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The Writing Works

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Odyssey Productions
Formations Exhibit Design
The Old Capitol – Museum of Mississippi History

"The Honorable Representatives Speak"

Final Script

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Staging: This production will be filmed in the House Chamber, with authentic lighting and acoustic characteristics. Great care will be taken to match the shadowy ambiance of pre-electric lighting. We will use and/or simulate window daylight or gaslight that will have an impressionistic period feeling.

Story #1: The Secession Convention of 1861

Two reenactment actors in period costuming deliver excerpts from speeches that hold opposite positions of the secession issue:

"An Address Setting Forth the Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of Mississippi"

... countered by...

"Union and Secession in Mississippi" delivered by John H. Wood

Fade in:

1. The House Chamber.

a) We begin with a Historian walking through an empty house chamber, giving a brief introduction for what we're about to see.

Historian: (on camera)

(ad-libbing some background):

- Abraham Lincoln was elected president in November 1860; his party pledged to restrict slavery.
- This was a sure sign to Mississippians that the abolishment of slavery was imminent.
- South Carolina seceded from Union on December 20th.

slow "match dissolve":

b) The Historian fades out and now the same scene shows the delegates in their seats. Note that there were male and female spectators in the balcony -- which would be good to show a little because there are so few females in the overall productions.

▶ Gov. Pettus called the legislature into special session; delegates were elected and a state convention met at the Capitol beginning January 7th, 1861.

SFX: Natural background sounds -- people talking, chair legs scraping the floor, etc.

2. The "Declaration" Speaker is at the podium. He likely has a copy of the Declaration in hand that glances down at as he speaks.

SFX: A gavel pounds and the voices quiet down

"Declaration" Speaker: (on camera)

Here, now, honorable Delegates, is ...

"A DECLARATION OF THE IMMEDIATE
CAUSES WHICH INDUCE AND JUSTIFY
THE SECESSION OF THE STATE OF
MISSISSIPPI FROM THE FEDERAL
UNION.

(pause)

"In the momentous step which our State has taken of dissolving its connection with the government of which we so long formed a part ...

"... it is but just that we should declare the prominent reasons which have induced our course.

"Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery -- the greatest material interest of the world.

cutaway to:

3. Delegates looking at each other and responding favorably.

"Its labor supplies the product which constitutes by far the largest and most important portions of the commerce of the earth.

4. Archival images of slaves working in the fields.

"These products are peculiar to the climate verging on the tropical regions, and by an imperious law of nature, none but the black race can bear exposure to the tropical sun.

5. Archival images of bales of cotton being loaded onto wagons.

"These products have become necessities of the world, and a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization.

cut back to:

6. "Declaration" Speaker becoming adamant.

"That blow has been long aimed at the institution, and was at the point of reaching its consummation. There was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of absolutism, or a dissolution of the Union, whose principles had been subverted to work out our ruin.

cutaway to:

7. Closeups of hands vigorously clapping.

SFX: Spontaneous loud applause

cut back to:

8. The "Declaration Speaker continues:

"... We do not overstate the dangers ...

"The hostility to this institution commenced before the adoption of the Constitution ...

"It has grown until it denies the right of property in slaves ..

cutaway to:

9. Delegates' hands writing notes.

"It refuses the admission of new States into the Union...

"It tramples the original equality of the South underfoot...

cut back to:

10. The "Declaration" Speaker continues:

"It advocates negro equality, socially and politically, and promotes insurrection and incendiarism in our midst.

"It seeks not to elevate or support the slave, but to destroy his present condition without providing a better.

cutaway to:

11. The delegates abuzz talking amongst themselves.

(He speaks louder above the side conversations)

"Utter subjugation awaits us in the Union, if we should consent longer to remain in it.

cut back to:

12. The "Declaration" Speaker delivers his finale:

"We must either submit to degradation, and to the loss of property worth four billions of money, or we must secede from the Union framed by our fathers, to secure this as well as every other species of property. For far less cause than this, our fathers separated from the Crown of England.

"Our decision is made. We follow their footsteps. We embrace the alternative of separation; and for the reasons here stated, we resolve to maintain our rights with the full consciousness of the justice of our course, and the undoubting belief of our ability to maintain it."

13. A wide shot from behind the "Declaration" Speaker showing the delegates gushing with support.

SFX: Great amounts of applause and yelling of support

14. Another "slow match dissolve" so that the House Chambers are empty again except for the Historian.

SFX: Maybe the applause continues a bit as the Historian starts to speak, then fades out

**Historian: (on camera)
(ad-libbing introduction to John Wood):**

- Secessionists including Jefferson Davis dominated the special session.
- John Wood was opposed to secession.
- He was called upon to become a candidate for a seat at the convention and "mounted my horse for a canvass of the county, addressing the people

nearly every day from two to three hours, and sometimes longer, till the day of the election. The result was, my election by a majority of only 34 votes."

15. Similar to Scene 1b -- the scene with the Historian "slowly match dissolves" into the room filled with the delegates.

16. John Wood at the podium; he addresses himself to the Convention President.

John Wood: (on camera)

"Mr. President:

"I have strong convictions, Sir, that the hearts of the people of Mississippi are not in this revolution.

"I am apprehensive that the verdict of the people, upon calm reflection, will be against hastily and rashly tearing down the fairest fabric of Freedom ever erected in the civilized world."

cutaway to:

17. Archival images of slaves working in the fields.

"My ancestors being large slave-holders, and always a slave-holder myself ... I challenge any member of this body for greater devotion to the true interests of the South.

cut back to:

18. John Wood at the podium.

Mr. President: Your ears have been lulled by the cry of peaceable secession; but Sir, there is no such thing as peaceable

secession. It is revolution that you are inaugurating ...

"Peaceable secession! Sir, if ever the sun of this Union goes down, it will sink beneath the horizon bathed in the blood of thousands and tens of thousands of the best men of our country. This day, which has been ushered in with so much enthusiasm ... I fear, will prove the darkest day that ever broke upon the State...

SFX: Perhaps some very weak and scattered applause

cutaway to:

19. The delegates, most of whom are in favor of secession, look at each other and shake their heads.

"The Constitution is the great act of incorporation, binding the States... in a perpetual Union, and their citizens into one common indissoluble nationality.

"The right of secession is a mere abstraction, about as reasonable as the right of a part owner of a boat to destroy his part.

20. Archival images of sailing ships loading cotton to take overseas.

"This sir, is not the only delusion resting upon this body. We have been taught to believe that 'Cotton is King' and that England and France will be forced to intervene in our behalf.

cut back to:

21. John Wood at the podium.

"I fear, Sir, that this is a delusion ... The sympathies, not only of France and England, but of the civilized world will be against us. They are opposed to the institution which underlies this revolution.

"Let me warn you and this Convention, that if Secession is carried out, there will be nothing but ruin and desolation follow in its course -- war, war,"

cutaway to:

22. Archival scenes from the battles that were already going on at the time.

"... inevitable war, the depreciation of every species of property, stop laws, and bankrupt laws, the neglect of agricultural pursuits, the collection of large bodies of troops, the diseases which will necessarily spread among them.

cut back to:

23. John Wood at the podium delivering his finale.

"And before the last act in the great drama is closed, not only war, but 'war, pestilence and famine' will spread over the land a scene of devastation, desolation and destruction."

"The last words I have to say are, that posterity will hold you, Sir, and this Convention, responsible for the act which you this day commit."

SFX: Mostly polite applause with a little bit of enthusiastic clapping

24. Similar to Scene 14 -- another "slow match dissolve" so that the House Chambers are empty again except for the Historian.

Historian: (on camera)
((ad-libbing about what happened immediately after this speech))

‣ On January 9th, delegates voted 85-14 to leave the union.

25. A slow-motion superimposed scene illustrating this scene where people from the balcony hand down the Bonnie Blue Flag, which brings sounds of cheers under the Historian's voice.

‣ From one source: when the vote passed, a Bonnie Blue Flag (one big star on a field of blue) "was handed down from spectators in the balcony to the delegates on the floor, which prompted a tumultuous response."

- Mississippi seceded January 9
- Florida seceded January 10
- Alabama seceded January 11
- Georgia seceded January 19
- Louisiana seceded January 26
- The Mississippi Convention was held until January 26 (there's a book of the proceedings)
- Texas seceded February 1
- Feb. 5th Jefferson Davis of Miss. was elected President of the Confederate States of America

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To see the complete script, contact me at matrazzo@msn.com
