

African American Cowboys: A Forgotten Legacy

Literature, film, and music have made the honest and brave cowboy an icon of the West. These forms of media have embedded tales of white cowboys in gunfights and white lone rangers busting bronchos into the classic American narrative. However, these accounts ignore the multicultural character of 19th-century cattle raising. Not only did cowboy techniques originate from Mexican vaqueros, but African Americans also played an essential role in the growth of Western ranching. The rise of integrated cowboy crews and cattle towns during the era of the long drives was a unique phenomenon uncharacteristic of the 19th century. However, whites in power then purposefully excluded black cowboys from the narrative and legacy of the West to conceal the story of a desegregated community distinguished by mutual respect between blacks and whites.

African American expertise played a crucial role in the development of the American cattle system. Indeed, before emancipation, many slaves were purchased and known for their skill as cowhands.¹ In South Carolina, African expertise was likely essential to the expansion of the cattle industry.² In antebellum Texas, whites working with cattle were referred to as drovers, traders, or stock raisers and keepers, while blacks were called the more-derogatory “cow boy”, which may be the origin of the term “cowboy” and a testament to the consistent presence of African Americans on the range.³ Following the Civil War, the great era of the cattle crews

¹ Deborah M. Liles, “Before Emancipation: Black Cowboys and the Livestock Industry,” in *Black Cowboys in the American West: On the Range, on the Stage, Behind the Badge*, eds. Michael N. Searles and Bruce A. Glasrud (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 2016), 20-21.

² Michael N. Searles, “In Search of the Black Cowboy in Texas,” in *The African American Experience in Texas: an Anthology*, eds. Bruce A. Glasrud and James Smallwood (Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 87.

³ Tracy Owens Patton and Sally M. Schedlock, “LET’S GO, LET’S SHOW, LET’S RODEO: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE HISTORY OF RODEO,” *The Journal of African American History* 96, no. 4 (2011): 507, doi:10.5323/jafriamerhist.96.4.0503; Liles, “Before Emancipation,” 21.

began in earnest and then peaked in the late 1870s and early 1880s.⁴ Thus, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a high demand for cowboys regardless of their race.⁵ These opportunities led many freedmen, some of whom were already familiar with cattle-raising, to remain on the frontier or move West.⁶ Most historians agree that at least 25% of the cowboys on the frontier were African American and that a typical cowboy crew would have 2 to 3 black members.⁷ Black cowboys drove cattle up all of the major trails and were active members of the 19th-century Western cattle industry.⁸

Cowboy crews were characterized by mutual respect between blacks and whites, which was very atypical in the 19th-century. In interviews, white cowboys almost always reference a black crew member and a survey of 350 manuscripts from the American Life Histories Project found that several white cowboys also expressed admiration toward the skills of their black workmates.⁹ For example, W.H. Mullins, Avery Barrow, and E.E. Steen all described a black cowboy as the “best rider” that they had ever seen and William Blevins declared that an African American cowboy he met on the Chisholm Trail was “the toughest and bravest person I ever saw.”¹⁰ Even Charles Goodnight, a quintessential Texan rancher that is considered the “Father of

⁴ Ana Carolina Castillo Crimm, “Mathew “Bones” Hooks A Pioneer of Honor,” in *Black Cowboys in the American West: On the Range, on the Stage, Behind the Badge*, eds. Michael N. Searles and Bruce A. Glasrud (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 2016), 35.

⁵ William Loren Katz, *The Black West: A documentary and pictorial history of the African American role in the westward expansion of the United States* (Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2019), 252.

⁶ “Deadwood Dick and the Black Cowboys,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 22 (1998): 30, doi:10.2307/2998819.

⁷ Barbara Lee Bloom, *Nat Love* (New York: Chelsea House, 2010), 59; Roger D Hardaway, “African American Cowboys on the Western Frontier,” *Negro History Bulletin* 64, no. 1/4 (2001): 28, accessed April 20, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24766998.

⁸ Douglas Flamming, *African Americans in the West* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 62.

⁹ Ibid; The Library of Congress, “American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1940,” accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/federal-writers-project/>.

¹⁰ W.H. Mullins, interview by Woody Phipps, 1938, transcript, U.S. Work Projects Administration, Federal Writers’ Project, Manuscript Division, The Library of Congress, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002478/>; Avery N Barrow, interview by Sheldon F. Gauthier, 1936-9, transcript, U.S. Work Projects Administration, Federal Writers’ Project, Manuscript Division, The Library of Congress, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002367/>; E. E Steen, interview by Elizabeth Doyle, 1936-9, transcript, U.S. Work Projects Administration, Federal

the Texas Panhandle”, rode with the freedman Bose Ikard as he charted the Goodnight-Loving Trail.¹¹ Goodnight not only rode with a black cowboy, but he also described how Ikard “surpassed any man I had in endurance and stamina. There was a dignity, a cleanliness, and a reliability about him that was wonderful... I have trusted him farther than any living man.”¹² These accounts demonstrate how, on the range, skill was valued over color, and cowboys were respected for their expertise regardless of their race. Cattle-driving was a tough and dangerous occupation that demanded mutual reliance from members of a cowboy crew.¹³ On the frontier, black and white cowboys ate together, worked together, lived in the same bunkhouses, earned similar wages, and some whites defended their black crewmates over other whites.¹⁴ A few African American cowboys even became ranch bosses and the same survey of American Life Histories found that black cowboys were most often cooks, which was a position that gave them a level of authority over the cowboy chuckwagon.¹⁵ Especially compared to the segregation and lynchings in the South, the racial dynamics within cowboy crews were characterized by exceptional reliance and trust.

These unprecedented respectful racial dynamics extended to 19th-century cattle towns. In an interview, Pinkney Joel Webb, a white cowboy, recalled how:

Writers' Project, Manuscript Division, The Library of Congress, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002321/>; William Blevins, interview by Sheldon F. Gauthier, 1936-9, transcript, U.S. Work Projects Administration, Federal Writers' Project, Manuscript Division, The Library of Congress, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002376/>.

¹¹ Katz, *The Black West*, 247; Linda Wommack, “Texas Museum Honors Charles Goodnight,” *Wild West* 29, no. 5 (2017): 76, accessed August 10, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f6h&AN=119485027&site=ehost-live>.

¹² James Evetts Haley, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman* (1936; repr., Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 242.

¹³ “Deadwood Dick and the Black Cowboys,” 30.

¹⁴ Hardaway, “African American Cowboys on the Western Frontier,” 28.

¹⁵ *Ibid*; The Library of Congress, “American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940”; Kenneth W. Porter, “African Americans in the Cattle Industry, 1860s-80s,” in *Peoples of Color in the American West*, eds. Sucheng Chan et al. (Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994; Internet Archive, 2019), 160-164, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/peoplesofcolorin0000unse/>.

A story is told of two negroes who worked on the ranch. At one time when Anson and Verner [the owners of the ranch] were away... these two negroes... would put on the Englishmen's clothes, ride their top horses and go to town; passing themselves off as Anson and Verner. That wasn't impossible. People in those days didn't inquire anything about you as long as you attended to your own business.¹⁶

Webb's account reveals the lack of explicit discrimination on the streets of cowtowns and the amicable coexistence of black and white cowboys. Even in the era of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, blacks were allowed to play with whites in gambling houses and patronize frontier proprietors.¹⁷ Also, although saloons were segregated, these divisions were informal and they had a "neutral zone" in which blacks and whites intermingled.¹⁸ Furthermore, even though African American cowboys could not stay in white hotels or eat in white restaurants, both black and white cowboys did not frequent those institutions.¹⁹ Black cowboys were not only accepted as parts of cowboy crews, but they also faced largely non-discriminatory treatment within cattle towns.

Discrimination against African Americans was more prominent in Wild West shows; the exclusion of black cowboys from these productions helped conceal the desegregated cowboy crew. Following the decline of the free-range, Wild West Shows were crucial in establishing cowboys as the heroes of the West.²⁰ However, due to Jim Crow-era prejudice, black cowhands were rarely able to enter the rodeos.²¹ Some cowhands were only able to participate by adopting a different name; for instance, Mose Reeder began calling himself "Gaucho the Coral Dog... because they wouldn't allow colored to ride".²² Even Bill Pickett, who became one of the most

¹⁶ Pinkney Joel Webb, interview by Nellie B. Cox, 1941, transcript, U.S. Work Projects Administration, Federal Writers' Project, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002290/>.

¹⁷ Porter, "African Americans in the Cattle Industry, 1860s-80s," 167.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁹ Hardaway, "African American Cowboys on the Western Frontier," 28; Porter, "African Americans in the Cattle Industry, 1860s-80s," 166-7.

²⁰ Patton and Schedlock, "LET'S GO, LET'S SHOW, LET'S RODEO", 504-505.

²¹ Katz, *The Black West*, 260.

²² *Ibid.*

well-known black cowboys because of his remarkable bronco-busting skill, faced blatant racial discrimination. Pickett gained national and international recognition by performing daring feats and inventing bulldogging, a technique in which a cowboy bites a steer's lip to stun it before wrestling it to the ground.²³ One newspaper even listed bulldogging in an article titled "A Big Demonstration to Show Progress of the Great New West", another described how Pickett performed "one of the most intensely thrilling acts in any arena today."²⁴ However, before he gained recognition, Pickett could not participate in rodeos as a black man and he was forced to dress as a Mexican toreador.²⁵ Once he gained fame, Pickett still could not perform in some locations because of his race.²⁶ Moreover, when implicit Jim Crow regulations were established by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, African American participation in rodeos was further restricted.²⁷ By trying to bar black cowboys from riding in Wild West shows, whites in power were able to obscure the presence of African American cowboys and confine their legacy, thus concealing the integrated cowboy community.

African Americans had many tales that fit into the adventurous cowboy narrative, however, their presence in integrated cowboy crews has been largely omitted from literature and film. One of the most well-known examples of an early cowboy novel is *The Virginian* by Owen Wister, which was the number one bestseller in 1902 and is perhaps the most widely read

²³ Hardaway, "African American Cowboys on the Western Frontier," 31; William R. Sanford and Carl R. Green, *Bill Pickett: Courageous African American Cowboy* (New Jersey: Enslow Publishers Inc., 2013), 35-37.

²⁴ "A Big Demonstration to Show Progress of the Great New West," *The Spokane press* (Spokane, WA), June 9, 1905, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, The Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88085947/1905-06-09/ed-1/seq-4/>; "Bull Ring Feats Help Make Wild West a Success," *Newark evening star and Newark advertiser* (Newark, N.J.), July 19, 1910, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, The Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn91064011/1910-07-19/ed-1/seq-7/>.

²⁵ Patton and Schedlock, "LET'S GO, LET'S SHOW, LET'S RODEO", 510.

²⁶ Sanford and Green, *Bill Pickett*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 504.

American-authored novel.²⁸ However, in his book, Wister includes a scene that exemplifies early-20th century casual racism.²⁹ Around halfway through *The Virginian*, Wister's protagonist suddenly bursts into minstrel song, he sings:

'Dar is a big Car'lina n*gger,
...
By de name of Jim Crow.
Dat what de white folks call him.
If ever I sees him I 'tends for to maul him³⁰

The Virginian helped define the cowboy as an American icon, however, in his book, Wister also casually inserts a passage in which a white man entertains others by being antiblack.³¹ This dynamic is the antithesis of the integrated cowboy crew in which some whites defended their black crewmates over other whites. *The Virginian* was a bestselling and founding piece of the literature of the American West, but by casually emphasizing racial divisions, it disregards the presence of African American cowboys and implies that integrated communities were both nonexistent and impossible. Furthermore, in dime novels and film, black cowboys have been largely excluded, even though some cowboy icons like the Lone Ranger have been theorized to be inspired by black cowboys.³² Only a few African American cowboys were able to write themselves into the Western narrative, such as Nat Love, who wrote the most well-known autobiography of a black cowboy.³³ However, Love's autobiography does not emphasize the integrated cowboy community; instead, it perpetuates the stereotype of the individualistic black

²⁸ David A. Smith, "Owen Wister's Paladin of the Plains: The Virginian as a Cultural Hero," *South Dakota History* 38, no. 1 (2008): 47, accessed August 10, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f6h&AN=43903068&site=ehost-live>.

²⁹ Owen Wister, *The Virginian*, Project Gutenberg (Macmillan, 1902), Retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1298/1298-h/1298-h.htm>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.; Smith, "Owen Wister's Paladin of the Plains", 48.

³² Ibid., 93; "Deadwood Dick and the Black Cowboys," 31; Barbara C. Behan, *The Journal of African American History* 94, no. 2 (2009): 286, accessed August 13, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/25610085.

³³ Bloom, *Nat Love*, 16; Flamming, *African Americans in the West*, 63

westerner.³⁴ In his book, Love focuses on his solitary escapades; he leaves his family and completes the most noteworthy portions of his narrative—being captured by Indians, riding a hundred miles in twelve hours, getting lost in a blizzard, winning the nickname “Deadwood Dick”—alone.³⁵ Indeed, for his story to be accepted into the primarily white-authored Western narrative, Love focuses on stereotypical cowboy experiences and does not mention integrated Western communities.³⁶ The story of black cowboys in integrated cowboy crews is not acknowledged in film and literature.

Black cowboys were also deliberately excluded from the making and legacy of cowboy music. John Lomax was a prominent folk song collector who traveled West to record the sounds of the frontier.³⁷ While collecting Western ballads, he categorized “negro” and “cowboy” songs separately and he begins the Collector’s Note in his book *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910) by stating:³⁸

Out in the wild west yet survives the Anglo-Saxon ballad spirit... Illiterate people... utter themselves through somewhat the same character of songs as did their forefathers of perhaps a thousand years ago.... [The songs] are chiefly interesting to the present generation... because of the information they contain concerning that unique and romantic figure in modern civilization, the American cowboy.³⁹

Lomax identifies the forefathers of song-writing cowboys as Anglo-Saxons and describes how cowboys songs are closely related to European songs. Thus, Lomax culturally segregated blacks

³⁴ Michael K. Johnson, *Hoo-Doo Cowboys and Bronze Buckaroos: Conceptions of the African American West* (Mississippi: University Press Of Mississippi, 2014), 11.

³⁵ *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love Better Known in the Cattle Country as "Deadwood Dick" by Himself; a True History of Slavery Days, Life on the Great Cattle Ranges and on the Plains of the "Wild and Woolly" West, Based on Facts, and Personal Experiences of the Author: Electronic Edition* (California, 1907; Documenting the American South, 1999), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/natlove/natlove.html>.

³⁶ Michael K. Johnson, *Hoo-Doo Cowboys and Bronze Buckaroos*, 11.

³⁷ Ted Gioia, “The Big Roundup: John Lomax Roamed the West, Collecting Classic Songs from the Cowboy Era,” *The American Scholar* 74, no. 2 (2005): 106-7, accessed April 20, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/41222920.

³⁸ Michael K. Johnson, *Hoo-Doo Cowboys and Bronze Buckaroos*, 8.

³⁹ John Avery Lomax, *Cowboy Songs, and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1910; Internet Archive, 2007), <https://archive.org/details/cowboysongsother00lomaufi/>, xvii.

from the cowboy experience and ignored the importance of African Americans to the legacy of the cowboy. Instead of evaluating how cowboys of different racial and cultural backgrounds could have created new forms of music, starting from the very first sentence of his Collector's Note, Lomax chooses to describe a static musical culture that has remained unchanged for "perhaps a thousand years." Indeed, Lomax and many other ballad collectors wanted to show how racial heritage — in this case, white Anglo-Saxonism — could be passed down through folk songs, which sometimes led them to record the songs of African Americans while simultaneously insisting on their white origins.⁴⁰ Ironically, in cowboy crews, black cooks were the most noteworthy musicians and Lomax collected one of the most famous songs in his collection, "Home on the Range", from a black cowboy.⁴¹ In a 1945 journal article discussing the origins of the song, Lomax concedes that he recorded "Home on the Range" from an African American who "had been a camp cook for years and had made the trip up the Chisholm Trail half a dozen times".⁴² However, Lomax also makes it clear that this anonymized figure who is simply referred to as "the Negro" is not the "unique and romantic figure in modern civilization" he describes in his Collector's Note. Lomax writes about how he found the African American cowboy in a "Negro red-light district" and when he asked to record a song, the cowboy responded by saying "I'se drunk". Furthermore, Lomax concludes his account of the origins of "Home on the Range" with the sentence "The original cylindrical record of the song has

⁴⁰ Erich Nunn, *Sounding the color line: Music and race in the southern imagination* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2015), 16-7; Johnson, *Hoo-Doo Cowboys and Bronze Buckaroos*, 8.

⁴¹ Ibid.; Porter, "African Americans in the Cattle Industry, 1860s-80s," 163.

⁴² John Avery Lomax, "Half-Million Dollar Song: Origin of 'Home on the Range'," *Southwest Review* 31, no. 1 (1945): 1-2, accessed August 14, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/43463031.

David A. Smith, "Owen Wister's Paladin of the Plains: The Virginian as a Cultural Hero," *South Dakota History* 38, no. 1 (2008): 47, accessed August 10, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f6h&AN=43903068&site=ehost-live>.

crumbled into dust, but the music that Henry Leberman set down from the record I made still survives.”⁴³ Herein, Lomax does not even mention the black cowboy, instead, he places the emphasis on himself and Henry Leberman, the white man who transcribed “Home on the Range”. In Lomax’s description, the anonymous black cowboy is credited, however, he plays the role of a passive conduit through which the song was preserved; unlike Lomax or Liberman, “the Negro” is not an active contributor to the legacy of the cowboys. Folk music collectors deemphasized the importance of the black cowboy legacy and therefore also helped hide their presence in desegregated 19th-century cowboy communities.

The tale of the cowboy would be incomplete without considering the prominent presence of African Americans on the long drives. In cowboy crews and cattle towns, black cowboys found themselves in accepting communities that valued skill over race. However, in the formation of the story of the cowboy through literature, film, and music, blacks were intentionally segregated from the cowboy narrative to conceal the integrated cowboy community. Recently, there has been a push to reclaim and uncover the legacy of the black cowboys within the American West and even in large urban centers including New York City and Compton, California.⁴⁴ These efforts to reclaim an American heritage and diversify an American icon may ultimately help demonstrate that American history has always been and will always be multiracial.

⁴³ Lomax, “Half-Million Dollar Song,” 1.

⁴⁴ Dillon Hayes, “A Black Cowboy Confronts the Whitewashed History of the West,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/opinion/all-i-have-to-offer-you-is-me-black-cowboys.html> (accessed August 13, 2020); Sarah Maslin Nir, “The Last of New York’s Black Cowboys,” *New York Times*, January 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/nyregion/black-cowboys-nyc.html> (accessed August 13, 2020); Walter Thompson-Hernández, *The Compton cowboys: The new generation of cowboys in America's urban heartland* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020).

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Appendix:

- **Excerpt from:** Lomax, John Avery. "Half-Million Dollar Song: Origin of 'Home on the Range'." Southwest Review 31, no. 1 (1945): 1-8. Accessed August 14, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/43463031.

During night the V-J Day celebration on the night of August 14, 1945, the radio brought to my home the singing of a group of American soldiers. They stood on the Riviera in Nice, France, with their arms about each other and sang lustily, "Home, home on the range." The brass hats in Washington may keep them away longer than is necessary, but that song showed where their hearts were. And the story of how the song became the folk-national anthem of America is a part of this great United States where they want to be.

On a summer day in 1908 I walked into the Buckhorn Saloon in San Antonio lugging a heavy Edison recording machine. It was the earliest, crudest type of a dictaphone, requiring for its operation earphones and a large five-foot horn. The amazed German proprietor stared at my strange equipment and hastily put his hand under the counter where he was supposed to keep his arsenal of democracy. When I assured him I was looking for cowboy songs his face relaxed. He seemed to feel safe, though not entirely satisfied. He kept looking furtively at the unwieldy, bigmouthed horn as though he feared it might be a mortar ready for shooting.

As I sipped a glass of beer, I noticed on the bar a stack of broadsides titled "Hell in Texas." By reading one I learned that the Devil had created a second hell down on the Rio Grande in which

He scattered tarantulas along all the road,
Put thorns on the cactus and horns on the toad;
He lengthened the horns of a Texas steer
And added some inches to the rabbits ear.
The rattlesnakes bite you, the scorpion stings,
The mosquito delights you with buzzing wings ;
The sand is speckled with millions of ants
And those who sit down need half soles on their pants.

The heat in the summer is a hundred and ten,
Too hot for the devil and too hot for men ;
The wild boar runs through the black chaparral,
It's a hell of a place that he has for hell.
The red pepper grows on the banks of the brook,
The Mexicans use it in all that they cook ;
Just dine with a Greaser and then you will shout,
"I've hell on the inside as well as the out."

Said the German saloonkeeper, "I've already given away a hundred thousand copies of that song." It turned out my friend had two hobbies : He was interested in ballads and on the walls of his saloon hung one of the world's largest collections of horns. I had come to the right place.

In chatting about San Antonio he told me how General Phil Sheridan, when a young lieutenant stationed in San Antonio, had said that if he had his choice of living either in Texas or in hell, he would rent out Texas and live in hell. Whereupon a Texan retorted, "Well, damn a man that won't stand up for his own country."

Then he told me of a Negro singer who ran a beer saloon out beyond the Southern Pacific depot in a scrubby mesquite grove. This Negro had been a camp cook for years and had made the trip up the Chisholm Trail half a dozen times. Moreover, he claimed to have cooked for Sam Bass's outfit. "He can give you a lot of cowboy songs if you can get him to sing," said my friend.

That same afternoon I found my man behind his saloon shack with his hat pulled down over his eyes, his head tilted back against a mesquite tree. When I shook him awake and told him what I wanted he muttered, as he looked at me with bleary eyes, "I'se drunk. Come back tomorrow and I'll sing for you."

I spent all the next day under the mesquite with this Negro. Among the songs he sang for me was "Home on the Range," the first time I had heard the melody.

From the record I made that day down in the Negro red-light district (they used stolen switch lanterns to advertise the trade) , Henry Leberman, a blind teacher of music at the State School for the Blind in Austin, a few weeks afterwards set down the music. Leberman used earphones and played the record over and over again until he felt sure that he had captured the music as the Negro saloonkeeper had rendered it. This music, printed in the 1910 edition of *Cowboy Songs*, makes up the core of the tune that has become popular in this country and is, in fact, sung throughout the world. The original cylindrical record of the song has crumbled into dust, but the music that Henry Leberman set down from the record I made still survives.

For twenty years the song remained unnoticed among twenty-seven other cowboy songs, the music of which Henry Leberman also wrote out for my book. From time to time I attempted to use the song to illustrate some of my folksong talks before the annual meetings of the Modern Language Association and among college groups throughout the United States. It made little headway. One night the Cornell Club in New York City sang through the song enthusiastically, but nothing else happened. Thereafter I stopped my efforts to publicize it and fell back on the standard, "Goodbye, Old Paint," "Whoopee Ti Yi Yo, Git Along Little Dogies" and "The Old Chisholm Trail."

In 1925 Oscar J. Fox of San Antonio first put the song into sheet-music form. Five years afterwards David Guion of Dallas followed with another arrangement. During the next six years eight other publishers of music issued the song in a slightly different musical dress. All followed closely the words and tune and order of stanzas I first printed in 1910.

[...]

In the early 18th century, Black cowboys were the only cowboys in the West. That's because white men didn't want to do the work. We're telling their story. Black cowboys have long been a part of the culture of the American West, though you wouldn't know that if your knowledge of cowboys stems mainly from movie Westerns. The real-life truth is that, after the Civil War, when the Wild West really began to flourish, somewhere around 25 percent of all cowboys were Black. Some historians claim the number is even higher than that. To which Callies, who runs The Black Cowboy Museum in Rosenberg, Texas, simply laughs. "In 1830, 1840, the 1850s and '60s, there was nothing but Black cowboys," Callies says. "You wanna know why? In Texas, 'cowboy' was a slav In the 1840's, the American West was sparsely occupied. The largest groups of residents included Native Americans, who lived throughout the region, and Spanish-speaking settlers, who were dominant in the Southwest. Native Americans, whose cultures were many thousands of years old, had developed an amazing range of adaptations to the American West. Agriculture, fishing, and hunting and gathering provided a varied diet. The shifting frontier had devastating effects on Native American cultures. Thousands of southern blacks settled in the West, mainly in Kansas, after the American Civil War (1861-1865). Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, a former slave from Tennessee, led the migration movement. Unfortunately, Black cowboys are rarely seen, mentioned or given credit for in American history. Dating back to the late 1800s, a large number of cowhands were enslaved Africans, as records indicate at least one in four of American cowboys were of African descent. During this time farmers began searching for undeveloped land to harvest in the West. As a result, skilled workers in the realm of herding and ranching became in high demand, contributing to a vast majority of Blacks migrating to the Western hemisphere. For enslaved Africans, this was just the tip of the iceberg, as the West not only USA | Some of the first Cowboys were black; Black men born into slavery found they experienced less open discrimination and a better life on the open range. Black Cowboy by David Berry / 500px. A founder of the Black Cowboys, he tells historical legends of Black cowboys such as "Legend of Nat Love, Annie Oakley and Wild Bill Hickock." He has been teaching at Medger Evers College in 1989 as an adjunct and became a fulltime professor (in the Department of Mass Communications) in 1995. For over 50 years, art has been an indispensable aspect of his existence, beginning with his own art, which ranges from the fine arts to Oakland's Black Cowboys Parade celebrates African Americans' role in the West. Cheerleaders hooted and waved pom-poms. Main page Black cowboys in the American West accounted for up to 25 percent of workers in Contents the range-cattle industry from the 1860s to 1880s, estimated to be between 6,000 Featured content and 9,000 workers.[1][2] Typically former slaves or born into the families of former Current events slaves, many black men had skills. Retrieved 29 August 2017. Emancipation: Black Cowboys and the Livestock Industry. 3. ^ a b Goldstein-Shirley, David (30 April 1997). "Black University of Oklahoma Press. ISBN 9780806156507. Black ISBN 0806156503. Cowboys in the American West: On the Range, on the Stage, Behind the Badge. University of Oklahoma Press. Categories: African Americans in the American Old West American cattlemen Cowboys.