

# **DRAMATURGICAL INFORMATION FOR *STOLEN GIRLS***

**BY SHAMAR BARNETT**



# RICHELL HART

## Biography of the Playwright:

Richell Hart, a native of Los Angeles California who currently resides in Valdosta Georgia, She received her Bachelor's of Fine Arts from VSU in 2015 and a Master's in Creative Writing in 2017 from Goddard College, and she also has a license in cosmetology. Over the past 18 years her passion for writing/directing/poetry and acting has opened many doors in her career. Her many credits include: Acting Credits - *She Stoops to Conquer* (Landlord), *Suspense the Life of Riley* (Secretary); Directing Credits - *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, *Hurricane Cocaine*, *Two Peas in Pod*, *Mother Knows Best*. She has been a member and performer for the group Poetic Magic for 19 years. She has worked with South Health District and Percy Chastang as mentor, spoken word artist, and motivational speaker, and as an instructor of workshops at Pines Women Campus. She also authored two original plays, *Finding Your Voice* and *Making a Difference* for the Youth Methodist Home. She credits God, family, and her educators for their support.

## Excerpts from an Interview with Richell Hart on *Stolen Girls*, by Shamar Barnett:

"This story moved my spirit in 2017 when I was in graduate school. I saw a short 7-minute video on social media. At the time my daughter was 13 and I couldn't imagine the youth of this day and age being able to survive such inhumane conditions. I also enjoy shedding light on unfamiliar stories. People need to become aware of historical events that took place in this country that affected all mankind. Our youth need to be challenged to become more involved in political and racial occurrences. The human race as a whole should take responsibility in the fight against racism. It is not a black issue but a human issue. I would like this play to impact the audience in a way that they feel responsible as humans to partake in the necessary change of racism in our country. It is important that the audience is aware of all the elements of the play. The songs are connected to the characters as well as the time period and the culture of the black race. The games reflect the time period and capture the youth of the characters. The poems are a piece of me that translate into a connection between the characters as they begin to develop a bond."





# CIVIL RIGHTS CONTEXT

## ALBANY MOVEMENT (1961-1962)



- The Albany Movement formed on November 17, 1961 by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Ministerial Alliance, the Federation of Women's Clubs, and Negro Voters League and was the first mass movement of the civil era in South Georgia. Its goals centered on desegregation of the entire community focusing specifically on travel facilities such as bathrooms, bus stations, restaurants, motels, and other public spaces.
- This Movement was known as an extension of the Reconstruction Era, dedicated to electing African American men to serve as political officials in local and state offices.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. and along with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was drawn to the Movement, mobilizing meetings and protests in December of 1961. King was arrested along with other black protesters withdrawing from the movement. Over 1,000 African American protestors in Albany and surrounding rural counties were arrested and ordered to pay fines or serve 45 days in jail. Because of the number of arrests the Movement ended unsuccessfully in summer of 1962.
- King's involvement gave the Albany Movement its significance in history of civil rights movement later applying the same narrative in Birmingham, AL which becomes a success.

# CIVIL RIGHTS CONTEXT

## Americus Movement (1963-1965)

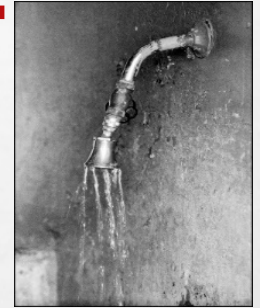
- Following the Albany Movement, civil rights activism emerges to Americus organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) along with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The movement targeted voter registration and the citizenship education plan.
- The first protests were in July 1963, at the Martin Theater where more than 250 activists consisting primarily of teenagers and preteens protested segregation. At the first protest, more than thirty girls were arrested and sent to a Stockade in Leesburg, GA.
- As law enforcement became more involved, the number of arrests increased. The movement later slowly collapsed in July 1963, due to the arrests of so many civil rights activists.
- The Americus Movement and similar movements in Alabama resulted in The Voting Rights Act which was signed in early August giving 2,000 Africans Americans the right to vote in Sumter County.





# THE GIRLS IN THE LEESBURG STOCKADE

- On July 1963, 33 girls between ages of 13-15 were detained during a SNCC protest at the segregated Martin Theater in Americus, Ga. After 30 minutes of the girls trying to buy tickets, a big truck pulled up and police officers told everyone they were under arrest.
- The girls were taken to Dawson, 30 miles south from Americus, where they spent one night in jail. They were then hauled to the stockade in Leesburg where they stayed for 45 days. Because the girls weren't formally arrested, prison authorities did not inform the girls' parents of their detainment, so their families had no idea where they were.
- In the stockade, they experienced harsh conditions. They slept on cement floors and only had access to a single toilet that had completely stopped. Their only source of water was a shower head. The stockade was infested with mosquitoes and roaches. They were fed nothing but egg sandwiches and undercooked hamburgers.
- The girls' parents found out where they were being held through a janitor at the Stockade who personally went to their homes and notified them.
- Word got back to the SNCC and the photographer of the organization, Danny Lyon, traveled to the stockade and snuck in to provide proof of the horrific conditions. On September 14, 1963, the front-page article in the Chicago Defender led with the headline, "Kids Sleeping on Jail Floor: Americus Hellhole for Many," and featured Lyons' photos.
- The girls were released in mid-September 1963 without charge of any crime, but their parents were ordered to pay two-dollar boarding fee.
- Despite the press, there was no significant public outcry and it faded from local memory. For decades, none of the girls spoke out about incident. Nine of the girls are still living today, and some of them have moved far away from Americus.



# WHERE ARE THE GIRLS OF THE LEESBURG STOCKADE TODAY?



**SHIRLEY GREEN REESE**

Dr. Green-Reese has since earned numerous awards and accolades. She went on to earn her Bachelor of Science Degree from Savannah State University, her Master's from Georgia State University, and a Ph.D from Florida State University. In 2017, she was the recipient of the "Fortitude Award" from the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus. Dr. Green-Reese has served on various National College Athletic Association (NCAA) committees, such as the NCAA Championship Project Team, the NCAA Post-Graduate Scholarship Committee and the NCAA Gender Equity Task Force. She is also an Americus city councilwoman and board president for the Boys & Girls Club of Americus-Sumter County. She has received numerous awards for her "unusually devoted service. . . in helping youth to achieve a fuller and richer life through the positive guidance and influence of the Boys & Girls Clubs."



**LULU M. WESTBROOK**

Griffin is a writer and poet that has written poems based on her experience in the stockade and the civil rights movement. She co-produced a documentary titled *LuLu and The Girls Of Americus, GA* and has written a Teaching Tool, titled "FREEDOM is NOT FREE!" She left Americus at the age of sixteen and moved to Rochester, New York. She has travelled to many colleges, schools, and universities sharing her story with young people. "I was born into segregation and it was difficult for me as a young girl. In 1863, President Lincoln had supposedly freed the slaves. But, we were still living at the lower stratum of our society," said Griffin. "Where I came from, I was standing up for what I believed in, trying to take down the Jim Crow laws of segregation. I felt that at a certain time I had to be the change. Not necessarily make the change, but be the change," said Griffin.



**CAROL ANN SEAY**

In 2003, Seay graduated from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. In 2014, she received her doctorate from Andersonville Theology Seminary in Camilla, Georgia. She has traveled stateside and abroad and worked as a long-term substitute teacher for thirty-nine years in public and Christian schools and is also an author. She founded Faith Temple Deliverance Christian Center of Americus, Georgia, where she has been the pastor for fourteen years. She believes that she is an apostle who been chosen by God.