

**Readers Theatre**  
1945  
Alaska Territorial Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**Cast:**

Joe Green	Mrs. Jones	Elizabeth Peratrovich
Allen Shattuck	O. D. Cochran	Roy Peratrovich
Frank Whaley	Norman R. Walker	Audience in the Senate
Talbor Scott	Grenold Collins	

**Narrator** This is a 1945 session in the Senate of the Alaska Territorial Legislature. Senators are discussing a newly proposed bill that calls for equal rights for all Alaskans.

**Joe Green** I am Joseph Green and I will be chairing this hearing. Today we are discussing and act that allows everyone equal rights and equal access to all public places and businesses in Alaska and punishes those who refuse.

**Allen Shattuck** Mr. Chairman!

**Joe Green** The Chair recognizes Senator Allen Shattuck.

**Allen Shattuck** Mr. Chairman, I am violently against this bill! Instead of being brought closer together, which is the reason for this bill, the races should be kept further apart. Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to mix with us whites with 5000 years of recorded civilization behind us?

**Frank Whaley** Mr. Chairman.

**Joe Green** The Chair recognizes Senator Frank Whaley.

**Frank Whaley** I am a pilot and a gold miner from Fairbanks. I'm also against this bill. As a bush pilot, I believe this bill will create bad feelings between whites and natives. As you can see, there are already bad feelings there.

**Talbor Scott** Mr. Chairman

**Joe Green** The Chair recognizes Senator Talbor Scott.

**Talbor Scott** I disagree with this bill unless it is changed. Mixed races are trouble. They wish to mix with whites. It would have been better if the Eskimos had put up signs, "No whites allowed."

**Grenold Collins** Mr. Chairman.

**Joe Green** The Chair recognizes Senator Grenold Collins.

**Grenold Collins** I agree with Senator Scott. The Eskimos of St. Lawrence Island have not suffered from the white man's evil and they are well off. The Eskimos are not a lower race, but an individual race. The pure Eskimos are proud and are aware that harm comes to them from mixing with the whites.

**O. D. Cochran** Mr. Chairman.

**Joe Green** The Chair recognizes Senator O. D. Cochran.

**O. D. Cochran** I am shocked by Senator Whaley's comments. I can tell of many instances of discrimination that I myself have witnessed. In Nome, an Eskimo woman was removed from a movie theater by force when she dared to sit in the "white" section. She ended up in jail over it! It would take up way too much time to tell what I have witnessed in Alaska, but know that I have seen it. There is blatant discrimination in Alaska! I support this equal rights bill!

**Audience in the Senate** *(Cheer and applaud loudly.)*

**Senator Whaley** *(Jump up, knock over a chair and stomp out.)*

**Audience in the Senate** *(Boo and hiss loudly.)*

**Norman Walker** Mr. Chairman.

**Joe Green** The Chair recognizes Senator Norman R. Walker.

**Norman Walker** I am strongly in support of this bill. No Native has ever died of a broken heart, but discrimination has caused life to be difficult for the Native people.

**Mrs. Jones** Mr. Chairman.

**Joe Green** The Chair recognizes Mrs. Jones.

**Mrs. Jones** I support separating the whites and Natives in Alaska. Otherwise it will get worse. We are not willing to accept mixing of the races. It just will not work!

**Norman Walker** Mr. Chairman, I would like to call upon Mr. Roy Peratrovich to testify.

**Joe Green** Mr. Peratrovich would you like to testify.

**Roy Peratrovich** Yes.

**Joe Green** Mr. Peratrovich, would you please state your educational background and tell what right you have to speak for the Natives.

**Roy Peratrovich** Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate. I am a graduate of Western Washington College and I have been Grand Camp President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood

since 1940. I stand before you today in favor of the equal rights bill.

The Honorable Governor Ernest Gruening knows discrimination exists in Alaska. At the Fairbanks convention for the Democratic Party they favored a solution on behalf of the Natives. There are members of the Senate here that helped frame the solution.

Only Indians can know how it feels to be discriminated against. Either you are for discrimination or you are against it. As you vote on this bill, think about it carefully.

**Joe Green** Thank you, Mr. Peratrovich. It is the custom to offer the audience a chance to share. Is there anyone present who would like to come forward and talk?

**Elizabeth Peratrovich** (Standing.) My name is Elizabeth Peratrovich. I am the Grand Camp President of the Alaska Native Sisterhood and I would like to speak.

**Joe Green** Yes, Mrs. Peratrovich. Please come forward.

**Elizabeth Peratrovich** I would not have expected that I, whom am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights.

My husband and I came to Juneau to look for a home in a nice neighborhood where our children could play happily with our neighbors' children. When we found such a house and arranged to lease it, we were told "No", because we were Indians. Would we have to live in the slums then?

There are three kinds of persons who practice discrimination. First, the politician ~ who wants people to remain less than others, so he can promise them something. Second, the Mr. and Mrs. Jones ~ who aren't quite sure of their status and who are nice to you one day and can't see you on other days, depending on who they are with. Third, the great superman ~ who believes in the greatness of the white race. The discrimination we have suffered has forced the finest of our race to associate with white trash! This super race attitude is wrong!

**Allen Shattuck** Do you think the proposed bill will stop discrimination?

**Elizabeth Peratrovich** Do your laws against robbery and even murder prevent those crimes? No law will do away with crimes, but at least you, as legislators, can say to the world that you recognize how bad it is and speak your plan to stop discrimination.

**Audience in the Senate** *(There is silence for a few moments. Then wild applause and cheers as Elizabeth returns to her seat.)*

**Narrator** After a long political battle and a speech by a five foot five inch Tlingit woman, the Senate passed the equal rights bill by a vote of 11 to 5 on February 8, 1945. The bill was signed into law on February 16, 1945. A new time for getting along with each other had begun.

That evening, Roy and Elizabeth Peratrovich danced at the Baranof Hotel ballroom. They danced amongst people they did not personally know and they danced in a business where they were not welcome before. They were happy. They belonged.

