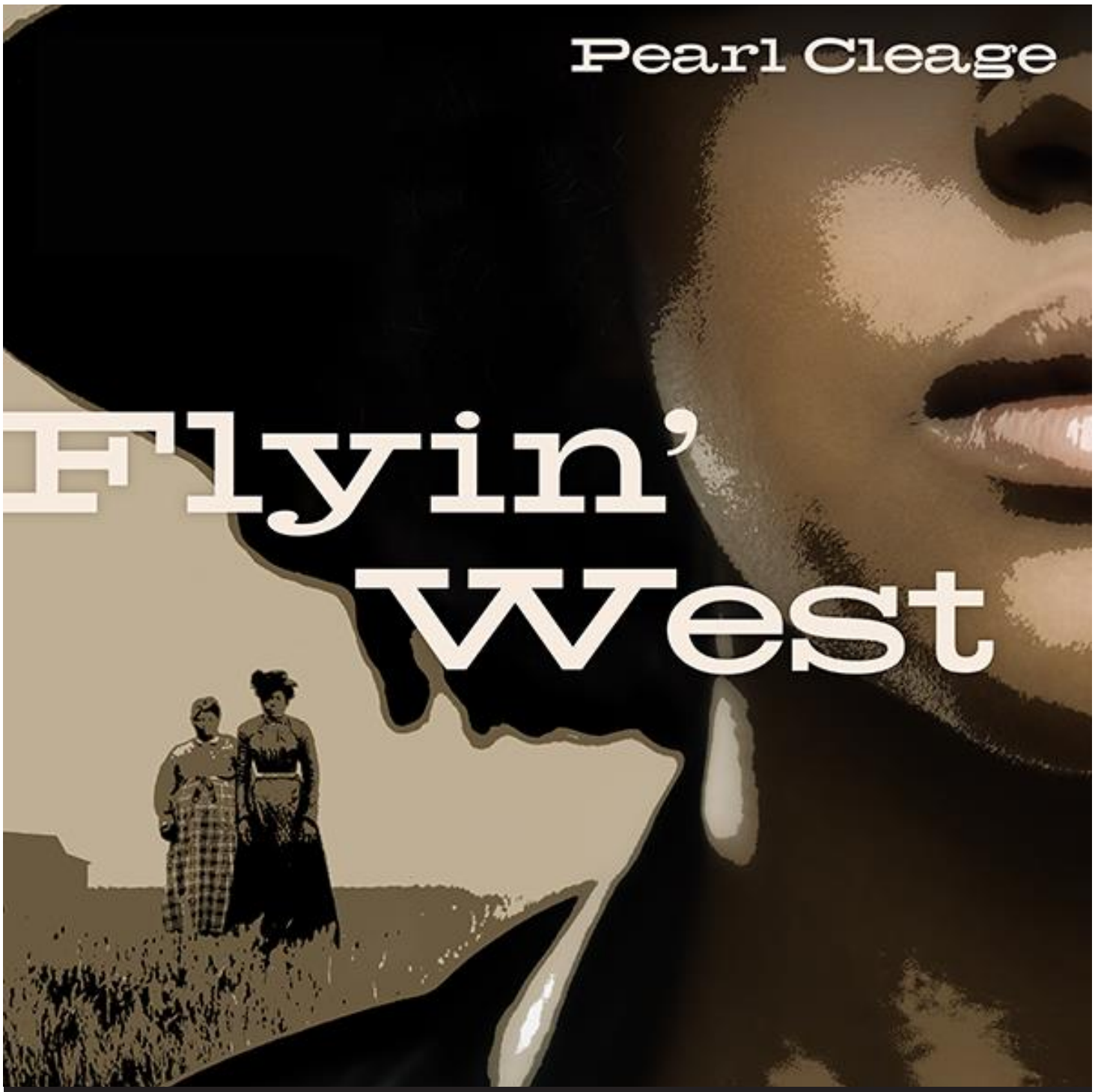
Pearl Cleage

Flyin' West



AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at **AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

FLYIN' WEST

Written by Pearl Cleage

Directed by Chuck Smith*

STARRING


Sydney Charles


Wardell Julius Clark


Tiffany Renee Johnson


Joslyn Jones


Tiffany Oglesby


Henri Watkins

Following the end of the Civil War, many former slaves took advantage of The Homestead Act and went West to build new lives for themselves and their families. Many of these homesteaders were black women who overcame tremendous odds to work their own land and make a place for themselves in an often harsh and forbidding environment. Set in 1898, this is the story of some of these African-American female pioneers who settled, together, in the all-black town of Nicodemus, Kansas. "A gripping play…a paean to women…Ms. Cleage writes with amazing grace and killer instinct." – *The New York Times.*

** Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater*

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Elyse Dolan
Associate Producer
American Blues Theater

with Gwendolyn Whiteside, Chuck Smith,
Jared Gooding, and Lily Grace Walls

NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE


Artistic Director
Gwendolyn Whiteside

Welcome to American Blues Theater's Season 33 "Home Sweet Home". We proudly present a revival of Pearl Cleage's *Flyin' West*, directed by Goodman Theatre's Resident Director and American Blues's Artistic Affiliate Chuck Smith.

Ms. Cleage is a highly-successful writer and regarded as one of the most influential African-American contemporary playwrights in the United States. The daughter of civil rights activist Bishop Albert Cleage, she learned to use her voice from a young age. She writes, "My response to the oppression I face is to name it, describe it, analyze it, protest it, and propose solutions to it as loud[ly] as I possibly can every time I get the chance. I purposely people my plays with fast-talking, quick-thinking black women since the theater is, for me, one of the few places where we have a chance to get an uninterrupted word in edgewise."

The characters in *Flyin' West* are as relevant in 2018 as when they first appeared in The Alliance Theater's world premiere (1992). Ms. Cleage's characters are complex, fiercely independent, and unforgettable. They speak their truths and claim ownership of their stories. In the first scene, you'll hear Miss Leah say, "Colored folks can't forget the plantation any more than they can forget their own names. If we forget that, we ain't got no history past last week."

Ms. Cleage and our production team will transport you back to the late 1800s. You'll encounter references to the Homestead Act and timeless themes of freedom and identity from perspectives that should be required learning in schools. American Blues Theater proudly partners this production with Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Abused Women Coalition. We give each organization complimentary tickets and materials for educational growth.

In the famous words of Ms. Cleage, "You can't know the meaning of the lesson until the class is over!" •

Q&A WITH DIRECTOR
CHUCK SMITH

What excites you about this project?
I have always loved stories about the nineteenth century American West.

What do you admire about Pearl Cleage's writing?
Pearl Cleage is one of my favorite playwrights. Her characters and plotlines have always intrigued me.

Why is it important to tell this story now?
American history doesn't teach anything about African-American settlers in the American West.

What will you be working on next?
My next project will be directing James Baldwin's *Amen Corner* for the Westcoast Black Theatre Throop in Sarasota, FL where I am a resident director. •


Director
Chuck Smith

ABOUT PLAYWRIGHT
PEARL CLEAGE

Pearl Cleage is a fiction writer, playwright, poet, essayist, and journalist. In her writing, Cleage draws on her experiences as an activist for AIDS and women's rights, and she cites the rhythms of black life as her muse.


Playwright
Pearl Cleage

Cleage (pronounced "cleg") was born on December 7, 1948, in Springfield, Massachusetts, the younger daughter of Doris Graham and Albert B. Cleage Jr. She grew up in Detroit, Michigan, where her father was a church pastor and played a prominent role in the Civil Rights Movement.

After graduating from the Detroit public schools in 1966, Cleage enrolled at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she majored in playwriting and dramatic literature. In 1969 she moved to Atlanta and enrolled at Spelman College, graduating in 1971 with a bachelor's degree in drama. She later joined the Spelman faculty as a writer and as a creative director. Also in 1969 she married Michael Lomax, an Atlanta politician and educator. They have one daughter, Deignan Njeri. The marriage ended in divorce in 1979. Cleage married Zaron W. Burnett Jr., writer and director for the Just Us Theater Company, in 1994.

In her writing Cleage is zealous about those issues of black life she feels need a forum for discussion, and she promotes practical education with regard to these issues whenever possible. In the essay collection *Deals with the Devil and Other Reasons to Riot* (1993), she discusses sexism and domestic abuse. Of particular interest in this nonfiction volume is a section entitled "Mad at Miles" in which she criticizes jazz musician Miles Davis for brutality to women and draws parallels to abusive male behavior in everyday relationships. Among other topics, she also writes about the controversial hearings for Clarence Thomas's nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court as well as the controversies sparked by the film director Spike Lee and his work.

Throughout her career Cleage has often been in the public eye. She worked as press secretary and speech writer in the 1970s for Maynard Jackson, the first black mayor of Atlanta. Since then, her contribution to the Atlanta community has been steady and intense, finding expression through her columns in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *Atlanta Tribune*; in the pages of *Catalyst*, a literary journal she cofounded and edited; and in her work as a faculty member at Spelman. In 2014 Cleage published *Things I Should Have Told My Daughter: Lies, Lessons, and Love*, which chronicles her early years as a writer in Atlanta's turbulent political climate of the 1970s and 1980s.

Cleage's first novel, *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day*, was an Oprah Book Club selection in 1998 and appeared on the *New York Times* best-seller list for nine weeks. Cleage has received numerous awards in recognition of her work, including the Bronze Jubilee Award for Literature in 1983 and the outstanding columnist award from the Atlanta Association of Black Journalists in 1991.

Cleage's theatrical works include *Flyin' West* (1992), which was the most produced new play in the country in 1994. Her other plays include *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (1995), *Bourbon at the Border* (1997), *A Song for Coretta* (2007), *What I Learned in Paris* (2012), and *Tell Me My Dream* (2015). *Blues for an Alabama Sky* was performed in Atlanta as part of the 1996 Cultural Olympiad in conjunction with the 1996 Olympic Games. In 2013 she was named playwright-in-residence of Atlanta's Alliance Theatre. The initial three-year term was renewed for an additional three years in 2016. •

(edited from GeorgiaEncyclopedia.org, PearlCleage.net, and Wikipedia.org)

DESIGNERS' CORNER:
"THE BACKSTORY" WITH JARED GOODING

American Blues Theater Ensemble member Jared Gooding is the Lighting Designer for *Flyin' West*. We asked Jared to share some lesser-known facts about himself in "The Backstory."

If I weren't a designer:
I'd like to think I'd be a civil engineer. When you really think about how much planning and thought went into making the simplest things in our homes and businesses happen, it's almost mind boggling. Someone had to plan all of the sewer lines taking waste water from our homes and where to take it. The pipelines that bring gas into our homes in the winter without leaking or exploding. And the electrical lines the bring massive amounts of electricity into this very theater.

Childhood nickname:
J-rod. I had a German P.E. teacher that called me that when I lived in Tennessee because I told him Jared sounded weird coming from him. When I moved to Texas there was another Jared in my homeroom, so my teacher asked either one of us went by a nickname and I offered up mine. From then on I was only known as J-rod to a lot of people at school.

Best career advice I've received:
"Maintain a work life balance." Because of the industries I work in, it is very easy for me to find myself working 14 days straight or more. I will often just block off a day or two where I will not answer emails or plan to do much of anything. I'll just let the day happen as it does. Those days are the most rejuvenating. (And to any directors or production managers reading this, your email really did just slip through the cracks, or I was distracted by another tech/job. I promise!)

Favorite part of the job:
Getting work with so many other artist who challenge me and inspire me in so many different ways. And then getting to call these wonderful people my friends.

Worst part of the job:
The fact that I only takes a week or two in the space for me to accomplish my job. So much of my work is done alone and before we even step foot in the theater, that by the time we begin tech for a show, the actors, run crew, musicians, and directors have all spend so much time together that they have already formed a tight bond. They welcome you into the room with open arms and you instantly feel at home, but there is also the fact that they've had a month or two of rehearsing together to bond into a family. I often wish I could build that type of close bond with everyone I get to work with in the room. (That and the temporary blindness gained after a long day of focus when I have to stare into lights for 4-8 hours straight.)


Lighting Designer Jared Gooding

How I made my first dollar:
Selling bubblegum in 6th grade. I would sell a stick of Juicyfruit for 25 cents a stick, then turn around and buy a 5 pack for a quarter while grocery shopping with my mom. BAM $1! I was making about $7 a week before I was busted by the faculty.

Last meal I'd want:
My mom's meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and green-beans. Then I'd at least eat so much that I would pass in my sleep. Cause there is no waking me up after that.

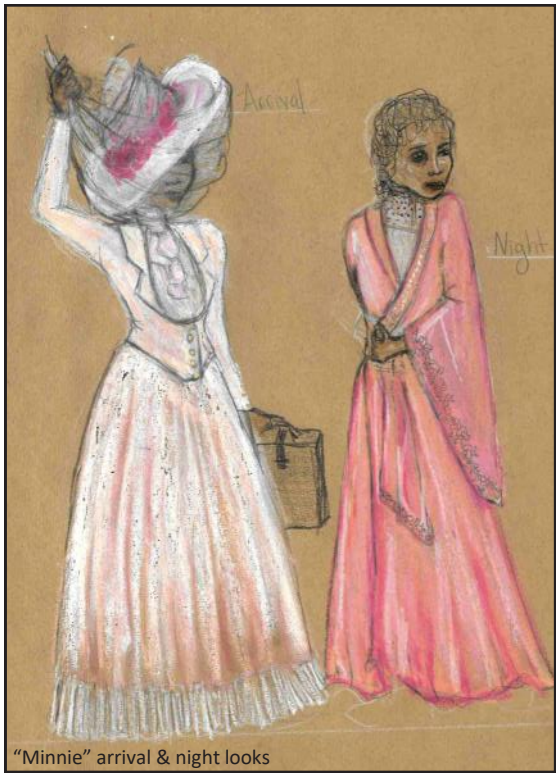
Favorite item of clothing:
Well jackets of course, it's Chicago... OH!!! You mean "'My' favorite item of clothing?" Probably whatever pajamas I was sleeping in that night. They give you your first warm hug of the day every morning.

If I could invent one thing:
Vibranium. Wakanda Forever!

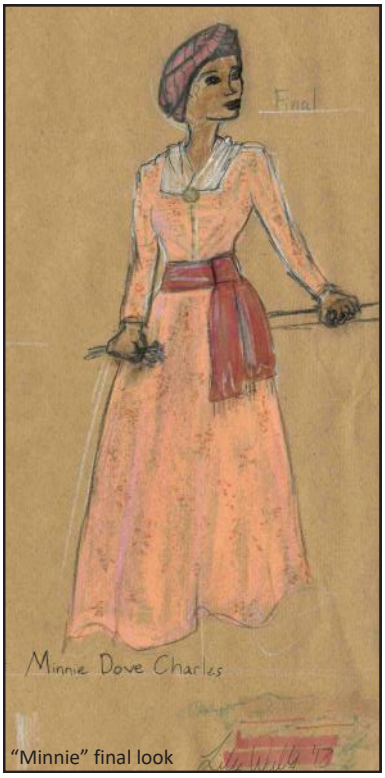
One of my hidden talents:
I like to think I'm pretty good at noticing when people make puns on accident. It's really because my brain works in strange ways though... •

DESIGNERS' CORNER: **COSTUME SKETCHES**

We asked Costume Designer Lily Grace Walls to share some preliminary sketches of her designs for *Flyin' West.* Below are a handful of her sketches featuring different looks for three of the characters: "Minnie Dove Charles", "Fanny Dove", and "Sophie Washington".



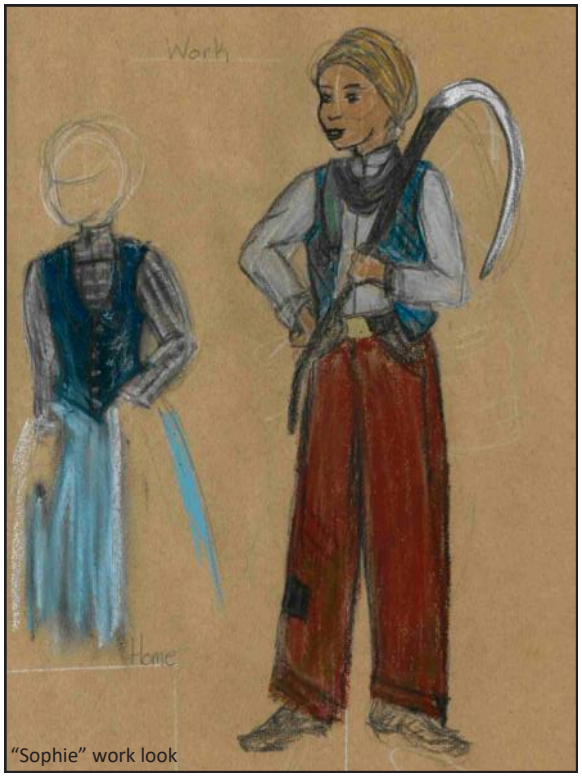
"Minnie" arrival & night looks



"Minnie" final look

"Fanny" work look

"Fanny" church/dance look



"Sophie" work look

"Sophie" church/dance look

ABOUT
NICODEMUS, KANSAS

Flyin' West is set in Nicodemus, Kansas — a real all-black town built by former slaves and their descendants looking to escape the post-Civil War South and take advantage of the opportunities promised by the West.

The settlement of Nicodemus was part of a greater movement of westward migration that occurred in the latter half of the 19th century. Several technological and cultural factors contributed to the growing trend of movement, enabling and encouraging new groups to move west.

Kansas also had an appeal to African-Americans living in the post-Civil War South. In the minds of many of these recently freed slaves, Kansas represented a land of freedom and opportunity due to the actions of John Brown and other abolitionists. Promoters such as Benjamin "Pap" Singleton encouraged African-Americans to move to Kansas. Nicodemus would become a destination for these new migrants. Eager to escape the persecution and poor living conditions of Reconstruction, thousands left the South and headed west seeking economic opportunity and a sense of freedom.

1877: Foundation

On April 18, 1877, a group of seven Kansans, six of whom were black, established the Nicodemus Town Company. Most of the group consisted of former slaves from Kentucky in search of a new livelihood. The goal was to establish the first all-black settlement on the Great Plains. Two theories explain the choice of the name Nicodemus. One claiming the town was named after the biblical figure Nicodemus. The other holds the town was inspired by the legendary account of an African prince taken into slavery who later purchased his freedom. The location of the town was along the northern bank of the Solomon River, an area suitable for developing farming. The town itself was located on a 160-acre plot, of the 19,200 acres of the township, at large.

Leaders of the town made efforts to promote the town and attract new settlers. Publications describing the resources and benefits of moving to the area were mailed to prospective migrants across the South. Early promotional efforts were directed towards attracting people with enough money to develop the town. Residential lots cost $5 while commercial lots were $75. The promoters charged additional fees for establishing the settlers on the land. Efforts succeeded in bringing groups of colonists from eastern Kansas and Kentucky, and at one point the population reached about 600 people in 1878.

The early settlers found life in Nicodemus to be challenging. Some people turned around after seeing the scarcity of resources. Most were very poor farmers who came without money and other provisions. Without proper tools and equipment, such as plows, wagons, and horses, farmers could not efficiently develop the rough land; some resorted to using hand tools to make improvised fields. A lack of timber forced settlers to build homes out of prairie sod. To earn money some people collected and sold Buffalo bones found on the plains; others ventured miles away to work for the railroads.

Nicodemus, Kansas in 1885

Settlers in Nicodemus, Kansas

1879-1880: Growth

New groups of settlers arrived in Nicodemus in 1878–79 from Kentucky and Mississippi. Unlike the early migrants, they had the resources necessary to develop and cultivate the farmland; they came with the horse teams, plows, other farm equipment, and money that the early settlers did not have.

Soon the town began to grow and businesses became profitable; a hotel and two stores were established and a school and three churches were built. Social organizations such as the Grand Independent Benevolent Society of Kansans and Missouri put on dances and other celebrations for the benefit of the town. One such event was the annual celebration of England's emancipation of slavery in the West Indies.

1880–1888: Decline

After the growth of 1879–80, Nicodemus experienced a period of decline after 1880. Most people who settled in the town did not intend to remain there permanently and subsequently moved on. Not enough of the $75 commercial lots were sold to keep the town growing. Years of poor harvests also contributed to declining population. In 1884, less than 50 people remained in the town.

Beginning in 1886 the town began another campaign of promotion. Local papers sought to broaden the appeal of Nicodemus by reaching out to other populations, both black and white. Descriptions of the towns' numerous social clubs, activities, celebrations, and business opportunities were spread in the hope of attracting new migrants. The town undertook a major effort to bring a railroad route through Nicodemus, passing a vote to sell $16,000 of bonds to finance the projects. Unfortunately, none of the three prospective railroad companies—the Missouri Pacific, Union Pacific, and Santa Fe—brought their tracks to the town.

1888–Present

The failed attempt to attract the railroad marked the end of growth for Nicodemus and most of the businesses in town relocated elsewhere. Despite the loss of business, the town remained a social center for the local community. Organizations such as the Masons, the American Legion, and the Priscilla Art Club continued to host dances, celebrations, and other events. The annual emancipation celebration continued to be a focal point of town life. In the 1920s, thousands attended the event which consisted of horse races, boxing matches, parades, and baseball games.

The Great Depression and the Dustbowl each had a serious impact on Nicodemus; the population of the town fell to as low as 40 people. The declining population led to the closure of the post office in 1953 and the school around 1960. Because of a lack of attendance, the social organizations also closed down.

Starting in the 1970s Nicodemus underwent a process of revitalization and restoration. Donations from former residents led to efforts to repair damage to the deteriorating town buildings. New improvements were made to the town including low-income housing units, construction of a 100-foot tall water tower, and the pavement of the major town streets. These efforts succeeded in preserving Nicodemus and rebuilding its popularity. The town developed a new identity as a retirement destination for former residents. The emancipation celebration, renamed Homecoming, changed to become a gathering of old residents to celebrate their roots and common history and continues to be celebrated annually.

In 1976, Nicodemus was named a National Historic Landmark, and it was designated a National Historic Site by an Act of Congress in 1996. The site is still home to several descendants of the original settlers. •

(edited from Wikipedia.org)

ABOUT
THE HOMESTEAD ACT OF 1862

The characters of *Flyin' West* were able to secure their own land because of the Homestead Act of 1862, which offered land to U.S. citizens, including unmarried women, immigrants, and people of color.

The Homestead Acts were several laws in the United States by which an applicant could acquire ownership of land, typically called a "homestead." In all, more than 270 million acres of public land, or nearly 10% of the total area of the U.S., was given away free to 1.6 million homesteaders; most of the homesteads were west of the Mississippi River.

An extension of the Homestead Principle in law, the Homestead Acts were an expression of the "Free Soil" policy of Northerners who wanted individual farmers to own and operate their own farms, as opposed to Southern slave-owners who wanted to buy up large tracts of land and use slave labor.

Norwegian settlers in 1898 North Dakota in front of their homestead, a sod hut

The first of the acts, the Homestead Act of 1862, opened up millions of acres. Any adult U.S. citizen who had never borne arms against the U.S. government could file an application and lay claim to 160 acres of surveyed government land. Women, people of color, and immigrants who had applied for citizenship were eligible. For the next five years, the homesteader had to live on the land and improve it by building a 12-by-14 dwelling and growing crops. After five years, the homesteader could file for his or her patent (or deed of title) by submitting proof of residency and the required improvements to a local land office.

Local land offices forwarded the paperwork to the General Land Office in Washington D.C., along with a final certificate of eligibility. The case file was examined, and valid claims were granted patent to the land free and clear, except for a small registration fee. Title could also be acquired after a six-month residency and trivial improvements, provided the claimant paid the government $1.25 per acre. After the Civil War, Union soldiers could deduct the time they served from the residency requirements.

Physical conditions on the frontier presented great challenges. Wind, blizzards, and plagues of insects threatened crops. Open plains meant few trees for building, forcing many to build homes out of sod. Limited fuel and water supplies could turn simple cooking and heating chores into difficult trials. Ironically, even the smaller size of sections took its own toll. While 160 acres may have been sufficient for an eastern farmer, it was simply not enough to sustain agriculture on the dry plains, and scarce natural vegetation made raising livestock on the prairie difficult. As a result, in many areas, the original homesteader did not stay on the land long enough to fulfill the claim.

Homesteaders who persevered were rewarded with opportunities as rapid changes in transportation eased some of the hardships. Six months after the Homestead Act was passed, the Railroad Act was signed, and by May 1869, a transcontinental railroad stretched across the frontier. The new railroads provided easy transportation for homesteaders, and new immigrants were lured westward by railroad companies eager to sell off excess land at inflated prices. The new rail lines provided ready access to manufactured goods and catalogs like Montgomery Ward offered farm tools, barbed wire, linens, weapons, and even houses delivered via the rails. •

(edited from Archives.gov and Wikipedia.org)

ABOUT
FEMALE HOMESTEADERS

Thousands of women took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862 that offered free land in the American Great Plains. Women who were single, widowed, divorced, or deserted were eligible to acquire 160 acres of federal land in their own name. The law discriminated against women who were married. A married woman was not allowed to take land in her own name unless she was considered the head of the household. The majority of homesteading women were young, single, and interested in adventure and the possibility of economic gain.

Homesteading provided widows with an economic opportunity often denied them elsewhere. Many had children to support. Even the elderly women took part in this venture. A woman named Anna Hensel was sixty-seven when she immigrated to the United States from Bessarabia in southern Russia. A year later, in 1903, she declared her intent to become a citizen and applied for a homestead in Hettinger County, North Dakota. Women from almost all ethnic groups took advantage of homesteading opportunities. An extensive but not all-inclusive list would include Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Finns, Dutch, Icelanders, Germans, Bohemians, Poles, Ukrainians, Lebanese, Irish, English, Scottish, Italian, African-Americans, and Jewish Americans.

Women who took homesteads tended to work outside of the farm as well. Many of them pursued careers as teachers, nurses, seamstresses, and domestic workers, but a few followed less traditional paths such as journalism or photography. Many eventually married, but some remained single. Those who achieved economic success used their resources in a variety of ways. Some stayed on their homestead and accumulated additional land. Others sold their holdings and invested elsewhere. In some cases homesteaders rented out the land and used the proceeds for personal or family needs.

In many ways, women who homesteaded resemble contemporary women. Their schedules were demanding, requiring flexibility, ingenuity, and endurance. Most would be considered community movers and shakers, as their initiatives were instrumental in building schools, churches, and other community institutions.

The homesteading period of history usually brings to mind stories of blizzards, prairie fires, and other catastrophic events. Yet tragedy is but one dimension of human life. To dwell on that aspect is to distort reality. In spite of their heavy demands, many homesteaders found time to devote to music, art, literature, and even poetry. A sense of humor was important in shaping their outlook on life.

The Chrisman sisters—all four of whom filed homestead claims—outside their Nebraska house in 1886.

Women as well as men were proficient in violin, piano, organ, and other instruments. One homesteader, Anna Zimmerman told of playing for dances with her brother. They both played accordion, violin, and guitar. Anna often played the harmonica and danced at the same time. Homesteading was more than tears and suffering.

Women who homesteaded do not fit the old descriptions that characterized them as secondary "helpmates" or reluctant pioneers. Rather, they, along with men, were main characters in the settlement drama. •

(edited from PlainsHumanities.unl.edu)

ABOUT
THE GREAT EXODUS

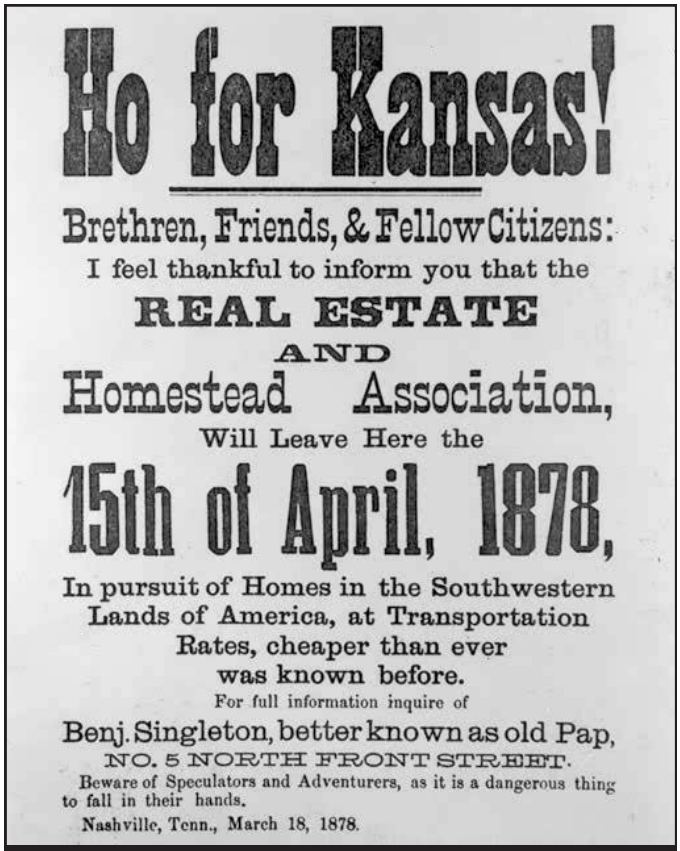
Like the characters of *Flyin' West*, thousands of African-Americans from the South migrated west following the Civil War. The largest and most well-known of these migration efforts was known as the "Great Exodus" in the late 1870s.

In 1879, an African-American man from Louisiana wrote a letter to the governor of Kansas that read in part: "I am very anxious to reach your state, not just because of the great race now made for it but because of the sacredness of her soil washed by the blood of humanitarians for the cause of black freedom."

This man was not alone. Thousands of African-Americans made their way to Kansas and other Western states after Reconstruction. The Homestead Act and other liberal land laws offered blacks (in theory) the opportunity to escape the racism and oppression of the post-war South and become owners of their own tracts of private farmland. The large-scale black migration from the South to Kansas came to be known as the "Great Exodus," and those participating in it were called "exodusters."

The post-Civil War era should have been a time of jubilation and progress for the African-Americans of the South. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution had granted them citizenship and the Fifteenth Amendment outlawed suffrage discrimination based on race, color, or previous slave status. However, many Southern whites sought to keep blacks effectively disenfranchised and socially and economically inferior.

During the era of Reconstruction in the South (1865-1877), federal troops occupied the states of the former Confederacy to ensure compliance with laws and regulations governing Southern states' re-entry into the Union. President Rutherford B. Hayes ended Reconstruction in 1877 and pulled the U.S. troops out of the South. This gave the white ruling class of the South free reign to terrorize and oppress freed blacks without interference from the U.S. Army or anyone else. Murders, lynchings, and other violent crimes against blacks increased dramatically. It was likely at this point that many African-Americans began to feel that leaving the South forever was their only real chance to begin new lives. Movement to parts further west, such as Kansas, began almost immediately after the end of Reconstruction.



Ho for Kansas!

Brethren, Friends, & Fellow Citizens:

I feel thankful to inform you that the

REAL ESTATE

AND

Homestead Association,

Will Leave Here the

15th of April, 1878,

In pursuit of Homes in the Southwestern Lands of America, at Transportation Rates, cheaper than ever was known before.

For full information inquire of

Benj. Singleton, better known as old Pap,

NO. 5 NORTH FRONT STREET.

Beware of Speculators and Adventurers, as it is a dangerous thing to fall in their hands.

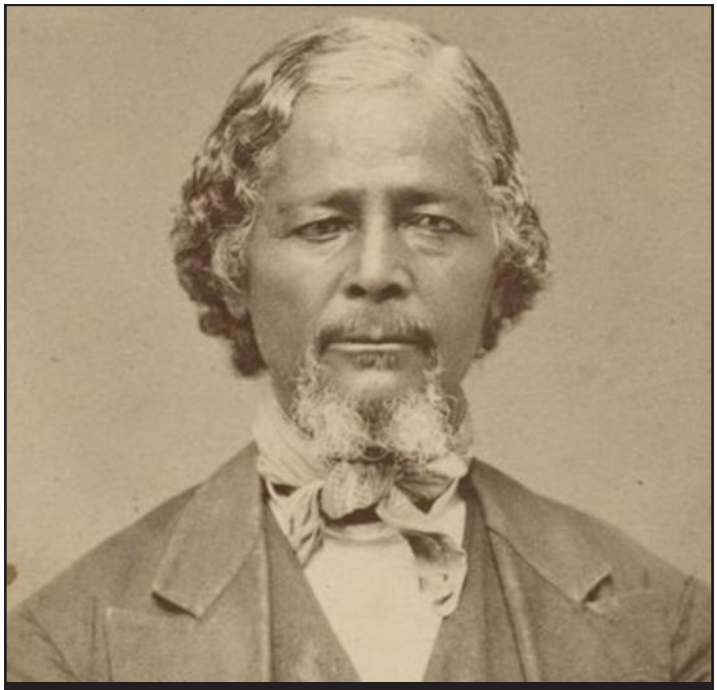
Nashville, Tenn., March 18, 1878.

One of Benjamin "Pap" Singleton's flyers

What was it about Kansas that particularly attracted African-Americans to that state? First, purely logistical and geographic factors must be considered: Kansas is much closer to the South than far-off spots like California and Oregon. Another factor—a human one—also played a role in the selection of Kansas as the new Promised Land. The exploits of anti-slavery activists like John Brown gave Kansas an almost holy sacredness to many African-Americans. In Kansas, blood had been spilled to keep slavery out.

Many of the African-Americans that migrated to Kansas prior to the 1879 exodus came from Tennessee, where there was a "colored people's convention" in Nashville in May 1875. Many town promoters, including the notable Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, saw this convention as a way to convince people to migrate to Kansas. The convention resulted in the designation of a board of commissioners to officially promote migration to Kansas. This board would later stipulate that would-be migrants needed at least $1,000 per family to relocate to Kansas; very few interested in doing so had such funds. Nevertheless, many freed blacks determined to leave Tennessee anyway.

The great 1879 exodus of African-Americans was largely influenced by the outcome of 1878 elections in the state of Louisiana, in which the Democratic Party made major gains by winning several congressional seats and the governorship. Freed blacks, largely Republican supporters, were coerced, threatened, assaulted, and even murdered to keep them away from the ballot box. When the final tallies were in and the Democrats claimed almost total victory, many black Louisianans knew that the time had come for them to abandon their state and join those already in Kansas.



Exodus Leader Benjamin "Pap" Singleton

Black social leaders and ministers often sang the praises of the exodus, comparing it to Moses and the Israelites' escape from Egypt. Of course, some black leaders spoke out against the exodus as well, stating that those leaving for Kansas were jeopardizing the future of those who chose to stay behind and that democracy should be given more time to work. Among the most notable of those that tried to dissuade blacks from fleeing the South was Frederick Douglass.

Terrified of losing cheap labor, Southern whites opposed the exodus as well. Many went to extreme measures to try to keep blacks from emigrating, including arrest and imprisonment on false charges and acts of violence.

The exodus began to subside by the early summer of 1879. In 1870, Kansas had hosted a black population of approximately 16,250. Ten years later, in 1880, approximately 43,110 African-Americans called Kansas home. Though few found Kansas to be the Promised Land for which they hoped, they did find it a place that enabled them to live freely and with much less racial interference than in the South. •

Exodusters waiting for a steamboat to carry them westward in the late 1870s

(edited from NPS.gov)

ABOUT
IDA B. WELLS

The women of *Flyin' West* moved to Nicodemus, Kansas from Memphis, Tennessee in the late 1800s, around the same time that Civil Rights pioneer Ida B. Wells was encouraging African-Americans to leave Memphis following the lynching of three black men.

Ida Bell Wells-Barnett (July 16, 1862 – March 25, 1931), more commonly known as Ida B. Wells, was an African-American investigative journalist, educator, and an early leader in the Civil Rights Movement. She was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She arguably became the most famous black woman in America, during a life that was centered on combating prejudice and violence.

Wells was born into slavery in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Freed by the Emancipation Proclamation during the American Civil War, she lost both her parents and a sibling in the 1878 yellow fever epidemic, when she was 16 years old. She went to work and kept the rest of the family intact with the help of her grandmother. She moved with some of her siblings to Memphis, Tennessee, where she found better pay as a teacher. Soon she co-owned a newspaper, the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*.

In 1889 Thomas Moss, a friend of Wells, opened the People's Grocery in the "Curve", a black neighborhood just outside the Memphis city limits. Moss' store did well and competed with a white-owned grocery store across the street. In 1892, while Wells was out of town, a white mob invaded her friend's store. During the altercation, three white men were shot and injured. Moss and two other black men, named McDowell and Stewart, were arrested and jailed pending trial. A large white lynch mob stormed the jail and killed the three men. After the lynching of her friends, Wells wrote in *Free Speech and Headlight*, urging blacks to leave Memphis altogether:

> "There is, therefore, only one thing left to do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts, but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons."

Wells emphasized the public spectacle of the lynching. More than 6,000 black people did leave Memphis; others organized boycotts of white-owned businesses. After being threatened with violence, Wells bought a pistol. She later wrote, "They had made me an exile and threatened my life for hinting at the truth."

Ida B. Wells in 1893

The murder of her friends drove Wells to research and document lynchings and their causes. She began investigative journalism by looking at the charges given for the murders, which officially started her anti-lynching campaign. She spoke on the issue at various black women's clubs and raised more than $500 to investigate lynchings and publish her results.

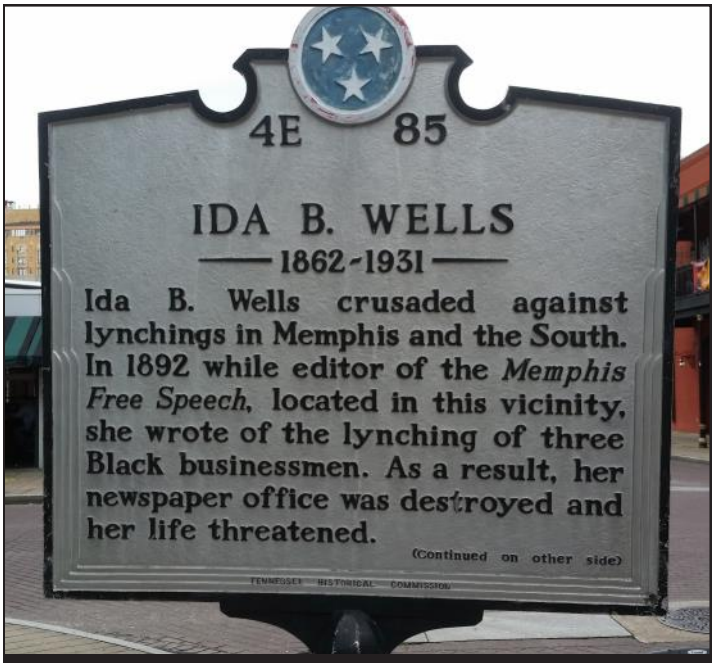
Wells found that black people were lynched for such social control reasons as failing to pay debts, not appearing to give way to whites, competing with whites economically, and being drunk in public. She found little basis for the frequent claim that black men were lynched because they had sexually abused or attacked white women. This alibi seemed to have partly accounted for white America's collective silence on lynching, as well as its acceptance by many in the educated African-American community.

She published her findings in a pamphlet entitled "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases." She followed this with an editorial that suggested that, unlike the myth that white women were sexually at risk of attacks by black men, most liaisons between black men and white women were consensual.

After the editorial was published, Wells left Memphis for a short trip to New England, to cover another story for the newspaper. Her editorial enraged white men in Memphis. Their responses in two leading white newspapers, *The Daily Commercial* and *The Evening Scimitar*, were brimming with hatred; "the fact that a black scoundrel is allowed to live and utter such loathsome…calumnies is a volume of evidence as to the wonderful patience of southern whites. But we have had enough of it". On May 27, 1892, while she was away in Philadelphia, a white mob destroyed the offices of the *Free Speech and Headlight*.

When her office was destroyed by a mob, she wrote a more detailed account in the *New York Age* a black newspaper in New York City. Having examined many accounts of lynchings due to the alleged "rape of white women," she concluded that Southerners cried rape as an excuse to hide their real reasons for lynchings: black economic progress, which threatened white Southerners with competition; the fear of "Negro Domination" through voting and taking office; and white ideas of enforcing black second-class status in the society.

Because of the threats to her life, Wells left Memphis altogether and moved to Chicago. She continued to investigate lynching incidents and the ostensible causes in the cases, and to write columns attacking Southern injustices. In 1985 she published a 100-page pamphlet called "The Red Record" which described lynching in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation. It included 14 pages of statistics related to lynching cases committed from 1892 to 1895; she also included pages of graphic accounts detailing specific lynchings. She notes that her data was taken from articles by white correspondents, white press bureaus, and white newspapers. "The Red Record" was a huge pamphlet, and had far-reaching influence in the debate about lynching.



A sign commemorating Ida B. Wells in Memphis, TN

> *"Dear Miss Wells,*
>
> *Let me give you thanks for your faithful paper on the lynch abomination now generally practiced against colored people in the South. There has been no word equal to it in convincing power. I have spoken, but my word is feeble in comparison… Brave woman!"*
>
> *- Frederick Douglass*

A selection of the preface to Ida B. Wells' pamphlet "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases", written by abolitionist Frederick Douglass

Numerous other studies have supported Wells' findings of lynching as a form of community control and analyzed variables that affect lynching. Beck and Tolnay's influential 1990 study found that economics played a major role, with the rate of lynchings higher when marginal whites were under threat because of uncertain economic conditions.

Despite Wells' attempt to garner support among white Americans against lynching, she believed that her campaign could not overturn the economic interests whites had in using lynching as an instrument to maintain Southern order and discourage Black economic ventures. Ultimately, Wells concluded that appealing to reason and compassion would not succeed in gaining criminalization of lynching by Southern whites. Wells concluded that perhaps armed resistance was the only defense against lynching. Meanwhile, she extended her efforts to gain support of such powerful white nations as Britain to shame and sanction the racist practices of America. •

(edited from Wikipedia.org)

TIMELINE OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAWS

Flyin' West takes place in 1898, a time when victims of domestic violence had virtually no legal power. The timeline below outlines some of the laws—and some of the legal setbacks—that have been put in place to protect and empower survivors of domestic violence through the years.

- **Early 1500's:** Two English common laws explicitly allowed wife beating for correctional purposes. To limit such behavior, many U.S. states passed rule of thumb laws limiting what could be used for wife beating to a whip no bigger than a thumb.
- **1871:** Alabama was the first state to rescind the legal right of men to beat their wives.
- **1882:** Maryland first state to make wife beating a crime punishable by 40 lashes or a year in jail.
- **1886:** North Carolina courts barred criminal indictment for spousal abuse unless the husband's battery resulted in permanent injury, endangered her life, or was malicious beyond all reasonable bounds.
- **1911:** The first Family Court is created in Buffalo, NY with the goal of solving family problems in a setting of discussion and reconciliation with social service intervention.
- **Late 1960s/Early 1970s:** The women's movement of the 1960's and the anti-rape movement of the 1970's encouraged survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault to speak out leading to the formation of the domestic violence movement and the formation of women's crisis centers and hotlines.
- **1962:** New York transferred all domestic violence cases from criminal to civil courts, allowing men to avoid the harsh penalties they would suffer if found guilty in criminal court.
- **1966:** Beating as cruel and inhumane treatment, becomes grounds for divorce in New York, but the plaintiff must establish that a sufficient number of beatings have taken place.
- **1967:** The state of Maine opens one of the first battered women's shelters in the United States.
- **1975:** Most U.S. states allow wives to bring criminal action against a husband who inflicts injury upon her.
- **1976:** Nebraska makes marital rape a crime.

Women protesting in Boston in August 1976

- **1990:** Stalking is first identified as a crime.
- **1990:** For the first time judges are required by state laws to consider any history of spousal abuse before determining child custody or visitation rights.
- **1992:** The Surgeon General ranks abuse by husbands to be the leading cause of injuries to women ages 15-44.
- **1992:** The American Medical Association releases guidelines suggesting that doctors screen women for signs of domestic violence.
- **1994:** The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) becomes law providing 1.6 billion dollars for 6 years to provide services for victims of rape and domestic violence, provides training to increase police and court officials' sensitivity, and provides that states and American Indian nations give full faith and credit to protection orders issued in another jurisdiction.
- **2002:** The Violence Against Women Office was renamed the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and was made a permanent office at the U.S. Department of Justice with a Presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed Director. •

(edited from Library.niwap.org)

HOW TO RECOGNIZE
ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Domestic violence is a serious threat for many. Know the signs of an abusive relationship and how to leave a dangerous situation. Remember: it might not be easy to identify abuse at first, as it often starts subtly and gets worse over time.

You might be experiencing domestic violence if you're in a relationship with someone who:

- Calls you names, insults you or puts you down
- Prevents or discourages you from going to work or school or seeing family members or friends
- Tries to control how you spend money, where you go, what medicines you take, or what you wear
- Acts jealous or possessive or constantly accuses you of being unfaithful
- Gets angry when drinking alcohol or using drugs
- Threatens you with violence or a weapon
- Hits, kicks, shoves, slaps, choke, or otherwise hurts you, your children, or your pets
- Forces you to have sex or engage in sexual acts against your will

If you're transgender or in a same-sex relationship, you might also be experiencing domestic violence if you're in a relationship with someone who:

- Threatens to tell friends, family, colleagues, or community members your sexual orientation or gender identity
- Tells you that authorities won't help a LGBT person
- Tells you that leaving the relationship means you're admitting that LGBT relationships are deviant
- Justifies abuse by telling you that you're not "really" lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender

Don't take the blame

You may not be ready to seek help because you believe you're partially to blame for one of the following reasons:

- **Your partner blames you for the violence in your relationship**. Abusers rarely take responsibility for their actions.
- **Your partner only exhibits abusive behavior with you**. Abusers are often concerned with outward appearances, and may appear charming and stable to those outside of your relationship.
- **You have acted out verbally or physically against your abuser during conflicts**. You may worry that this makes you abusive, but it's much more likely that you acted in self-defense or intense emotional distress.

If you're having trouble identifying what's happening, take a step back and look at larger patterns in your relationship.

Where to find help

In an emergency, call 911 or your local emergency number. The following resources also can help:

- **Someone you trust.** Turn to a friend, loved one, neighbor, co-worker, or religious advisor for support.
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233).** Call the hotline for crisis intervention and referrals to resources, such as women's shelters.
- **Your health care provider.** Doctors and nurses will treat injuries and can refer you to safe housing and other local resources.
- **A local women's shelter or crisis center.** Shelters and crisis centers typically provide 24-hour emergency shelter, as well as advice on legal matters and advocacy and support services.
- **A counseling or mental health center.** Counseling and support groups for women in abusive relationships are available in most communities.
- **A local court.** Your district court can help you obtain a restraining order that legally mandates the abuser to stay away from you or face arrest. Local advocates might be available to help guide you through the process.

It can be hard to recognize or admit that you're in an abusive relationship — but help is available. Remember, no one deserves to be abused. •

(edited from MayoClinic.org)

ABOUT
BLACK GIRL MAGIC

In contemporary terms, the women of *Flyin' West* could be described as having "Black Girl Magic". Below is a look at the popular hashtag that became a cultural movement.

Black Girl Magic is a concept and movement that was popularized by CaShawn Thompson in 2013. The concept was born as a way to "celebrate the beauty, power and resilience of black women", as described by Julee Wilson from *Huffington Post*, and to congratulate black women on their accomplishments.

In 2013, Thompson coined the phrase via the hashtag #BlackGirlsAreMagic—now shortened to #BlackGirlMagic—to create an online dialogue centered around the achievements of black women, in a society that has historically recognized very few of these achievements. Since being popularized, one can find the hashtag being used on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other social media and mainstream media platforms, celebrating positive messages and images of black women all across the globe.

Referring to a speech made by Michelle Obama at the Black Girls Rock Awards, Thompson explains that black women around the world persevering despite adversity inspired her to spread the concept of Black Girl Magic. With these women in mind, Thompson created the social media hashtag, clothing campaign, and rallying cry "Black Girl Magic", in the hopes of counteracting negativity society places on black women.

CaShawn Thompson, Creator of Black Girl Magic


Misty Copeland and President Barack Obama discussing Black Girl Magic

"I say 'magic' because it's something that people don't always understand," Thompson told *The Los Angeles Times*. She went on to explain how "Sometimes our accomplishments might seem to come out of thin air, because a lot of times, the only people supporting us are other black women." At its core, the purpose of this movement is to create a platform where women of color can stand together against the stereotyping, misogynoir, and racism that is often their lived experience.

Though born online, the movement has inspired many organizations across the world to host events using the title. The movement has also seen celebrity support, as singers Corinne Bailey Rae, Janelle Monáe, and Solange Knowles have invoked the concept, and ballerina Misty Copeland and President Barack Obama discussed the idea in an interview for *Time* and *Essence* magazines.

Since being popularized, the concept has also gained traction in cultural criticism, invoked in analysis of music and film. As its usage has grown, the expression has drawn criticism as well as staunch defenders.

While many black women support the concept of Black Girl Magic, some feel it reinforces the "strong black woman" archetype that black women often confront. In an article for *Elle* magazine, Linda Chavers argued that the movement suggests that black women are superhuman, or something other than human.

Chavers goes on to explain how, historically, black women have been seen and treated as subhuman beings, and how the image of black women persevering despite her suffering is the epitome of the strong black woman type that is often celebrated while simultaneously being criticized in today's culture.

Ashley Ford wrote an impassioned response to Chavers—also for *Elle* magazine—defending Black Girl Magic as a "wonderful, necessary thing", writing:

> "Black girls and women have been routinely denied their humanity in the face of a world ruled by racism, sexism, colorism, classism, and the enduring belief that our backs were built to carry what others would consider unimaginable burden. When we call ourselves beautiful anyway, when we succeed anyway, when we cry though they might never have imagined we had the capacity to feel so deeply, and when they find themselves wanting to imitate us anyway, that's Black Girl Magic. We defy the limits they set for us, lies we refuse to enroll in. It's not about tapping into something supernatural, it's about claiming or reclaiming what others have refused to see."

In a 2018 interview, creator CaShawn Thompson reflected, "It's become so much more than a hashtag — it is an iconic movement to celebrate all black women. #BlackGirlsAreMagic is what we are and what we will become." •

Left: an example of the Black Girl Magic hashtag, Tweeted by *Essence* magazine in February 2018 with a photo collage featuring Shonda Rhimes, Halle Berry, Rihanna, Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, Lena Waithe, Gabby Douglas, and Ava DuVernay.
Right: an infographic created by Spotify and Instagram of the artists most frequently added to playlists with the Black Girl Magic hashtag by state, including Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, Solange, H.E.R, Alicia Keys, Jazmine Sullivan, and Kehlani.

(edited from Wikipedia.org and Elle.com)

AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious 2016 National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.

Our diverse and multi-generational 36-member Ensemble has nearly 600 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of 2018, our theater and artists have 204 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 35 Black Theater Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades.

For over thirty years, American Blues has created essential productions and live theatrical experiences for Chicagoland. Their best known production is Chicago's holiday tradition *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* that has entertained over 50,000 patrons since 2002! Terry Teachout of *The Wall Street Journal* wrote American Blues is "exceptional" and the company "feels like home." Chris Jones of *Chicago Tribune* claimed Blues is "strikingly honest [with] deep emotional souls."

In addition to first-class theater, American Blues Theater believes it is an honor and duty to serve the community. They provide an integrated arts education program to Chicago Public Schools that serves approximately 3,000 students annually. They hold "Pediatric Previews" which donates a portion of box office sales to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. They donate thousands of complimentary tickets to underserved communities. They provide community engagement events called "Town Halls" for patrons following Sunday matinee performance, including curated discussions with Northwestern University psychologists. As a Blue Star Theater, they honor military service and first-responders through various initiatives. Former President of Illinois Labor History Society, Larry Spivak wrote, "American Blues is a dynamic force in Chicago – connecting culture, art, history, and politics into a holistic, aesthetic experience." •

SEASON 33 "Home Sweet Home"

by Pearl Cleage

Directed by
Chuck Smith*

Oct 5 - Nov 3, 2018

from Frank Capra's film

Directed by
Gwendolyn Whiteside*

Music direction by
Michael Mahler*

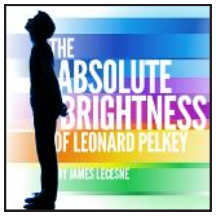
Nov 15, '18 - Jan 5, '19

by Steven Dietz

Chicago premiere

Directed by
Halena Kays

Feb 1 - Mar 16, 2019



by James Lecesne

Chicago premiere

Directed by
Kurt Johns

Mar 29 - Apr 27, 2019

by James Valeq &
Fred Alley

Directed by
Tammy Mader

Music direction by
Malcolm Ruhl

July 12 - Aug 17, 2019

*Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE THEATER

PERFORMANCE VENUE

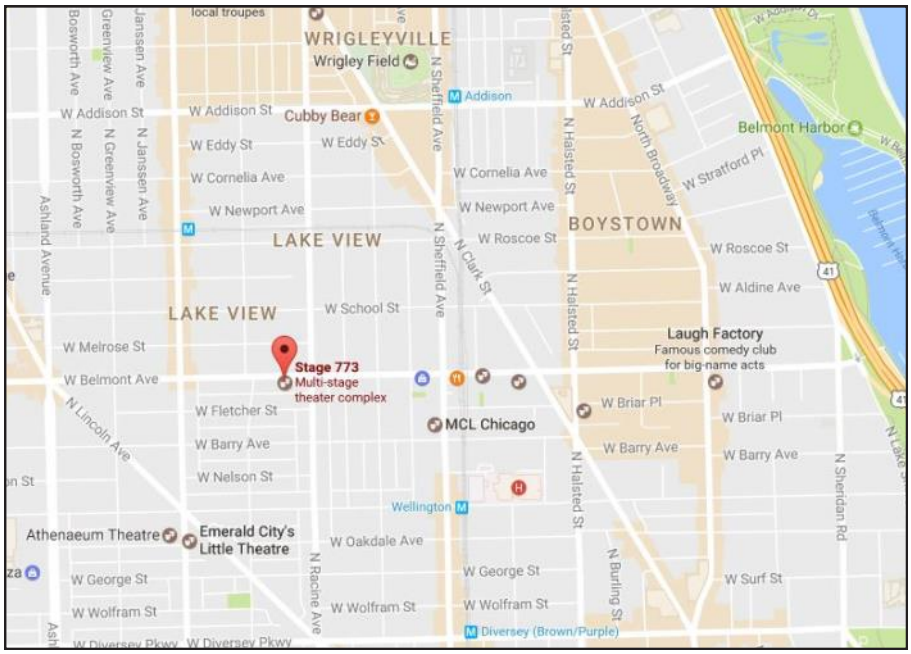
Stage 773
1225 W Belmont Ave
Chicago, IL 60657

BOX OFFICE

(773) 327-5252
Group sales (773) 654-3103

FOR MORE INFORMATION

AmericanBluesTheater.com



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