

Thanks to a generous grant from the Illinois Arts Council, Freedom Hall has been given the opportunity to bring together a group of talented artists to develop a classroom presentation about Isaac Burns Murphy and his mother America Murphy. Upon completion, this presentation will be taken to Chicagoland schools to honor the legacy and tell the long-forgotten story of Isaac Burns Murphy - one of the greatest sports figures of the 19th century.

Illinois **ARTS** Council

This program is sponsored by a
grant from the Illinois Arts Council



Special thanks to **Drama Group in Chicago Heights** for
loaning us the furniture used in todays performance

dramagroup.org

Sylvia

by A.R. Gurney - June 6 - 15, 2025

FREEDOM HALL | 410 LAKEWOOD BLVD.

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FREEDOM HALL HAS BANQUET ROOMS AVAILABLE FOR RENTAL

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Presents:

RIDING FOR AMERICA

**The story of Isaac Burns Murphy and
his mother America Murphy**



June 12, 2025 at 7pm



jockey Isaac Burns Murphy on Tenny
photo credits: Keeneland Library

The Prince of Jockeys

Isaac Burns Murphy was born into slavery in 1861 in Kentucky, to Jerry Burns and America Murphy. Isaac rose from these humble beginnings to become one of the highest-paid athletes of his era (1880s) and a pioneering figure in Black sports history.

At the heart of his remarkable journey was the unwavering resilience of his mother, America Murphy, who encouraged the extraordinary talent of her son, Isaac. Together, their story stands as a powerful testament to perseverance, determination, and the enduring bond between a mother and son. It is a story of two individuals who overcame immense adversity to achieve greatness.

The Riding for America Project

Originally conceived by Nancy Hays as a classroom presentation in collaboration with Working in Concert for the Chicago Public Schools curriculum, *Riding for America* is now undergoing an exciting evolution. Our goal is to transform it into a more engaging, immersive, and emotionally impactful experience for students. This new version seeks to enhance the dramatic impact by:

- Revising and rewriting the script
- Incorporating creative staging techniques
- Structuring the performance for a compact, versatile team of artists and technician
- Seamlessly integrating music with storytelling
- Develop a high-quality audiovisual component
- Adding lighting, costumes, and props to enhance storytelling

Nancy Hays (*creator, writer, props & costumes*) singer/songwriter and business owner based in Chicago. Telling the story of *Riding for America* is Nancy's passion project, which began as an inspiration in 2019 after reading about Isaac Murphy's story. She has also written a Young Adult novel about Isaac and his mother, America, who raised her son to become a legendary sports hero.

Stephan Mazurek (Cinematographer, director, & projection design) is a filmmaker, cinematographer and theater director and projection designer.

Projection Design by Lotus Beast Productions
Projection Designers: Stephan Mazurek/Liz Sung

Jazzma Pryor (actor & writer) is an award-winning actress and ensemble member with Shattered Globe Theatre. She has a M.S. in Leadership for Creative Enterprises from Northwestern University and B.A. in Production Studies in Theatre from Clemson University. She is represented by Grossman & Jack Talent.

Eldridge Shannon III (actor) is an Evanston, IL native who discovered theatre and acting at the young age of 10. He has had the privilege and honor of performing for Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre, Piven Theatre, and many more. Eldridge is excited to portray the iconic and historic Isaac Burns Murphy.

Shelley Strasser (producer, lighting, costumes, & props) is the Assist. Cultural Arts Supervisor at Freedom Hall. With over 30 years of experience as an educator, lighting designer, and theatre technician, she is happy to bring her expertise to this work. Shelley extends her gratitude to the *Illinois Arts Council* for awarding grant funds to Freedom Hall, making this project possible.

Lily Sherman (Light Board operator) is a junior and theatre technician at Homewood Flossmoor High School.

FREEDOM HALL STAFF

Cultural Arts Supervisor: *Victor Blackful*

Assistant Cultural Arts Supervisor : *Shelley Strasser*

Office Assistant: *Stacey Coleman*