



AUTRY MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN WEST
4700 Western Heritage Way
Los Angeles, CA 90027-1462

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

4/3/2025 **The Autry Museum of the American West Presents New Exhibition**

Black Cowboys: An American Story

June 14, 2025–January 4, 2026



Chanel Rhodes with her horse, Lady, 2021. Courtesy of Amanda Lopez

“And to be a Black cowboy, it shows you that we were always there. It’s not like we became Black cowboys, or we got into this now that it has become trendy. No, we were always there.”

—Kyle Tecumseh “Ponyboy” Williams, Los Angeles

(DATE - Los Angeles, CA) — Did you know that one of four cowboys who went on the trail was Black? From the ranches of Texas to the cities of California, *Black Cowboys: An American Story* offers a clearer picture of the Black West and a more diverse portrait of the



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American frontier. Historical and contemporary objects, photographs, and personal stories convey the work and spirit of Black cowboys and reveal how Black men and women turned their equestrian skills to popular performances in rodeo, Western film, and music. Videos created for this exhibition highlight individual Black cowfolk, past and present, who have kept these traditions alive.

Black Cowboys: An American Story was conceived and organized by the Witte Museum in San Antonio, Texas (wittemuseum.org). The Autry joins the Witte Museum in celebrating the stories of Black cowboys, adding a companion exhibition that showcases the history and impact of the Black cowboy spirit in California. “The individual stories of Black cowboys – from histories of discrimination to legacies of excellence – illustrate the strength and persistence of the men, women and children who raised and roped cattle for generations,” said Michelle Everidge, CEO and President of the Witte Museum. The Autry Museum of the American West and the Witte Museum were privileged to collaborate closely with community leaders, scholars, cowboys, and ranchers to create this exhibition.

Museum visitors will discover how Black cowboys tamed and trained horses, tended livestock, and rode the trail with thousands of cattle across America. Over time, the role of Black cowboys evolved as they used the skills they learned on the ranch and trail to own and manage ranches, serve as lawmen, compete in rodeos, and perform as entertainers. Today, the lives and legacies of these historic trailblazers have inspired new generations to explore the Black cowboy culture of the past through contemporary expressions in music, film, fashion, and design.

While the original show focuses on Texas, The Autry’s presentation features important contributions by the Buffalo Soldiers, World Champion Bull Rider Charlie Sampson, and Sharon Braxton, one of the first female African American barrel racers in the Women's Professional Rodeo Association. Highlighting Hollywood’s influence on the Black cowboy image, this exhibition also includes early film posters from Bill Pickett’s *The Bull Dogger* (1922) to the costumes used in the 2021 Netflix film *The Harder They Fall*. “With this exhibition, the history of the most mythologized of American figures, the cowboy, gets a long overdue expansion. I am particularly excited by what the Autry has added to the Witte’s exhibition,” said Stephen Aron, Calvin and Marilyn Gross Director and President and CEO of the Autry Museum of the American West.



Black Cowboys: An American Story was developed in partnership with the Witte Museum. The exhibition is presented by Bank of America and generously supported by the John L.



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Santikos Charitable Fund of the San Antonio Area Foundation, H-E-B, and the Ed Rachal Foundation.

About the Autry Museum of the American West:

The Autry Museum of the American West is dedicated to exploring and sharing the stories, experiences, and perceptions of the diverse peoples of the American West, connecting the past to the present to inspire our shared future. The museum presents a wide range of exhibitions and public programs—including lectures, film, theatre, festivals, family events, and music—in addition to scholarship, research, and educational outreach. The Autry's holdings comprise more than 600,000 artworks and cultural objects, including one of the largest and most significant collections of Native American materials in the United States.

For more information, please visit theautry.org/black-cowboys.

The Autry Museum of the American West acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and So. Channel Islands). We recognize that the Autry Museum and its campuses are located on the traditional lands of Gabrielino/Tongva peoples, and we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), 'Ahihirom (Elders) and 'Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present, and emerging.

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Museum and Store Hours:
Tuesday–Friday 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Saturday–Sunday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

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