

## Exodusters, Black Cowboys, and Buffalo Soldiers in the Black West Part 1

### Why the first US cowboys were black

Link: <https://youtu.be/KkmD-vpQ4Qs> (2021[7 mins]) The Guardian

From the YouTube description: “Historians estimate that one in four cowboys were African American, though you’d never guess because the conventional Hollywood image of a cowboy is a white man. Black cowboys have been written out of history, along with the original cattle-raising Native Americans and Mexican vaqueros who taught them.” This video opens with the Black men and women mounted and visible in the Black Lives Movement. But Black people have mastered cowboy skills for centuries. The term cowboys originally referred to Black ranchers; whites were called “cowhands”. During slavery and after, when the white census men arrived, landholders would hide their Black cattle ranchers in order to evade taxes. The stories are now being told of the great original cowboys and how Black cowboys have been “white”-washed out of American history. This video highlights some of the early legends as well as the current Compton Riders who are working to highlight the original cowboys’ strengths and stories.

### Additional Resources:

For the Compton Cowboys, Horseback Riding Is a Legacy, and Protection ► <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/31/us...> Evoking History, Black Cowboys Take to the Streets ► <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/us...> The Compton Cowboys: The New Generation of Cowboys in America’s Where have all the black cowboys gone? ► <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020...> Black cowboys: Creole trail rides showcase unique culture ► <https://www.theguardian.com/global/20...> The black cowboys of Mississippi ► <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddes...> <https://www.dazeddigital.com/politics...> The lesser known history of African American cowboys ► <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/histor...> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-2...>

Hollywood Tried to Hide These Black Cowboys | PBS American Experience

Link: <https://youtu.be/MAwSKwV8ayo> (Jan 2022 [7 mins])

This video highlights the hidden diversity—in history and in film—of the Cowboys that included Black and Indigenous riders. While there was almost no visible representation in Hollywood—“the whitening of the westerns”—there were many Black people on the frontier who were drawn there by the end of Reconstruction and The Gold Rush. Bill Pickett was in “westerns” in the 20s, and Herb Jeffries in the late 30s and became an icon, but these Black men were the exception versus the rule. Some BIPOC cowboy standouts were Nat Love, John Ware, Hector Bazy, Bidy Mason and Cherokee Bill, Stagecoach Mary, and Ben Hodges. Bass Reeves was the “first Black Deputy US Marshall west of the Mississippi, spoke tribal languages and was quite possibly the person on whom the Lone Ranger was based. However, white supremacy centered manifest destiny and white cowboys over the reality. While The Lone Ranger was very much influenced by real life Black cowboy phenoms, when it came to creating a hero for the mainstream, a white man with a black mask was used.

Link: <https://youtu.be/WldkW5-FYaE> (October 2021[13 mins]) Black History Resources (African Elements) Exodusters, Black Cowboys and Buffalo Soldiers in the Black West

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After the Civil War, freed Blacks believed that their patriotism and service would be recognized in positive and concrete ways by the country, but the post-Reconstruction reality demonstrated that violence typical of the massacre in Wilmington, SC was more likely than a fair shake in a new society. "Negro Domination" became the white rallying cry. But the 1862 Homestead Act held potential promise and 25,000 Blacks looking for options became "exodusters" and moved west to Kansas. Settlers in Nicodemus—the best-known town for these Kansas bound exodusters—found the transport getting there dangerous, and the taming of the land challenging by drought, crop failures and grasshoppers. Despite living in dugouts, there were some successful homesteading efforts. But ultimately, Nicodemus could not survive without connections to other communities and the town was bypassed by the rail system. In Kansas, there was often an absence of frontier law, but that was preferable to Jim Crow, so the new inhabitants continued to search for work and a living. 5,000 Black men became Cowboys. Buffalo Soldiers were African American military servicemen and 20% of all military; with limited options and dire economic circumstances they fought on the Western front. Many of these men were on the front lines that "cleared the land" by pushing back indigenous groups-- often killing families in the process. The oppressed oppressing the oppressed cannot be examined without using the lens of White Supremacy. The Buffalo Soldiers were freed enslaved persons, former sharecroppers and political refugees; "we cannot condemn their choices without first understanding their options." The racist concept of "manifest destiny" prevailed at the time; the US was ordained to expand westward, and indigenous people needed civilizing. And of course, the Buffalo Soldiers needed jobs, and there were few others.