

Black Cowboys

Economic Impact Yesterday & Today



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Economic Impact Today

Today it is more about the people than the animals although horses, cattle and bulls still play a major role. As cities continued to grow and all the territories became states, the role of the cowboy continued. In Oklahoma Black and Indian Rodeos were a weekly source of entertainment. Weekend rodeos featuring black cowboys began to spread in the late 1940s and continue to be popular today including the Bill Pickett Traveling Rodeo Tour (1984) and the Real Cowboys Association Rodeo Tour (late 1990's).

Mr. Black Rodeo: Cleo Hearn operates Cowboys of Color Rodeos, the largest multicultural rodeo tour which hosted it's first rodeo in 1975 when Hearn took 100 Black Cowboys to Harlem, New York to put on a rodeo for 10,000 kids. This Legend has been producing rodeos annually since 1982. These rodeos and the smaller ones held all over the South owe their existence to the Negro Cowboys Rodeo Association, formed in 1947 by a group of East Texas black businessmen-ranchers and cowboys.

LARGEST RODEOS MAKE A SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC IMPACT

Today, the money is in the people. The biggest indoor rodeo is the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) Wrangler National Finals Rodeo held in Las Vegas every December. Las Vegas took the deadest two weeks of the year and made them the biggest 10 days. Each December, the top 15 contestants in bareback riding, steer wrestling, team roping, saddle bronc riding, tie-down roping, barrel racing and bull riding qualify to compete at the Wrangler NFR for the biggest prize money of the year. During the 10 days of competition, the Wrangler NFR transforms the look and feel of the "Entertainment Capital of the World." Thousands of rodeo enthusiasts decked out in Wrangler jeans, Justin boots and cowboy hats fill hotels, casinos, restaurants, shopping malls and showrooms. In addition, hotel marquees are splashed with the names of the brightest stars in country music. Attendance in 2018 was almost 170,000 and revenues where \$113 million. Many of the hotels sell out the next year before the previous year's rodeo is even over.

The granddaddy of them all is Cheyenne Frontier Days (1897), which boasts the largest outdoor rodeo and Western celebration in the United States, held annually each July in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The event draws slightly over 101,000 rodeo attendees and generated 27 million in recent revenue. Lodging fills up quickly during the peak

tourist season throughout southern and eastern Wyoming, into northern Colorado and western Nebraska. In 2008, Cheyenne Frontier Days was inducted into the ProRodeo Hall of Fame.

The multiple Stock Shows and Rodeos from the National Western (\$100 million) in Denver to the oldest Southwestern Exposition held annually since 1896 at Fort Worth (\$100 million), along with events at San Antonio (\$250 million) and Houston (\$391 million) Texas bring not only hundreds of thousands of children and adults in during multiple days to learn about livestock, farming, and ranching, they also are entertained by some of the best rodeo athletes and the biggest acts in country music. However, the most significant thing is the economic impact to those communities. An activity that began so long ago is still changing and impacting people's lives.

Even our own Cowboys of Color National Finals Rodeo which is only one day has an economic impact of \$250,000 with 4,000-6,000 (participants and attendees) on any given year. We annually produce 4 rodeos through the year. Although most of our cowboys and cowgirls are urban dwellers there are a few families that continue the ranching tradition. The oldest in Texas is under the Houston skyline.



**The Taylor-Stevenson Ranch in Houston, Texas 144 years
Only African American Texas Century Ranch (100 Year
Family Owned)**

On Almeda Road about five miles south of NRG Stadium where the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is held, beyond the roar of 610, beyond warehouses and small industries, beyond the Tweety Bird Motel and a grimy oil depot, is one of the most historic ranches in Texas. It's nothing like the mighty King Ranch or the 6666, to be sure, but the modest, little Taylor-Stevenson spread, about 640 acres, can boast more than a century and a half of history - history I'm not sure you'll find duplicated anywhere else. Mollie Stevenson Jr., the ranch's regal matriarch, is a former model and the first living African-American member – along with her mother, Mollie Stevenson Sr. – of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame in Fort Worth. Mollie, Sr passed away in 2003. Mollie, Jr. and family members run a working ranch, with horses, cattle, hay production and oil. The family also supports youth rodeos, hosts school tours and developed the nonprofit American Cowboy Museum. The museum is dedicated to exposing youngsters to women, blacks and other minorities who throughout American history have been ropers, riders and ranchers. "We didn't write many books or produce movies, so we were left out of history," Stevenson said.

Most people are unaware that there is a whole subculture of Black Cowboys living and traveling across the United States. They just love the lifestyle, the independence and the camaraderie on the trail. The sense of family and feeling good that comes when you work close to the land and with animals especially horses. There is always a cowboy willing to give you a ride down the road or even share their ride (let you ride their horse) which is the way Mr. Black Rodeo started.

GREAT NAMES

Cleo Hearn born in Seminole, Oklahoma in 1939. He grew up playing baseball until he met a cigar smoking, swaggering, well-dress Cowboy Marvel Rogers and from then on his only dream was to be a cowboy. Today he can say he lived his dream. Hearn has been a member of the PRCA since 1959. He was won of the first eight African Americans to serve on the John F. Kennedy Presidential Honor Guard. He was the first African American to go to school on a rodeo scholarship and the first African American to win a National Calf Roping Championship, the National Western on Denver, Colorado in 1970. He is the Founder of the Texas Black Rodeo/Cowboys of Color Southwest Rodeo Tour. He retired from tie-down roping last year at age 79.



Charles "Peewee" Sampson born in Watts, California in 1957. To avoid the violence that surrounded him as a boy growing up, he took a job at a riding stables near Gardena, California. There he sparked an interest in horses and rodeo. He was a fan of the famous African-American bull rider, Myrtis Dightman, who was known as the "Jackie Robinson of Rodeo". Sampson who stands 5 feet, 4 inches tall was a ground breaking rodeo cowboy and the 1982 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) World Champion bull rider. He is the first African American cowboy to win a World Title in professional rodeo. [2]He was inducted into the ProRodeo Hall of Fame in 1996. Today he motivates children and adults as a speaker and youth leader in Colorado.

Fred Whitfield born in 1967 in Hockley, Texas grew up roping anything and everything in sight. Little did he know at the time that his talent would take him to the pinnacle of ProRodeo success. Whitfield has won eight world titles, including seven in tie-down roping and one in the all-around during his storied career. He became the third cowboy in history to surpass the \$2 million mark in career earnings; and became only the second African-American cowboy in PRCA history to win a world title and the first to win an all-around title. Whitfield was elected to the ProRodeo Hall of Fame in 2004.