

FLORIDA for SALE, 1819

a THEATER with a MISSION living-history performance
based on first-person perspectives from 200 years ago

by
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SCENE ONE

library of John Quincy Adams, US Secretary of State

John Quincy Adams (born 1767)

Louisa Catherine Adams (born 1775)

The couple has been married 22 years & have 3 grown sons.

LCA *offstage right*
Mr. Adams! Mr. Adams!

JQA *writing in diary*
In the library, Mrs. Adams!

LCA *enters humming and dancing*
Still awake? Still working, dearest friend? It's near one in the morning.

JQA *grunts*

LCA That ball in Georgetown –
very well attended, but so unimaginative ...
The only bright spot was when we sang Mr. Key's new poem,
"O say, can you see, by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming ..."
Stirring, isn't it?

JQA *grunts (or does he get up and dance with her? Or sing the next line?)*

LCA Next year, dear friend,
we should host the ball honoring George Washington's Birthday!
That could set the stage for electing John Quincy Adams as President in 1824!

JQA Mrs. Adams ...

LCA My dearest friend?

JQA This day, February 22, 1819,
is perhaps the most important day of my life.

LCA The Florida Treaty?

JQA The Florida Treaty – signed this morning.
I close this day with fervent gratitude to the giver of all good!

Mr. Onís came at eleven.
I had one copy of the Treaty, and Mr. Onís the other –
I read the English side (which he collated),
and he read the Spanish side (which I collated).

We discovered, and rectified,
some few errors of copying, and even of translation.
We signed and sealed both copies, on both sides.
Then I delivered our copy to President Monroe
and took the Treaty to the Senate.

LCA Yes – Mr. Fromentin, the Senator from Louisiana, told me
the Senate received your Treaty with “universal satisfaction.”

JQA Its prospects are propitious and flattering in an eminent degree –
Shall I read you what I’ve been writing about the Treaty, in my diary?

LCA Please do, dearest friend.
I delight in hearing you read.

JQA “For three enduring reasons,
this Treaty merits swift ratification,
and a lasting place in history:

“First, a provision 15 years in the making:
the Treaty acquires both of the Florida’s from Spain,
East Florida and West Florida,
and makes them US territory, at the modest cost of five Millions.

The Florida’s will be found in all probability
less valuable in possession than when merely coveted –
But the acquisition of the Florida’s
has long been an object of earnest desire to this Country –
They secure our Eastern coastline.

“Second, a provision I first introduced only four months ago:
a provision to push our Western Boundary farther west:

By this Treaty, Spain acknowledges the Sabine River as our boundary
from the gulph of Mexico to the Red River –

This is a peculiar and appropriate right
acquired by my Negotiation;

it forms a great Epocha in our History,
and makes the Florida Treaty truly a Transcontinental Treaty.

“Third, a provision that looks far into the future:

The Florida Treaty changes our relations with Spain,
from the highest mutual exasperation and imminent War,
to a fair prospect of tranquility and of secure peace.

This fills my heart with gratitude unutterable
to the first Cause of all things!

LCA May it speed as it has begun!
And may God speed you, my dearest friend,
in the high station you fill so honorably.
caress
Are you ready to retire to bed, Mr. Secretary of State?

JQA Not yet, dearest friend.
I have four more copies of the Treaty to execute.

LCA “Perseveratingly laborious –
the good of the Country your constant aim ...”

I’ve been scribbling, too –
a novel about life in our nation’s capital.
Would you like to meet a character I’ve just created?

JQA Yes, indeed, Mrs. Adams –
I delight in hearing you read.

LCA “Lord Sharply” is his name.
Here’s how I describe him:

“Lord Sharply was a man of outstanding talents –

Perseveratingly laborious,
he had filled many high Stations
with great satisfaction to the Nation.
But he viewed mankind as the medium
through which the great plans he formed
for the welfare of his Country
were to be matured.
The good of his Country was his constant aim.

Only those who were the most constantly in his society could sometimes observe
the flashing of his eye,

and the tremulous motion of his lip,
conveying some faint idea of the volcano that burnt within –

He's based on a character from real life –
do you recognize the original?

JQA I don't think so, Mrs. Adams.
Is he someone we know?

LCA Think on it, kind sir –
someone matching my description
may yet spring to mind.

JQA It shall be done, Mrs. Adams.
absentmindedly returning to his writing
But first, those copies of the Treaty ...

LCA *singing to high heaven, to the tune of Star-Spangled Banner's last lines*
O say, is there any way to get through to that brilliant mind?!
Is there anything as blind as a man ahead of his time?

TABLEAU

SCENE TWO

*Drawing room of Ambassador Onís,
near 1 in the morning of 22 February 1819:
Federika Christina von Mercklein, the Ambassador's dead wife (early 20s onstage),
and Luis de Onís y González-Vara (early 30s onstage, late 50s in history)*

CO *enters as LCA sings and JQA writes, ending Scene One*
Sits, opens her book, and reads softly:
“Aunque el gobierno federal
hace alarde de filantropía y dulzura con que los trata,
el resultado es que diariamente se ve á los indios
despojados de sus tierras ...”

LO *off left, singing*
Tengo fé en el despertar de España:

CO *joins in*
por siglos y siglos, ante gente estraña,
siempre invicta fué.

LO *enters*
Cristina! Mi amor?
I could have sworn I heard your voice ...

La voz mas dulce del mundo ...
Silenced now.

My love, it's done.
The great work that I came here to do –
to this nuevo mundo whose fevers sapped your life –
The Florida Treaty, signed today [hoy firmado]!

CO ¿Y los indios?
¿"despojados de sus tierras
por medio de tratados"?

LO They're calling it by our names, Cristina:
El tratado de Adams y Onís,
Y probará, mi alma,
una obra digna de tu nombre.

CO "No siempre se les hace justicia!"

LO What have I won?
I've saved Nueva España for España, mi vida –
the Western boundary I've negotiated
confirms Tejas y California
as indisputably Spanish.
Buffer zones protect their borders from adventurers.
The most opulent and desirable provinces in North America remain:
Tierras Españoles.

CO "Queda la mejor parte de sus tierras
adjudicada á los Estados-Unidos."

LO I've saved our treasury, too –
bankrupted by Napoleon.
Saved it from an endless procession
of unpayable land claims.
The US gets Las Floridas –
They also get all of Florida's debts.

CO "hacen incursiones en ellas,
y les privan de sus ganados,
y de todo lo que pueden haber á las manos!"

LO And I think I've saved our Treaty from rejection.
Ten years of hard labor, Cristina!
A decade of diplomacy
in an alien land that's killed you
and made our children estrangeros en su propia patria.

But I've made sure los americanos will eagerly adopt this Treaty.
La Florida sells herself –
“the topographical situation of the country,
the fineness of the climate,
the fertility of the land” –
and “bear in mind,
that the Americans have a passion for
frequently abandoning one piece of land for another,
and for always preferring new lands to old.”

CO “atacan á los que entran á talar sus campos”

LO ¿Y la gente?
What becomes of the people –
los indígenas, los Africanos, los criollos?
The people were ever your passion, mi compasión.
I swear to you, this Treaty saves the people.
The citizens of Spanish Florida?
All protected!
And as for the Indians,
I have a secret weapon, my sweet:
My pen.

CO “Ellos elevan sus quejas al gobierno federal;
pero no siempre se les hace justicia”

LO Stinging words can stir Los Estados-Unidos.
You remember how President Monroe
disciplined General Jackson
when I exposed his cruelties in Las Floridas?
To commemorate the negotiation of this Treaty,
I'm writing two volumes of memorias, tesoro mío,
and here is what my memorias have to say
about the Indians:

“The Indians are daily despoiled of their lands
by treaties but little equitable.
These outrages weary their patience;
they take vengeance into their own hands,
with the ferocity belonging to their nature.
The cry of alarm resounds through the whole United States,
and the government sends an army to chastise the Indians.”

CO *sings, ceding the chair to Luis, slowly moving upstage*
Tengo fé en el despertar de España:

LO “The government entrusts the conduct of these wars

to impetuous generals,
who pursue these almost defenceless aboriginals with fire and sword,
burn their miserable cabins,
and put to destruction all who are not so fortunate as to escape to distant forests.”

CO por siglos y siglos, ante gente estraña,
siempre invicta fué.

LO “At the end of the campaign,
a treaty is entered into with the unfortunate victims,
who have survived the extermination of their tribe;
and in this, the greater and better part of their lands
is adjudged to the United States,
who are thus successively getting rid of these neighbours,
and possessing themselves of the countries which they occupy.
The campaigns of General Jackson against the Indians of the Floridas,
present examples of what I have stated,
which will live in infamy for ever.”

CO Tengo fé en el triunfo y la Victoria,

LO Hence it comes, that the American name is abhorred among the Indians;
and that enemies of the United States will find Indians
always ready to make war upon these people,
whom they look upon as the most perfidious upon earth.”

CO en un porvenir de Gloria,

LO Mr. President, I call on you to honor this Treaty
by making peace with ALL Floridians!

CO hermano del ayer.

LO Have I done well, my love?

CO Bien hecho, mi amor!

LO Can you rest in peace?

CO en paz requiesco –
Recuerda a mí

LO O, Cristina –
Te echo tanto de menos [I miss you so].
Yo, Mauricio, Narciso, Clementina

CO te amo, Luis ... por siempre

LO *sings, reaching toward her as she exits*
Al amor quiero vencer,
¿más quién podrá?
Qu'ella con su gran poder
vencido me ha.

I will protect them, mi amor ...
Because "Truth is of all times;"
because "reason and justice are founded on immutable principles"
and for love of you ...
en memoria de tí, Cristina ...
memorias en memoria de tí ...

sits to resume writing his memorias
TABLEAU

SCENE THREE

*Antonio Proctor's cabin,
in an orange grove near St. Augustine
Antonio Proctor (AP, historically in his 70s)
& his son George (GP, historically nearing the age of 21)*

AP *enters center, singing*
Yankee Doodle went to town,
A-riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it ... Spanish Tony.
George! Mijo!

GP *offstage*
Sí, papa?

AP Come write me a letter.

GP Sí, papa – in a minute ...

AP Ahora mismo, mijo – march!

GP Sí, mi capitán – marchamos!
Enters marching to this song:
"Todos los buenos soldados
Que asentaren a esta guerra ..."

AP Where are you marching, little soldier [soldito]?

GP To defend the free blacks of Las Floridas!

AP I see ... Good instinct, son, but bad timing –
History has gotten ahead of you / [stolen a march on you].
El Gobernador Coppinger tells me that
a Treaty's just been signed,
ceding Las Floridas to los Estados-Unidos.
Time to lay down your rifle,
and take up the pen.

GP Por qué, papa?

AP “Para qué,” mijo.
AP To write me a letter.

GP Who to, papa?

AP “To whom,” George.
To His Catholic Majesty Fernando VII [Fernando el séptimo] of Spain
and to President James Monroe of los Estados-Unidos.

GP Ready, papa – fire away.

AP Hombres honrados – Men of Honor:
My name is Antonio Proctor.
I am a free African citizen of La Florida.
I have won my liberty and my property
with signal service to both your governments.
Rey Católico, my name is in your records:
 Juan de Arredondo y San Felices, your auditor of war,
 has reported me
 “un hombre de bien extraordinario de San Agustín”
 and Governor José Coppinger has rewarded my efforts to
 “pacify the province” with 185 acres of orange grove.
Mr. President, I was present for the Boston Tea Party
 and afterward at the Battle of Lexington.
 Then, a British soldier called himself my master,
 but then as now my love for freedom made me love your Revolution.
To speed the spread of freedom, I have blessed both your countries with my
 “great knowledge of the Indian character and language
 and great influence over the Florida Indians.”
Time out of mind, your representatives have chosen me
for skilled diplomacy –
to act as your translator, interpreter, and Indian agent.
They have sent you written testimony that I have

“rendered you, and your countries, most essential benefits,
from my usefulness with the Indians,
my prudence and good sense.”

Now I petition you, honorable heads of honorable states:
Protect every one of my hard-won privileges, rights, and immunities
as Florida changes hands.
Hear reason! Do me justice!
Antonio, or Tony, Proctor

GP “Antonio, or Tony, Proctor ...”
Do you think they’ll listen, papa?
Venceremos?

AP Sí, mijo. Toca su honra.
We’ve told them the truth.

AP And truth endures through time.

GP Were you really at the Battle of Lexington, sir?

AP Yes, George. I’ve fought for freedom many ways.

GP *sings*
“Men if you want to make history
And win fame in the fierce fight that’s coming ...”

AP Times are changing, child.
Time to change our tune.
Try this one:

*Antonio lines out the song in English for George,
who repeats in Spanish (taking over at the end of the verse)*

AP Yankee Doodle went to town

GP Yankee Doodle went to town

AP Riding on a pony

GP Riding on a pony

AP Stuck a feather in his cap

GP Stuck a feather in his cap

AP And called it ...

GP “Treaty’s coming!”

AP Bien cantado, mijo –
“The Florida Treaty’s coming!”
God send us a Treaty full of reason, justice, and truth
[un Tratado que tenga razón, verdad, y justicia]!

TABLEAU

CODA

library of John Quincy Adams, US Secretary of State

JQA Four copies of the Florida Treaty – certified!
How many lives, how many fortunes, how many sacred honours
may be blessed by this day's work!

“In the midst of this hope
there are seeds of fear –
The ratification of Spain is yet uncertain –
If ratified, many difficulties will
clog the execution of the Treaty.”

But let us take heart from this provision:

“Article 6.

The Inhabitants of the Territories
which His Catholic Majesty cedes
shall be ... admitted to
all the privileges, rights and immunities
of the Citizens of the United-States.”

Here we plant the seeds of justice.
May they flower,
as Florida grows from Spanish province
to the newest territory ...
sings
“in the land of the free ...

TABLEAUX *reanimate as characters echo this phrase, and join in singing:*

ALL ... land of the free,
... land of the free,
and the home of the brave”!

SOURCES for SCENE ONE

John Quincy Adams diary for 1819, entry for 22 February, excerpted in *John Quincy Adams Diaries, 1779-1821*, ed. David Waldstreicher (New York: Library of America, 2017), pages 474-77.

Louisa Catherine Adams, *The Metropolitan Kaleidoscope*, quoted in *Mrs. Adams in Winter* by Michael O'Brien (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), pages 234-35.

SCENE ONE SONG REFERENCE

“Adams and Liberty”

To “Anacreon in Heaven,” the same tune as “The Star-Spangled Banner”

Should the Tempests of War overshadow our land,
Its bolts could not rend Freedom's temple asunder;
For, unmoved, at the portal, would George Washington stand,
And repulse, with his Breast, the assaults of the thunder!
His sword, from the sleep
Of its scabbard would leap,
And conduct, with its point, ev'ry flash to the deep!
And ne'er shall the sons of Columbia be slaves,
While the earth bears a plant and the sea rolls a wave.

Let Fame to the world sound America's voice;
No intrigue can her sons from the government sever;
For her pride is John Adams; his laws are her choice,
And shall flourish, till Liberty slumbers for ever.
Then unite heart in hand,
Like Leonidas's band,
And swear to the God of ocean and land;
That ne'er shall the sons of Columbia be slaves,
While the earth bears a plant and the sea rolls a wave.

SONGS in SCENE TWO

La Generala

Tengo fé en el despertar de España:
por siglos y siglos, ante gente estraña,
siempre invicta fué.

I believe in Spain's once and future victory;
cent'ry after cent'ry, turning back invaders,
always undefeated She.

I believe in this battle's outcome glorious,
in our country's cause victorious,

companions brave and free!

Tengo fé en el triunfo y la Victoria,
en un porvenir de Gloria,
hermano del ayer.

Source: Housewright *An Anthology of Music in Early Florida*
Trans. © Ben Gunter 2014

Al amor quiero vencer

Luis Milán

Al amor quiero vencer,
¿más quién podrá?
Qu'ella con su gran poder
vencido me ha.

Al amor querría vencer
y con bien ser del vencido.

How I'd love to conquer my love,
Winning goodwill from my beloved!

How I long to vanquish love!
But that can't be.
'Cause my lady's loveliness has vanquished me.

Por poder mejor querer
para ser mejor querido.

¿Quién tuviese tal poder,
más quién podrá?
Qu'ella con su gran poder
vencido me ha.

Source: Housewright *An Anthology of Music in Early Florida*
translation © Ben Gunter 2015

SOURCE for SCENE TWO

SPANISH:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ucm.5320559168;view=1up;seq=25>

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Aunque el gobierno federal hace alarde de filantropía y dulzura con que los trata, no puede prescindirse de observar, que cualesquiera que sean sus disposiciones para llenar en este punto sentimientos tan propios del siglo presente, y de todos los países libres como el Americano, el resultado es que diariamente se ve á los indios despojados de sus tierras por medio de compras, que muchos gradúan de fraudulentas, ó de tratados poco equitativos, como tambien por medio de las armas. Sucede

frecuentemente que los colonos, establecidos en la frontera ó cerca de las tierras de los indios, hacen incursiones en ellas, y les privan de sus ganados, y de todo lo que pueden haber á las manos. Ellos elevan sus quejas á los

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gobernadores y autoridades del Estado ó territorio respectivo, y en muchos casos al gobierno federal; pero no siempre se les hace justicia, ni se les da satisfaccion. Esta serie de actos irregulares llega, en fin, á cansar su paciencia; y cuando hallan ocasion oportuna se vengan por sí mismos, atacan á los que entran á talar sus campos, ó á privarles de sus ganados, y los matan ó persiguen algunas veces hasta mas allá de la frontera, cometiendo represalias en las posesiones americanas con la ferocidad propia de su clase. Cuando sucede lo uno ú lo otro el grito de alarma y de indignacion resuena en todos los Estados-Unidos, y el gobierno envía un ejército á castigar á los indios. Tal es el motivo ó la causa aparente de la mayor parte de las guerras de muerte y de exterminio que han sufrido estos infelices hasta ahora. El gobierno las encarga siempre á generales impetuosos, quienes dejándose arrastrar del ardor de la guerra hasta cebarse en la ruina de los casi indefensos y miserables indígenas, lo llevan todo á sangre y fuego, queman sus pobres chozas, y destruyen á todos los que no logran escaparse á bosques remotos ó montañas inaccesibles.

Concluida la campaña, se estipula entonces un tratado con las desgraciadas víctimas que han sobrevivido al exterminio de su tribu; y por él queda la mayor y mejor parte de sus tierras adjudicada á los Estados-Unidos, quienes por este medio consiguen ir sucesivamente deshaciéndose de estos vecinos, y apoderándose de los países que ocupan. Las dos campañas del general Jackson contra los indios de las Floridas presentan algunos ejemplares de lo que se ha dicho, principalmente la última, que acaso ha excedido

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en horrores á todas, se se examinan bien sus circunstancias, y cuyo recuerdo será siempre sensible.

De aquí viene, que el nombre Americano es un nombre aborrecido entre los indios que confinan con el territorio de los Estados-Unidos; y cualquiera nacion los hallará prontos siempre para hacer la guerra á este pueblo que ellos miran como el mas pérfido de todos los que hay en la tierra, y como sistemáticamente conjurado á exterminarlos ó destruirlos. Entre las naciones Europeas de que tienen conocimiento, estiman con predileccion á la española y á la francesa; y á pesar de que han cesado de recibir los regalos acostumbrados y la proteccion necesaria del gobierno español en estos últimos años, conservan siempre mucha veneracion y afecto á los españoles. Los que habitan dentro del territorio de las Floridas manifiestan tambien grande respeto y afecto á los ingleses.

ENGLISH: (translated by Watkins, 1820)

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t3fx7jwow;view=1up;seq=3>

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“Although the federal government boasts of the tenderness and philanthropy with which it treats them, it cannot but be observed, that whatever may be its disposition to cherish

sentiments so becoming the present age, and all free countries like that of America, the fact is, that the Indians are daily despoiled of their lands by purchases, for the most part fraudulent, or by treaties but little equitable, as well as by force of arms. It frequently happens, that the settlers, established on the frontier or near the lands of the Indians, make incursions into them, and rob them of their cattle, and of every thing upon which they can lay their hands. They

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complain to the governors and authorities of their respective State or Territory, and in many cases to the federal government; but justice is not always done to them, nor any satisfaction given. A series of these outrages at length wearies their patience; and when they find a fit opportunity, they take vengeance into their own hands, attack those who enter their grounds to lay them waste, or drive off their cattle, and either murder them or sometimes pursue them beyond the frontier, committing reprisals upon the American possessions, with the ferocity belonging to their nature. When either of these events happens, the cry of alarm and indignation resounds through the whole United States, and the government sends an army to chastise the Indians.

Such is the motive or apparent cause of the deadly and exterminating wars, which have been hitherto waged against these unhappy beings. The government always entrusts the conduct of them to impetuous generals, who suffering themselves to be carried away by a passion for war, even to the overwhelming in ruin these almost defenceless and wretched aboriginals, pursue them with fire and sword, burn their miserable cabins, and put to destruction all who are not so fortunate as to escape to distant forests or inaccessible mountains.

At the end of the campaign, a treaty is entered into with the unfortunate victims, who have sur-

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vived the extermination of their tribe; and in this, the greater and better part of their lands is adjudged to the United States, who are thus successively getting rid of these neighbours, and possessing themselves of the countries which they occupy. The two campaigns of General Jackson against the Indians of the Floridas, present some examples of what I have stated, particularly the last, which, perhaps, if we examine its circumstances, exceeded all the rest in horrors, the remembrance of which will last for ever."

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Hence it comes, that the American name is abhorred among the Indians who border upon the United States; and that any nation will find them always ready to make war upon these people, whom they look upon as the most perfidious upon earth, and as having systematically conspired to exterminate or destroy them. Among the European nations of which they possess a knowledge, they prefer the Spanish and the French; and notwithstanding they have ceased to receive the usual presents and necessary protection from the Spanish government of late years, they still preserve great respect and affection for the Spaniards. Those who live with the Territory of the Floridas manifest also great esteem and regard for the English."

SOURCE for SCENE THREE

Rosalind Parker, “The Proctors – Antonio, George, and John”

(read November, 1943)

Apalachee: the Publication of the Tallahassee Historical Society, vol. 2:
1946, 19-29.

SOURCE for CODA

John Quincy Adams diary for 1819, entry for 22 February, excerpted in *John Quincy Adams Diaries, 1779-1821*, ed. David Waldstreicher (New York: Library of America, 2017), pages 474-77.