

Richard Gallion.

In his stage play *1800s vs. 2020*, Richard Gallion holds a mirror up to society, revealing a reflection of America's sordid past during slavery. The play is arguably an amalgam of everything Gallion has created up until this point, as the actor, playwright, athlete, educator, and activist has incorporated every piece of his life into his art.

Born on the West Side of Chicago, Richard knew early on that he was wired differently. "I was a dreamer as a kid," he recalls. "I always had an active imagination." He didn't realize where those dreams would take him until later on, though he spent most of his early life playing sports. From boxing to playing basketball at Chicago State University, Richard was geared for a career as an athlete, though an advanced wrist injury derailed that goal from coming to fruition. He found a new path, however.

"I was walking down the street on my way to the gym," he says, "when I was stopped by a guy who worked for *Ebony* and *Jet*, and he asked if I ever considered modeling." Their conversation led to Richard spending the next year traveling for *Ebony* and *Jet*, modeling on runways as part of their fashion shows. It was an opportunity for him to grow and to network. "I had a few different contacts that I met on the tour," he adds, ultimately kickstarting his acting career. He met fellow Chicagoan and playwright John Ruffin, and a chance opportunity to host one of Ruffin's plays (*No More Sheets*) led to Richard catching the acting bug.

Richard performed in another one of Ruffin's plays *All For Love*, when he made the decision to take acting more seriously, even taking online classes in acting, screenwriting, and character development. "I haven't looked back," he explains. His love of the craft led to roles on *Empire*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Shameless*, *Transformers 4*, *Black Butterfly*, and many more. He moved further into screenwriting, first co-writing *Hard Knock Life* and later moving into writing his own stage plays. From the intensely personal *Living Without Love* to *Voice of a Child* and *Desperate*, it was clear that Richard's art was a way to express himself therapeutically. This became the heart of the genesis of *1800s vs. 2020*.

"This idea came to me about seven years ago in a dream," he expresses, where he felt as if the message came to him and needed to be relayed to the world. It evolved into a touchstone for societal ills, politics, presence, and self-actualization, yet Richard hadn't quite put the wheels in motion. As the pandemic raged on, a series of deaths impacted Richard's personal life—combined with the growing racial tension in the country—and he felt the need to progress his art more than ever. *1800s vs. 2020* begins when a young man finds a family photo from the 1800s in his basement; one of the men in the photo looks exactly like him. He "falls into the photo" and is transported into a world where the past and the present unite.

Demorris Burrows (*Chicago P.D.*, *Adullam*) stars alongside his twin brother Demetrius to portray the identical men from the past to present. Other stars include Eric Epps from *Chicago Med* and *The 4400*, Lynette Shakespeare from *Chicago P.D.*, as well as former WBC Light Heavyweight Champion Montell Griffin. Richard also stars in the play as the role of Congo, a 65-year-old man who's been enslaved his entire life, dealing with marital issues after his wife is raped by the slave master.

Subjects come to light in the forms of human trafficking, revisionist history, as well as mental and physical enslavement. *1800s vs. 2020* is more than just a carefully crafted stage play. It's a catalyst for honest discourse, and a culmination of the passion that Richard Gallion has for placing truth and reality into his work.

Premiering in February during Black History Month, Richard Gallion hopes this will open minds and hearts, as well evolve into a greater conversation across platforms, including academia. "I feel like the message is so strong," he says matter of factly. "Like with all my shows, I hope to ignite some change, where you leave thinking differently from how you came."