

# JERRY PINKNEY

*Role-Playing and Discovery*



On Saturdays, after household chores were finished, I would meet up with my best friends. Off we would rush to the movies. Tickets were ten cents, and there was always a double feature. I was most excited when there were westerns. As a young boy growing up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I dreamed of exploring the early frontier.



My friends and I played at being cowboys and explorers. With much enthusiasm and intensity, we inhabited the characters portrayed on the silver screen. We fashioned our costumes and gear from what we could find at home or purchase from the local five-and-dime store. I would whittle out of wood a bowie knife modeled after the one Jim Bowie had at his side while defending the Alamo. I would then take my turn at being Roy Rogers, the cowboy, or Daniel Boone, the famous pioneer, journeying through the rugged wilderness.

If anyone had asked at that time if my excitement was due to an early interest in history, my answer would have been a

resounding, "No!" However, looking back, I realize that answer would not have been entirely true. Yes, we did have fun, and yes, our flights into the past seemed to be more about action than about learning history, but that role-playing seeded my interest in discovery. When I learned as an adult that one out of three cowboys was black or Mexican, that discovery was moving and profound.

I do wonder, though, how we would have been affected as young boys if, at that impressionable time, we had known about Nat Love, a cowboy; Bill Pickett, a rodeo cowboy; Jim Beckwourth, a fur trader; or Jean Baptiste Du Sable, the explorer—all persons of African descent.

### **Biography:**

**Grew up:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Now lives:** Croton-on-Hudson, New York

**Random fact:** Even wearing a coonskin cap, couldn't get anyone to believe he was Daniel Boone

### **Selected Bibliography:**

*Black Cowboy, Wild Horses: A True Story* by Julius Lester

*Uncle Remus: The Complete Tales* by Julius Lester

*John Henry* by Julius Lester