Git on Board

(Blackness. Cut by drums pounding. Then slides, rapidly flashing before us. Images we've all seen before, of African slaves being captured, loaded onto ships, tortured. The images flash, flash, flash. The drums crescendo. Blackout. And then lights reveal Miss Pat, frozen. She is black, pert, and cute. She has a flip to her hair and wears a hot pink mini-skirt stewardess uniform.)

(She stands in front of a curtain which separates her from an offstage cockpit.)

(An electronic bell goes "ding" and Miss Pat comes to life, presenting herself in a friendly but rehearsed manner, smiling and speaking as she has done so many times before.)

Miss Pat: Welcome aboard Celebrity Slaveship, departing the Gold Coast and making short stops at Bahia, Port Au Prince, and Havana, before our final destination of Savannah.

Hi. I'm Miss Pat and I'll be serving you here in Cabin A. We will be crossing the Atlantic at an altitude that's pretty high, so you must wear your shackles at all times.

(She removes a shackle from the overhead compartment and demonstrates.)

To put on your shackle, take the right hand and close the metal ring around your left hand like so. Repeat the action using your left hand to secure the right. If you have any trouble bonding yourself, I'd be more than glad to assist.

Once we reach the desired altitude, the Captain will turn off the "Fasten Your Shackle" sign . . . (She
efficiently points out the "FASTEN YOUR SHACKLE" signs on either side of her, which light up.) . . . allowing you a chance to stretch and dance in the aisles a bit. But otherwise, shackles must be worn at all times.

(The "Fasten Your Shackles" signs go off.)

Miss Pat: Also, we ask that you please refrain from call-and-response singing between cabins as that sort of thing can lead to rebellion. And, of course, no drums are allowed on board. Can you repeat after me, "No drums." (She gets the audience to repeat.) With a little more enthusiasm, please. "No drums." (After the audience repeats it.) That was great!

Once we're airborne, I'll be by with magazines, and earphones can be purchased for the price of your first-born male.

If there's anything I can do to make this middle passage more pleasant, press the little button overhead and I'll be with you faster than you can say, "Go down, Moses." (She laughs at her "little joke.") Thanks for flying Celebrity and here's hoping you have a pleasant takeoff.

(The engines surge, the "Fasten Your Shackles" signs go on, and over-articulate Muzak voices are heard singing as Miss Pat pulls down a bucket seat and "shackles-up" for takeoff.)

Voices:
GET ON BOARD CELEBRITY SLAVESHIP
GET ON BOARD CELEBRITY SLAVESHIP
GET ON BOARD CELEBRITY SLAVESHIP
THERE'S ROOM FOR MANY A MORE

(The engines reach an even, steady hum. Just as Miss Pat rises and replaces the shackles in the overhead compartment, the faint sound of African drumming is heard.)
Miss Pat: Hi. Miss Pat again. I'm sorry to disturb you, but someone is playing drums. And what did we just say . . . "No drums." It must be someone in Coach. But we here in Cabin A are not going to respond to those drums. As a matter of fact, we don't even hear them. Repeat after me. "I don't hear any drums." (The audience repeats.) And "I will not rebel."

(The audience repeats. The drumming grows.)

Miss Pat: (Placating) OK, now I realize some of us are a bit edgy after hearing about the tragedy on board The Laughing Mary, but let me assure you Celebrity has no intention of throwing you overboard and collecting the insurance. We value you!

(She proceeds to single out individual passengers/audience members.)

Why the songs you are going to sing in the cotton fields, under the burning heat and stinging lash, will metamorphose and give birth to the likes of James Brown and the Fabulous Flames. And you, yes you, are going to come up with some of the best dances. The best dances! The Watusi! The Funky Chicken! And just think of what you are going to mean to William Faulkner.

All right, so you're gonna have to suffer for a few hundred years, but from your pain will come a culture so complex. And, with this little item here . . . (She removes a basketball from the overhead compartment.) . . . you'll become millionaires!

(There is a roar of thunder. The lights quiver and the "Fasten Your Shackles" signs begin to flash. Miss Pat quickly replaces the basketball in the overhead compartment and speaks very reassuringly.)

Miss Pat: No, don't panic. We're just caught in a little thunder storm. Now the only way you're going to
make it through is if you abandon your God and worship a new one. So, on the count of three, let's all sing. One, two, three...

NOBODY KNOWS DE TROUBLE I SEEN

Oh, I forgot to mention, when singing, omit the T-H sound. "The" becomes "de." "They" becomes "dey."
Got it? Good!

NOBODY KNOWS...
NOBODY KNOWS...

Oh, so you don't like that one? Well then let's try another—

SUMMER TIME
AND DE LIVIN' IS EASY

Gershwin. He comes from another oppressed people so he understands.

FISH ARE JUMPIN'... come on.
AND DE COTTON IS HIGH.
AND DE COTTON IS... Sing, damnit!

(Lights begin to flash, the engines surge, and there is wild drumming. Miss Pat sticks her head through the curtain and speaks with an offstage Captain.)

Miss Pat: What?

Voice of Captain (O.S.): Time warp!

Miss Pat: Time warp! (She turns to the audience and puts on a pleasant face.) The Captain has assured me everything is fine. We're just caught in a little time warp. (Trying to fight her growing hysteria.) On your right you will see the American Revolution, which will give the U.S. of A. exclusive rights to your life. And on your left, the Civil War, which means you will vote Republican until F.D.R. comes along. And now
we're passing over the Great Depression, which means everybody gets to live the way you've been living. (*There is a blinding flash of light, and an explosion. She screams.*) Ahhhhhhhhh! That was World War I, which is not to be confused with World War II . . . (*There is a larger flash of light, and another explosion.*) . . . Ahhhhh! Which is not to be confused with the Korean War or the Vietnam War, all of which you will play a major role in.

Oh, look, now we're passing over the sixties. Martha and the Vandellas . . . "Julia" with Miss Diahann Carroll . . . Malcom X . . . those five little girls in Alabama . . . Martin Luther King . . . Oh no! The Supremes broke up! (*The drumming intensifies.*) Stop playing those drums! Those drums will be confiscated once we reach Savannah. You can't change history! You can't turn back the clock! (*To the audience.*) Repeat after me, I don't hear any drums! I will not rebel! I will not rebel! I will not re—

(*The lights go out, she screams, and the sound of a plane landing and screeching to a halt is heard. After a beat, lights reveal a wasted, disheveled Miss Pat, but perky nonetheless.*)

**Miss Pat:** Hi. Miss Pat here. Things got a bit jumpy back there, but the Captain has just informed me we have safely landed in Savannah. Please check the overhead before exiting as any baggage you don't claim, we trash.

It's been fun, and we hope the next time you consider travel, it's with Celebrity.

(*Luggage begins to revolve onstage from backstage left, going past Miss Pat and revolving onstage right. Mixed in with the luggage are two male slaves and a woman slave, complete with luggage and I.D. tags around their necks.*)
Miss Pat: *(With routine, rehearsed pleasantness.)*

Have a nice day. Bye bye.
Button up that coat, it's kind of chilly.
Have a nice day. Bye bye.
You take care now.
See you.
Have a nice day.
Have a nice day.
Have a nice day.