

One of the most popular holiday stories is Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. While an uplifting story with an important moral, it is also very much a product of Victorian London and the social problems of that era. That is why Paula Vogel found herself asking "Why are we doing a *Christmas Carol* about Victorian London poverty? Where is the American *Carol*?!" She was also compelled by advice from her late brother, Carl. In regards to how to approach the piece he said, "I want you to teach the children of our family history, they have to know where we came from." No matter what, we are a product of the past. Therefore, Vogel turns our eyes to history in one of its most contentious moments.

With the vast number of people the Civil War affected, it is intriguing to consider the fact we tend to only focus on figures such as Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, Robert E. Lee. What of Lee's slave? What of Mary Todd Lincoln? What of Jewish soldiers on their deathbeds? What of the African Village in the White House? What, even, of the horses and mules in the war? Our history isn't comprised of the few who are highlighted, but rather, an entire cast of those underrepresented who contributed just as much to the building of our nation. This seems to be the ultimate goal of an American version of *A Christmas Carol*: to show that a shared experience is not shared in the same way. Just as in Dickens showcases London during a time of significant class differences, Vogel showcases a nation divided by war and racial politics.

Christmas is a holiday that has a relationship with the supernatural. These spirits have been represented in many ways: through the holiday's Pagan origins, through the Ghost of Christmas Past, Present and Future in Dickens. However, in *A Civil War Christmas*, when we see the spirits of loved ones that visit people such as Decatur Bronson and Elizabeth Keckley, we recognize both the literal price of freedom they have paid and the emotional toll this war has taken on them. We see metaphorical haunting as Hannah attempts to hide her daughter from slave catchers as they escape their lives on a plantation. Haunting and injustice help add a broader picture to the often narrowed vision we are presented of the Civil War.

*A Civil War Christmas* is a story that is specifically designed to bring together a community. It is an example of story theatre, a mode of storytelling that asks a group of actors to play multiple roles and provide narration. It allows for us to honor our history in a way many can access. As we see this group effort, it is interesting to consider how our nation itself was shaped by a group of individuals coming together in order to contribute to a new world. By taking us back to 1864, Vogel allows us to examine how a familiar holiday such as Christmas is crucial to our heritage, and how this heritage was built by a collective.