

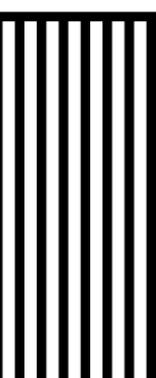


**BEN
BUTLER**

**BY RICHARD
STRAND**



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



BEN BUTLER

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BEN BUTLER received its world premiere at the New Jersey Repertory Company (SuzAnne Barabas, Artistic Director; Gabor Barabas, Executive Producer), Long Branch, New Jersey. It was directed by Joseph Discher; the set design was by Jessica Parks; the lighting design was by Jill Nagle; the sound design was by Merek Royce Press; the costume design was by Patricia E. Doherty; the properties design was by Jessica Parks; the technical director was Michael “Rusty” Carroll; the stage manager was Jennifer Tardibuono; the fight director was Brad Lemons. The cast was as follows:

MAJOR GENERAL BENJAMIN BUTLER	Ames Adamson
LIEUTENANT KELLY	Benjamin Sterling
SHEPARD MALLORY	John G. Williams
MAJOR CARY	David Sitler

CHARACTERS

MAJOR GENERAL BENJAMIN BUTLER of the Union Army

LIEUTENANT KELLY of the Union Army

SHEPARD MALLORY, a runaway slave

MAJOR CARY of the Confederate Army

*(A change in the text to include two supernumeraries
may be found on page 68)*

SETTING

The action takes place in Fort Monroe in the state of Virginia
at the beginning of the American Civil War.

BEN BUTLER

Scene 1

The office of General Benjamin Butler of the Union Army, 1861, inside Fort Monroe in Virginia. There is a single door leading to another room. There is a window that looks out onto the yard. It is a nicely decorated room with sturdy but tasteful furnishings. There is a desk and some chairs. There is also a small table on which there is a bottle of sherry and some ornate glasses. Perhaps there is some additional furniture. The office appears more like a masculine residence than an austere military facility. The patriotic pictures and the map of Hampton Roads on the wall have been there through more than one occupant.

Butler is only newly arrived—a few unpacked crates are stacked next to his desk—and yet his office appears to be a functioning work area.

Butler is sitting behind his desk, reading a long telegram. In his 40s, he is a portly, bald man with a moustache. He is self-assured—maybe even arrogant. He does not have the crisp neatness associated with military men. In fact, he appears to be a little sloppy.

A young West Point graduate and career Army man, Lieutenant Kelly, enters. Kelly, unlike Butler, is all military. Kelly is in his 30s. He has been assigned to serve as an adjutant to Butler. In the two days Butler has been at Fort Monroe, Kelly has found few reasons to like or respect his commander.

As Kelly enters, Butler holds up his hand to indicate that he does not wish Kelly to speak just yet. Butler continues to read. Kelly waits at attention while Butler takes his time. Butler

chuckles at something he has read. Kelly waits. Eventually, Butler speaks to Kelly.

BUTLER. (*Holding up the telegram he was reading.*) What do you make of this, Lieutenant?

KELLY. Well, I don't know, sir. I can't read it from here.

BUTLER. It informs me that, last night, Virginia seceded from the Union. What do you make of that?

KELLY. Well, not much, sir. It only makes official what we already knew.

BUTLER. I agree. Not much. It's almost silly, really. (*Changing topics.*) What did you want, Lieutenant?

KELLY. There is a Negro slave outside who is demanding to speak with you.

Butler is nonplussed. He stares at Kelly with some mixture of real and pretended amazement. Kelly grows uncomfortable under Butler's stare.

Sir?

BUTLER. You astonish me.

KELLY. I don't understand, sir.

BUTLER. I am astonished.

KELLY. Sir, I had no intention of...

BUTLER. It was not your intention to astonish me? That is hard to believe. Because what you have just said is, well, there is no other word for it...

KELLY. Um, what should I do about the Negro slave, sir?

BUTLER. Do you know specifically what it is that I find so astonishing?

KELLY. Well, I think it is the fact that there is a Negro slave within the fort.

BUTLER. That is a little surprising, isn't it?

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. And, why, Lieutenant? Why would that be surprising?

KELLY. Well, for one thing, there's no very good reason for a Negro slave to be here. So I understand why that might surprise you. And for another thing,...

Pause.

...well, I don't know. Maybe that's the only thing.

BUTLER. Oh, I think there is at least one more thing I should find surprising. Don't you?

KELLY. Well,...

BUTLER. I won't make you guess. I'll just tell you what it is. As commander of this fort, shouldn't I know about everyone who is here? Or, put another way, shouldn't someone have informed me that there was a Negro slave inside the fort before that slave started demanding to see me? More specifically, Lieutenant Kelly, shouldn't *you* have told me?

KELLY. Well, sir, he has only just arrived. And you have only just arrived. And I didn't know he was going to demand to see you. Sir.

BUTLER. What time did he arrive?

KELLY. Just today, sir.

BUTLER. I didn't ask what day. I asked what time.

KELLY. Maybe six o'clock this morning.

BUTLER. Maybe six o'clock. Or, put another way, maybe ten hours ago.

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. That's too long. Too long for me to find out that there was a Negro slave in my fort. (*Picking up his telegram.*) I get news from Washington faster than I get news from my own fort. You should have told me sooner.

KELLY. You were busy.

BUTLER. Next time, Lieutenant, interrupt me. Do you understand?

KELLY. Yes, sir. Next time there are Negro slaves in the fort I will tell you immediately.

BUTLER. Very good.

Pause.

Well, Lieutenant, you are correct that I am surprised to learn that

there is a Negro slave...by the way, Lieutenant, does this gentleman have a name?

KELLY. I assume so, sir.

BUTLER. But you don't know what it is?

KELLY. I do not, sir.

BUTLER. Why is that, Lieutenant?

KELLY. I didn't think to ask him.

BUTLER. I see. Well, for now, I guess we can continue to refer to him as the Negro slave. So, Lieutenant, I am indeed surprised to learn that there is a Negro slave inside my fort. And I'm somewhat surprised that I am only now learning that he is here. But I am merely surprised by that. Not astonished. Surprised.

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. Do you want to guess again why it is that I am astonished?

Kelly appears to be thinking as ordered.

KELLY. Well, sir, um, I believe I know, sir.

BUTLER. I believe you do also. But I'd like to hear you say it.

KELLY. I believe it is because he used the word "demand." I believe it is because he has "demanded" to see you.

BUTLER. Well, it is not so much because *he* used the word "demand." It is more because *you* used that word. But that's close enough.

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. Do you have any idea how I feel about that word?

KELLY. Well, yes, I do.

BUTLER. How do I feel about it?

KELLY. Um, you don't like it, sir.

BUTLER. No. I don't like it. And how is it that you know that about me?

KELLY. You told me, sir.

BUTLER. When?

KELLY. Yesterday, sir. Yesterday morning.

BUTLER. Where?

KELLY. In this very room, sir.

BUTLER. And were you listening?

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. Let's see if you were. Who do I allow to make demands upon me?

KELLY. Well, the president, Mr. Lincoln, for one.

BUTLER. Yes. I believe I mentioned Mr. Lincoln by name. Anyone else?

KELLY. Secretary Seward, Secretary Cameron...

BUTLER. Yes, yes, pretty much the entire cabinet. Please don't name them all. Anyone else?

KELLY. General Scott, General McClellan,...

BUTLER. Yes, yes. People who outrank me. You don't need to name them either.

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. Anyone else you can think of? Anyone else I allow to make demands on me?

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. Do you know who that would be?

KELLY. Yes, sir.

BUTLER. But for some reason you don't wish to say whom?

KELLY. Well, your wife, sir.

BUTLER. That is correct. I am pleased that you were paying attention when we spoke yesterday.

KELLY. I was.

BUTLER. Tell me, Lieutenant, when we spoke yesterday about me and my feelings about having demands placed upon me, did I speak in quiet tones?

KELLY. I'm not sure what you mean.

BUTLER. Did I whisper?

KELLY. No, sir, you did not.

BUTLER. Did I speak at a moderate level, as I am speaking to you now?

KELLY. No, sir, you did not.

BEN BUTLER

by Richard Strand

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When an escaped slave shows up at Fort Monroe demanding sanctuary, General Benajmin Butler is faced with an impossible moral dilemma—follow the letter of the law or make a game-changing move that could alter the course of U.S. history?

“[BEN BUTLER is] part comedy, part historical drama and part biography, often all at once... Just call it splendid. ...The beauty of the script...is how it approaches thorny topics. In short, it’s a hoot. Rather than dry exposition or long-winded discussions, these men use wordplay that is by turns sarcastic, droll and witty. ...[Strand’s] comic voice is...clever without being glib, meaningful without being pretentious. It’s a funny and impressive mixture.”

—The New York Times

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—TheaterMania.com

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