

Isaac Woodard, In His Own Words

By James Blaylock

NOTES

Isaac Woodard, Jr. was an African-American World War II veteran, whose maiming, hours after being discharged from the United States Army, sparked outrage around our nation and galvanized the civil rights movement. Based on courtroom transcripts, interviews and sworn affidavits, *Isaac Woodard, In His Own Words*, is an incredibly powerful story of one man's life in the face of adversity. Written as a first-person narrative, this selection may be entered in either Prose Interpretation or be performed as a monologue and entered in Dramatic Interpretation. Regardless, this selection should be performed by a mature, African-American male. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer where to turn the pages in his manuscript. The performer will notice italicized words used throughout the selection. The italics are simply suggestions to aid the actor in determining which words to emphasize. The location of the story is obviously set in the South; therefore, keep in mind the pacing of the material. The pacing should be slower, allowing Isaac to methodically and thoroughly recollect the memories of that tragic day he returned from the military. Before rehearsing and performing this selection, take some time and do a little research on Isaac Woodard's life. Isaac Woodard is one of our country's unsung heroes, and his story piqued the interest of President Harry Truman, Orson Welles, and folk singer, Woodie Guthrie, who wrote a song titled, *The Blinding of Isaac Woodard*.

My *name* is Isaac Woodard. I'm twenty-eight years old. I was *born* in Winnsboro, South Carolina. I lived there, until I was fifteen years of *age*. From there, I went to Salisbury, North Carolina. I stayed *there* about four years. From Salisbury, I went to Burlington, North Carolina, where I stayed for *two* years. After that, I went *back* to Winnsboro, South Carolina where I lived for eighteen *months*. Then, it was off to Camp Jackson, in Fort Benning, Georgia, where I

was inducted in the United States Army. The 13th day of October, 1942. I stayed there nine days. *About* nine days. They transferred me to Bainbridge, Georgia, and I *stayed* there for around eighteen months. Then I went to Camp Story, Georgia for *three* months. *Then* I went to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, the Army base there. Then to Norfolk, *Virginia*, the Army base. Then, after three *months*, I went out to camp in California for about three *weeks*. Then I was sent to the Southwest Pacific, New Guinea Island. I *stayed* there for fifteen months. I saw service in the Southwest Pacific on New Guinea Island and the *Philippine* Islands. The last place I was stationed—was *Brittania Bay*. I stayed there for about a *month*. Then it was *back* to the United States. In the Army, I received a Good *Conduct* Medal and one *Battle Star* and an Honorable *Discharge*. I tell you all of this, because I want you to know that I've seen some *sights!* Yes, I have. I have *seen* some *sights!* But I don't *see* no *sights* no more. You see—*today*—I'm *blind*.



When I got *back* to the United States, I was in Augusta, Georgia. I went down to the Greyhound Bus Company, and I purchased a ticket from *Augusta*, Georgia to *Winnsboro*, South Carolina. After I boarded the bus, a few miles out of *town*, after about an hour's ride, the bus driver *stopped* the bus. I asked him did he have time to *wait* until I go to the rest room, I mean the *latrine*. He says to me, "Hell, no." He said, "Damn it, go back and sit down. I ain't got time to wait." I says, "Damn it, talk to *me* like I am talking to *you*. I am a *man* just like *you*." He said, "Go ahead then and hurry back." Well, I goes ahead and hurried *back* and takes my *seat* again. *That* was all of *that*. So he did not say anything more to *me*, and I did not say anything more to *him*, until we come into Batesburg, South Carolina. He gets in *Hatesburg*, and he stops the bus. He gets *off* the bus, and I don't know what he got off the *bus* for, but he came *back* to the bus and walks up to me and taps me on the *shoulder* and says, "*Get up!* Some one *outside* wants to see you." He turns around and walks back out of the bus, so *I* gets up and walks out of the bus. There was *two* polices standing there when I walked out. The bus driver was standing out there talking to the police. He said, "This *soldier* has been making a *disturbance* on the bus," so I goes to *explain* to the *police* that I had not been doing *anything* for them to *arrest* me. I was explaining to them what the bus driver *said* to me, and what I said to *him*. But before I could explain it, the police *hit me* with a billy club across my *head* and told me to *shut up*. So I *hushed*. The driver finished talking, and *after* he finished talking, the police said to me, "You won't ride this bus out of here. You will catch the *next* bus out. Otherwise, *I* am going to *lock*