



**ABE LINCOLN  
AND UNCLE  
TOM IN THE  
WHITE HOUSE**

**BY  
CARLYLE BROWN**



**DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.**



## ABE LINCOLN AND UNCLE TOM IN THE WHITE HOUSE

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ABE LINCOLN AND UNCLE TOM IN THE WHITE HOUSE was first presented by Carlyle Brown & Company at the Guthrie Theater's Dowling Studio (Joe Dowling, Artistic Director) in March 2014. It was directed by Carlyle Brown, the scenic design was by Joseph Stanley, the costume design was by Clare Brauch, the lighting design was by Mike Wangen, and the sound design was by Andrew Mayer. The cast was as follows:

LINCOLN .....	Steve Hendrickson
TOM .....	James A. Williams
ELIZABETH .....	India Gurley
MARY .....	Jodi Kellogg

## **CHARACTERS**

ABE LINCOLN

UNCLE TOM

ELIZABETH KECKLEY

MARY TODD LINCOLN

## **SET**

A spare wall-less room with a door upstage center, and two windows, wall hangings, and furniture defining the space.

# ABE LINCOLN AND UNCLE TOM IN THE WHITE HOUSE

The White House  
September 22, 1862

*We begin with the opening strains of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” as house lights go down.*

*Sounds and lighting slowly rise of a Civil War battle with cannon and rocket fire, musket volleys and the cries of battling forces. In its midst is the repeating voice of a boy calling out for his father.*

*Lights slowly rise on Lincoln sleeping restlessly on his horse-hair sofa.*

*Tom enters through the door carrying a silver tray with a near-blinding backlight behind him. Tom closes the door and the lights and sounds of the raging war outside go away. Lincoln awakes at Tom’s entrance.*

TOM. Good evening Mr. President. Or should I say soon to be morning. It must be hard to tell with the terrible hours you must keep. I brought you a tray. There’s sherry, a pitcher of water, a side of cold beef, and some warm bread and butter. Oh yes, and some jam, strawberry jam. I love strawberry jam. Don’t you Mr. President.

LINCOLN. Yes I do and thank you very much, but I’ve never seen you before. Who are you?

TOM. My name is Tom Mr. President. Folks call me Uncle Tom. Have you read that book by Mrs. Beecher Stowe?

LINCOLN. Yes, I have. Practically everybody has.

TOM. Then you already know me Mr. President, 'cause that's me, Uncle Tom.

LINCOLN. Are you trying to tell me that you're the Uncle Tom in the book, that you're a character in a book?

TOM. That's right Mr. President.

LINCOLN. Well Uncle Tom I don't know if you came from any book, but you certainly are a character. I had no idea that anybody in my cabinet had any sense of humor whatsoever. I think I'm finally seeing a little ray of hope. So if you're Uncle Tom from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* then tell me where do you come from?

TOM. I come from Kentucky in the town of P. I don't why Mrs. Beecher Stowe does that. She always gives a town a letter, never a name. It's always the town of P or the village of T or B across the river, never a name. It just don't make any sense. Why a person just can't tell where they are with only a letter and not a name. Anyway I live outside of the town of P in a little cabin on the Shelby plantation. That's where I come from Mr. President.

LINCLON. And who then would George Shelby be?

TOM. Who you asking this Mr. President? Master George, little George, why I practically raised him. Why I did raise him. I'm the reason he's the man he is today. Master George taught me how to read. Imagine that, a little boy teaching a grown man how to read. Sounds funny but that's the way it is.

LINCLON. You certainly know the book alright, but come on friend, why don't you give a fellow a leg up and tell me who put you up to this? How did you come to be here?

TOM. I have no idea Mr. President. All I know is that I found myself downstairs in a kitchen with this here silver tray sitting there and something tells me to take it upstairs and bring it to you. And so I did. I do things on faith you know. Yes sir that's the way I am. If my faith tells me to something I do it.

LINCOLN. Well, how did your faith get you past my security?

TOM. ...Security? I don't know nothing about no security Mr. President. All I know is that I never seen a soul from the time I

picked up this here tray and set it down for you. ...I know Mr. President it's hard to believe sometimes what you see before your eyes, I know 'cause I been here before.

LINCOLN. You've been here before? You've been *here* before.

TOM. Oh yes Mr. President I've been here before. In this same situation I mean. Talking to some white gentleman, big and powerful like yourself and him asking me who I am. Master Shelby he thinks he knows who I am. Master St. Clare that's all he wants to do is to find out. And Simon Legree he just can't figure me out so it makes him mad and he kills me. And I tell them like I'm telling you Mr. President I am just a thought in Mrs. Beecher Stowe's mind and ever since she thought me up for the life of me I can't figure out where I am or who I am.

LINCOLN. Why, that must be an awful state to be in.

TOM. Yes it is Mr. President. Yes it is.

LINCOLN. ...Like living in a kind of purgatory.

TOM. That's the right word for it Mr. President. A purgatory is what it is.

LINCOLN. But how can that be? Then how can I see you and I can touch you, you must come from somewhere.

TOM. Do you have a copy of my book Mr. President?

LINCOLN. ...Your book? What book? ...Oh, you mean that book. ...Your book. ...I have it right here. Here it is *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

TOM. This is where I come from Mr. President... This is the world that I live in. My life is just this thick as this book and the pages are years each one turning and turning one after the other all the way to the end until I'm gone with my body dead and a soul that will last forever. And then Mr. President to my horror I have to go back to the beginning of the book and start turning pages all over and over again.

LINCOLN. My, I must say you do have a rather clever way of turning a literary phrase.

TOM. Well, that's me Mr. President, literary. I'm about as literary as you can get.

# ABE LINCOLN AND UNCLE TOM IN THE WHITE HOUSE

by Carlyle Brown

2M, 2W

Alone in the Executive Office, President Abraham Lincoln is struggling with signing the Emancipation Proclamation when he is mysteriously visited by Uncle Tom, the fictional character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*. These two iconic characters from life and literature—one real, the other fiction—attempt to understand each other across a chasm of race in the midst of the Civil War. Throughout one late night and into the dawning day, they find themselves crossing over into each other's world in a tale of suffering, self-discovery, and redemption.

*"[A] meaty and ingenious one-act... a crafty conversation, based on an absurd setup, on freedom and slavery, on war and faith. ...[Brown] is a master of this type of interrogation of historical figures. ...In ABE LINCOLN, he shows the historical power of Uncle Tom...even as he attempts to rescue him from being a byword for betrayal. This Uncle Tom is a man of providence and progress... ABE LINCOLN, which packs a punch in 75 minutes, [is] excellent work that is not to be missed."*  
—Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)

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