

Virginia Rep on Tour- Why we say it:



At Virginia Rep on Tour, it is always our intention to enrich young audiences by portraying history accurately. It is never our intention to be irresponsible or to promote unacceptable language or behavior. On the contrary, we believe once young people encounter the historic context and hurtful impact of epithets through the empathetic experience of drama, they will become more thoughtful and reject hate-speech as deeply unacceptable.

The Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama was the final turning point that persuaded the majority of U.S. citizens that Southern Segregation was cruel and evil, and that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was indeed on the side of justice, goodness and truth.

During what was otherwise a peaceful demonstration, Bull Connor, the Commissioner of Public Safety in Birmingham Alabama, ordered fire hoses and police dogs turned on the young marchers. As the marchers ran for cover from the brutality of the hoses and dogs, Bull Connor was televised into living rooms across America yelling, "Look at those niggers run!" This moment, seen by so many Americans right in their living rooms, couldn't be denied. It helped turn the tide of white American support for Civil Rights.

Here is an excerpt from our script:

Actor 5 The world watched as television cameras recorded for all time the clash between Bull Connor and the Black children of Birmingham. On May 2, more than 1,000 children assembled at 16th Street Baptist Church.

M. L. King Jr.: Are you willing to follow me today in a march for freedom?

All: Yes.

M. L. King Jr.: Are you willing to go to jail if Mr. Connor arrests you?

All: Yes.

M. L. King Jr.: And most importantly of all, are you willing to resist all temptation to fight or to hate or engage in any violent activity?

All: Yes.

M. L. King Jr.: Then my children, we can conquer the world.

Actor 3: On the 1st day, under orders from Bull Connor, 959 children were arrested and jailed. On the 2nd day, 2,000 more children and parents came forward to replace their brothers and sisters.

Actor 5: Bull Connor was ready. When the marchers rounded a city corner, Bull Connor ordered city fireman to batter the crowd of children with 100-pound pressure fire hoses. After the children were slammed to the ground and against brick walls by the raging water, Connor freed all his police dogs, which attacked the battered children without mercy. Millions of Americans watched on television as Bull Connor laughed and shouted to the camera, "Look at those niggers run."

M. L. King Jr.: Don't worry my children. God is on our side. We will not hate, but we will not obey a hateful law. We shall overcome.

Actor 2: On the 3rd day, an even larger crowd faced the dogs and fire hoses. And on the 4th day, over 3,000 children began their final peaceful march to the jail.

Actor 5: But Bull Connor waited for them on the steps. "Turn on the hoses" he cried. (pause) "Turn on the hoses."

Actor 4: But the firemen refused to obey the order.

Actor 2: The policemen refused to budge.

Actor 3: The marchers came forward, and the policemen and fireman, with tears in their eyes, parted and let the marchers through.

Actor 2: Within days, the leaders of Birmingham voted official segregation out of Birmingham forever. Three months later, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. He put down his note cards, and spoke from his heart, and from that moment on, our country has never forgotten his words.

A quote of that significance in American history should be heard and understood.



Eric Williams
Director of Tour Operations
Virginia Rep on Tour
ewilliams@virginiarep.org