

Oakland Museum of California

Exhibition Proposal

PROPOSAL BY MEGAN RILEY, MLIS '20

WORKING TITLE

The Oakland Black Cowboy Association Parade at 45 Years: Celebrating the History and Communities of the Black American West

BACKGROUND

Black people have been cowboys and cowhands for essentially as long as the profession has existed. Before the abolition of slavery in the United States, having a job as a cowboy offered relative freedom - solo work on horseback, a gun, and more. After the Civil War, thousands of Black Americans migrated westward, and many found work in the cattle industry. Despite the prevalence of Black cowboys - it's been estimated that in Texas alone between 1866 and 1895, thousands in the cowboy workforce were Black (Pate 2001) - their history has largely been ignored or forgotten in the general history and mythos of the American West. Sporting events like rodeos solidified its imagery, and "the mythology that has been perpetuated about the American West, cowboy culture, and rodeo privileges whiteness and the contributions of Anglo-Americans" (Patton and Schedlock 2011). Despite the relative lack of attention paid to and scholarship on Black cowboys, there is a wealth of stories to be told and many institutions and organizations dedicated to sharing them and rewriting the assumptions inherent in a whiteness-centered Western mythology.

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

One of the organizations dedicated to recentering the Black experience in the history of the western United States, particularly California and what is now the Bay Area, is the Oakland Black Cowboy Association. OBCA has held an annual parade in Oakland since 1974, when the organization was known just as the Black Cowboy Association. 2019 will be the 45th anniversary of the parade and thus an excellent time to celebrate its history, the broader history of Black cowboys and ranchers in California and the West, and today's generation of Black cowboys and cowgirls.

The exhibit will include items from OMCA's own holdings, including old posters for OBCA's parade in past years, Juneteenth celebration fliers featuring images of Black cowboys, and other ephemera. Additional objects and materials, such as personal photographs, home movies and sound recordings, should be acquired through consultation and partnership with the community, institutions with related archival materials, and organizations including OBCA and others, such as the Compton Cowboys and Horses in the Hood.

Particular attention will be paid to the history and current community of Black cowboys and cowgirls in the Bay Area; although the focus of many Western exhibits are on the men in the cattle and ranching professions, there were also plenty of women cowhands, ropers, and rodeo riders, and that should be acknowledged and reflected in the exhibition content.

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EXHIBITION THEMES

- The history of the Oakland Black Cowboy Association and its annual parade
- The role the city of Oakland and its community has played in preserving Black cowboy and cowgirl heritage and history
- The history of Black cowboys and cowgirls, ranchers, and rodeo riders in California
- How the enduring myth of a white-centered American West was created through marginalization, discrimination, and erasure of Black communities
- How institutions and communities can work together to preserve and promote the non-whiteness-centered history of the West and its Black pioneers

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This exhibit is intended for visitors ages 8+; visitors with an interest in Western history; visitors with an interest in cowboys and/or rodeo performers; visitors with an interest in Oakland history; visitors who are members of these communities; visitors with an interest in famous Black cowboys such as Nat Love; visitors with an interest in Black Western movies

ASSOCIATED PROGRAMMING

Ideally this exhibition should overlap in some way with OBCA's 75th annual parade in 2019, which is held the first Saturday of October at DeFremery Park in West Oakland. Cross-promotional material can be created to encourage visitors to attend both the parade and the museum exhibit. Potential additional programming could include live demonstrations of riding from OBCA members at special museum events, movie screenings of old Western films featuring Black stars, and more.

Oakland Museum of California had a past exhibition about the OBCA and its parade, but there's little information or documentation available about that exhibit; in fact, one of the only indications on the internet of its existence is a 1990s recording by local TV station KTOP that covered the exhibit by photographer Beverly Woodin, "The Black Cowboy, Then and Now." It could be interesting to include any available information about this old exhibit either in the new exhibition or as part of associated programming to relate back to the history of OMCA itself.

KEY OBJECTS

- *"Don't leave out the cowboys."* KTOP-TV, 1990s: this 23-minute VHS recording of a local news broadcast highlights OMCA's exhibit "The Black Cowboy, Then and Now" by photographer Beverly Woodin (coordinated by Beatrice Cox), which was on view sometime in the 1990s.
- *"California's Gold: Singing cowboys."* Huell Howser, 1992: VHS recording of an episode of Huell Howser's *California's Gold* TV program on KCET that features Howser traveling to Oakland to see OBCA's annual parade.

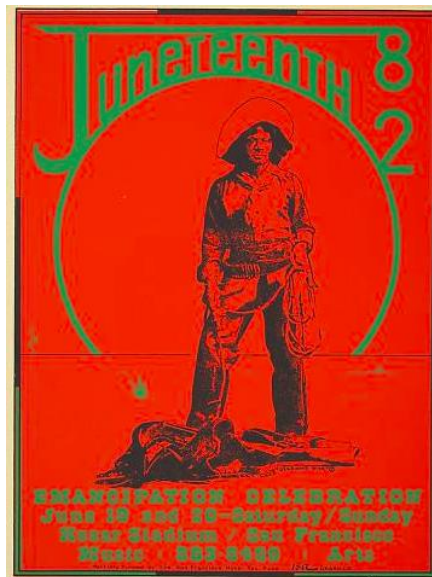
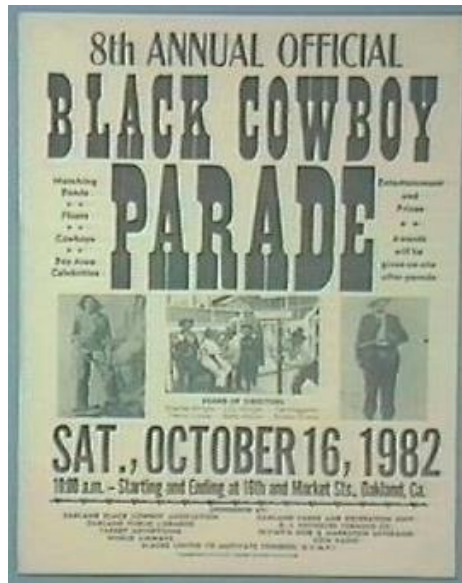
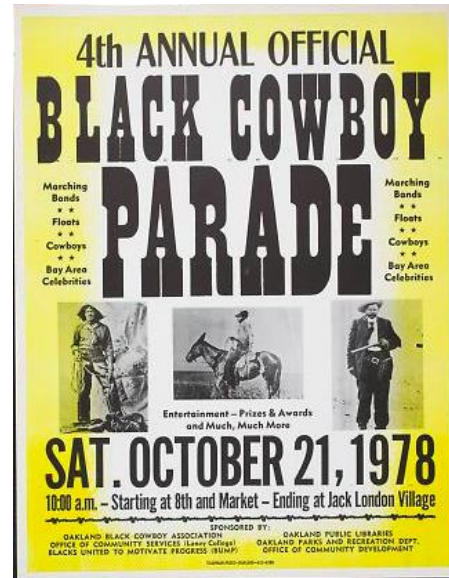
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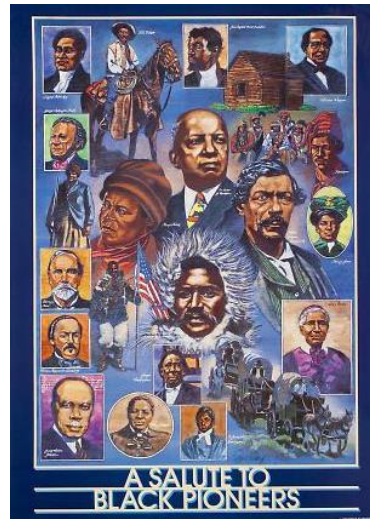
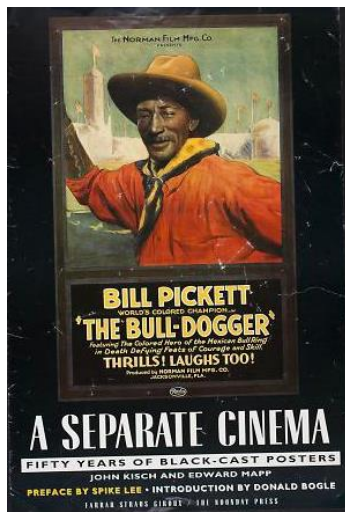
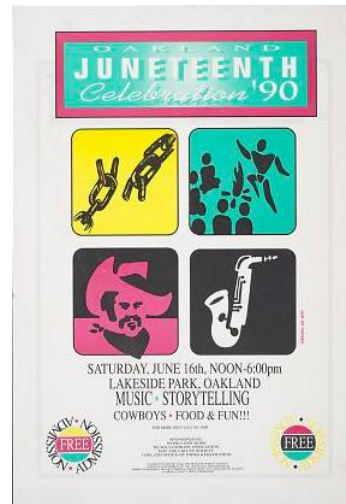
- *Poster for the 3rd Annual Official Black Cowboy Parade, October 22 1977*: This poster was acquired by OMCA originally for the Folk Roots exhibit.
- *"Black Cowboy Parade." Tilghman Press, printer*: This is a poster for the 4th annual parade on October 21, 1978, and is part of OMCA's All Of Us Or None Of Us Archive.
- *Poster for the 8th Annual Official Black Cowboy Parade, October 16 1982*: This poster is another OMCA acquisition for the Folk Roots exhibit.
- *"Juneteenth 82 [1982] Emancipation Celebration." ISA Graphics, artist and printer*: Poster advertising a Juneteenth celebration at Kezar Stadium in San Francisco; image featured on the poster is famous Black cowboy Nat Love, aka Deadwood Dick. Part of OMCA's All Of Us Or None Of Us Archive.
- *"Juneteenth 84." ISA Graphics*: Poster advertising a Juneteenth celebration with a parade and rodeo; features an image of a Black cowboy. Part of OCMA's All Of Us Or None Of Us Archive.
- *Poster for Oakland Juneteenth Celebration '90*: Poster advertising a Juneteenth celebration at Oakland's Lakeside Park that features an image of a cowboy and indicates that there will be cowboys at the event. Part of OCMA's All Of Us Or None Of Us Archive.
- *"A Separate Cinema." Poster work on paper*: Features movie poster of famous Black rodeo man Bill Pickett in "The Bull-Dogger" film. Part of OCMA's All Of Us Or None Of Us Archive.
- *"A salute to black pioneers." Empak Enterprises Inc., publisher*: Lithographed poster with portraits of 18 Black pioneers; one of the illustrations is of Black rodeo man Bill Pickett. Part of OCMA's All Of Us Or None Of Us Archive.
- *"Blacks in the Westward Movement: Oakland Museum, Oct. 18 - Nov. 9"*: Poster advertising an exhibit at the Oakland Museum (the former name of OMCA); image on poster seems to be of Nat Love. Part of OCMA's All Of Us Or None Of Us Archive.

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IMAGES OF SOME KEY OBJECTS



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REFERENCES

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