



A UNIQUE ASSIGNMENT

WRITTEN BY
HARRISON DAVID RIVERS
DIRECTED BY RICHARD D. THOMPSON
MARCH 16 - APRIL 7, 2024

history theatre

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WELCOME



RICHARD D. THOMPSON

Welcome back to History Theatre, thank you for being here and supporting theatre.

Continuing our season with *A Unique Assignment* we are exploring stories about the personal histories, relationships, and joyous triumph of the human spirit. Building upon History Theatre's important legacy of creating new and existing work, we seek to continue telling well-known and untold stories while amplifying unheard voices and welcoming everyone to the audience.

Hope to see you back in the theatre this May for *Blended 和 (Harmony): The Kim Loo Sisters*, a co-production with Theater Mu.

Richard D. Thompson, Artistic Director



KAREN MUELLER

Welcome to today's performance of *A Unique Assignment* by Harrison David Rivers. This important story goes to the heart of our mission, in that we create new work to tell the stories of important events that have shaped our world. We are honored to relive on stage the story of James Meredith and Henry Gallagher, two men thrust into each other's lives in the aftermath of the Ole Miss Riot in 1962.

If you appreciate our unique mission and the entertaining, educational, and engaging productions you see on our stage, we invite you to join us to celebrate at our annual benefit at 5 pm on Sunday, April 21. "A Historic Night Out" will be held at the beautiful and historic 317 on Rice Park (next door to the Ordway). Spring will be in the air, and we'll experience fantastic entertainment, great food and drink, and enticing live and silent auction items. Reserve your tickets now at www.historytheatre.com/annualbenefit.

Hope to see you there!

Karen Mueller, Managing Director

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A UNIQUE ASSIGNMENT

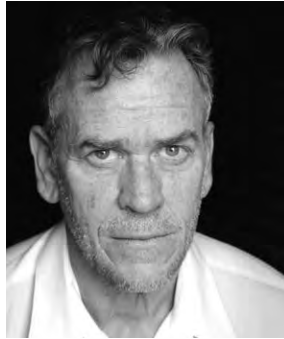
Written by HARRISON DAVID RIVERS

Directed by RICHARD D. THOMPSON

THE CAST



KEVIN BROWN, JR.*
ENSEMBLE



PEARCE BUNTING*
HENRY GALLAGHER (73)



KEVIN FANSHAW
HENRY GALLAGHER (23)



JAMES A. WILLIAMS*
JAMES MEREDITH, ENSEMBLE

UNDERSTUDIES

Kevin Brown, Jr. James Meredith
Peyton Dixon Ensemble

SPECIAL THANKS

Mortenson

ARTISTIC TEAM

Playwright	Harrison David Rivers
Director	Richard D. Thompson
Scenic Designer	Ursula K Bowden
Properties Designer	Kirby Moore
Costume Designer	Meghan Kent
Lighting Designer	Kurt Jung
Video Designer	Kathy Maxwell
Sound Designer	Katharine Horowitz
Rehearsal Stage Manager	Jessica Goldade Swanson*
Performance Stage Manager	Lee Johnson*
Assistant Stage Manager	Samantha Smith

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Electricians	Sasha Blinnikova, Nick Fetting, Asa Gutow, Gabe Hubbard, Brianna Mae, Corinne Steffans, Kelly Yount
Carpenters	Shawn Bollinger, Robin Letine, Phong Mai
Scenic Charge	Erika Soukup
Costume Assistant	Meghan Kent
ASL Interpreters	James Gardner, Erin Gardner
Audio Describer	Elena Centor
Open Captioner	Sheila Bland

STAFF

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Master Electrician	Nick Walberg
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Education Manager	Paul de Cordova
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Development Assistant	Molly Johnson
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FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT



HARRISON DAVID RIVERS

When Ron Peluso emailed me back in 2018 to gauge my interest in writing a play about Henry Gallagher, he led with James Meredith -- which makes sense, given the fact that of the two men, Meredith was the name I knew, the story I knew.

Now six years later, I can't imagine James Meredith's story (or at least the Ole Miss portion of it) without Henry.

And isn't that so often the case with history? There's the story you know (or think you know), but really, THAT story is a single thread in a tapestry of stories. Pull one and the others... Well, you know how that goes.

I feel incredibly grateful to have played a small part in bringing this important story to the History Theatre stage.

Many thanks to Ron for commissioning the work and to Rick, Laura, Jessica, Sam, Lee (and the rest of the team at History Theatre) for carrying it across the finish line.

Many thanks to Henry for sharing his story – with me and with us; and to James for deciding to act.

THE CAST

KEVIN BROWN, JR.* (he/him)*Ensemble*

History Theatre: *Parks: A Portrait of a Young Artist, Christmas Of Swing, Not In Our Neighborhood, Diesel Heart.* **Theater:** *Orday Theatre: Smokey Joe's Cafe; Artistry: Shrek; Capri: Ain't Misbehavin'; Six Points: Survivors.* **Education:** University Of Miami. @TheKevinBrownJr

PEARCE BUNTING* (he/him)*Henry Gallagher (73)*

History Theatre: *Diesel Heart, Parks, All The Way, The Great Society, The Things They Carried, Dance Till You Drop, Radio Man.* **Theater:** *Broadway and National Tour: Mamma Mia; Guthrie: Dial M For Murder (US); Illusion Theatre: Five Minutes of Heaven; Park Square: Holmes and Watson; Open Eye: The Holiday Pageant, Cabinet of Wonders; Theatre Novi Most: The Master Builder, The Seagull, Denim, Rehearsing Failure; Theatre Latte Da: Peter and the Starcatcher; Ten Thousand Things: Pericles, As You Like It; Points of View: The Life and Loves of Sinclair Lewis; Theatre Exile: Killer Joe, Blackbird, Lieutenant of Inishmore, A Behanding in Spokane, Annapurna, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf; The Wilma Theatre: Under The Whaleback, Quartet, Road.* **Other:** *TV: Boardwalk Empire (HBO), Law and Order S.V.U., Homicide: Life On The Street. Film: The Public Domain (Patrick Coyle), Meat (Michael Forstein), First Person Singular (Eric Tretbar).* **Awards:** Barrymore Award (Best Performance by a Leading Actor). **Training:** Yale School of Drama. Pearce also co-hosts the podcast *Growing Up Naked* with his son, Milo Bunting, available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and more!

KEVIN FANSHAW (he/him)*Henry Gallagher (23)*

History Theatre: Debut. **Theater:** *Jungle Theater: Redwood; Penumbra Theatre: This Bitter Earth; Park Square Theatre: The Diary of Anne Frank; Wonderlust Productions: The Labyrinth and the Minotaur; TigerLion Arts: Nature; Gremlin Theatre: Journey's End, Becky Shaw; Orchard Theater: 12th Night; Theatre Coup d'Etat: Equus, The Glass Menagerie, The Tempest, The Crucible.* **Awards:** Ivey Award: *Equus*; *Cities Pages* 2016 Best Emerging Actor. **Training:** B.A. Performance, UW - La Crosse.

JAMES A. WILLIAMS**James Meredith, Ensemble*

History Theatre: *Parks: Portrait of a Young Artist, Orphan Train, George Bonga: Black Voyageur, Adrift on the Mississippi.* **Theater:** Broadway veteran, founding member of Penumbra Theatre Company. He originated the role of Roosevelt Hicks in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*. He has performed at The Arena Theater, Cal Shakes, Center Stage Theater, The Goodman Theater, The Huntington Theater, The Kennedy Center, Mark Taper Forum, The McCarter Theater, Seattle Rep, Syracuse Stage and Yale Repertory Theater. James has appeared Off Broadway in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, and Athol Fugard's *My Children! My Africa!* **Awards:** McKnight Theater Fellow, Fox Distinguished Acting Fellow, Ten Chimneys Acting Fellow. A multiple Ivey Award recipient, he was named 2008 "Artist of the Year" by the *Star Tribune*. Past NAACP Image Award Nominee. **Other:** In 2012 Macalester College, his Alma Mater, named Mr. Williams a Distinguished Global Citizen. In 2023, the school bestowed upon him a Doctorate of Humane Letters and renamed the Black Box Theater in his honor.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

HARRISON DAVID RIVERS (he/him)*Playwright*

Harrison is an award-winning playwright, librettist and television writer based in St. Paul. A *Unique Assignment* marks his third collaboration with History Theatre. Other works include *The Salvagers* (Yale Rep), *we are continuous* (Diversionsary Theatre, Uptown Players, New Conservatory Theatre Center, Geva Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival), *the bandaged place* (Roundabout, New York Stage & Film), *This Bitter Earth* (Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre, White Bear Theatre, Seattle Public, TheaterWorks Hartford, InterAct, The Road, Richmond Triangle Players, Theater Alliance, About Face, Penumbra, New Conservatory Theatre Center), among others, and the musicals *Last of the Red Hot Mamas* with Sue and Lloyd Ecker (Bucks County Playhouse), *We Shall Someday* with Ted Shen (Theater Latté Da) and *I Put a Spell on You* with Nubya Garcia. His television credits include *One of Us Lying* (Peacock), *The Nevers* (HBO) and *Wytches* (Amazon). Harrison is a recipient of McKnight, Jerome and Van Lier Fellowships, residencies with the Siena Art Institute, New York Theatre Workshop, Williamstown, Geva and Duke University, and commissions from Roundabout, Transport Group, Geva, People's Light, La Jolla Playhouse and Minnesota Opera. He sits on the Board of Directors of The Movement Theatre Company and Playwrights' Center. MFA: Columbia University. harrisondavidrivers.com

URSULA K BOWDEN (she/her)*Scenic Designer*

History Theatre: Debut. **Theater:** *Theater Mu: Kung Fu Zombie Saga; nimbus theatre: A Count Up to Christmas, The Red and the Bright, The Remarkable Life and Pathetic Afterlife of Elmer McCurdy*, and over 20 other titles; UMN Theatre and Dance Department: *Pride and Prejudice, Troilus and Cressida, The Amateurs, Silent Sky, School for Lies, The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, She Kills Monsters; Open Door Community Theatre: School of Rock, The Little Mermaid; Park Square Theatre: Jefferson Township Sparkling Junior Pageant, The Pirates of Penzance.* As well as productions at Swandive Theatre, Theatre Pro Rata, Theatre Unbound, Six Elements Theatre, Drake University Theatre, Hamline University Theatre, 20% Theatre, Woodbury Community Theatre, Circus Juventas, Frank Theatre, Theatre Latté Da, overhire props artisan for The Guthrie Theatre, Minnesota Opera. **Awards:** Featured in *American Theatre Magazine* for design of an *Outopia for Pigeons*. **Training:** BFA Theatrical Design and Technical Theatre at Drake University. **Upcoming:** *A Very Electric Christmas*, nimbus theatre. *F*cking A*, and *Anne Boleyn*, U of M. *Tarzan*, Open Door Community Theatre.

KIRBY MOORE (he/him)*Properties Designer*

History Theatre: *Handprints, Glensheen, The Defeat of Jesse James, Teen Idol: The Bobby Vee Story, Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story, Coco's Diary, Courting Harry, Lombardi and Christmas of Swing.* **Other:** His professional career spans 40 years of stage, film, and commercial production in Minneapolis, Chicago, and Los Angeles. He's grateful to Circa 21' Dinner Playhouse, in Rock Island Ill., and to Children's Theatre Company for their design internship programs which gave him his start in the professional arts.

KURT JUNG (he/him)*Lighting Designer*

History Theatre: Debut. **Theater:** Camp Capri: *Once On This Island Jr.*; Breck School: *Newsies, Frozen Jr, Cyrano*; Lyric Arts: *Miss Bennett, Guys and Dolls*. Assistant Lighting Designer: Minnesota Opera: *Don Giovanni*; Guthrie Theater: *A Christmas Carol (2021), West Side Story, The Royal Family*. **Training:** MFA University of Nevada- Las Vegas. kurtjung.lighting

MEGHAN KENT (she/her)*Costume Designer*

History Theatre: Debut. **Theater:** Lakeshore Players: *Calendar Girls, She Loves Me, Little House on the Prairie: The Musical*; The Phipps Center for the Arts: *Something Rotten, Murdered to Death*; Old Log Theatre: *Once Upon a Mattress, The Reluctant Dragon, Snow White and the Seven Vikings, Million Dollar Quartet*; Stages Theatre Company: *Once Upon This Island, Newsies Jr.*; Ashland Productions: *Company*; Freshwater Theatre Company: *The Bucket List of Booze Club*; Youth Performance Company: *Little Women, Elf, Freedom Riders, Velveteen Rabbit, Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief, A Woman Called Truth, A Year with Frog and Toad, Tuck Everlasting, Frozen Jr., Hairspray, The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; Steppingstone Theatre: *Nate the Great, Fly Guy the Musical, Annie*; among others. **Training:** BFA, Iowa State University. **Upcoming:** Lakeshore Players: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*; Stages Theatre Company: *Matilda Jr.*

KATHY MAXWELL (she/her)*Video Designer*

History Theatre: *This Side of Paradise, God Girl, Watermelon Hill, Complicated Fun, Teen Idol, The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin, All the Way, A Crack in the Sky, Dirty Business, Superman Becomes Lois Lane, Parks, Christmas of Swing, Great Society, Not in Our Neighborhood, Not For Sale*. **Theater:** Designed video and lights for Penumbra Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, Open Eye Figure Theatre, Children's Theatre Company, History Theatre, the

Ordway and the Guthrie Theatre. Recent design credits: *This Bitter Earth, Benevolence, Mamma Mia!, Ride the Cycle*. **Education:** M.F.A. Theatrical Design, University of Minnesota, B.A. in theatre and dance, University of Texas.

KATHARINE HOROWITZ (she/her)*Sound Designer*

History Theatre: *The Boy Wonder, Diesel Heart, The Root Beer Lady, Stewardess!, Superman Becomes Lois Lane, A Crack In The Sky, The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin*. **Theater:** Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre Company, Theatre Latté Da, Jungle Theater, Great River Shakespeare Festival, Mixed Blood Theatre, Park Square Theatre, Pillsbury House Theatre, Theater Mu, Gremlin Theatre, Walking Shadow Theatre Company, Creede Repertory Theatre, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre, Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival. **Awards:** 2017 McKnight Theatre Artist Fellow at the Playwrights' Center. **Training:** BA, University of Iowa. **Upcoming:** *The Sound of Music*, Artistry. katsound.com

JESSICA GOLDADE SWANSON* (she/her)*Rehearsal Stage Manager*

History Theatre: *The Boy Wonder*. **Theater:** Artistry: *Pajama Game, Shrek, Memphis, Sod House - RARE: stories of dis-ease*. **Other:** Artistry Visual Arts and Operations Coordinator, Ordway Manager of Production Department Operations, Children's Theater Company Corporate Sales Coordinator. **Training:** BFA Stage Management, The University of Montana. **Upcoming:** Smart Mouth - *Patty's Revenge*. IG @jessica.a.swanson

SAMANTHA SMITH (she/her)*Assistant Stage Manager*

History Theatre: Debut. **Theater:** Artistry: *Crazy For You, Some Enchanted Evening, Memphis; Little Women*; Yellow Tree Theatre: *The Rats and The Wasp's Nest, Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill, Misery*; Theatre L'Homme Dieu: *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical, Dancing Lessons*; Guthrie Theater: *A Christmas Carol*. **Training:** BA (Hons) Drama and Theatre Arts, Goldsmiths, University of London.



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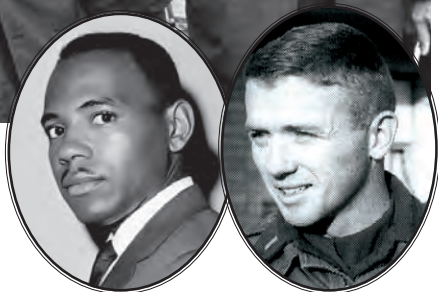
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Chief U.S. Marshal James McShane (left) and U.S. Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights John Doar (right), escorting James Meredith to class at Ole Miss after the riot. Source: Marion S. Trikosko, *U.S. News & World Report*



(l-r) James Meredith and Henry Gallagher

In the wake of the Supreme Court's 1954 decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, James Meredith tried to integrate Ole Miss by applying in 1961. When he informed the university that he was African American, his admission was delayed and obstructed, first by school officials and then by Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett. In a bid to block his enrollment, Barnett even had Meredith temporarily jailed. Multiple attempts by Meredith, accompanied by federal officials, to enroll were physically blocked. Hoping to avoid violence and ensure Meredith's enrollment, President Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy had a series of unproductive telephone negotiations with Barnett.

Ole Miss riot of 1962

(Sept 30 – Oct 1, 1962), also known as the Battle of Oxford, was a violent disturbance that occurred at the University of Mississippi—commonly called Ole Miss—in Oxford, Mississippi. Segregationist rioters sought to

prevent the enrollment of African American veteran James Meredith, and President John F. Kennedy was forced to quell the riot by mobilizing over 30,000 troops, the most for a single disturbance in American history.

Integration in the South

The riot and the federal crackdown were a major turning point in the civil rights movement and resulted in the desegregation of Ole Miss—the first integration of any public educational facility in Mississippi. The final time troops were deployed during the civil rights movement, it is regarded as the end of the segregationist tactic of massive resistance. A statue of James Meredith now commemorates the event on campus, and the site of the riot is designated as a National Historic Landmark.

James Meredith

An American civil rights activist, writer, political adviser, and United States Air Force veteran he became, in 1962, the first African-American student admitted to the racially segregated University of Mississippi after the intervention of the federal government (an event that was a flash point in the civil rights movement). Inspired by President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, Meredith decided to exercise his constitutional rights and apply to the University of Mississippi. His goal was to put pressure on the Kennedy administration to enforce civil rights for African Americans. The admission of Meredith ignited the Ole Miss riot of 1962 where Meredith's life was threatened and 31,000 American servicemen were required to quell the violence – the largest ever invocation of the Insurrection Act of 1807.



A 716th MP at the entrance to the Baxter Hall dormitory, with James Meredith and press. *Special Collections, University of Memphis. Reprinted with permission from James Meredith and The Ole Miss Riot*



The guards. Soldiers from the 716th Military Police (MP) Battalion stand at a gate to the campus. *Special Collections, University of Memphis. From James Meredith and Ole Miss Riot. Reprinted with permission from James Meredith and The Ole Miss Riot*

Henry T. Gallagher

On Friday, September 28, 1962 the regular U.S. army 716th Military Police Battalion was placed on alert for possible duty in connection with the racial integration of the University of Mississippi by the impending enrollment of James Howard Meredith. Second Lieutenant Henry Gallagher, a recent college graduate from the State of Minnesota, was a platoon leader with the 716th, stationed at Fort Dix, New Jersey. In the early hours of Sunday September 30, 1962 his battalion (650 officers and men) was airlifted to the U.S. Naval Air Station at Millington, Tennessee. Later that evening he was assigned to be the lead vehicle to escort the battalion by convoy from Millington to Oxford, Mississippi during the tumultuous



Henry Gallagher, Spec-4 Adams (driver), PFC Barret (rear seat) watch James Meredith at Peabody Hall. Gallagher's collection. Reprinted with permission from James Meredith and *The Ole Miss Riot*

night of the University of Mississippi riot. He would later serve as the principal military security officer for Mr. Meredith from October 1 through late November 1962 as the officer in charge (OIC) of a special security patrol assigned to protect him and any accompanying US. Marshals. He would return to Oxford from March 15 through May 8, 1963.

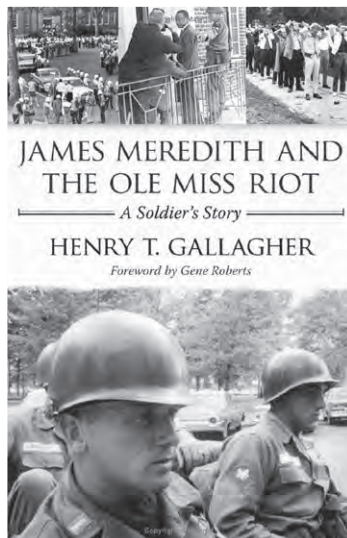
Source: Wikipedia, grove.olemiss.edu (University of Mississippi), *James Meredith and the Ole Miss Riot*.



James Meredith entering Peabody Hall. Author's collection. Reprinted with permission from James Meredith and *The Ole Miss Riot*

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FROM THE EDUCATION MANAGER



PAUL DE CORDOVA

Welcome to *A Unique Assignment*, the story about one of the turning points in the Civil Rights movement told through the relationship of two men, James Meredith and Henry Gallagher.

History Theatre is excited to collaborate with On Stage: Creating a Community Dialogue Around Live Theater in the spirit of transformative partnership. On Stage brings actors and teaching artists to college classrooms throughout the Twin Cities connecting them with our thriving Twin Cities theater scene. Since 2016, over 8,000 students and community members have been exposed to new theater and new theater venues as a result of their efforts, and History Theatre is proud to collaborate with them for the second year in a row, bringing new audiences through our doors.

Our long-standing collaborations with high schools in the Seats to Stage program, the amazing members of Vail Place in Uptown Minneapolis and Hopkins, and the wonderful students at Minnesota Independence College and Community all contribute to our success. With each of these programs, History Theatre teaching artists lead students on a journey of discovery and sharing their personal stories. Each of these groups then creates a short play to perform on our stage, which tells a bit about their collective personal histories. The generosity, courage, and vulnerability on display at these presentations never cease to impress.

History Theatre believes strongly in the value of all of our stories and the power of spreading them widely. Our work in the Education Department puts this belief in action. Real people with real stories are what we are all about.

Thank you again for your supporter of History Theatre and enjoy the show!

Paul de Cordova

THANK YOU FUNDERS



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