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THEATRE ESPRESSO PRESENTS
THE TRIAL OF ANTHONY BURNS

Boston, Mass. – What role did political favoritism and economic sanctions play in the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law in pre-Civil War ‘free states’? What were the responsibilities of a state judge to uphold a controversial federal law in 1854? Can the legal system ever resolve conflicts between the law ‘written in our hearts’ and the statutes enacted by our government? Theatre Espresso explores these questions in their play, *The Trial of Anthony Burns*, about an 1854 fugitive slave trial in Boston. Students from the [your school] _____ will be among the first in [your town] _____ to participate in this interactive performance – in role as members of the Massachusetts State Senate in 1858. They will decide the fate of Judge Edward G. Loring, the state magistrate charged with determining whether Anthony Burns was indeed a fugitive slave. Over 3,000 students in Massachusetts and other New England states have experienced *The Trial of Anthony Burns*. In addition to schools like [your school] _____, *The Trial of Anthony Burns* has been presented at libraries, museums, and courthouses throughout New England, including the JFK Library and the Moakley Federal Courthouse in Boston. **For further information about *The Trial of Anthony Burns* please contact Managing Director, Derek Nelson at (617) 899-1635 or dstonenelson@aol.com.**

About *The Trial of Anthony Burns*

Massachusetts was at the center of the abolitionist movement in pre-Civil War America. However, escaping from slavery was illegal, and state judges were obligated by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to return runaway slaves to their owners in the South. Theatre Espresso explores the tension between human law and moral principles in a compelling original drama based on the trial of Anthony Burns. Born into slavery in Virginia, Burns escaped to Boston where he lived as a free man until he was captured and placed on trial in 1854. In court, a group of prominent Boston lawyers fiercely defended Burns’ right to freedom. Despite their efforts, Judge Edward G. Loring returned Burns to his Southern master. After viewing a dramatization of this critical case, students interview the characters, debate the issues, and render their own judgment on Loring’s actions during the trial. This play was commissioned by “Discovering Justice: The James D. St. Clair Court Education Project.”

About Theatre Espresso

Theatre Espresso creates, produces, and performs interactive dramas that bring history to life for students, in order to foster a generation of critical thinkers and true citizens. Since 1992, Theatre Espresso has toured its educational dramas to schools, museums, libraries, and courthouses throughout New England. Inspired by the highly successful Theatre-in-Education teams of Great Britain and by the belief that drama is a potent teaching tool, Theatre Espresso’s work challenges students to make critical judgments, explore social relationships, reflect on the role of law and human rights in our society,

and question accepted truths about the history of America. These plays confront students with complex situations—based on actual historical events—that provoke a variety of opinions and solutions. Justice Stephen G. Breyer of the U.S. Supreme Court said of Theatre Espresso’s work: “[Their] object is to have students understand, in a dramatic way, the history of law in this country and the role the judicial system has played in our history. This kind of thing will make them treasure what we have. I’d like to see it expanded.” [*The New York Times*, 6/9/04] Theatre Espresso is currently researching and writing a new drama about the school desegregation case in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957, which will premiere in the autumn of 2008. Please visit Theatre Espresso on the web at www.TheatreEspresso.org.

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