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Amir Abdullah Brings the Story of Isaac Murphy — and the Mother Who Shaped Him — to Life in the *Riding for America* Audiobook

Four-hour unabridged audiobook restores a forgotten Black sports icon and a foundational American story through voice and performance

Chicago, IL — January 14, 2026 — The audiobook edition of [*Riding for America: The Story of Isaac Murphy*](#), written by award-winning performer and producer **Nancy Hays**, is released today on Audible, featuring a powerful four-hour unabridged narration by acclaimed actor **Amir Abdullah** (*Empire, Chicago Med*). whose work narrating Percival Everett’s *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* received major industry recognition and critical acclaim.

Through Abdullah’s performance, the audiobook restores the nearly forgotten legacy of **Isaac Burns Murphy**, the son of formerly enslaved parents who became the most dominant jockey of the 19th century and one of the greatest athletes in American history. Murphy is perhaps best known for winning the historic “**Match Race of the Century**,” a head-to-head competition between the era’s top Black and White jockeys — a race photographed by **John C. Hement** and widely regarded as the **first official photo finish in sports history**.

More than a sports biography, *Riding for America* explores Murphy as an intellectual and moral figure: a disciplined, well-read athlete who carried himself with restraint and dignity in an era defined by racial injustice. Shakespeare is woven throughout the narrative, reflecting Murphy’s lifelong respect for language and learning.

Equally central to the story is Isaac’s mother, **America Murphy**, whose intellect, discipline, and moral authority shaped her son’s character and ambition. Her presence in the narrative underscores the often-overlooked role of Black mothers as foundational forces in American history — guiding, educating, and preparing their children to succeed against extraordinary odds.

“When I encountered Isaac Murphy’s story, I heard more than the sound of a race,” said Abdullah. “I heard a mind shaped by discipline, education, and a mother who understood the power of character. Narrating this audiobook felt like restoring voices history allowed to fade.”

Hays emphasized the importance of audio in reclaiming the story’s emotional depth. “Audio allows listeners to experience Isaac and America Murphy as living presences, not historical footnotes,” said Hays. “Amir’s narration gives dignity and weight to a story that deserves to be heard.”

The audiobook release coincides with growing national interest in *Riding for America* as a multi-format storytelling initiative spanning literature, audio, education, live performance and feature film, with student and community programs supported by an Illinois Arts Grant launching in 2026.

Midwest Book Review praised the novel as:

“Deftly crafted, impressively engaging, and exceptionally informative... unreservedly recommended for schools and community libraries.”

The *Riding for America* audiobook is available now on Audible. Review copies and interview opportunities with Nancy Hays and Amir Abdullah are available upon request.

About *Riding for America*

Riding for America: The Story of Isaac Murphy is a young adult historical novel by Nancy Hays that tells the true story of Isaac Burns Murphy and the mother who inspired him, bringing history to life through voice, language, and performance.

Learn more at www.RidingForAmericaDrama.com

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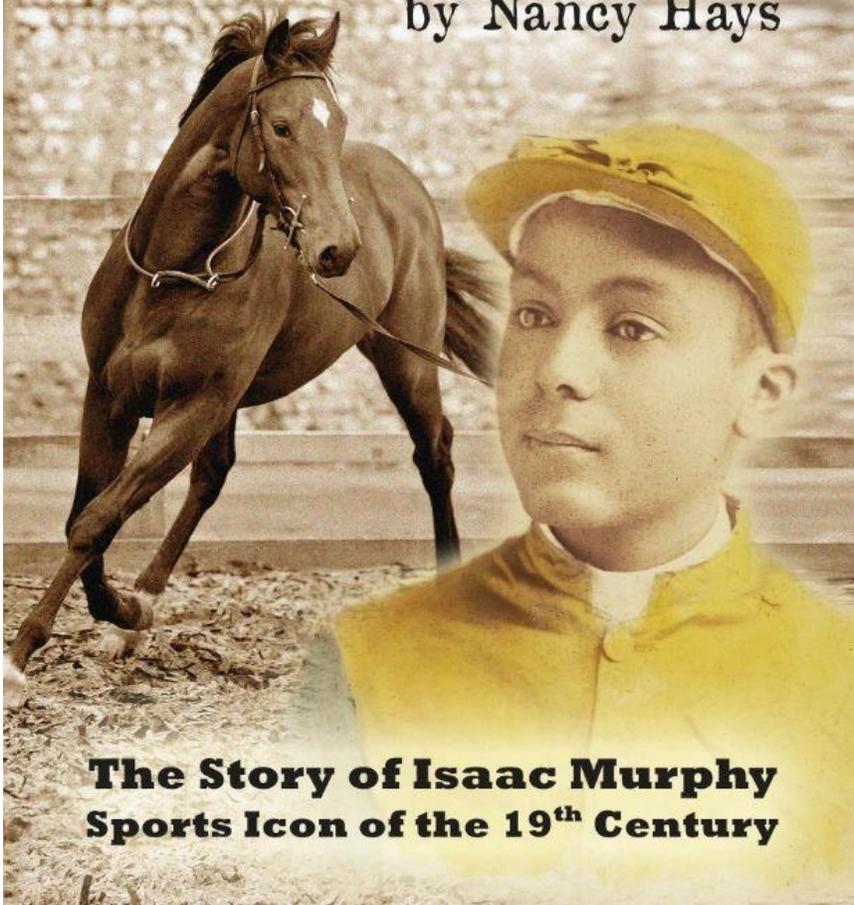
Amir Abdullah



Nancy Hays

RIDING FOR AMERICA

by Nancy Hays



**The Story of Isaac Murphy
Sports Icon of the 19th Century**