

# **No Easy Road to Freedom: Lessons in American Diversity**

*By Tom Quinn*

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## **DEDICATION**

For Nate

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

The road to freedom for people of diversity has not been easy in American history. Students will learn of the struggles for acceptance of a wide range of minority groups through poetry, drama, and song. Hear the stories that made America and that continue to shape our nation today. From immigration to oppression to acceptance; listen to the stories of bravery and determination from the likes of heroines like Rosa Parks and brave individuals who represent Asian, Italian, Latino, Jewish and Native Americans. It has been no easy road, but students can see that history constantly changes and unfolds and they are part of the American mosaic. About 40 minutes.

## **ORIGINAL PRODUCTION**

“No Easy Road to Freedom” was first performed by the Walnut Street Theatre Outreach program in January of 2002 and was directed by Bill Van Horn.

ANGELO: J. Andrew Keitch  
MARTIN: Steven Wright  
LUCY: Jennifer Jung  
GLORIA: Susan Rankus

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(2 m, 2 w)*

*This is a play for four actors. Each actor will have one character name assigned to them, but they will play many roles throughout the play.*

**ANGELO:** Italian Immigrant, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Poppa, Bus Driver, Native-American, Prof. Edward H. Clarke, '50s Dad, Matthew Shepard.

**MARTIN:** Dr. King, Businessman, Foreman, Soldier, Langston Hughes.

**LUCY:** Japanese Internee, Rosa Parks, Paperboy, Longshoreman, '50s Housewife.

**GLORIA:** Flapper, Rachel, Longshoreman, Soldier, Mexican-American, Susan B. Anthony, Rosie the Riveter, World Trade Center Witness.

## **No Easy Road to Freedom**

*(AT RISE: ANGELO, MARTIN, LUCY, and GLORIA enter a bare stage.)*

ANGELO: I'm different.

LUCY: I don't look like each one of you.

GLORIA: I wear strange clothes.

MARTIN: I don't speak the way you do.

LUCY: Sometimes people hate me because I'm different.

GLORIA: Sometimes history has been cruel to people like me.

ANGELO: Sometimes hate and ignorance makes people blind.

MARTIN: Sometimes people have to rise up against oppression.

ANGELO: I'm different.

LUCY: I don't look like each one of you.

GLORIA: I wear strange clothes.

MARTIN: We're Americans.

ANGELO: And we're different.

LUCY: And that's good.

*(ANGELO breaks away as the other three ACTORS exit. When he speaks he speaks with a heavy Italian accent.)*

ANGELO: It was 1920 and I was sleeping on the deck of the ship. My parents had purchased tickets in the steerage compartment, but you couldn't breathe. It was springtime and while it was cold, anything was better than that cramped space below the decks. It was April. I remember it so clearly. The fog had settled in over New York Harbor and out of the mist I saw her. She was the most beautiful lady I had ever seen. You call her the lady with the lamp. I made my children memorize the words at the bottom of the statue:

*(The other ACTORS enter.)*

GLORIA: "Give me your tired,  
MARTIN: Your poor,  
LUCY: Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
GLORIA: The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
MARTIN: Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me.  
ANGELO: I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

*(ALL exit except ANGELO.)*

ANGELO: America was the golden door and Sicily, where I was born, was the teeming shore. If you don't know where Sicily is, it is the little island off the coast of Italy. Italy is shaped like a boot and Sicily is the island that looks like it's getting kicked. That is what I felt like as a boy in Sicily. Then my parents told me we were going to America. *(Out to audience.)* How many of you have been to the Statue of Liberty? *(Pause.)* You should all go! Did you know it was 305 feet tall? Do you know what the tablet she holds in her hand says? *(Pause.)* It says July 4, 1776. The day freedom was born into this world. It is a magical place, that statue. But just because freedom is written on a beautiful statue doesn't mean everyone is free. No, it is not that easy. When I got to New York everything was moving so fast.

*(LUCY enters as paperboy. MARTIN enters in business suit holding an old-fashioned phone.)*

LUCY: Extra, extra, read all about it! President Wilson says League of Nations will end all war! Stock Market continues to rise! Charlie Chaplin to make new movie! Baseball moving on after Black Sox scandal! *(She continues only quieter so Martin can be heard.)*

MARTIN: *(Talking to an unseen person.)* If the price is going up then buy, buy, buy! If it goes down then sell, sell, sell! Things are great--there will never be a crash!

*(HE continues as ANGELO takes stage now talking over both the Lucy and Martin.)*

ANGELO: There was activity everywhere you looked. I thought to myself as I looked at all the faces: I'm different. I could barely speak any English and life seemed bigger than in Italy. And the music...

*(SFX: A CHARLESTON is heard. GLORIA enters dressed as a flapper. She dances with ANGELO as MARTIN and LUCY pantomime their stockbroker and paperboy roles. They also join in. At the end of the dance Gloria exits and the MUSIC continues as Martin and Lucy continue yelling until Angelo is overwhelmed by the activity and the sound.)*

ANGELO: *(Cont.)* It was all too much!

*(The SOUND stops and MARTIN and LUCY exit.)*

ANGELO: *(Cont.)* In America we could do whatever we wanted. I was sixteen and I needed a job.

*(ANGELO walks over to MARTIN who has now reentered as a Dock Foreman. GLORIA and LUCY enter as Longshoremen.)*

ANGELO: Excuse, I need work.

GLORIA: Say pal, where are you from?

ANGELO: Sicily.

LUCY: That in Jersey?

ANGELO: Please ... work ... job ... food.

MARTIN: You speak English?

ANGELO: A little.

MARTIN: I don't need any Wops taking the jobs of good American men!

LUCY: Yeh, why don't you go back to where you came from!

*(ANGELO walks away dejected as the OTHERS exit.)*

ANGELO: I did not know what a Wop was. Apparently it was a name used to make fun of Italian immigrants. It did not take me long to realize that people looked at me differently because I was Italian. I did whatever I could to learn the language, but it took time. People looked at me like I was stupid and somehow did not want to be a part of this country. I learned enough English so I could understand and things were not so confusing to me. Yet I still had an accent and every once in a while people would say things behind my back. But I did not care, I was free. But one day a long time after I came here, 21 years to be exact, the United States went to war with Italy. I was glad. I was an American and I did not like Mussolini, the leader of Italy. But because of my accent they placed a curfew on my neighborhood and some of my friends were arrested because the government thought they might be spies. All because of their accent. I came to America to be free. I wanted a place where my children could grow to be whatever they wanted and I knew that someday I would have a grandson who would not speak with an accent like me. *(Drops the accent.)* A grandson who was not judged as being different. But fit in perfectly. No one would judge him as anything but what he was. An American. Maybe some of you have relatives who sound or sounded like my grandfather did. My grandfather lived the dream and saw that lady with the lamp. It was no easy road, but he found his way to freedom.

*(ANGELO exits. SFX: An air raid siren is heard as LUCY enters.)*

LUCY: *(Out to audience.)* How many of you knew that Italian Americans were held by the police during World War II? *(Pause.)* It's the kind of thing you don't learn about in history class. Many of you might think history class is boring; all those names and dates and strange sounding places. I got my history from my grandmother. You see, I don't look like each one of you.

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