



Anacostia Community Museum, Smithsonian Institution

BLACK COWBOYS

AN AMERICAN STORY

Explore the lives and work of the numerous Black men, women and children—enslaved and free—who labored on ranches and participated on cattle drives from before the Civil War through the turn of the twentieth century.



By revealing stories that have largely been untold, *Black Cowboys* offers insight into the legendary cowboy, a clearer picture of the Black West, and a more diverse portrait of the American West.

INTRODUCTION

Visitors entering *Black Cowboys* first encounter a saddle from the early 1900s that belonged to a Black cowboy whose name has been forgotten. Most of the tools that cowboys used on the trail or on a ranch were used up or repurposed, few known examples of saddles and other tools used by Black cowboys exist today.

Here, visitors come face to face with lifesize figures and discover that Black cowboys were men, women and children—enslaved and free—who labored on ranches and worked on cattle drives from before the Civil War through the turn of the twentieth century.



HECTOR BAZY THEATER

Beyond the saddle of the unknown cowboy, an immersive theater features an intimate conversation with Hector Bazy, played by award winning actor and playwright, Eugene Lee. In 1910, Hector Bazy published a memoir, detailing his daily life cattle herding and cooking on the prairies of Texas. Bazy was born in 1851 on a plantation in Grimes County, Texas; he and his parents were enslaved there. His story welcomes visitors to the exhibition and invites them to explore the lives of other Black cowboys, about many much less is known.

Biographical profiles, photos, artifacts, multimedia and interactives reveal how Black cowboys were integral to the American economy, shaped the legacies of Black ranching families and turned ranch skills into popular performances in rodeos, music and film.

ON THE TRAIL

From 1865 until the 1890s the largest number of domestic animals in world history were driven up trails from Texas to be sold at market to provide the country with beef. By the early 1880s, the highly profitable cattle industry was one of the largest in the United States.



RANCHERS AND FAMILY LEGACY

Formerly-enslaved Black cowboys continued to work in ranching and farming after Emancipation. They developed skills and networks to become ranch owners. Even after Emancipation, Black ranchers' legacies were under constant threat from the Klu Klux Klan and use of the judicial system to steal their property.

POPULAR PERFORMANCES: RODEOS, MUSIC AND FILM

Thousands of Black cowboys in the American South made rodeos a part of ranch gatherings and small fairs across the United States. The riding skills, music and dress styles of Black Americans were showcased in Black rodeos, Wild West shows, and later in movies, radio, recordings and television.



FEATURING THE STORIES OF



Nat Love
Documenting the American South,
University of North Carolina at
Chapel Hill



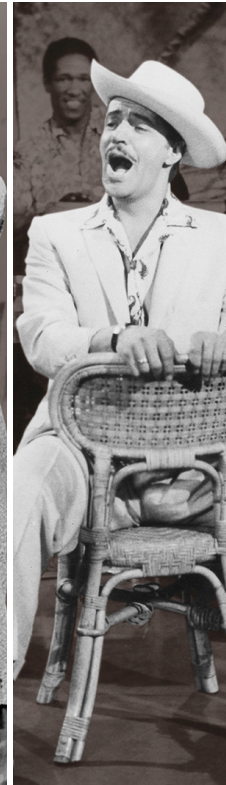
Hector Bazy
Anacostia Community Museum,
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George McJunkin
©Denver Museum of Nature
and Science



Johana July
Library of Congress, Prints and
Photographs Division



Herb Jeffries
Michael Ochs Archive,
Getty Images



Fred Whitfield
Photo by Ric Andersen, Courtesy
of ProRodeo Hall of Fame and
Museum of American Cowboy

TRAIL DRIVE

Bose Ikard
Ben Kinchlow
George Glenn
Robert Lemmons
Al Jones
Jack
“Aunt Rittie” Foster
Coaley Owens
Tom “Ball” Rodgers
Hector Bazy
Nat Love
Monroe Brackins
Jim Perry

RANCHING

Steve West
The Ashworth Family
“80 John” Daniel
Webster Wallace
Ann George Taylor
Daniel Alexander
The Wilcox Family
Sam Jones Washington
James Cape
Johana July
Mack Williams
George McJunkin

PERFORMANCES

“Tony” Lott
Larry Callies
Tex Williams
Myrtis Dightman
Bill Pickett
Leon Coffee
A.J. Walker
Fred Whitfield
Herb Jeffries

BLACK COWBOYS: AN AMERICAN STORY

Through striking visuals and transformative experiences, this powerful exhibition transports visitors through time to meet a variety of real Black cowboy figures and discover their profound impact in American history.



AVAILABILITY	From February 2026 onward
SPACE REQUIREMENTS	Approximately 2,000 square feet, including 145 running feet of wall space
VENUE LENGTH	12 weeks
CONTENTS	33 biographical cowboy profiles 14 historic artifacts with cases and mounts Two hands-on interactives Two immersive theaters Two audio experiences
SHIPPING	To be arranged by the Witte Museum. Venue is responsible for inbound shipping costs.
SECURITY	High security
REQUIREMENTS	Facility report must be submitted for review before approval of loan Secure gallery space with moderate climate controls Two couriers from the Witte Museum

ABOUT THE WITTE MUSEUM

The Witte Museum inspires people to shape the future of Texas through transformative and relevant experiences in Nature, Science and Culture. For 96 years, the Witte Museum has shared the stories of those who have lived on this land we now call Texas. Visitors come from near and far seeking a deeper understanding of the history of Texas, from the lives of indigenous people to Spanish settlement to the tumultuous 19th century to today.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about this exhibition from the Witte Museum, please contact:

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