.
But what would I be then?
Who would be me then?
What would I see when
I looked in the mirr-
or and what would I hear
when someone said freedom?
When my children were three and
and I started to see in
their eyes
these spirit-eating
lies
of race
take hold
then what word of grace
could I even
unfold
for them to believe in -
I'd be dead and cold
while my heart was still beating.
So I'm sure I'm deceived when
I say that it matters
but I say that it matters.
And I'll likely be just one more battered
black
body forgotten
and rotting
in some tattered
back
alley in the morning
and there'll be no heaven
for me
either because such pleasant
things aren't true,
but still I've got to see this through.
I've just got to.
I don't even know why anymore but I do.
I realize today th-
at I'm not much of a man
and I've never been so afraid
but here I am.
I only wish the wait-
ing done,
that the next footsteps would come
to kill me or let me go.

O (entering): You boys up!
Show
a little dignity! On your feet! The governor's here to
meet
you

and if you make me look bad I'll beat
you
like a fish againt a stone!
I'll make ya hurt!
Tuck in your shirt
and keep your backbones
straight! You, there, quit your chatterin'.
They're all yours, Governor Patterson.

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4. (Holding cell under the county courthouse.)

P - Patterson (to enter), R - Reed, O - Police Officer, non-speaking (to exit), S - other protesters with Reed, non-speaking

P (entering as police officer exits): Well, here I see
 nine impatient
school boys
who want to rage and
make noise
and occasion
bois-
terous confrontation
by ploys
requiring neither agenc-
y nor discipline
nor mettle
nor valor,
their intents and
purposes in these instances
but to nettle
fools who take pride in a kind of pallor,
but unaware that their own pensive
powers
now atrophy
by stooping down to pageantry
and dumb low
show
instead of humbly hoe-
ing the certain row
of their ow-
n dear manhood and future.
Now tell me does this suit you?
to squabble
with rabble
and saddle
yourself at best with wasted time
or worse by battling
these adders
to come out blind
or hurt
or dead,
when with your mind
and effort
instead
you might have actually come through?
I know it's less drama

but it's true
that when you're fighting Rommel -
which I attest
is a lo-
sing fight -
the best
you can do
is sit tight
and let him get himself gassed
and killed
'cause
that's by nature what he does
if you just hold still.
And these bast-
ards are half the man he was
so they'll go much fast-
er.
Now three of
you are from out of state
which you'll hate
to hear actually presents us
with some decent stuff
for escap-
ing these policemen's rough
and hasty holding cell,
and not just that
but Alabama's black
and specious chauv-
inistic hell
of prejudice
as well,
if you can swallow your pride with some intell-
igence.
Now I'm spell-
in' out sense,
so listen. We'll say you come with loose
uppity ways
from the northern place-
s where you were raise-
d and you confused
your barely race-
aware young friends
but by the grace
of Alabama you'd make amends,
that you've talked to the governor,
that for your sins
you'll all take the summer to
work in the community,
that you seek not impunity
but redemp-
tion and another chance.
I know it's degrading

but white men love a black man propitiating
them with his hat in his hands.

And waiting
is part of war
and so are good plans.
So, if you're not just placating
your own young egos
then play ingratiating
negroes
outwardly while you quietly make your footing
firm.

Let this incident go fading
into time and then start back to school next term.

R: You want us to apologize?

P: With downcast eyes
and many quiet but audible
sighs
of penitence.

R: And then what modicum
of difference
will we have made for black ci-
tizens -
who pay tax-
es, who enlist and fight,
who are debtors and workers and creditors -

P: Save your rhetoric
for a better setting
than your prison
and ostracism.
You're forgetting
that I'm a veteran
of much verbal pugilism
and I see where you'd go.
Here's all that you have to know.
One,
if you stick by what you've done
you run
a high risk of throw-
ing your young lives away for nothing.
Two,
if you do
what I've told you to
and suffer the slow
inglorious process of work and time,
you'll come through fine
and alive
and you'll find
that by surviv-

ing you can accomplish much more than a corpse.

R: I speak only for myself
of course.
But I'll go to hell be-
fore
I apologize.
For in my eyes,
and in our country's prize-
d Declaration of Independence
the unhealth-
y arrogance
of oppressors must be cast away;
it is sin.
I'm proud of what I did today
and if you let me out I'll do it again.

P: And this goes for all of you?
Not one of you can grasp what I'm trying
to convey?
Not one of you has anything else to say? Fine. Then
remember if you end up dying
that you wanted it this way.

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5. (Alabama governor's office.)

P - Patterson, M - Mann (they enter together at start of scene, exit together at end)

P: What a bunch of dunces! Dying over where they eat their lunches! Sitting there while punches are thrown! As if once this is all blown over and accomplished even one will say he actually wants to sit with those pompous presumptuous dysfunction-al scumbags! But still these young black soldiers for their cause do not pause and once ask if there is no better way, or if their losses today are worth a little more patience, as if their lives were only playthings to toss away blind in mistaken attempts to change idiots' minds. And I'm stuck here tryin' to keep both sets of bastards from causing disaster in Alabama. Did you get each man a car?

M: Yes, each is out with no charges, only a warning against disturbing the peace.

P: Out with a uniform?

M: Yes, released in custody of a trusted officer with mostly norm-

al human morals if still racist, but responsible enough to get them all safe and secure to their residences.

P: And what about tomorrow? I told you Wallace said he sent their names out for the papers to print them.

M: Well, unless you have more of a talent for tyranny and rape of the Constitution than Wallace, your only solace in this instance is that there's nine. So, it's possible angry whites will find it more political than personal and set it out of mind. We can't stop the press and we can't outguess every minute of the day to keep those black boys safe.

P: So, we're trusting fate?

M: I'll do my best but there's only so many places I can be and only so many faithful officers that we can rely on to do more good than bad while keeping their eyes on blacks who have become a target.

P: Maybe that's the smartest way to think of it. What you said was farthest from my thoughts but now that you speak of it it's what's exactly needed - a singular target that we can keep in safe proximity while drawing white anger away from those blacks who acted so indiscriminately today.

M: A distraction?

P: And more than nine black men
what does a white racist abhor?
What makes him roar
and madly expectorate
and score
his conscience on his sad pathetic hate
like nothing else?
It's a black man with more
than himself.
It's a black man with a belt,
with shoes and a hat,
a black man that
holds a good job and a degree,
a black man whom he can see
has surpassed him.
Just ask him
and listen between whatever he regurgitates
about how noble Robert E Lee was -
what a white racist hates
is a black man who makes
more money than he does.
You make sure those boys got home safe,
and check on Wallace.
I'm going to Alabama State College.

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6. (Dr Reddick's office, Alabama State College.)

D - Dr Reddick, R - Reed, P - Patterson (to enter),
M - Mann (to enter)

R: I was so afraid
and I prayed
but felt no comfort
nor relief,
and my hands stayed
shaking underneath
my pockets,
and I felt like my eye-sockets
could not keep
my eyes inside my head.
I don't think I am ready
for all this in spite of what I said
to the governor today.

D: What did you say?

R: I told him I was proud
of what I'd done
and that if he let me out
I'd run
the same risk once more
to force justice to Alabama's door.

D: And is that still what you'll do?

R: If I have to
then, yes. Truly
I'm willing
to put myself forward
even if it comes to them beating
or killing
me for what
I believe.
But my heart is eating
me because I know I deceive
you and everyone else
when I stand there calm and brave;
inside myself
I am terribly afraid,
I have no faith,
and every second I only want to get away.

D: And you feel guilty

for wanting to live and not be hurt or killed?
But you still keep
yourself there by force of will?
Do you think that if you felt brave
your actions would be more real?
Do you think that every one of us
doesn't hope we somehow save
ourselves from the ominous
chill
of the lyncher's cold hands?
Do you think that I or Reverend King
are any more of a man
than you,
or that we don't understand
or don't feel the same thing
too?
It's because we do
that our actions have power.
It's because we risk much -
we risk the only thing that's truly ours -
our lives,
that by such sacrifice
we hope to touch
the cauterized
hearts of our oppressors
and return them to flesh and
feeling.
It's by -

P (entering): Ah, Dr Reddick, dealing
with a student?
I can wait - or hold up, you then
are the imprudent
young boy from the holding cell
this morning
who couldn't tell
his toes from his ears with fright
but still wouldn't listen to warning
or right
or reason.

D: Governor Patterson, this is Joe Reed in
my history class.
He's in
need of counsel so may I ask -

P: Ordinarily I'd say yes and
yield
the office,
but in this case there's a lesson
for this boy's profit s-
o no,

I will not wait or deal
or go.
I will say what I've come to say.
Here is what you've accomplished,
Joe Reed, young and lawless,
since you had to have your way;
Dr Reddick, you are dismissed
from Alabama State College,
effective today.

D: What!

R: You can't do that!

P: By virtue of my office
I can and I do.
And what's more you
were the leader
and corruptor
of the twenty-nine blacks with Joe Reed up
in the courthouse earlier.

R: That's a lie! dirtier
and lower
than all your unworthy per-
fidious campaign ora-
tory!
There were only nine of us! And he wasn't there!
He met us in the morning and left!

P: But I don't care.
And my story
will be in the next
printed newspaper
with a photo of Dr Reddick standing where
your eight compatri-
ots dally beside him
outside the courthouse entrance.
And when people read twenty-nine then
they'll forget all about the rest and fo-
cus on him since
he's older and successful and educated.
And that's a recipe for making a black man hated.
But he's smarter than you
and has worked harder than you
and so he'll pardon himself to
leave Alabama and bide his time
without feeling like he's committed a crime
of cowardice
but rather with true
wisdom of mind
knowing that when you are powerless

you had best wait
and withdraw.
And all
that raw
white Alabama hate
that shifts to him from you tomorrow
will fizzle and fade
and fall
from memory
with no horror
of violence. And for him it'll be
only a hard but recoverable check to his career.
So you see I sacrifice one good man's job right here
to save nine young lives.
And that's politics for you, that's being wise,
that's Paul keeping toward the prize;
you let the little snake bite you
while you pluck out the bigger one's eyes
and then strangle it,
and you hope some Good Power
will give you the might to
fight through
this one this hour
and still have enough righteous anger
in you to pull the little one's fangs out
of yourself after
and kill that bastard
too.
But either way you know you can only do
your part,
right now,
with trust in your own heart
with perhaps not even an ou-
nce of glory
or acknowledgement
but knowing, for e-
xample, in this instance
that some young men's moms can spend
another holiday with them.
That's what it means to be a man -
when it stings,
and you're damned,
and you know you'll never get your own word in,
but still you do everything
you can
to accomplish what good has become your burden.

M (rushing in): Governor!

P: It's too late!
He's already fired! He's forced out!

M: No! Forget about the courthouse!
It's a footnote now!
That bus that came down
from Washington
that we had our secret investigator watching on
and sitting in the first seat
was attacked in the heat
of Anniston and Birmingham by a mob
rushing out
into the street
with pipes
and wires
and bombs
and they cut the tires
and burned the whole damn bus and beat
stripes
into those who tumbled out coughing -
if not for our man there
they'd be already in their coffins
and some are in such critical condition
they may end up dead anyways before morning.
What I mean is while you were on your self-
appointed
mission
to silently
save these students here
we've had the worst outbreak of racial violence
in ten years.
Picture a bus turned into a bonfire,
asphalt like napalm in flames,
women shrieking
and engines screeching
gone haywire
and fifty bodies mangled
dangling
bloody everywhere across the highway lanes.

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7. (Dr Reddick's office, Alabama State College.)

D - Dr Reddick, non-speaking, R - Reed, P -
Patterson, M - Mann

P: A burning bus?
A riotous,
murderous mob
beating people unto the quietus
of death in Alabama streets?
My God,
please,
are you serious?
Or am I so delirious
with anger
at the stupidity of these reckless nine men
that I've become a stranger
to my own nightmares and do not recognize when
I am dreaming?
Is the phone on Dr Reddick's desk
ringing?

M: I'll bet that's President Kennedy bringing
the wrath
of Capitol statecraft
into this catastrophe.
His secretary's been aft-
er you half
the day, asking me
how to get you on the line,
and I told them eventually
they'd find
you somewhere
here,
though it wasn't clear
to me exactly which office or for what end -
though from what you said when
I came in
now I think I can
guess.
Nevertheless,
we have a bigger mess
to fix now than
this morning
and no time to spend
any more on
the courthouse arrests.

P: People burning buses in the road?
People being beaten with pipes
and towed
at their heels
by friends and foes
alike
towards safety or more
violence, respectively,
is that what you said to me?

M: Governor, I've always known you to be
a man of action
and resolve,
and to come through when your backs a-
gainst the wall,
so I don't like the look of you now
so low.
Buck up and tell me what's happenin'
in Alabama and how
we can get it back under control.

P: Brutalizing people in the streets
in Anniston
and Birmingham,
but that's just like Phenix City back again
when my father first took up
the man-
tle of trying to rout
the crooked
crime rings out
of that place -
now violence and lawlessness careers
across the face
of Alabama in spite of all I've done to keep it at bay.
You work ten years
and look up
and you're further back than the day
you started -

M: Governor, I beg your pardon,
but we have to get on this.

P: But honest-
ly what difference does it make?
For my country and State
I've fought in two wars
on three landmasses
and in my tenure
as governor I've put through more
law for public advantages
and protections endur-
ing to both white and black

than these random hap-
hazard civil rights theat-
rics will yet accomplish
for a great deal
of time.
And yet by my politics
I've made
myself accomplice
to these crimes
today.
When people look back on me they'll say
I was a racist
segregationist,
full of hatred
like every other snake in the
South.
I'll be bile in their mouths.
Forget about the fact
that
I didn't ask for this job,
that my father was murdered by the mob
in the back
of an alley
in Phenix City, in the black
close night
because he had sallie-
d forth as a lone voice of right-
eous anger threatening to bring them down,
nominated as Attorney General.
When they put him in the ground
what could I do but take up his position
and bring those criminals
to their perdition?
What could I do but once started into it
strive for their swift and
permanent
removal not only from Phenix City but all
Alabama?
Or should I have left some place
for another young man to
find his father face-
down in a pool of blood
in a space
in a parking lot,
shot dead by some thug
or loan-shark or rot-
ten policeman?
So, how could I proceed then?
All my work would have been extinguished
if I had not become governor after
so I could cast
my fired sense of justice deep in-

to every aspect
of our courts and commerce and State -
and I did;
if you took the lid
off the whole country and examined each place
for graft
and corruption and public waste
you'd find Alabama scoured cleaner
and leaner
and more productive
than any other.
But all that is nothin'
to the race
rhetoric.
When I became governor
I had to say
what I did
or lose -
simple as that.
And it's no excuse
but again I ask
what else could I do?
just wipe my hands
and walk away from the few s-
quare feet of land
that used
to be my father?
Forget about all that
I've done, all the roads and schools
and the docks cleaned up
and Phenix City brought under rule
and all organized crime subdued
and bad cops locked up
and the courts given their legal and civic tools -
forget it all because I'm that fool
beside the picture of the burning bus,
the bloody bodies,
the violence still oozing like pus
out of my wounded life for all I've tried to heal.

M: Governor, stop your whining and deal
with the problem
at hand.
Nobody promised
you'd be much of a man,
and you know from the rawness
of war
that nobody's honest-
ly remembered for
what they do or don't do.
Your reputation
is a crapshoot

in the mouths
of fugacious
future grass-roots
that for a while can walk
and talk
and sin
until they're scattered by the wind,
but your character's something else.
Kennedy's secretary said the President wants you to
humble yourself
and get the help
of a young black student leader,
a boy by the name of Joe Reed, if
you can find him.

R: That's me. That's who I am.

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8. (Dr Reddick's office, Alabama State College.)

D - Dr Reddick, non-speaking, R - Reed, P -
Patterson, M - Mann

P: Yeah, well I don't give a damn
who Kennedy wants me to meet with!
And I don't give a damn
who Joe Reed is!
And it makes me sick
to my stomach as a man
that right now, while my State is bleeding
and what she needs is
someone to carry her off the field,
Kennedy's playing politics
tryin' to feel
out if he can polish this
into a shiny
headline
about how we couldn't deal
with our own problems
and yielded
to our inherent immodest
need for Northern succor.
You can tell that motherf -
You can tell him
he'd still be sellin'
his vote in the Senate
if I hadn't taken it
into my own hands to peddle
his meddlesome
traitorous name across the South.
You tell him I put him in the White House
and in a couple years I'll take him out!
Did anyone die here
last year?
Was anyone beaten?
We've had racial peace in
Alabama even since the ruling
in Topeka,
and we're progressing slowly but surely -
we got the Montgomery buses integrated -
but these agitators come down fooling
themselves with self-righteousness.
Instead of waiting
for the opportune time to get
justice achieved,
they deceive

themselves with self-importance
and only seek
their own misfortune.
But when I try to relieve
them and protect
them from stupidity
and tell them to work this through in the courtroom
they only tsk at me
and say that I'm a redneck
and disrespect
me.
Well, what were they expecting?
Doesn't a thrush know its own swamp?
Didn't I cry out a warning?
Does a rabbit come from its den in the morning
to the riverbanks
and hope not to get chomped
where gators are swarming
in ranks?
And now I'll bet Kennedy comes pompously
telling me to get out my tanks
and planes
and National Guardsmen
to protect some insane
idiots who want to pretend this swamp is a garden -
this is Alabama! It's hot as hell
and tough as nails
and we do fine
just for ourselves!
Just give me time
is what I tell
'em all!
Just get in line
behind
me is what I tell
'em all!
Don't try to undermine
me!
You can't come down here blindly
with impatience
and expect the United Nations!
This is the South!
Alabama is my house!
And I'm here to work it out!
I am the governor - nobody should doubt
this is my Alabama
and I have a plan to
get her through this racial disaster
if the country'd just get off my back for
a minute!
instead of coming down to my State
and pokin' and proddin' in it!

and causin' a problem in it!
But it's too late
anyways for these bus-riding idiots and the
Kennedies!
I'll have my revenge on these
treas-
onous bastards!
I'm rolling up my sleeves
and I'll teach'em to agitate
and hobble
and bother -

M: That's enough! You sound like the men who
murdered your father!

P: Gentleman, I am sorry for my outburst
and I hope it does not hurt
our work-
ing relationship
because what we're doing here is urg-
ent and more important than personal venom.
Joe Reed, I understand you are in a
position of
leadership for a group against desegregation?

R: Yes, sir. I'm the organizer for this city
of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

P: Very good. Please sit with me
and help me see
things through your eyes for exactly a half-hour.
Dr Reddick may I please
use your desk for now wh-
ile I'm in this office?
I'm sorry but the papers have already gone through
for your removal,
but I'd like it if you could sit with us, too,
and give your views on
all this.
First things first
though is take care of the worst -
tell me what you need
to get those buses and riders safely across Alabama,
Mann.
Then run out and call the cabinet to meet
and I'll ask Kennedy to speed
us all the help from Washington that he can.
Let's screw up our courage and intelligence,
fellows.
Let's forget our personal hurt.
It is time to work.

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(iv) Historical Notes and Liberties

John Patterson's father was shot to death in Phenix City, Alabama in June of 1954 after winning the Democratic nomination for Attorney General - in his campaign he had promised to rout organized crime from Phenix City. In the wake of his father's death, John Patterson ran instead and became the 36th Attorney General of Alabama. Four years later, he ran for governor. By then, Alabama was afire with racial rhetoric, and John Patterson took a strong stance for segregation. He won the election and became the 44th Governor of Alabama.

Joe Reed was a student at Alabama State College during John Patterson's tenure as Alabama's governor. Reed, as well as about 30 other men, including Dr Reddick of Alabama State College, staged an interracial sit-in at the county courthouse in Montgomery in 1960 to protest segregated seating. Several students were expelled and Dr Reddick lost his job, most likely due to Governor Patterson's leadership of the school's board. In this play, the meetings between Governor Patterson and Joe Reed are fictionalized, but in reality these two men's paths would cross several times across the years; in spite of their differences, both would come to appreciate the other's respect for law and just legal proceedings.

In 1961, the Freedom Riders rode interstate buses into Alabama in mixed racial groups to protest segregation. They were met with terrible mob violence by white segregationists. A bus was firebombed outside of Anniston, where the mob held the doors closed to burn the riders inside to death. An undercover state investigator - placed on the bus by Governor Patterson and his Director of Public Safety, Floyd Mann - brandished a revolver and the mob yielded, allowing the riders to escape the flames, though many were still beaten and harrassed in the streets. Although the two events took place a year apart, this play puts the sit-in at the courthouse and the bombing of the Freedom Riders' bus on the same day.