

Who Are The People?

Excerpt from The Broken Consort's collaboratively devised libretto
for the full-length performance *The American Promise*

[Video of this section here](#)

PETER

For some, America began in 1619 with the promise of democracy:
20-odd firstborn Englishmen formed Virginia's General Assembly
Rule by The People.

ALL

But who are The People?

EMILY

For some, America began in 1619 with the promise of cheap labor:
20-odd African people were stolen from their own lives, their own bodies
To be ruled by Other People.

ALL

So who are The People?

NICCOLO

Indentured servitude meant work.
Seven years of hard work, then the promise of freedom.
African workers and Irish workers trapped in the same system

ALL

Together.

JULIE

Together they gathered power,
To tear off their shackles

ALL

Together.

JULIE

But how dangerous that was for the ruling class,
Those so proud of their new democracy:
Their rule by The People.
By the middle of the century, it was time for them to decide:

ALL

Who are The People?

EMILY

Before the slavery laws, The People were the wealthy,
And The Others were not.
After, The People were white,
And the Others were not.

NICCOLO

And so, an early American Promise:
Abandon your African brethren
And ascend one ladder rung
Up from the bottom.

ALL

*The beginning of Promise for some,
The end of Promise for others.*