

JCCC spotlights Nicodemus and blacks in the West



Flyin' West, a play regarding historic Nicodemus, will be performed free at 7 p.m. March 11 in Polsky Theatre.

Flyin' West, a play about Nicodemus, Kan., an all-black town settled by former slaves in 1877, will be performed by JERIC productions at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 11, in Polsky Theatre of the Carlsen Center. Playwright Pearl Cleage tells the tale of three strong black women struggling to keep their land and preserve their way of life, fighting the greed of both white speculators and some of their own black townspeople only 20 years after the end of the Civil War.

Flyin' West will be followed by a brief presentation by Angela Bates, executive director, Nicodemus Historical Society, and an informal discussion with Bates, cast members, the audience and JCCC faculty Dr. James Leiker, director, Kansas Studies Institute and associate professor, history, and Dr. Carmaletta Williams, executive director, Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and adjunct English professor.

In advance of the play, Bates will give a lecture, *Blacks and Black Towns in the West – The Nicodemus Story*, from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Thursday, March 11, in the Craig Community Auditorium.

Co-sponsored by the KSI, ODEI and Performing Arts Series at JCCC, the lecture and play are free and open to the public.

Nicodemus, in the northwest corner of Kansas, was founded after the Reconstruction Period had ended following the Civil War. This living community is the only remaining all-black town west of the Mississippi River that was settled on the western plains by former slaves. Now part of the National Park Service, five historic buildings represent this community.

At its height, 700 people lived in the town of Nicodemus. Farming was the main industry with corn and wheat as the main crops. Nicodemus boasted several businesses such as general stores, grocery stores, hotels, pharmacies, millineries, barber shops and a bank. There are now 36 people living in town; 30 are direct descendants.



Photographer: Kathryn Sommer

Angela Bates will discuss the historic town of Nicodemus.

Bates, a descendent of the original settlers, organized the Nicodemus Historical Society in 1989 to solicit, collect, preserve and interpret the history of Nicodemus. In early 1990, she established the Nicodemus Historical Society Museums and also one of the country's most extensive black historic photographic collections. She is responsible for the designation of Nicodemus as a National Historic Site in 1996.

Flyin' West debuted in September 2009 at the Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center, Kansas City, Mo., home to JERIC Productions, a black theater company. This encore production features Evelyn Trigg, Laura Partridge, Andrea Agosto, Ro Flowers Jr., Cheri Brown and Stephen Brown. ■