

Who Will Sing for Lena?

by Janice L. Liddell

In 1944, a black domestic woman in Cuthbert, Georgia killed her long-time white lover/abuser after a night of drinking and arguing. He had kept her imprisoned in his mill for an entire day, then returned to have forced sex with her. She refused, they fought, she killed him. Lena was arrested that day in April. Her trial was held in August and lasted only four ½ hours. The deliberation of the jury of twelve white men lasted ½ hour on the same day. She was found guilty and was sentenced to die. In March, 1945 Lena was transferred to Reidsville Prison, a male prison and where she became the first and only woman to die in Georgia's electric chair. On August 30, 2005, Ms. Lena Baker was finally granted a posthumous pardon by the State of Georgia Pardons and Parole Board in a ceremony attended by the playwright in Atlanta, Georgia.

Who Will Sing for Lena? is a one-woman 75-minute play that gives a voice to Lena Baker and provides insight into the background of Ms. Baker and her tragic story. Using actual trial transcripts, the play provides motivations for Ms Baker's actions—as a poor, black, woman in the rural south in the 1940s and dramatically tells the story of her abuse, the killing, the trial and the execution. Because the details of her life outside the transcript are virtually unknown, the playwright has used creative license to fill in the gaps of Ms. Baker's story.

"A tour-de-force vehicle for one actress."

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Dr. Janice Liddell is a Professor of English at Clark Atlanta University, where she served as chairperson from 1988 to 1998. She is the author of a children's book, *Imani and the Flying Africans*; and co-editor of a collection of literary criticism, *Arms Akimbo: Africana Women in Contemporary Literature*. She is also author of several articles and poems published in various collections and journals. In addition to *Who Will Sing for Lena?*, which has won several awards, her produced plays include *Hairpeace*, *Diante's Hell*, and *Amy's Beauty*, a children's play.