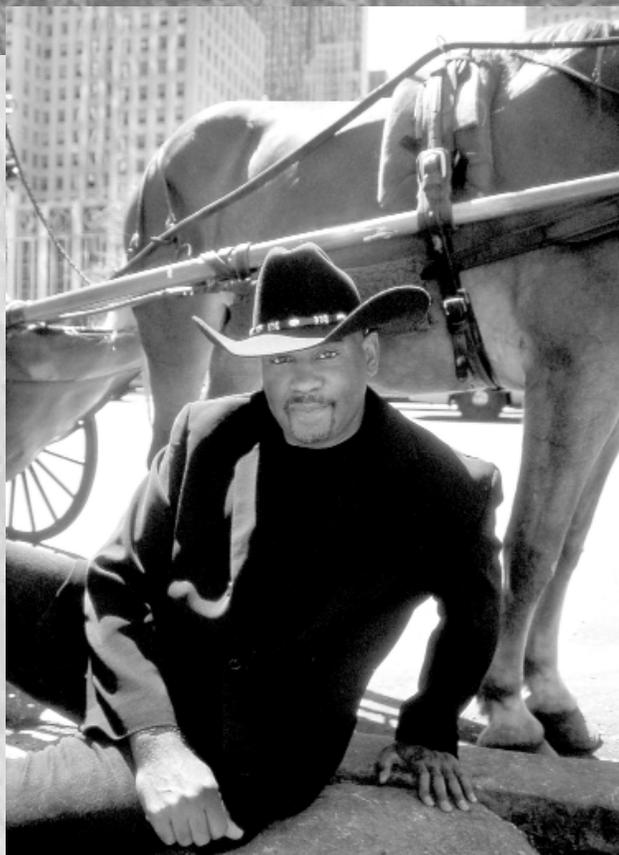


ALLAN HARRIS

CROSS THAT RIVER



key notes

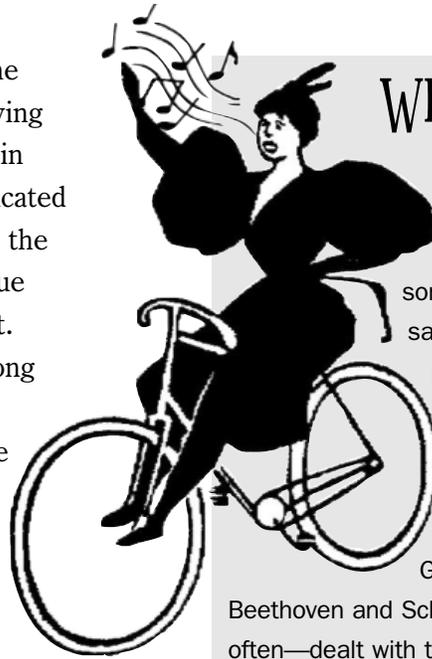
Welcome to *Keynotes*, a performance guide created by the Education Department of the State Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ. These *Keynotes* are designed to be used with the companion CD before and after attending the performance of *Cross That River*.

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Cross That River is a **song cycle** that tells the story of the African American cowboy. Interweaving fiction with historical fact, each of the ten songs in the cycle presents a different page in this complicated chapter of American history. The story begins in the 1850s, in the deep South, with a slave named Blue who longs to find his way to freedom in the West. With every song, the audience moves further along on Blue's journey.

The music and lyrics of *Cross That River* were written by Allan Harris—a singer, songwriter, and musician who is best known as a singer of classic jazz. At the performance, you'll hear Harris perform the songs with his band, which includes violin, bass, percussion, guitar, banjo, mandolin, dobro, and backup singers. In spoken narration, he introduces each song and provides a brief historical background. Projected images add a visual component to help the audience enter the world of the black cowboy.



What's a Song Cycle?

A song cycle is a set of songs that are meant to be performed together, in a specific order. Usually all of the songs in the cycle have music by the same composer and words by the same poet or lyricist. Some song cycles tell a story, while others explore a general theme or idea.

Song cycles first became popular early in the 19th century in Germany. Classical composers such as Beethoven and Schubert wrote song cycles that—most often—dealt with the subject of unrequited love. These works are usually performed by a solo singer accompanied by piano or other instruments.

More recently, rock and pop musicians have created song cycles—artists ranging from the Who, Pink Floyd, and the Beach Boys to Elvis Costello, David Byrne, and Janet Jackson.

MEET ALLAN HARRIS

Growing up in Brooklyn, Allan Harris was surrounded by music; his mother was a classical pianist and his aunt was an opera singer who later turned to the blues. Allan decided to become a musician at the age of eight, when his mother insisted he sing "Blue Velvet" for school. He has gone on to build a successful career as a jazz singer, performing all over the world and recording nearly a dozen albums.

*"I wrote *Cross That River* to reveal a little known fact: originally, cowboys were black men, not the Lone Ranger, not John Wayne, but black men, escaped slaves, freedmen."*

—Allan Harris

As a child, Allan loved horses as much as he did music. "I

learned to ride when I was a kid on my grandfather's farm in Western Pennsylvania," he says. "I spent my childhood riding all day, every day. I also loved Western movies, and I kept looking for a person of color in them. I knew they existed, but Hollywood hardly ever portrayed them." He wrote *Cross That River* to tell the history of the African American West and to celebrate the accomplishments of the black cowboys. "I believe that many African Americans feel disenfranchised in this nation partly because of the negative portrayal of our culture in America's history. I want the music I'm writing to be a source of pride for all Americans because for far too long the true story has been hidden."





Nat Love (1854-1921), nicknamed “Deadwood Dick,” was famous for his roping and shooting skills, as well as his vivid personality.

Around the world, the cowboy is a symbol of American culture, the brave hero of countless books, movies, and television shows. From the images we are shown, we would never guess that more than one-third of America’s cowboys were people of color—African Americans, Mexicans, and Native Americans. Among the African Americans on our western frontier were not only cowboys, but explorers, guides, homesteaders, farmers, fur trappers, gold miners, soldiers, outlaws, missionaries, and—for a time—slaves.

Between 1866 and 1896, as many as eight thousand black cowboys (about one-fourth of all cowboys) are estimated to have worked as trail drivers. They moved herds of cattle from ranches in Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma to rail yards in Colorado and Kansas, from where they would be shipped east. On

the trail, cowboys of all colors shared the same hardships, battling storms, stampedes, rattlesnakes, outlaws, and Indians. Black and white cowboys often ate the same food, received the same salary, and even shared sleeping quarters—perhaps the only place in the U.S. at that time where such an arrangement would have been permitted.

“Though Americas history includes slavery, prejudice, and intolerance, we all helped build this wonderful nation. During the more than 20 years of the great cattle drives on our Western frontier, we worked together on a level playing field that transcended race. Skills and hard work were more important than where you came from and what you looked like. The frontier was harsh and demanding but it was also an equalizer when it came to ones position.”

—Allan Harris

Gallop over to the library or your computer and see what you can discover about these black cowboys and cowgirls:

- James P. Beckwourth, explorer and guide
- Isom Dart, cattle rustler
- Isaiah Dorman, U.S. Army interpreter killed in the Battle of Little Bighorn
- Mary Fields, “Stagecoach Mary”
- Bose Ikard, cattle driver
- Nat Love, cowboy legend
- Bill Pickett, rodeo star
- Woody Strode, actor who played black cowboys in films
- Cathay Williams, female “Buffalo Soldier”



Bill Pickett (1871-1932), the first black cowboy to be inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

In 1865, when the Confederate States surrendered to the Union at the end of the Civil War, four million African American slaves suddenly became free. For the first time, they could choose where they wanted to live and what kind of work they wanted to do. Some freed slaves stayed in the South and worked as farm laborers, perhaps saving their money in the hopes of buying their own land.

Though they were legally free, however, African Americans still faced serious discrimination and persecution in the South. Looking for a better life, many emigrated to the northern cities in search of work.

Still others went in a different direction. After the Civil War, more than 20,000 African Americans headed west. Many were farmers who helped to establish all-black communities in Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. Some went to large cities in search of employment. Still others pushed further west—to the silver mines of Colorado or all the way to the Pacific Coast.

FREE LAND?

On May 20, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law the Homestead Act. Designed to provide opportunity to farmers and encourage settlement of the western frontier, the legislation awarded 160 acres of government land free to any American citizen over 21 years of age who built a house on the land and lived there for at least five years. About 270 million acres (10% of the area of the U.S.) was claimed and settled under this act, mostly in areas such as Montana, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Kansas.

For many newly-liberated slaves, however, the promise of free land turned out to be a myth. After emancipation, some states created constitutions that prohibited African Americans from settling on or owning land. Numerous other legal and illegal obstacles were put in place to prevent ex-slaves from acquiring property.

Go West, Free Man?

In 1877, the last Federal troops withdrew from the South following the Civil War. With their departure came renewed violence and discrimination against African

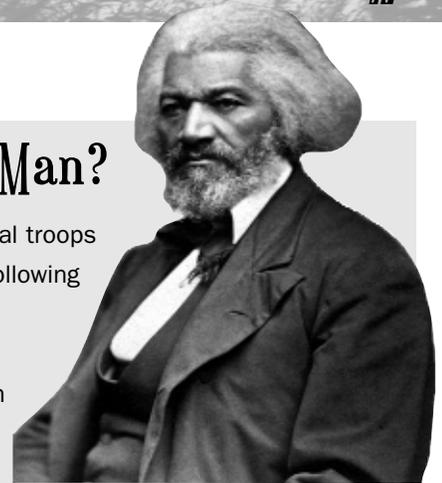
Americans. In response, many decided to seek a better life and greater

opportunity elsewhere. Between 1879 and 1880 alone, six thousand former slaves left Louisiana and Mississippi and moved to Kansas. This mass migration prompted a Congressional hearing and sparked a national debate about whether African Americans should leave the South to improve their political and economic prospects or remain in the region and work toward achieving their rights.

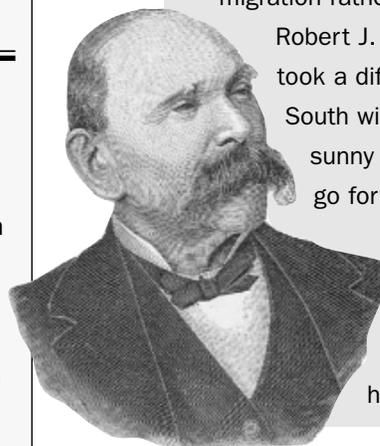
Frederick Douglass, the nation's most prominent African American leader, argued against migration because "it leaves the whole question of equal rights on the soil of the South open and still to be settled." Refusing to stay and fight, he said, "would make freedom and free institutions depend upon migration rather than protection."

Robert J. Harlan, in an 1879 speech in Nashville, TN, took a different view. "If the leading men of the South will make another Egypt of these bright and sunny valleys," he said, "then must the oppressed go forth into the promised land of liberty, into the

Western States and Territories, where the people are at peace and the soil is free, and where every man can secure a home for himself and family with none to molest him or make him afraid."



Frederick Douglass



Robert J. Harlan

Divide your class into two groups, one researching what Douglass and his followers said and the other what Harlan and his supporters had to say about the exodus of former slaves from the South. Stage a debate on the issue, with one team taking the pro-migration side, the other supporting the position that African Americans should stay in the South and fight for their rights.

“Blue was dark as molasses, had hair like a buffalo.”

Here’s a description of the ten songs you’ll hear in *Cross That River*. Four of the songs are discussed in greater depth in these *Keynotes* and are also on the CD your teacher will play for you.

1. “Cross That River”

CD track 1
Keynotes p. 6

This song is in the voice of Blue, a slave on a plantation in Louisiana. He describes how his family is being torn apart: Big Daddy has just been sold to the next farm, while Sister has been moved into the main house to serve the white masters. He dreams of escaping to a free life “way across that river.”

2. “Blue Was Angry”

Amid rumors of an approaching Civil War, Blue steals his master’s horse and escapes to Texas, where he becomes a cowboy on the Circle T Ranch. Though he’s free now, he’s constantly afraid that he’ll be sent back into slavery.

Why would Blue be worried about losing his freedom? Find out by reading about the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.



3. “Buffalo Soldiers”

CD track 2
Keynotes p. 7

This song celebrates the Buffalo Soldiers, black soldiers who served with honor in the U.S. Army.

CD track 3
Keynotes p. 8

4. “Mail-Order Woman”
This song introduces the character of Annie, who answers a newspaper ad placed by a frontiersman looking for a wife. She decides to take the long journey west to marry a man she’s never met. Will her gamble pay off?

5. “Diamond Jimmy”

Annie’s new husband turned out to be a cruel man, so she ran away from him. Now she works in a saloon, where she’s known as “Dancing Annie.” She’s the girlfriend of Diamond Jimmy, a handsome Creole gambler who shot a white man over a game of cards. Mustang Billy falls in love with Annie. Better watch out, Billy.... Jimmy keeps a loaded six-gun ready for anyone who tries to touch his gal!

6. “Dark Spanish Lady”

Blue tells of a night in Mexico when he fell in love with a beautiful, dark-skinned Spanish woman. When he woke up the next morning, he discovered she had run off with all of his money, leaving him with a broken heart.

Did You Know?
Slavery was abolished in Mexico in 1824—forty-one years earlier than in the U.S.

7. “Mule Skinner”

Before the days of railroads and interstate highways, goods were shipped across the American frontier in wagons pulled by mules. The mules were driven and looked after by a man called a mule skinner. In this song, an angry mule skinner cries out for revenge on the men who murdered his beautiful Indian wife.



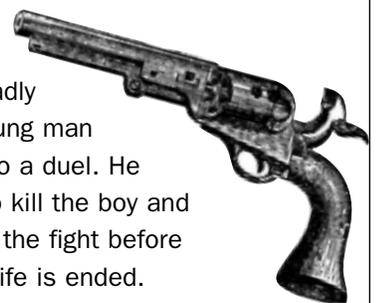
8. “Black Seminoles”

CD track 4
Keynotes p. 9

This song celebrates the Black Seminoles, escaped slaves who made their way to Florida and lived beside the Native Americans. Some of them became famous Indian fighters in Mexico and Texas.

9. “One More Notch”

Black Jo Jo, an experienced gunfighter, sadly waits for a hot-headed young man who has challenged him to a duel. He knows that he will have to kill the boy and wishes they could call off the fight before another promising young life is ended.



10. “Dat Dere Preacher”

Religion was important in building community in the American West. This song describes the exciting atmosphere as the congregation gathers for Sunday morning services led by a traveling minister known as a circuit preacher.

Mama said a white man
Be comin' in the morning—
Gonna drag Big Daddy away.
Sold him to the next farm;
Gonna breed him to the stock there.
I guess that's where he's gonna stay.

Took Baby Sister
Up to the big house;
Learn her to cook and mend their things.
Sometimes in the late night,
Underneath the staircase,
Sister rocks herself to sleep.

They say there's an old man—
He'll take you cross that river;
Nobody knows his name.
Sometime around a full moon,
Better make it to that river
And hide along the bank
'Til he whispers your name

Cross that river...

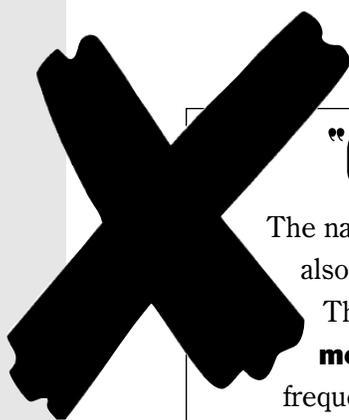
Dogs caught a runaway
Down on the south fork—
Mama said it's gonna be okay.
But we heard that man a-screamin'
'Til the early dawn;
Lawd, it kept us all awake!

I know there's a free
place,
Way across that river,
Where the wild ponies run
and play.
One day I'm gonna get
there,
If it takes me a lifetime....
A lifetime of being a slave.



Fugitive slaves cross the Rappahannock River in Virginia on their way north in 1862.

Timothy H. O'Sullivan. *Selected Civil War Photographs, 1861-1865*, Library of Congress.



“Cross” Words

The name of the show, *Cross That River*, is also the name of the first song in the cycle.

The title is a **metaphor** that is frequently used in songs and stories about escaping from slavery—“crossing over” from bondage to freedom.

METAPHOR - a word or phrase that is used as a symbol for something else

Crossing over water had symbolic meaning for people longing to be free. In the Bible, the Israelites fled from slavery in Egypt and entered the promised land by crossing the River Jordan. In America, many slaves literally had to cross the Ohio River on their way north.

Can you think of any other reasons why the metaphor of crossing over water might have a special meaning for African Americans?

Have you ever heard the expression that someone has “crossed over”? What does it mean?

What does freedom look like and feel like to you? Create your own metaphor for freedom and share it with your class.

CHORUS:

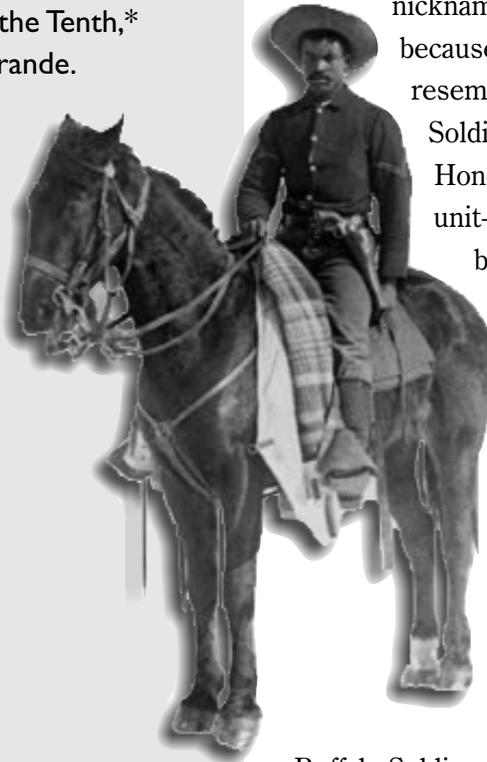
Buffalo Soldiers, fighting men,
Rode for the Army to clean up the land.
Nobody messed with the Ninth and the Tenth,*
From the Kansas plains to the Rio Grande.

From the cotton fields of Georgia
To the farmlands in the North,
The only way to be a man
Was in that uniform.
Some had never had their freedom,
Others fought for dignity;
Dark soldiers on the frontier—
They're part of history.

CHORUS

They were lean, tough, and ornery,
And didn't take no guff;
They chased those wild Apaches
'Til their moccasins wore off.
They battled brave Comanches,
Kiowas and Cheyennes, too;
They called them Buffalo Soldiers—
America's pride in blue.

* The Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments were two units of the “Buffalo Soldiers.”



“Buffalo Soldiers” was the unofficial name given to six all-black regiments of the U.S. Army that were established by Congress in 1866. They got their nickname from the Native Americans, possibly because they thought the soldiers' hair resembled the mane of a buffalo. The Buffalo Soldiers were awarded more Medals of Honor than any other American military unit—proving that they also shared the buffalo's fearlessness, toughness, and strength.

Though the enlisted men in the Buffalo Soldiers were all black, their officers were usually white. One exception was Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper. Born into slavery, he became the first African American graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the first black commander of a U.S. military regiment.

During their first decades, the Buffalo Soldiers served in the Indian Wars and other military campaigns in the Southwest and Great Plains. They also performed other jobs, such as building roads and protecting the U.S. mail. At the end of the 19th century, black regiments served with honor in the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars, and later in the two World Wars and the Korean War. All-black military units continued to serve with distinction until the U.S.

Army became integrated in the 1950s.

Buffalo Soldiers often encountered racial prejudice from other members of the army as well as from civilians in the places where they were stationed. Though they were assigned to the worst posts, suffered the harshest discipline, the worst food, equipment, and shelter, they had the lowest rate of desertion in the Army.



Lt. Henry O. Flipper

African Americans in the Military

In what ways might joining the military have been a good choice for an African American man right after the Civil War? Why would African Americans have been willing to fight Native Americans? How do you think these troops might have felt about being sent by white American commanders to fight and kill Native Americans?

Today, nearly 30 percent of those who enlist in the U.S. Army are black, even though African Americans represent only 12 percent of the general population. How would you explain this statistic? Do you see it as a positive or negative situation? Why?

Her hand grabbed the handle
Of that ol' leather satchel
That contained all her petticoats and dreams;
The other clutched the letter
From the fella who would get her
At the station in old Abilene.
She's twenty years and seven,
Her folks gone to heaven—
Just a widow without any means;
Then she got that message,
Said, "Please come to Texas,
Take the stage that leaves for Abilene."

She's a mail-order woman
And she's purchased, sight unseen.
Well she's not much to holler,
But fit as a dollar,
When she comes it will be C.O.D.
She's a mail-order woman
And her beauty is sometimes unseen.
With her suitcase and letter
She got from that fella,
Says, "Please come to old Abilene."

"There'll be church on Sunday,
We start work on Mondays,
And Saturday nights, if you please,
On the porch swing together
We'll discuss the weather
Then I'll ride to town for a drink.
They'll be lots of hassles
And no frills or tassels—
A strong, able man I will be.
Together we'll endeavor
To always stay together,
No matter how hard times might be."

Glass, the African American Chief of Scouts, Ft. Apache, Arizona, and his wife



One of the problems faced by pioneers in the American West was a shortage of women. In some places, men outnumbered women by as much as a twelve-to-one ratio. Intermarriage with Native American and Mexican women was one way of dealing with the situation.

Another solution for a lonely frontiersman was to take a "mail-order bride." Using newspaper ads, match-making services, or friends and family back home, he would seek out a woman who would consider making the long and difficult journey to harsh, unsettled territory to marry him. They might exchange letters (and sometimes photographs) through the mail; if they liked what they read, the man would pay the woman's expenses for the journey west. The woman promised to marry him when she got there.

Sometimes these mail-order marriages were successful. Other times, however, the bride arrived at her new home to discover that her intended husband had not been completely truthful about himself and his circumstances. Such women usually had no trouble finding a better match, since there were so many single men looking for wives.

Black women were especially scarce out West. In some African American frontier communities, the married women took it upon themselves to contact black churches and newspapers in the East to send "mail-order brides" of good character for the large numbers of single men who were stirring up all kinds of trouble.



These women are from Nicodemus, Kansas, an all-black town established after the Civil War.

“BLACK SEMINOLIES”

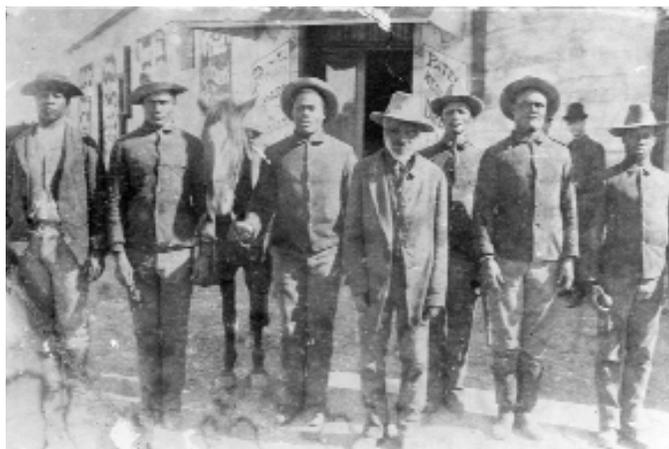
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From the lowlands of Carolina
To the islands off the Georgia coast,
The people known as the Gullah*
Ran away to the Florida shore;
Fought hand-in-hand with the Redman
In the Everglades' marsh and waterholes,
Took on the ways of those people—
They became known as Black Seminoles.

Dark and proud, with spirits strong,
Kept their language and they sang their songs.
Never could be broken to the will of the
white man's law.
Found their freedom down in Mexico,
Feared by the soldiers sent to bring them
home;
Strong race of people, they were called Black
Seminoles.

They settled in Nacimiento,
Led by old John Horse,
Recruited by Captain Perry
To fight in the Indian Wars;
Some received the Medal of Honor:
Adam Paine, Pompey Factor, and John Ward.
Promised land by the Bureau—
Once again, all those promises were torn.

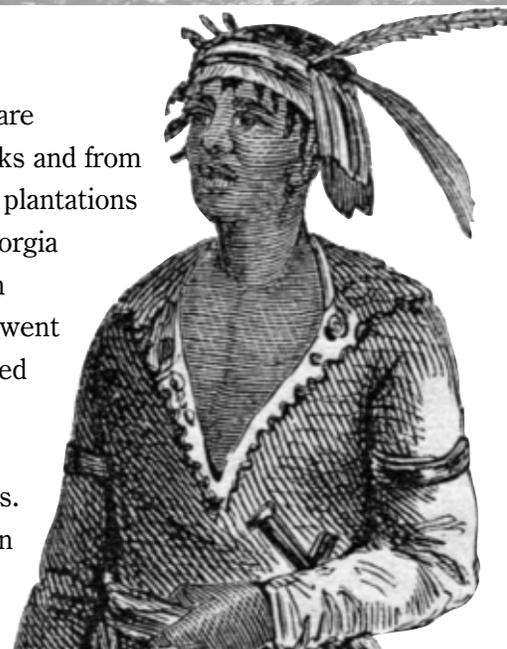
* “Gullah” is a culture that developed among African slaves living on the Sea Islands and coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia, and northeastern Florida.



Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts, 1889

Photo: New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

The Black Seminoles are descended from free blacks and from slaves who escaped from plantations in South Carolina and Georgia beginning in the late 17th century. Their ancestors went south to Spanish-controlled Florida, where they established communities near the Seminole Indians. They developed their own unique identity and culture—a combination of African, Indian, Spanish, and slave traditions.

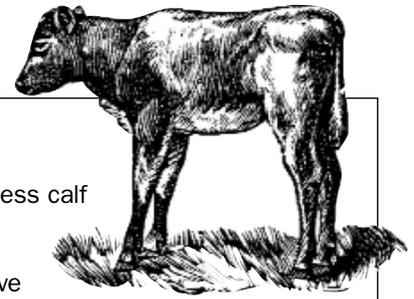


John Horse

In the first half of the 19th century, the Black Seminoles and their Indian allies fought the Seminole Wars against the U.S. government, who wanted to relocate them to the western Indian Territory. In the long and bloody conflict, the Black Seminoles showed themselves to be fierce and capable fighters. Eventually, however, most of the Black Seminoles were forcibly relocated with the Native Americans to what is now Oklahoma.

Out west, the Black Seminoles were in constant danger of being kidnapped by slave raiders. In 1849 the Black Seminole leader John Horse and about 100 followers escaped from the Indian Territory and headed for Mexico, where slavery was illegal. They eventually settled in Nacimiento (where some of their descendants still live today). In exchange for being granted Mexican citizenship, the Black Seminoles served as border guards and Indian fighters.

In 1870, a group of Mexican Black Seminole scouts were recruited by Captain Frank Perry of the U.S. Army to help stop Indian raids on white settlements in Texas. Designated the Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts, this elite unit fought until the early 1900s, serving with legendary skill and bravery. Four of their members—Adam Paine, Pompey Factor, Isaac Payne, and John Ward—earned the Medal of Honor, the highest award that can be given to a member of the U.S. Armed Services. In return for their service, the Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts believed they would be given their own land, but the U.S. government refused to honor their claims and left the soldiers without jobs or land once their military service had ended.



Listen for these words and phrases in *Cross That River*.

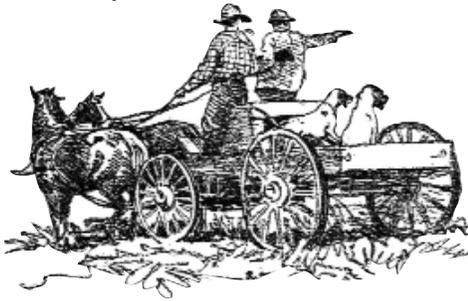
ABILENE - a city in central Kansas (also a city in Texas)

BRAZOS - a river in Texas

BREAK (an animal) - make tame; train to obey

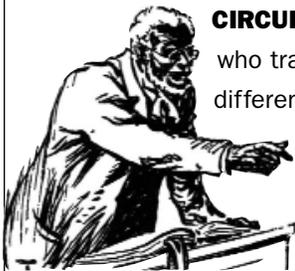
BROOD - the children in a family

BUCKBOARD - a plain horse-drawn wagon with a seat for the driver



BUNKHOUSE - a building on a farm or ranch where the workers sleep

CHISHOLM - the Chisholm Trail, a route used to drive cattle from southern Texas to the rail line in Abilene, Kansas



CIRCUIT PREACHER - a Christian minister who travels a 'circuit' to lead services at different places in areas where there is a shortage of clergy

C.O.D. - abbreviation for "cash on delivery"; paying for an item in cash when it is delivered

CREOLE - a person, language, or cultural tradition of mixed African American and European (French or Spanish) ancestry

DOGIE (DOH-ghee) - a motherless calf

GOODNIGHT - the Goodnight-Loving Trail, a route used to drive cattle from western Texas and New Mexico to the rail lines in Colorado

GRUB - food

MARE - an adult female horse

MUSTANG - a small, powerful horse of the American plains

NOTCH - a small mark carved into something (such as the handle of a gun) for keeping count of something

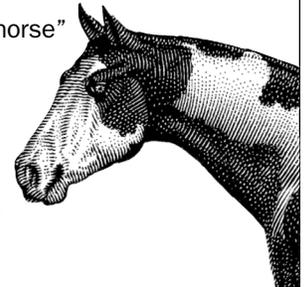
ORNERY - stubborn

PETTICOAT - a full, ruffled slip worn under a woman's skirt

PINTO - a horse marked with spots of white and other colors; also called a "paint horse"

SATCHEL - a small suitcase

STAGE - short for 'stagecoach,' a wheeled coach pulled by horses that transported travelers, mail, etc. over a regular route in the Old West



STOCK - animals kept on a farm

STUD - a male animal used for breeding

WRANGLER - a cowboy, especially one who looks after horses

Did You Know?

During the early days of the frontier, a letter could take MONTHS to travel from the Midwest to California!



Keeping in Touch

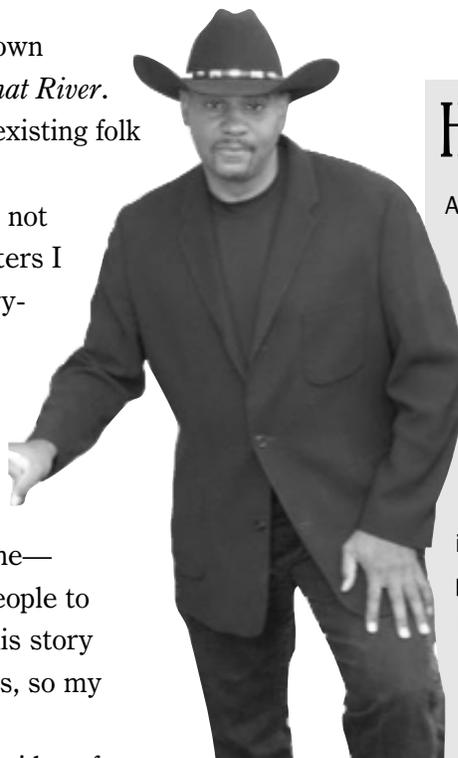
Letters, diaries, journals, and other written records are valuable primary source material for historians and researchers because they offer glimpses of the everyday lives of ordinary people who are often left out of the history books.

Imagine that you are an African American man or woman living and working in the Old West. Create a story for yourself: who you are, why you went west, where you are now, and what you're doing. Write a letter to your family back home. Be sure to include as many details as you can about your new life. Use some of the vocabulary words on this page to add a feeling of authenticity to your letter.

Allan Harris wrote his own original music for *Cross That River*. Why didn't he simply use existing folk music and cowboy songs?

"That type of music did not truly represent the characters I created," he says. "Country-western music represents only a certain segment of our society. In a way, using only that style would be repeating what the history books have done—omitting large groups of people to please a smaller group. This story encompasses all Americans, so my music had to reflect that."

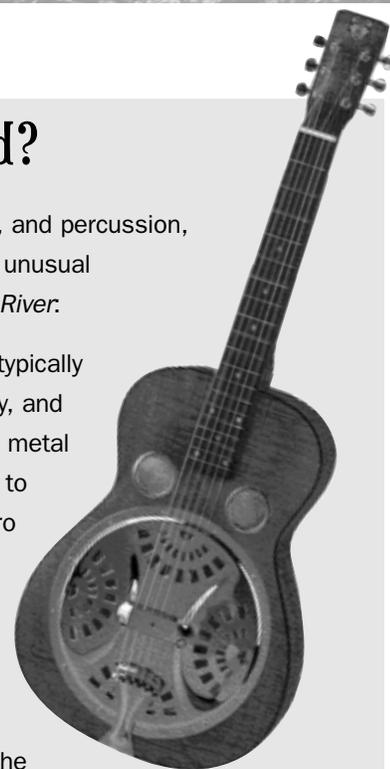
Harris came up with the idea of combining different styles of traditional and popular American music: blues, folk, bluegrass, country, gospel, rock-and-roll, rhythm-and-blues, and jazz, which he calls "America's classical music." Listeners will also hear influences of Spanish and Celtic music, two traditions that were important to the development of American folk music.



Have You Heard?

Along with guitar, violin, bass, and percussion, you'll hear these somewhat unusual instruments in *Cross That River*.

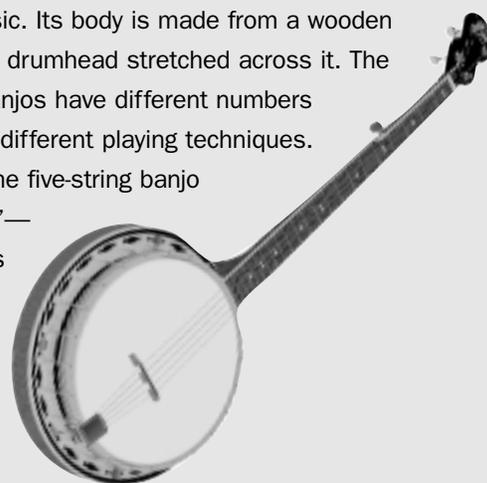
DOBRO - a type of guitar typically used in bluegrass, country, and Hawaiian music. It uses a metal resonator set into its body to amplify the sound. The dobro is usually held flat on the player's lap. While the player's right hand plucks the strings, the left hand slides a metal bar up and down the neck to produce the dobro's distinctive metallic, sliding sound.



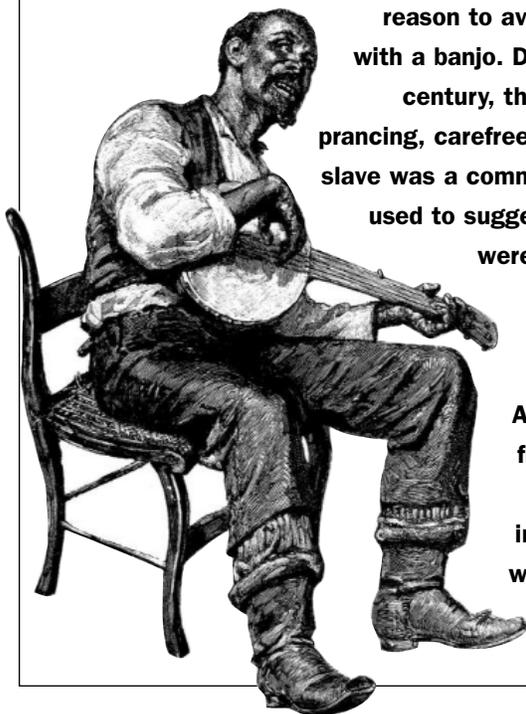
MANDOLIN - a small, teardrop-shaped guitarlike instrument with eight strings in four *courses*, or pairs. The mandolin can be played by plucking or strumming. A common playing technique for this instrument is *tremolo*—repeatedly plucking one or more of the courses very rapidly.



BANJO - a descendent of instruments brought over from Africa by slaves, the banjo is heard most often today in folk, country, and bluegrass music. Its body is made from a wooden or metal rim with a drumhead stretched across it. The various types of banjos have different numbers strings, as well as different playing techniques. Most common is the five-string banjo played "fingerstyle"—using the fingertips and/or fingernails, rather than a pick, to pluck the strings. This is known as "fingerpicking."



For decades, African American musicians had good reason to avoid being seen with a banjo. During the 19th century, the image of the prancing, carefree, banjo-playing slave was a common stereotype used to suggest that blacks were both lazy and carefree. Fortunately, African Americans have finally begun to reclaim the instrument that was invented by their African ancestors.



WHAT'S THE REAL STORY?

"History is written by the victors."

—Winston Churchill

We like to think of history as an **objective** record of facts that can be proved beyond question. In reality, though, history is **subjective**: the way historical events are described and interpreted varies widely, depending on who is telling the story. Discuss with your class:

- Does it *really* matter who gets to write history? Why?
- Why do certain historical figures get credit for their accomplishments while others are forgotten? How does this apply to the story of African Americans on the western frontier?
- Do you need to witness an event in order to understand it? If you wanted to understand an event that you did not witness, how would you go about finding information and different points of view? Would you get a more accurate description of an event if many people were involved?
- How does historical fiction (in movies, plays, novels, music, etc.) influence our view of history? Can you think of two movies or books on the same historical subject that give a very different account of that person or event?
- How does *Cross That River* change the way you view the history of the American West? Is it an effective way to teach history?
- What do you think your biography—your “history”—would look like if written by your parents? By your friends? By your teachers? By you yourself? Would any of these “histories” of you be completely accurate?

"Through the character of Blue I have tried to give the listener a birds-eye view of how society treated a strong black male during that timeframe. Blue is an amalgamation of many people that I have encountered and read about. Real characters such as Nat Love, Bill Pickett, Jim Beckwourth, and Jesse Stahl have influenced my conception of him."

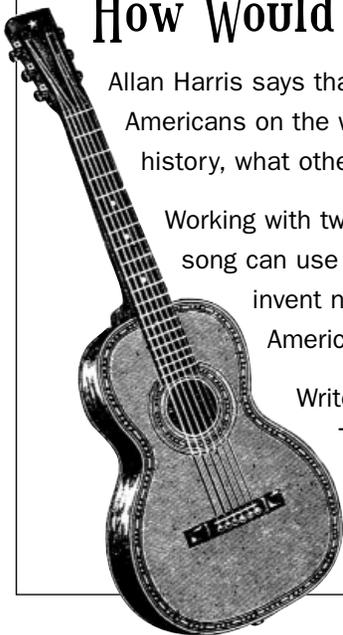
—Allan Harris



A black cowboy and his horse, c. 1890-1920

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How Would YOU Tell the Story?



Allan Harris says that *Cross That River* is just the first part of a planned musical trilogy depicting the story of African Americans on the western frontier. He still has two more parts to write. Based on your study of African American history, what other chapters from this story do you think he ought to include?

Working with two or three partners, choose a subject for a song that could be added to *Cross That River*. Your song can use characters already in the story (such as Blue, Diamond Jimmy, or Dancing Annie), or you can invent new ones. You can tell about a group of people or a significant event in the history of African Americans in the West. Research the people and events connected to your subject.

Write the lyrics for your song, making sure to include information you've picked up in your research. Then write the melody, or use an existing melody that fits the mood of your subject. Perform your song for the rest of the class. Even better—record all the songs your class has created and send the recording to the State Theatre. We'll be sure to share your own *Cross That River* song cycle with Allan Harris!

Step 1: Do Some Homework.

By reading the information in these *Keynotes* and listening to the songs on the CD, you'll get a lot more out of the performance of *Cross That River*. Explore some of the resources listed below to learn even more about African Americans in the American West.

BOOKS:

American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm, by Gail Buckley. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002

Black Cowboys of Texas, edited by Sara R. Massey. Texas A&M University Press, 2005

Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage, by William Loren Katz. Simon Pulse, 1997

Black Pioneers: Images of the Black Experience on the North American Frontier, by John Ravage. University of Utah Press, 2002

The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States, by William Loren Katz. Harlem Moon, 2005

Black Women of the Old West, by William Loren Katz. Atheneum, 1995

Hearts West: True Stories of Mail-Order Brides on the Frontier, by Chris Enss. Falcon, 2005

The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, by Nat Love. University of Nebraska Press, 1995

The Negro Cowboys, by Philip Durham & Everett L. Jones. University of Nebraska Press, 1983

The Wolf and the Buffalo, by Elmer Kelton. Texas Christian University Press, 1985. A novel about a freed slave who becomes a Buffalo Soldier.

WEBSITES:

African American History in the American West Timeline
http://faculty.washington.edu/qtaylor/aaw_history_public/aaw_timeline.htm

Allan Harris
www.allanharris.com

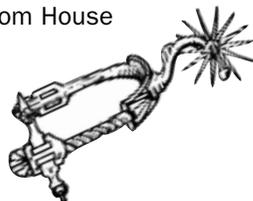
Buffalo Soldiers
www.buffalosoldier.net

Black Seminoles
www.johnhorse.com

Homestead Act
www.nps.gov/archive/home/homestead_act.html

People of Color on the Western Frontier
www.coax.net/people/lwf/WESTERN.HTM

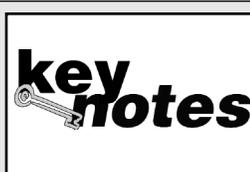
Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts
www.medalofhonor.com/IndianScouts.htm



Step 2: Learn Your Part.

As a member of the audience, you are a crucial part of the performance. Before you arrive at the theater, make sure you know your role!

- When you enter the theater, follow the usher to your seat.
- Once the house lights (the lights in the part of the theater where the audience is sitting) go down, focus all your attention on the stage.
- Attending a live theater performance is not the same as watching television at home. At the theater, behavior such as talking, text messaging, or moving around disturbs the performers and the rest of the audience. So please be sure to give the performance your complete and focused attention.
- Don't bring cameras, camcorders, tape recorders, or any other recording equipment to the performance.
- Food and beverages are not permitted inside the theater.
- If something in the show is funny, go ahead and laugh. And of course, feel free to applaud at the end of the performance if you enjoyed it!



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Keynotes written and designed by Lian Farrer
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