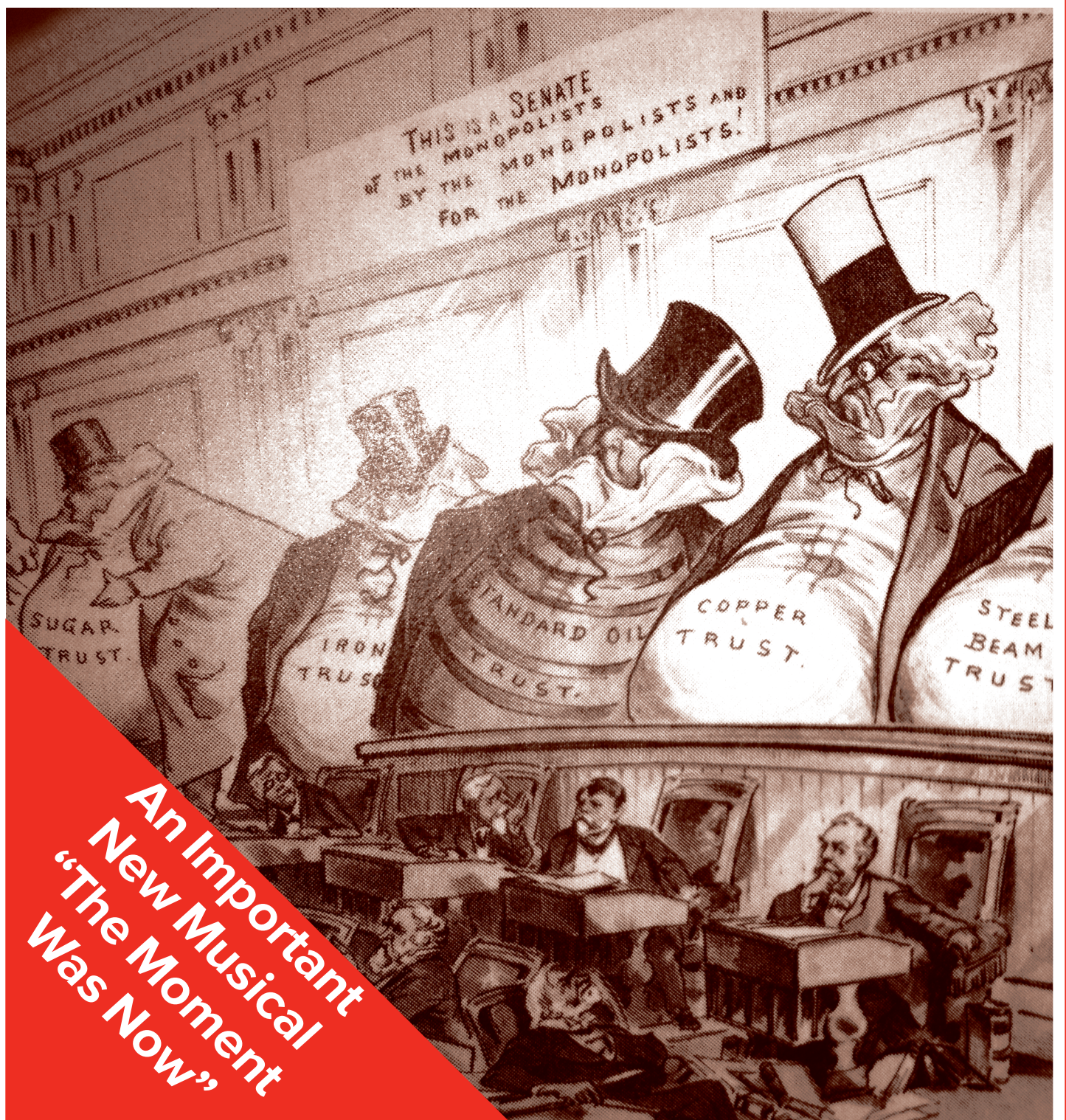


Social Policy

Organizing for Social & Economic Justice • www.socialpolicy.org



An Important
New Musical
"The Moment
Was Now"

An Important New Musical “The Moment Was Now”

By Mike Miller

Chester Burke, pianist works on a Moment Song



Darryll Moch, Artistic Director and Glenn Pearson, Music Director work on a song with EZ Jackson

“**T**he Moment Was Now” is former union organizer Gene Bruskin’s musical that imagines abolitionist and women’s suffrage supporter Frederick Douglass convening a post-Civil War era meeting of key leaders of the time to discuss unity. It’s about a moment when our country almost did the right thing! Everyday’s news is a continuing reminder of the play’s timeliness and importance.

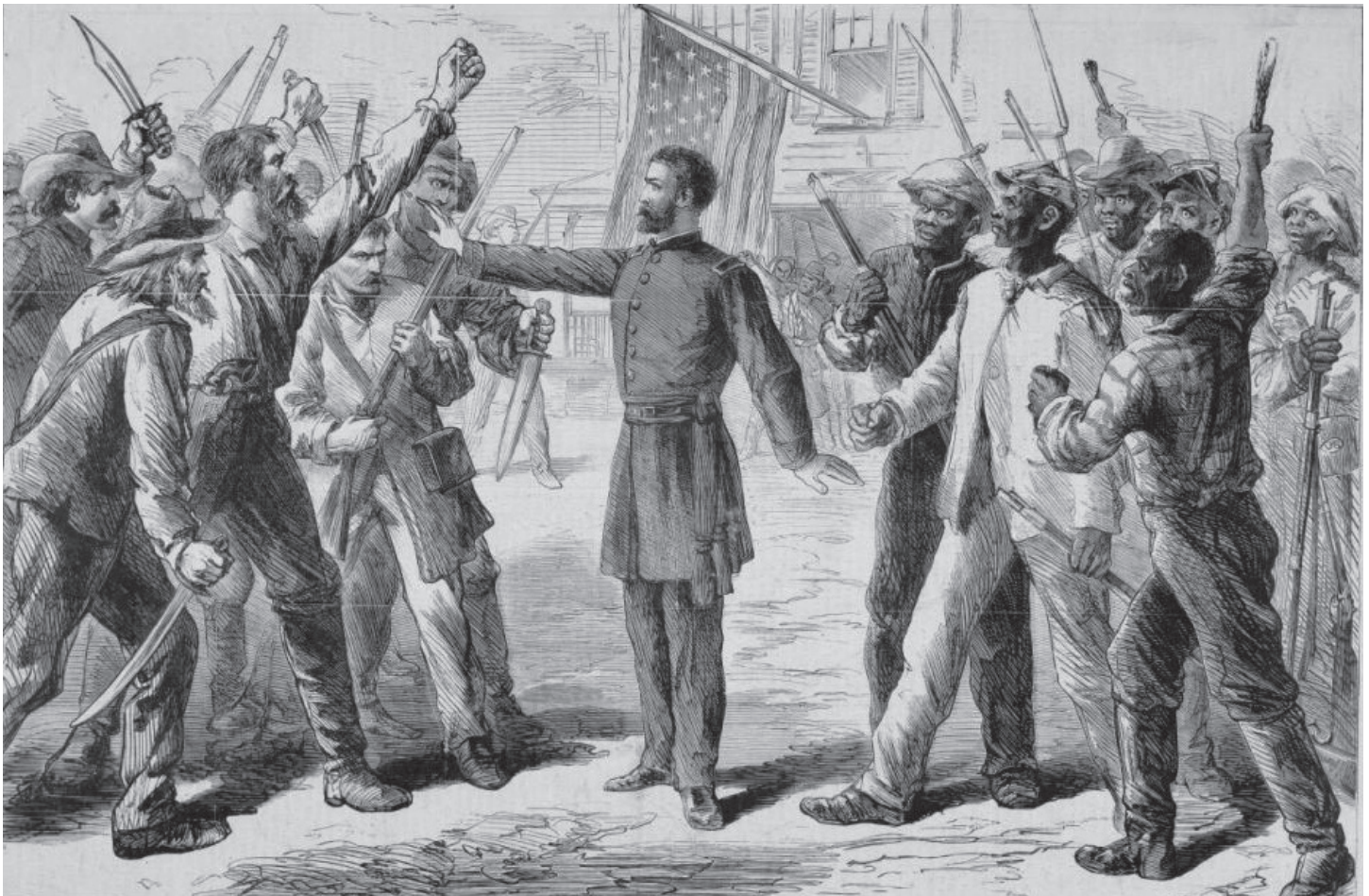
In its story, Douglass asks four leaders to discuss unity across lines of class, race and gender in the troubled period of Reconstruction. He uses words actually written or spoken by his characters, and turns them into song or spoken rhyme (with very slight poetic license for theatrical

purposes), but it is only in fiction that they actually meet.

Those convened by Douglass are Susan B Anthony, Isaac Myers, William Sylvis and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper.

Susan B Anthony is well known as a feminist leader. Far less known is her role as an organizer of women workers and delegate to National Labor Union meetings. Also less known is the fact that she was an abolitionist, active in the anti-slavery movement and the campaigns for the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution. But when women were excluded from the 15th Amendment’s extension of suffrage to freed slaves, she opposed it.

About Isaac Myers, the August 30, 2017 Baltimore Sun said:



The Freedman's Bureau—a key institution created by the federal government to manage reconstruction

In 1865, Isaac Myers stood on the front lines of the fight for civil rights. After white waterfront workers shut down the docks and forced African-Americans out of jobs that they had held since the 1830s, Myers decided to act. He and a group of 15 black Baltimoreans solicited Baltimore's black community to fund a cooperative business that they named The Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company...

In 1869, Myers attended the National Labor Union meeting in Philadelphia before organizing the Colored National Labor Union. The organization was one of the first nationwide black labor unions. Throughout his life, Myers not only championed African American civil rights but also worked diligently to overcome the racial prejudice that divided the nation after the Civil War ended.

William Sylvis was a class conscious militant and led the country's largest union federation, National Labor Union (NLU), which in 1869 had more than 300,000 members. Like the CIO, its membership included skilled and unskilled workers. But it resisted policies of full equality for women and racial minorities, though Sylvis invited both Anthony and Myers to speak at the NLU convention. It supported the Chinese exclusion act and didn't have women or African-American members. Sylvis,

however, became open to new ideas before his premature death at age 41, in 1869.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was a freeborn African-American suffragette and fighter for African-American rights. At the May, 1866 Eleventh National Women's Rights Convention in New York City she said,

We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul. You tried that in the case of the Negro. You pressed him down for two centuries; and in so doing you crippled the moral strength and paralyzed the spiritual energies of the white men of the country....[In] the South, the legislation of the country was in behalf of the rich slaveholders, while the poor white man was neglected...

I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to cure all the ills of life...[L]ike men they may be divided into three classes, the good, the bad, and the indifferent...

The power of the rising robber barons is embodied in Jay Gould, who bought politicians from whatever political party, and whose infamous line, "I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half," becomes in the play, "I can hire one half of you to shoot the other half down." Given corporate efforts since the early 1970s to defeat



The national colored convention in session at Washington, D.C.

union organizing drives and break unions with contracts, the appropriateness of “The Moment Was Now” is pretty plain!

Bruskin created “The Moment Was Now” for union halls, public school auditoriums, religious congregation, and other gathering places where it can be “theater for the 90%.” He also hopes for formal theater productions. The “Moment” team includes Artistic Director Daryl! and Musical Director Glenn Pearson.

Excerpts From “The Moment Was Now”

Below are some brief excerpts of the lyrics/music and spoken word that goes through the first act, laying bare some of the unresolved conflicts between the great movements of the day, to be developed and explored further in the second act.

The play opens with a Broadway style musical number that sets out the broader perspective for the story that follows.

BALTIMORE 1869
 JUST OVER THE MASON DIXON LINE
 A CITY WITH BOTH AND A NORTHERN AND
 SOUTHERN MIND

MEETING PLACE FOR THE SLAVE AND THE
 FREE
 THE CIVIL WAR IS HISTORY
 BUT THE PAST IS LOOMING
 WHILE THE FUTURE IS BOOMING
 EVERYONE IS NURSING THE MASSIVE WOUNDS
 OF WAR
 DESPERATELY WANTING MORE

(For the next section think “my country tis of thee”)

SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY,
 WHERE EVERYONE IS FREE
 GREAT POSSIBILITIES
 OF THEE I SING
 LAND OF DEMOCRACY
 BUT GREAT HYPOCRISY
 OF HOSPITALITY,
 AND BRUTALITY
 OF OPPORTUNITY,
 BUT MUCH DISUNITY
 HOPE FOR COMMUNITY
 OF THEE I SING

LET IT BE THE DREAM THAT DREAMERS
 DREAMED
 LET AMERICA BE ALL THAT IT CAN BE

Scene III

Frederick Douglass enters and addresses a large meeting, in this case the theater audience)

Greetings friends
Thank you for your presence at this announcement
Since you are here you are no doubt aware
I am Frederick Douglass,
I have worked hard to earn my reputation,
By trials and tribulations
As a slave who didn't behave
And as a fighter for freedom
So I have come to the conclusion
That I must bring together
The people who can unite our great movements
Before it is too late
To create a plan for massive foment
In this moment,
For moments come and moments pass
But moments don't last forever
And we cannot freeze them
If we do not seize them.

(Introduces/points to William Sylvis, Susan B Anthony, Isaac Myers. Frances Harper joins the group)

You understand that, at this hour,
Radicalism is the popular passport to power.
That power concedes nothing without a demand.
That this is the time for fire, thunder and earthquakes

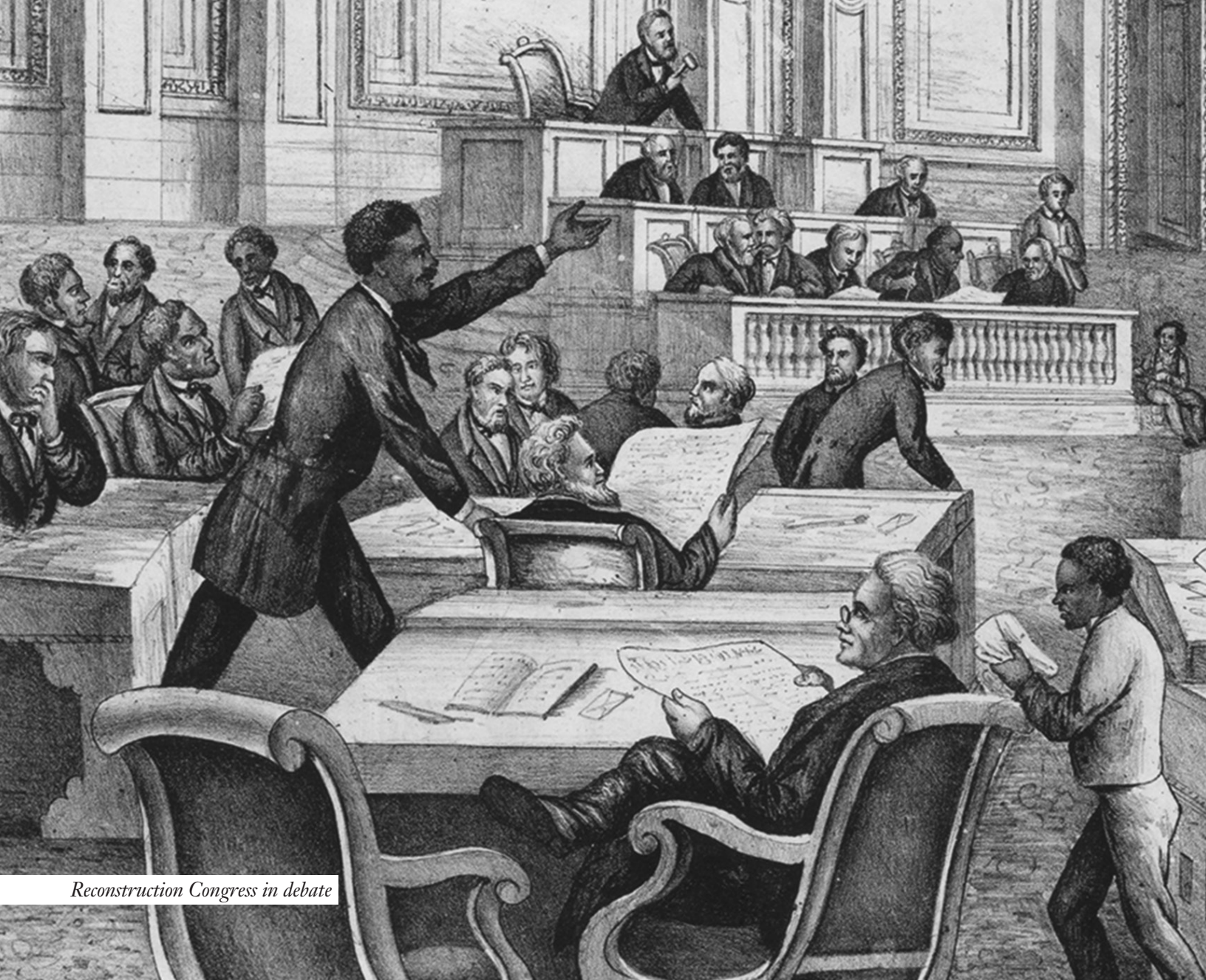
Scene IV

Douglass leaves to meet with President Grant. William Sylvis opens the conversation and addressed the others, who are there by his invitation to attend the convention of the National Labor Union

We are destined to form a triple power
To seize the hour,
And wrest the scepter of government from the idle
and the thieves,
A cooperative world where all produce,
No longer reduced to two classes, rich and poor,
A social and political revolution
That the world has never seen before.

Frederick Douglass and Isaac Myers-two key figures in the musical, both shipyard workers in Baltimore (Douglass escaped to freedom from the shipyard) in different periods and both leaders in establishing the (Colored) National Labor Union





Reconstruction Congress in debate

(All: YES! YES!)

(He sings)

*THIS IS THE LAST GRAND STRUGGLE
FOR HUMAN LIBERTY
LET THE PEOPLE ANSWER
THAT EVERY MAN BE FREE
AND IF THE BALLOT FAILS US
THEN SHED BLOOD WE WILL
TO THOSE WHO ASSAIL US
WE WILL NOT BE STILL
I WANT IT ALL...*

Scene V

Issac Myers speaks and then sings with Frances Harper, expressing their concerns about the deep racism still existing in the nation and in the NLU, which at this point consists of entirely white men.

ISAAC

There is something the white worker must understand
Slave labor degraded not just the colored man,
But all who labored in our land,
Now that slaves have cut the ropes
That bound them by the neck,
The white man is still fettered by the ankle,
Keeping unity in check.

(FRANCES AND ISAAC sing)

*WE COME THIS FAR
STRONGER WE ARE
THERE IS NO TURNING BACK
AND SO I SAY
CAN WE ALL AGREE
BROTHER, SYLVIS
THAT YOUR "WE" INCLUDES ME? (3X)*



AIN'T I A WOMAN SHE DID PROFESS
WE DON'T NEED AN ALIBI
WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY

SUSAN

It's either solidarity

FRANCES

Or be damned for posterity

BOTH

Equal pay for equal work!!

Scene VII

JAY GOULD, lurks, masked, in the background throughout the play, occasionally addressing the audience but never seen by the main characters. Here he sings.

I AM JAY GOULD

CHIEF AMONG THE RULERS OF THE RULED

EXPERT AT FOOLING ALL THE FOOLS
BUT WE ARE PROUD OF OUR WEALTH,
WE OWN AMERICA
WE GOT IT, WE BOUGHT IT AND WE
INTEND TO KEEP IT

Scene IX

ISAAC AND FRANCIS sing as the first act ends and the conflicts between race, class and sex have been drawn out as the barriers for unity, setting the stage for the second act as the struggle to overcome their differences and unite their movements.

NO WE WON'T WAIT

NO, NO -NO, NO, NO

WE WON'T WAIT NO MORE,

NO MORE

WE WON'T WAIT NO MORE!

(Spoken)

250 YEARS IS ENUF

Scene VI

Frances Harper and Susan B. Anthony raise their concerns about the unwillingness of the NLU to include women.

FRANCES

So close is the bond between man and woman that you cannot raise one without lifting the other.

SUSAN

Gentlemen—Absent the women, you have only half the might.

SUSAN AND FRANCES sing

WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY
THOUGH SOME SEEM TO FORGET
AND WHEN WE STAND FOR EQUAL RIGHTS
WE'RE VIEWED AS A THREAT
SOJOURNER TRUTH SAID IT BEST

Gene Bruskin is a retired trade unionist with 40 years in the labor movement as an organizer and campaigner. He wrote one other musical for workers since retirement: *Pray for the Dead: A Musical Tale of Morgues, Moguls and Mutiny*. (www.prayfortheadamusical.com) For more information or to support this work write to genebruskin@gmail.com.

Mike Miller can be found at www.organizetrainingcenter.org

For more information go to www.themomentwasnow.com

The "The Moment Was Now" is playing September 13–15; 20–22 at Emmanuel Episcopal Church 811 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD