

The Forgotten Foundation: How Black Equestrians Helped Build American Thoroughbred Racing

Presented by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame

Course Overview

The popular image of American thoroughbred racing is one of triumph and glory. Secretariat's iconic Triple Crown win. Seabiscuit's underdog victory against War Admiral. More recently, Rich Strike's long shot run in the Kentucky Derby. We tend to view sports through the lens of their greatest moments. But the history of thoroughbred racing, like the history of America, is far more complicated than the mythologized version told in film and television. And, like America, thoroughbred racing was built by generations of largely forgotten Black pioneers.

This educational packet explores the contributions of Black equestrians to thoroughbred racing. We will trace the journeys of several key figures who dominated the sport and analyze their lasting impact, alongside the racing community they helped to establish. Finally, we will discuss why Black participants were forced out of the sport, and the resurgence of Black equestrians today.

Targeted Grade Levels: 9 - 12

Subjects: Social Studies, U.S. History

Guiding Questions:

- How did Black equestrians develop a strong racing community in the early days of American history, and what was the role of slavery in thoroughbred racing?
- Who were the key figures in thoroughbred racing's Black renaissance and what did they contribute to the sport's early development?
- What were the key developments in racing's Black community throughout the 1900s, and what is their state today?

Lesson One

This first lesson explores the roots of Black equestrianism in the early period of American thoroughbred racing from the 1600s until 1865, starting with the history of Black riders in Africa, early interactions with European colonizers, and the beginning of slavery as an institution, resulting in the forced displacement and subjugation of millions of people. In this lesson, we will explore a historical timeline highlighting the key events in the development, resistance, and eventual abolition of slavery in the United States. This timeline also highlights key events occurring simultaneously in the development of American thoroughbred racing as a sport, illustrating how America's first national pastime evolved alongside the institution of slavery, and the role of enslaved riders and equestrians in racing up until 1865.

This lesson will provide important context for future learning about slavery's impact on thoroughbred racing. We will see how slavery impacted American thoroughbred racing and the extent that the two institutions were intertwined before the abolition of slavery in the United States. Since much of America's horse racing world was centered in the American South, this meant that the sport was largely funded by the money generated by enslaved labor. Many of the largest farms, owners, and racetracks in America were tied into the practice of slavery, and most of the people taking care of and riding these racehorses were also enslaved people. This lesson explores how thoroughbred racing and slavery were interdependent of each other.

African Horsemanship, Enslavement, and Early American Racing

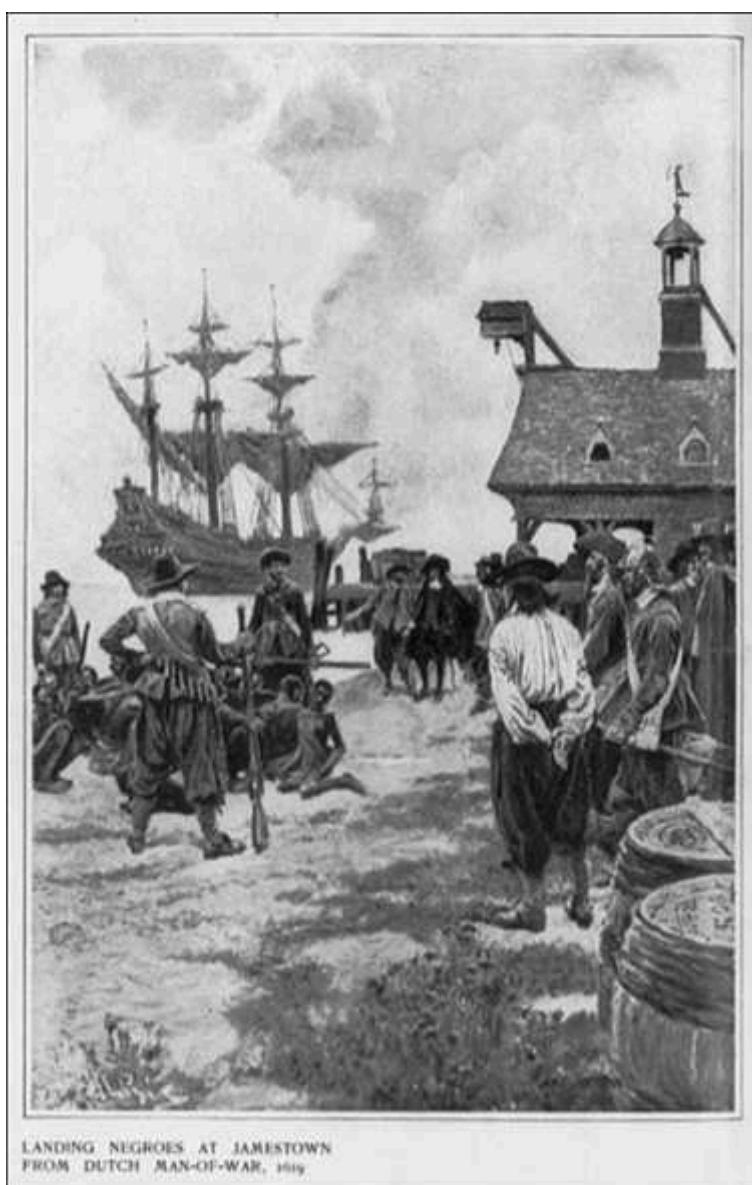
Section One, Pre-1600s: African and Middle Eastern Horsemanship

- The people of North Africa and the Middle East were well known for their equine experience and brought that experience to Western Africa.
- Talented horsemanship was a point of pride and accomplishment for many African civilizations, especially in Northern West Africa.
- When the transatlantic slave trade began in the 1500s, Europeans kidnapped people from the African continent, who brought their equine experience and knowledge of horses with them to the colonies in the west.

Section Two, 1600–1699: Colonization, Enslavement, and the Birth of American Racing

- 1610 – The British, longtime proponents of horse racing, ship the first horses over to the American colonies for informal races.
- 1619 – Over twenty Africans are captured from a ship and brought to Jamestown, Virginia, where they are enslaved but called indentured servants. Indentured servants were people who agreed to work for an owner for a set number of years with the expectation of having their freedom at the end of their servitude. Enslaved people had no such expectation and would be owned for life.
- 1640 – John Punch, an indentured servant, runs away but is caught. He is sentenced to servitude for life, becoming the first African to be enslaved, and the first legally enslaved person under criminal law. This sets a precedent for the lifelong enslavement of human beings in the Americas.

- 1645 – A ship called The Rainbow leaves the American colonies for Africa and becomes the first American ship to participate in the transatlantic slave trade.



A drawing of people kidnapped from Africa being taken to the Colony of Jamestown, 1619. Credit: Library of Congress.

- 1652 – Rhode Island places legal restrictions on slavery. These laws are rarely enforced and are eventually repealed in the 18th century as the colony becomes increasingly involved in the slave trade.

- 1662 – Virginia enacts a law declaring that children are born with the same status as their mothers. This means that the children of enslaved women are born into enslavement, even if their fathers are white and free.

- 1665 – The Newmarket Race Course on Long Island becomes the first sporting venue to open in the American colonies. Once a year, horses from around the colonies are brought there to race and determine who is fastest.

- 1674 – Sprint racing gains popularity in the colonies because it can be done in streets and open spaces, reducing the need for formal racetracks. The first recorded race in Virginia occurs

in September 1674, when James Bullock is fined one hundred pounds of tobacco for arranging a race between his mare and his neighbor's horse. While horse

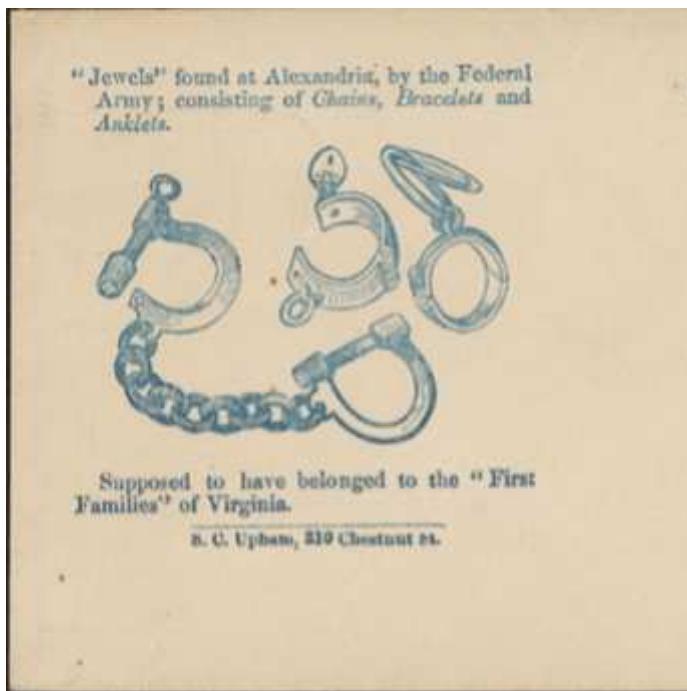
racing was not illegal in Virginia, street racing was.



This is a replica of the silver porringer awarded to the first winner at Newmarket Race Course on Long Island in 1665. On display at the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame.

- 1677 – In Richmond, Virginia, a white rider named Thomas Cocke races against “a boy of Chamberlaine” for three hundred pounds of tobacco. While the name of Chamberlaine’s rider is unknown, it is likely he was an enslaved Black man, as only white riders had their names recorded in court files from races like this one.
- 1680s – Until the 1730s, horse racing in the colonies mainly occurs on temporary “race-paths.” These makeshift tracks are created for occasional, judged, and regulated races. The contests do not follow a fixed schedule but happen when one person challenges another.
- 1688 – Four Quakers in Pennsylvania draft what is widely considered the first anti-slavery petition in America. They call on their fellow Quakers to abstain from participating in slavery.

Section Three, 1700–1774: The Expansion of Slavery and the Rise of Organized Horse Racing



An 1860s engraving showing chains found in Alexandria, Virginia that were reportedly worn by the first enslaved people in Virginia. Credit: Library of Congress.

resulting in tighter restrictions on the movement and freedoms of enslaved people.

- 1730s – Virginian plantation owners, having accumulated significant wealth fueled by the institution of slavery, begin purchasing horses bred specifically for racing from England. Quarter horses remain popular among the middle and lower classes, while the upper class favors English-bred thoroughbreds.

- 1700 – By this year, about 11% of the population in North America consists of enslaved Black people. Enslaved Africans are brought into Virginia at a rate of 1,000 per year. The slave trade rapidly becomes one of the most profitable businesses in the world.

- 1705 – Virginia legally declares enslaved people to be property. The colony also allows enslavers to punish enslaved people without fear of legal repercussions.

- 1712 – An enslaved revolt in New York City is unsuccessful,

- 1743 – A depiction of an African groom in William Cavendish's *A General System of Horsemanship in All Its Branches*, seen here, highlights the long-standing presence of Black men in British and American stables. They are established members of the equestrian workforce.



- 1750s – Thoroughbred jockey clubs form across the colonies, transforming horse racing from a rough, male-dominated pastime into an organized and respected sport. These clubs sponsor race meets that become both athletic and social events.
- 1770 – A highly anticipated race in North Carolina between a horse named Blue Boar and a Scottish riding pony attracts intense betting. Wagers grow to include money, livestock, and enslaved people. The winning jockey is a young enslaved boy, likely no older than twelve, weighing around fifty pounds.

Section Four, 1775–1789: Revolution, Abolition, and a Changing Nation

- 1775 – The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage is founded in Pennsylvania, becoming the first abolitionist society in America.
 - The American Revolution begins. The British promise freedom to any enslaved people who fight for them. George Washington, initially opposed, allows freed Black men to join the Continental Army. Between 10–20% of the Continental Army and Navy are Black soldiers.
 - By this year, over two dozen stud farms operate in Virginia and other colonies, with Virginia leading the production of racing and saddle horses.

With the start of the Revolutionary War, horse racing comes to a halt, especially in Virginia and South Carolina.

- 1776 – The Declaration of Independence is ratified. It originally includes a passage condemning slavery, but the section is removed to avoid alienating Southern states.



A 1784 watercolor painting by French artist Jean Baptiste Antoine de Verger (1762-1851) showing the variety of soldiers who fought for the Continental Army, including a black soldier who was a member of the First Rhode Island Regiment, an all-black unit of the Patriot army. Credit: Library of Congress.

- 1780s – Jockey clubs begin charging admission fees for races, restricting attendance to the wealthy. Before this change, race audiences were made up of people from all classes, races, and statuses, both free and enslaved.

- 1780/1781 – Simon, born in Africa and brought to South Carolina as a child, begins racing as a jockey in his early teens. His enslaver, Robert C. Foster, often lends him out to other horse owners to compete.

Section Five, 1790–1830: The Early Republic and Institutional Racism

- 1790s – Charleston, South Carolina, experiences a golden age of racing, centered around the February Race Week. Although the event existed before the

Revolution, it becomes a major social and sporting occasion for Southern elites in the late 1790s.



Reverend William McLain, the secretary of the American Colonization Society. Credit: Library of Congress.

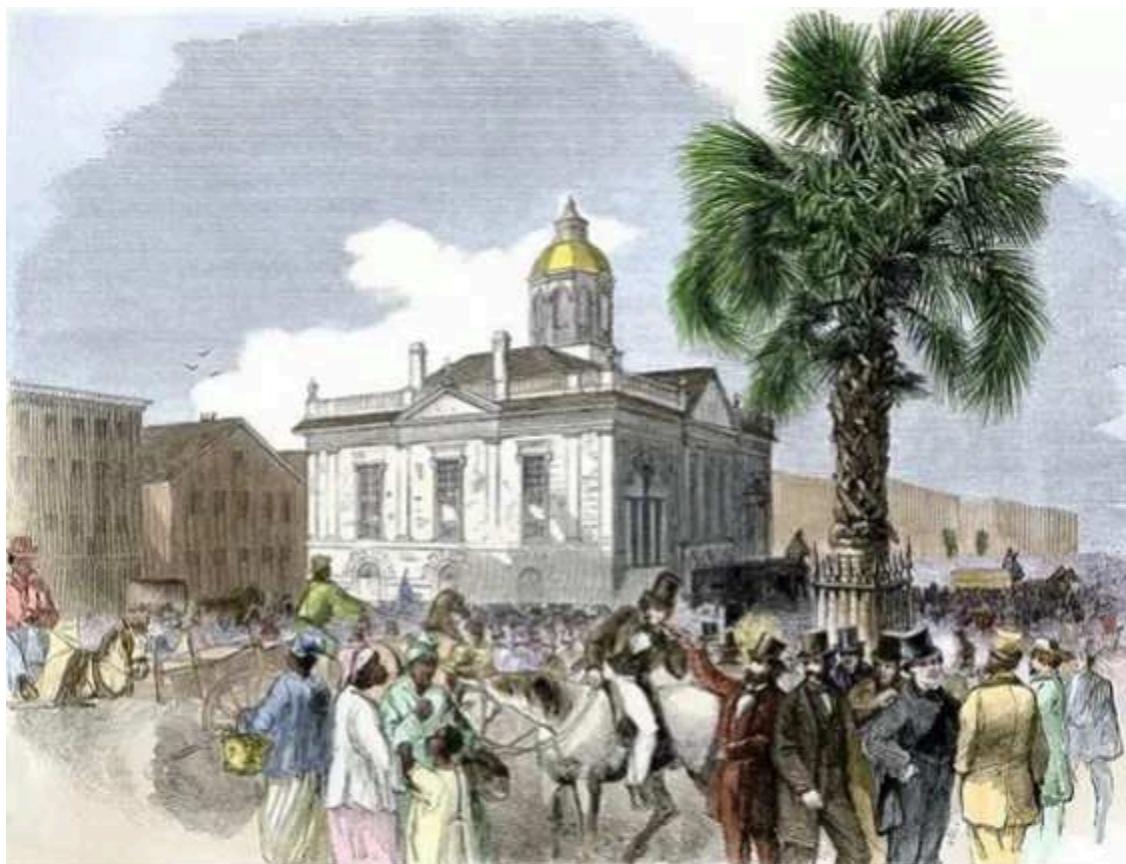
- 1793 – The Fugitive Slave Act is passed, making it illegal to harbor escaped enslaved people.

• 1808 – The African slave trade is officially banned in the United States and the British colonies. While importation of enslaved people ends, slavery itself continues to grow due to the natural increase of the enslaved population.

- 1810–1815 – For five years, the enslaved jockey Simon maintains a fierce

rivalry with future President Andrew Jackson. Jackson's horse and jockey lose eight times and forfeit once during their nine showdowns.

- 1816 – The American Colonization Society is formed, aiming to transport freeborn Black people and formerly enslaved people back to Africa. The group's efforts lead to the founding of what becomes the Republic of Liberia.
- 1820 – Congress passes the Missouri Compromise, restricting slavery north of latitude 36°30' in the Louisiana Purchase, except in Missouri.
- 1822 – The National Course opens in Washington, D.C., becoming a popular gathering place for politicians and horsemen.



Crowds in Charleston, South Carolina, 1860. Credit: Library of Congress.

- 1824 – In the presidential election, John Quincy Adams's victory, aided by Henry Clay, leads to political controversy when John Randolph calls Clay a “blackleg,” a term for a gambler or one who races for money.
 - William H. Roane compares the American Revolution to a horse race, calling it “the glorious race of '76,” with Virginia as the starting post and liberty as the prize.
- 1828 – British naval officer Basil Hall visits Charleston's Washington Course and remarks on the smaller crowds. The decline reflects the region's post-slave-trade economic struggles and the dissolution of many wealthy estates.

Section Six, 1830–1860: Black Horsemen, Resistance, and the Road to Civil War

- 1830 – By this time, every state east of the Mississippi River has at least one racetrack. Virginia alone boasts more than twelve.
- 1834 – John Henry Hammond purchases an enslaved man named George, a highly regarded trainer and groom. Enslavers discuss dividing George's ownership three ways, treating him like a valuable racehorse.
 - Artist Edward Troye paints the stallion Richard Singleton with his jockey Lew, trainer Harry Lewis, and groom Charles, all Black men. The painting reflects the central role of



An 1835 Quaker publication condemning the practice of slavery in the United States. Credit: Library of Congress.

Black horsemen in the sport. Harry Lewis, once enslaved, was freed and paid a salary to train horses such as Richard Singleton, Grey Eagle, and Darley (later renamed Lexington).

- 1839 – In a celebrated match race between Grey Eagle, ridden by a white jockey, and Wagner, ridden by an enslaved man named Cato, Wagner wins. Cato is granted his freedom, a rare occurrence, and continues to race as a free man for his former enslaver.



Illustration of Dred Scott. Credit: Library of Congress.

- 1840s – African American author Henry Clay Bruce recalls the mid-19th-century Black horsemen who were respected and admired as “uncrowned kings.”

- 1841 – A writer identified as “N. of Arkansas” remarks on the difficulty white enslavers face in getting Black jockeys to obey them over the directions of Black trainers, whose superior expertise challenges white authority in stables.

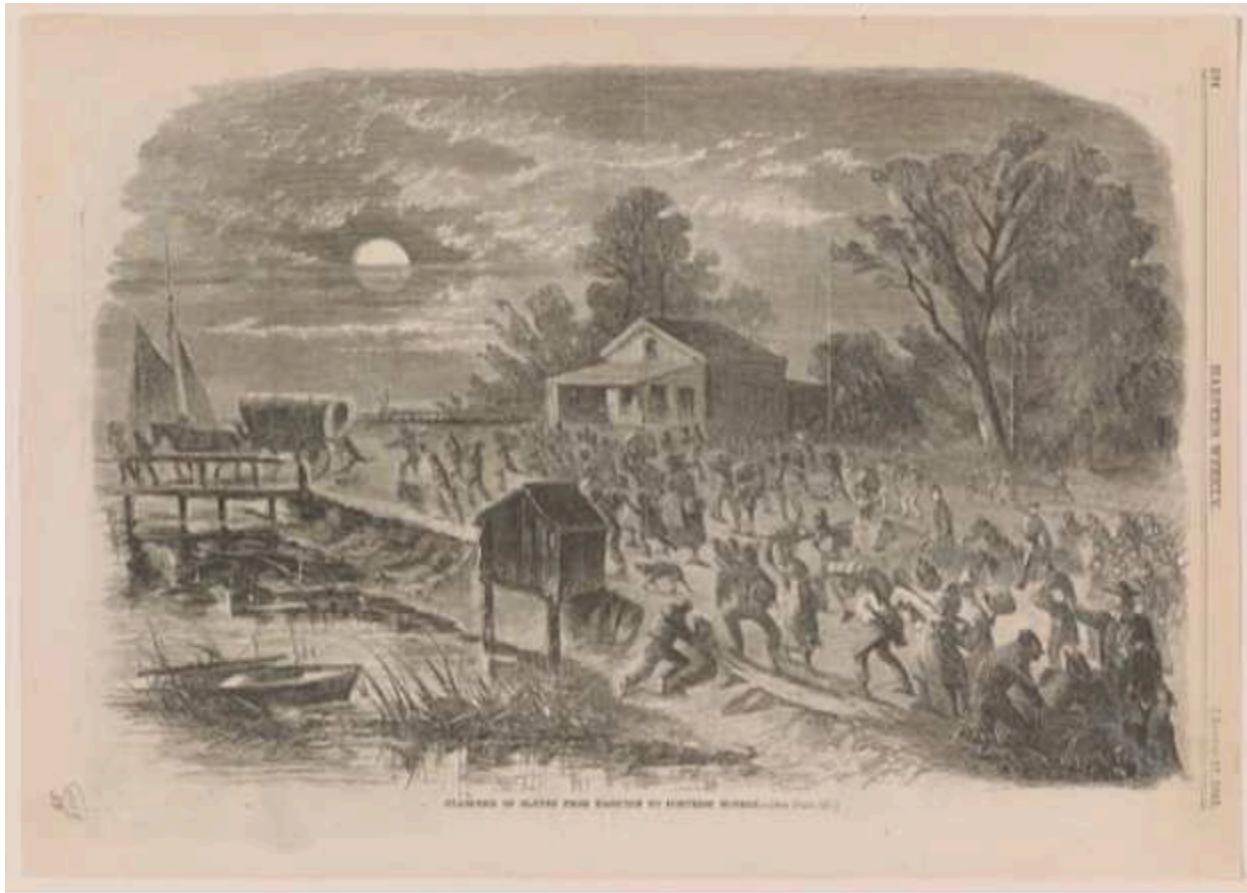
- 1841 – The U.S. Supreme Court rules in favor of the African captives of the

Amistad, declaring that they had the right to revolt against unlawful enslavement and were free.

- 1854 – The Kansas-Nebraska Act allows settlers in new territories to decide whether to permit or outlaw slavery. The law leads to violent clashes between pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions, a period later known as “Bleeding Kansas.”
- 1857 – The U.S. Supreme Court issues the Dred Scott v. Sanford decision, ruling that Black people are not citizens and therefore cannot sue in federal court.
- 1859 – A large sale of more than 400 enslaved people takes place at a racecourse in Savannah, Georgia, one of the largest auctions in U.S. history.
- 1860 – The U.S. Census reports that nearly 3,954,000 Black people in the United States are enslaved - about 89% of the total Black population.
 - Formerly enslaved man Robert Harlan writes to Wilkes's *Spirit of the Times*, a racing periodical, praising the endurance of American racehorses over European breeds. During Abraham Lincoln's presidential campaign, he names one of his horses Lincoln.

Section Seven, 1861–1865: The Civil War and Emancipation

- 1861 – The Civil War begins. Union General Benjamin Butler establishes the Fort Monroe Doctrine, declaring that escaped enslaved people are “contraband of war” and therefore not subject to return. This effectively provides a path to freedom for thousands.
- 1863 (January 1) – President Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all enslaved people in rebellious states to be free. The Civil War is thus transformed into a fight for human liberty.



An 1861 print showing escaped enslaved people fleeing with their possessions towards Union lines. Credit: Library of Congress.

- 1863 (July 18) – The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, an all-Black regiment, attacks Fort Wagner in South Carolina. Though unsuccessful, their courage inspires more Black men to enlist in the Union army.
- 1863 (August 3) – Heavyweight boxer John Morrissey organizes thoroughbred races in Saratoga Springs, New York, to capitalize on the closure of southern racetracks as a result of the ongoing Civil War. The enterprise is so successful that he formally opens the Saratoga Race Course the following year.
- 1865 – The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, abolishing slavery throughout the United States.



The Emancipation Proclamation. Credit: Library of Congress.

From Africa's rich equestrian traditions to the rise of horse racing in colonial America, the story of Black horsemen is inseparable from the development of American sport and identity. Long before the United States existed, Africans brought with them centuries of equine knowledge, skill, and care. These abilities became the backbone of early American stables - through enslavement and forced labor.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, enslaved men and boys were often chosen to care for, train, and race horses. They became the first American jockeys and trainers, their talent essential to the prestige and success of plantation owners and racing clubs. Even as laws deepened racial hierarchies and codified slavery, Black equestrians were mastering techniques, developing bloodlines, and setting records that defined the sport.

By the 19th century, Black jockeys were among the most skilled and respected figures in American racing - yet their achievements existed within systems of oppression. Many raced under bondage, with their victories enriching enslavers rather than themselves. Others, like Cato and Simon, earned rare freedom through their accomplishments. Their stories show the tension between mastery and exploitation, pride and injustice.

When emancipation came in 1865, it marked a new chapter - but the legacy of Black horsemen remained. They had laid the foundations for America's thoroughbred industry, shaping its breeding practices, training methods, and competitive traditions. Their influence continued well into the 19th century, when Black jockeys would dominate the early Kentucky Derby before being systematically excluded from the sport they helped build.

Understanding this history reveals how Black equestrians were not merely forced participants in early American racing, they were its creators, innovators, and champions. Their story is one of resilience, excellence, and cultural inheritance that continues to shape American equestrianism today.

Comprehension & Chronology

1. What regions of Africa were known for their equestrian traditions before the transatlantic slave trade began?
2. How did the equine skills of Africans influence early American horse racing?
3. When and where was the first organized horse race in the American colonies held?
4. What legal changes in Virginia during the 17th century contributed to the development of hereditary slavery?
5. How did the American Revolution temporarily affect horse racing in the colonies?

Critical Thinking & Interpretation

6. Why do you think horse racing became a popular sport among colonial elites? How did it reflect the social hierarchies of the time?
7. What does the story of Simon or Cato reveal about the contradictions of slavery and excellence?
8. How did the contributions of Black equestrians challenge the racist assumptions of their time?
9. In what ways did horse racing and slavery intersect - economically, socially, and symbolically?
10. How might the history of early Black horsemen change our understanding of American sports culture and heritage?

Connection & Reflection

11. Consider the phrase “uncrowned kings” used to describe Black horsemen of the 19th century. What does this mean to you?
12. Why do you think the stories of early Black jockeys and trainers were often erased or overlooked in later histories of the sport?
13. How might we honor and reintroduce these figures into the broader story of American racing and wider sports history today?
14. Can you draw parallels between the experiences of Black equestrians and other Black innovators whose work was appropriated or forgotten?
15. What lessons about perseverance, skill, and identity can students today take from these early equestrian figures?

Activity One

In this activity, you will examine four primary source documents, all dating from 1770-1860:

- A newspaper listing about a runaway enslaved man written by future President Thomas Jefferson.
- An obituary for a man named Austin (Jones) Curtis.
- A flier showcasing upcoming races in Charleston, South Carolina.
- A rare letter written by an enslaved woman, Vilet Lester.

In small groups, read through and analyze these documents, then discuss their significance. Compare and contrast the language used from different sources and within different contexts to understand the prevailing perspectives of this era. How do these documents differ from each other? How are they similar?

Write down your observations and notes as you go through these primary source documents and answer the questions from each section.

A newspaper listing about a runaway enslaved man:



RUN away from the subscriber in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto slave called *Sandy*, about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low, inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light; he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is insolent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is expected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoemakers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in *Albemarle*, shall have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere within the colony, and 10 l. if in any other colony, from

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Transcribed:

RUN away from the subscriber in Albemarle, a Mulatto slave called Sandy, about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low, inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light; he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is insolent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is expected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoemakers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in Albemarle, shall have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere within the colony, and 10 l. if in any other colony, from THOMAS JEFFERSON.

- *Virginia Gazette*, September 7th, 1769 (From the National Archives)

Guiding Questions:

1. How is Sandy described by Thomas Jefferson? Which traits are emphasized?
2. What does the ad suggest about Sandy's skills and independence?
3. Why do you think Jefferson included details about his talents as a jockey and shoemaker?
4. How might this ad reflect both the dehumanization of enslaved people and the reliance on their expertise?

An obituary for an enslaved man:

5101.

On the 10th ult. at Halifax (N. C.) AUSTIN JONES. a colored man, aged about 50 years—well known for many years past, as keeper of race horses; in the management of which useful animal, he particularly excelled. —His character was unblemished; his disposition mild and obliging—his deportment uniformly correct and complaisant—he possessed the esteem of many—the respect and confidence of all who knew him.

Transcribed:

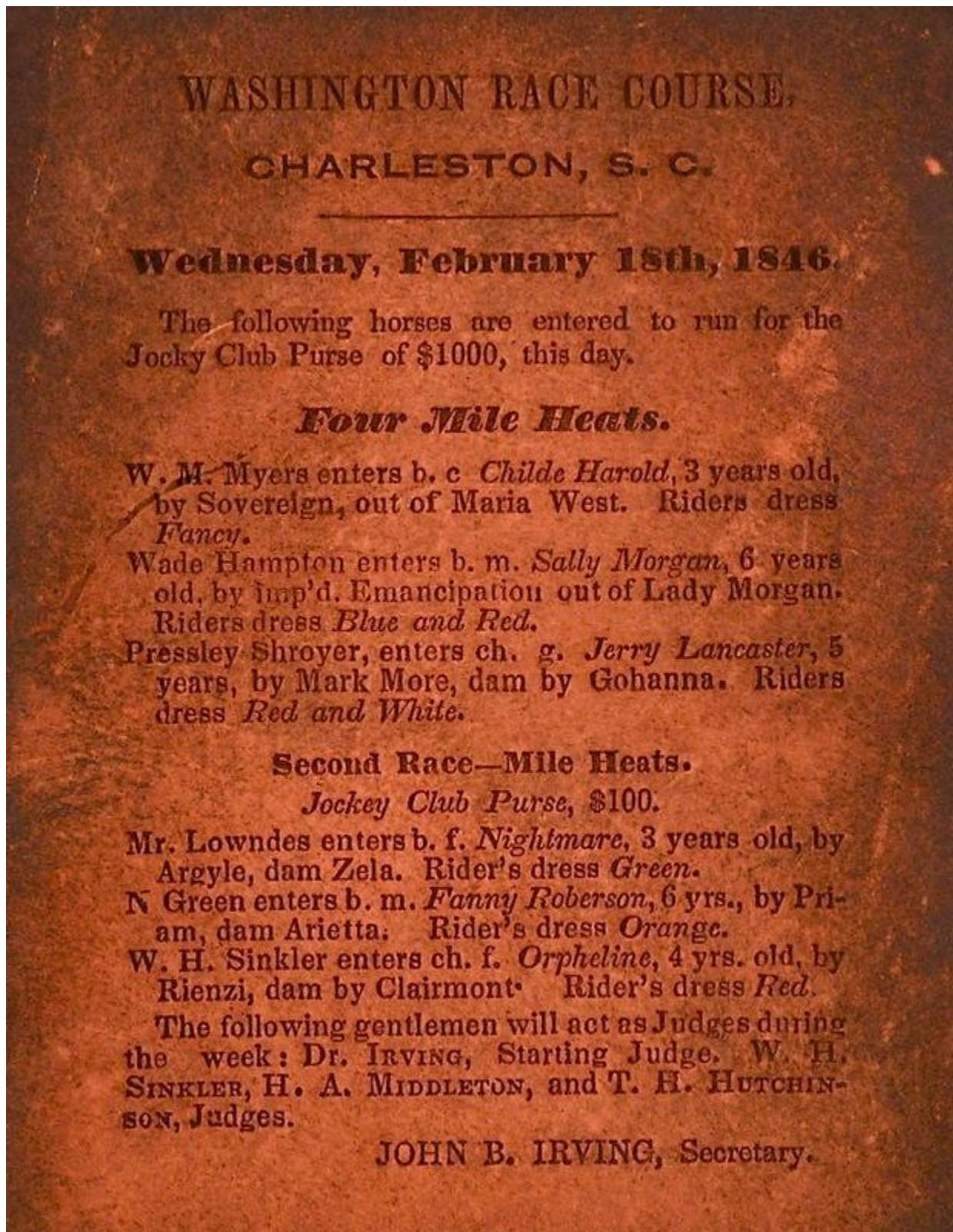
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- *Raleigh Minerva*, January 5th, 1808 (From the Halifax County Archives)

Guiding Questions:

1. How is Austin Jones remembered differently from Sandy in the Jefferson ad?
2. What qualities are praised in Jones's obituary?
3. How might his role as a respected horseman have challenged or reinforced racial attitudes in his community?
4. What can we learn about the visibility of Black equestrians from this source?

A flier showcasing upcoming races at a racetrack in South Carolina:



Transcribed:

**WASHINGTON RACE COURSE.
CHARLESTON, S. C.**

Wednesday, February 18th, 1846.

The following horses are entered to run for the Jockey Club Purse of \$1000, this day.

Four Mile Heats.

- **W. M. Myers** enters b. c. *Childe Harold*, 3 years old, by *Sovereign*, out of *Maria West*. Rider's dress *Fancy*.
- **Wade Hampton** enters b. m. *Sally Morgan*, 6 years old, by *Imp'd.* *Emancipation* out of *Lady Morgan*. Rider's dress *Blue and Red*.
- **Pressley Shrover** enters ch. g. *Jerry Lancaster*, 5 years, by *Mark More*, dam by *Gohanna*. Rider's dress *Red and White*.

Second Race—Mile Heats. Jockey Club Purse, \$100.

- **Mr. Lowndes** enters b. f. *Nightmare*, 3 years old, by *Argyle*, dam *Zela*. Rider's dress *Green*.
- **N. Green** enters b. m. *Fanny Roberson*, 6 yrs., by *Priam*, dam *Arietta*. Rider's dress *Orange*.
- **W. H. Sinkler** enters ch. f. *Orphelino*, 4 yrs. old, by *Rienzi*, dam by *Clairmont*. Rider's dress *Red*.

The following gentlemen will act as Judges during the week: Dr. Irving, Starting Judge. W. H. Sinkler, H. A. Middleton, and T. H. Hutchinson, Judges.

JOHN B. IRVING, Secretary.

- Race card from Washington Race Course, Charleston, South Carolina, February 18th, 1846 (From the South Carolina Jockey Club)

Guiding Questions:

1. Whose names appear on the flier, and whose names are missing? Why?
2. What role do jockeys play in the race according to this document?
3. How does this flier highlight the social world of elite horse owners versus the anonymity of riders?
4. What can this tell us about race, class, and recognition in antebellum racing?

A letter written by an enslaved woman, Vilet Lester:

Georgia Bullock Co August ²⁹ 1837

My Loving Miss Tally I hav
long bin wishing to imbrde this present and pleasant
opportunity of unfolding my Scars and feelings Since
I was constrained to leave my long loved home and friends
which I cannot never gave my self the least scrups of
returning to I am well and Enjoying good health and has
every Since I Left Randolph whend I Left Randolph I
went to Rockingham and stod there five weeks and then I
left there and went to Richmond virginia to be sold and I stade
there three days and was bought by a man by the name of
Groover and brought to Georgia and he kept me about two
months and he being a trader sold me to a man by the name
of Rimes and he sold me to a man by the name of Lester
and he has owned me four years and says that he will
keep me til death Separates us without some of my old north
Caroline friends wants to buy me again my dear mistress
I cannot tell my feelings nor how bad I wish to
See you and old Boss and Miss Rakes and mother I do
not now which I want to See the worst Miss Rakes
or mother I have thought that I wanted to See
mother but never before did I no what it was to want
to See a parent and could not I wish you to give my love
to old Boss Miss Rakes and Sarah and giving my
manifold love to mother brothers and sister and
pleas to tell them to Right to me so I may here

from them if I cannot see them and also I wish
you to right to me and right me all the news I ever
want to now whether old Bob is still living or
now and all the rest of them and I want to now
whether Baulum is married or no I wish to now what has
ever become of my Precious little girl I left her in
goldsborough with Mr Walker and I have not heard
from her since and Walker said that he was going
to carry her to Rockingham and gave her to his
sister and I want to no whether he did or no as
I do wish to see her very much and Bob says
he wishes to now whether he will sell her or now
and the least that can buy her and that he wishes
a answer as soon as he can get one as I wish him to
buy her and my Bob being a man of Reason and
feeling wishes to grant my troubled breast that
much gratification and wishes to now whether he
will sell her or now So I must come to a close
by Escribing my self yours long loved and well
wishing filly mate as a Servant until death with Lester

of Georgia

To Miss Patsey Madison
of North Carolina

My Bobs Name is James B Lester and if you should
think a nuff of me to right me which I do beg the
favor of you as a Servant direct your letter to Millers
Bullock County Georgia Please to right me So
fare for you well in love

Transcribed:

Georgia Bullock Co August 29th 1857

My Loving Miss Patsy

I hav long bin wishing to imbrace this presant and pleasant opertunity of unfolding my Seans and fealings Since I was constrained to leav my Long Loved home and friends which I cannot never gave my Self the Least promis of returning to. I am well and this is Injoying good hith and has ever Since I Left Randolph. whend I left Randolph I went to Rockingham and Stad there five weaks and then I left there and went to Richmon virginia to be Sold and I Stade there three days and was bought by a man by the name of Groover and braught to Georgia and he kept me about Nine months and he being a trader Sold me to a man by the name of Rimes and he Sold me to a man by the name of Lester and he has owned me four years and Says that he will keep me til death Siperates us without Some of my old north Caroliner friends wants to buy me again. my Dear Mistress I cannot tell my fealings nor how bad I wish to See youand old Boss and MSS Rahol and Mother. I do not [k]now which I want to See the worst Miss Rahol or mother I have thaugh[t] that I wanted to See mother but never befour did I [k]no[w] what it was to want to See a parent and could not. I wish you to gave my love to old Boss Miss Rahol and bailum and gave my manafold love to mother brothers and sister and pleas to tell them to Right to me So I may here from them if I cannot See them and also I wish you to right to me and Right me all the nuse. I do want to now whether old Boss is Still Living or now and all the rest of them and I want to [k]now whether bailum is maried or no. I wish to [k]now what has Ever become of my Presus little girl. I left her in goldsborough with Mr. Walker and I have not herd from her Since and Walker Said that he was going to Carry her to Rockingham and gave her to his Sister and I want to [k]no[w] whether he did or no as I do wish to See her very mutch and Boss Says he wishes to [k]now whether he will Sell her or now and the least that can buy her and that he wishes a answer as Soon as he can get one as I wis himto buy her an my Boss being a

man of Reason and fealing wishes to grant my trubled breast that mutch
gratification and wishes to [k]now whether he will Sell her now. So I must come to
a close by Escribing my Self you long loved and well wishing play mate as a
Servant until death

Vilet Lester
of Georgia
to Miss Patsey Padison
of North Caroliner

My Bosses Name is James B Lester and if you Should think a nuff of me to right
me which I do beg the faver of you as a Sevant direct your letter to Millray Bullock
County Georgia. Pleas to right me So fare you well in love.

(From the Duke Libraries)

Guiding Questions:

1. What emotions are expressed in Lester's letter?
2. What does this letter reveal about family separation under slavery?
3. Why is this letter significant as one of the rare written voices of an enslaved person?

Reflection Questions:

1. Compare how Sandy, Austin Jones, and the unnamed riders in the race flier are represented. What differences do you notice in tone, visibility, and respect?
2. How does the Lester letter deepen our understanding of the human cost of slavery beyond what the other documents show?
3. If you were to create a “counter-narrative” to the popular myths of horse racing, how would these documents change the story?
4. How do these documents together illustrate both the contributions and struggles of Black equestrians in early American racing?

Lesson Two

This second lesson will highlight the achievements of Black equestrians during the postwar period of America's thoroughbred racing heyday, from 1865 until 1905. This era of Black dominance in the sport would become a renaissance for Black equestrians in America, giving rise to some of the biggest names in the history of horse racing. In this lesson, you will meet several Black members inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, learn about their significance to the sport, the challenges they faced, and their lasting impact in the sport today. You will also learn about their careers in the broader context of the wider Black equestrian community, and how the great jockeys and trainers of the era were emblematic of a larger body of racing professionals in the burgeoning sport.

Horse racing in early America was largely concentrated in the South, where the economy relied heavily on wealth generated through enslaved labor. As a result, the largest race stables, tracks, and meets before the Civil War were funded by profits derived from slavery. Enslaved people were not only the backbone of this economic system, they were also central to the horse racing industry itself. They cared for the horses, trained them, and rode them. Before the Civil War, the idea of a "jockey" as a formal profession or career did not yet exist. Instead, most jockeys were enslaved boys - some as young as ten - who were forced to race on behalf of their enslavers and received no compensation for their labor and expertise. The same was true for horse trainers, who were also often enslaved. Many of these early Black jockeys and trainers left behind remarkable legacies, and after emancipation, they became professionals in the sport of racing. While some of their names and stories have survived, countless others have been lost to history. In this lesson, we will highlight the lives and accomplishments of several of these early Black horsemen, offering a broader understanding of what the horse racing industry once looked like - an industry built and run by skilled Black laborers whose contributions were instrumental, though long overlooked.

Key Figures of the Racing Renaissance

Section One: Foundational Trainers and Early Figures

Ansel Williamson (1806–1881)

Ansel Williamson was born enslaved in 1806 and became one of the most celebrated horse trainers in 19th-century America. While still enslaved, Williamson developed a reputation for excellence, training horses across Virginia and Kentucky before being sold to Robert A. Alexander, owner of the famed



Woodburn Stud near Lexington. At Woodburn, Williamson oversaw the training of elite thoroughbreds, including *Asteroid*, the prized offspring of *Lexington*, America's leading sire.

After the Civil War, Williamson continued his work as a free man, training for multiple prominent owners. His crowning achievement came in 1875 when his horse *Aristides*, owned by H. P. McGrath and ridden by Oliver Lewis, won the inaugural Kentucky Derby. Williamson's name became synonymous with success — his horses also captured major stakes such as the Travers, Belmont, and Jerome.

Williamson's career exemplified the dual legacy of Black horsemen: mastery born in bondage, professionalism achieved in freedom. His 1998

induction into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame recognized not only his achievements but also the generations of Black trainers who followed in his footsteps, building an industry that had once enslaved them.

Image: Ansel Williamson, cropped from Edward Troye painting. Courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Paul Mellon Collection.

Charles Stewart (dates unknown)

Charles Stewart began his life as a groom in the stables of Colonel William Ransom Johnson, one of the most prominent horsemen of the antebellum South. Stewart tended to famous horses like *Reality* and *Henry*, and at thirteen years old, he rode in his first race. His skill, discipline, and instinct for handling horses quickly elevated him beyond the role of a groom.



Unlike most enslaved people, Stewart was allowed to travel between Northern and Southern states on his enslaver's business — a rare and precarious privilege that reflected both his exceptional ability and the exploitative nature of the system that profited from it. Over time, he rose to become a stable foreman and trainer, positions that required judgment, trust, and mastery of horsemanship.

Stewart's story reveals the contradictions of slavery in the equestrian world: while enslaved men could rise to high positions of skill and authority within stables, their status remained bound by the institution that denied their freedom. Stewart's career, situated between the plantation South and the racetrack North, represents both the possibility of recognition and the limits placed upon it.

Image: Charles Stewart holding the thoroughbred racehorse Medley. Painting by Edward Troye. Courtesy of the Historical Marker Database.

Abe Hawkins (?-1867)

Abe Hawkins was one of the most celebrated Black jockeys of the mid-19th century, though the details of his early life remain largely unknown. He rose to prominence on Louisiana racetracks during the 1850s, when racing was dominated by plantation owners and powered by enslaved labor. By 1853, Hawkins was widely known for his remarkable skill, but newspapers like the *Spirit of the Times* still listed him among the “property” to be sold, reducing a man of talent to a line item beneath the names of horses.

In 1854, Hawkins achieved racing immortality when he rode *Lecomte* to victory over the legendary *Lexington*, setting a new four-mile record and stunning the American turf world. After the outbreak of the Civil War, Hawkins made his way north, where he continued racing as a free man. In a striking turn of fate, he later returned to the South to ride once again for his former enslaver, Duncan F. Kenner — not as property, but as a professional jockey.

Hawkins died of consumption in 1867, but his name endured among horsemen as a legend of speed and courage. His victories challenged the racial hierarchies of his time and proved that Black excellence on the track could not be denied, even in a society determined to overlook it. Abe Hawkins was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in 2024.



Image: Portrait of Abe Hawkins, the only known image of the jockey to exist.

Section Two: The Colston Family Legacy

Raleigh Colston Sr. (1837–unknown)

Born into slavery in 1837 at Nantura Stud in Kentucky, Raleigh Colston Sr. became one of the most accomplished Black trainers of the 19th century. From an early age, he absorbed the fundamentals of breeding, conditioning, and race strategy from his family. After emancipation, Colston turned this experience into independence. He trained at Woodburn and Stockwood Studs — two of the most important breeding farms of their era — and guided horses that defined an age of postwar excellence.

Colston's résumé included champions like *Kingfisher*, winner of the 1870 Belmont Stakes, and *Leonatus*, who captured the 1883 Kentucky Derby. His mastery of horse care, attention to detail, and strategic mind made him one of the most sought-after trainers of his time. In 1879, he opened his own stable — an extraordinary accomplishment for a man born enslaved. Colston's career symbolized the possibilities of Reconstruction, when skill and reputation briefly allowed some Black professionals to achieve recognition in the nation's most prestigious sport.

Harry Colston (1845–unknown)

Harry Colston, born enslaved at Nantura Stud in 1845, shared his brother Raleigh's passion for the racetrack. After the Civil War, he remained at Nantura to continue working with some of the most promising thoroughbreds in the South. Alongside his other brother Joseph, Harry helped train celebrated horses such as *Longfellow* and *Ten Broeck*, animals that defined the sport's Gilded Age.

Harry's talent and determination eventually earned him enough success to branch out on his own. He famously sold a colt for \$4,000 — an enormous sum for the time — which he used to establish his own racing stable. In an era when systemic racism still limited Black advancement, this act represented independence, entrepreneurship, and confidence in his expertise. Like his brothers, Harry exemplified the professionalism that Black horsemen brought to racing in the decades after slavery.

Joseph Colston (1853–unknown)

Joseph Colston, the youngest of the Colston brothers, was born enslaved at Nantura Stud in 1853. Following emancipation, Joseph followed in the footsteps of his brothers Raleigh and Harry, staying at Nantura as a trainer and jockey. Known for his steady temperament and patience with young horses, Joseph became respected by owners and fellow trainers alike. His partnership with Harry in training *Longfellow* and *Ten Broeck* reflected a deep bond of family trust and professional cooperation.

The Colston brothers' combined expertise turned Nantura Stud into one of the most productive training operations of its day. They showed that the culture of horsemanship developed by enslaved Africans and their descendants was not only technical but deeply communal — passed through kinship and apprenticeship as much as through formal contracts. Joseph's life, though less documented than Raleigh's, remains an essential thread in this family's extraordinary legacy.

Section Three: Post-Emancipation Trainers and Owners

Dudley Allen (1846–1911)

Dudley Allen was born enslaved in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1846. When he was eighteen, during the final years of the Civil War, he took a courageous step that would define the rest of his life — he enlisted in the 5th United States Colored Cavalry, gaining his freedom through military service. After the war, Allen returned to Kentucky, where his skill with horses found its true purpose.

For four decades, Allen worked as both a trainer and owner, combining technical precision with a soldier's discipline. He trained horses for major owners such as Thomas J. Megibben, but he also co-owned and operated his own Jacobin Stable, one of the few Black-run racing operations of the period. His crowning achievement came in 1891, when *Kingman*, a horse he co-owned and trained, won the Kentucky Derby with jockey Isaac Burns Murphy in the saddle. It remains the only Derby victory in history for a Black owner–jockey pair, and the last time a Black trainer won the race.

Allen's story is one of perseverance and quiet pride. He not only trained horses but also mentored a generation of Black jockeys and trainers, ensuring that the culture of excellence continued even as the sport grew increasingly segregated. Several other accomplished Black equestrians of the era apprenticed under Allen's tutelage.

Albert Cooper (1850–1898)

Albert Cooper was born enslaved in 1850 in Richmond, Virginia, to Albert and Edias Cooper. Though born into bondage, his early years near horses shaped a lifetime of mastery. After emancipation, he began an apprenticeship as a jockey that lasted eighteen months, working under Calvin Green of Fordham, New York, and Colonel David McDaniel of Princeton, New Jersey. His skill was evident from the start — Cooper rode horses like *Julina*, *Oakland*, *Lady Blessland*, and *Blackbird*, with *Blackbird* capturing major hurdle victories at Paterson (1867) and Hoboken (1868).

Cooper's transition from jockey to trainer revealed the full scope of his talent. Over the next two decades, he became one of America's most respected horsemen, training for a roster of powerful owners that included Joseph Donohue, John O'Donnell, Secretary J. E. Brewster, Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin, Theodore Winter, Senator George Hearst, James Ben Ali Haggin, and the Hough Brothers. His greatest success came during his eleven-year partnership (1878–1889) with California magnate *Lucky Baldwin*, where Cooper trained champions such as *Clara D.*, *Fallen Lead*, *Los Angeles*, *Mollie McCarty*, *Silver Cloud*, and *Volante* — the latter two winning back-to-back American Derbies in 1885 and 1886, a first for a Black trainer.

Afterward, Cooper continued to achieve distinction, training *Burlington* for the Hough Brothers — the horse won the Belmont Stakes, Brooklyn Derby, and Great Tidal Stakes in 1890 and was considered the best three-year-old of the season. Cooper later trained for Senator George Hearst, overseeing *Tournament* through an impressive forty-nine starts, before launching his own stable. In 1891, he accepted an offer from Jack F. Keene and his son Foxhall P. Keene to train their horses, then eventually opened a public training stable of his own.

Edward D. “Brown Dick” Brown (1850–1906)

Edward D. Brown, known affectionately as “Brown Dick,” was born enslaved in 1850 in Lexington, Kentucky. At the age of seven, he was sold to Woodburn Stud — one of the premier breeding farms in America — where he apprenticed under the legendary trainer Ansel Williamson. From this mentorship, Brown absorbed the full art of horse training, learning every facet of the craft from the ground up. He earned the nickname Brown Dick for allegedly being faster than the racehorse Brown Dick.

Still enslaved as a teenager, Brown briefly rode as a jockey, handling horses such as *Asteroid*, a son of the great *Lexington*. After the Civil War, he turned fully to training, and by his late twenties he had already made history: in 1877, his colt *Baden-Baden* won the Kentucky Derby, making Brown one of the youngest and most successful trainers of his generation. He also trained the 1870 Belmont Stakes winner and was widely recognized for his keen eye in scouting and developing young horses.

Over the decades, Edward Brown became a symbol of professionalism and mastery — a man who transformed knowledge inherited under bondage into a lifelong career of triumphs. He was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in 1984.

Image: Photograph of Edward D. Brown from the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame collection.



Section Four: Champion Jockeys of the Gilded Age

Oliver Lewis (1856–1924)

Born in Woodford County, Kentucky, in 1856, Oliver Lewis made history as the first jockey to win the Kentucky Derby in 1875. Employed by H. P. McGrath, Lewis was



chosen to ride *Aristides*, a colt trained by the great Ansel Williamson. On May 17, 1875, before a crowd of thousands at Churchill Downs, Lewis guided *Aristides* to victory in a stunning debut for what would become America's most famous race. Black jockeys would go on to win 15 of the first 28 runnings of the Kentucky Derby. Just weeks later, he and the same horse came second in the Belmont Stakes.

Despite this remarkable success,

Lewis's name faded from the public eye in the decades that followed — a reflection of how quickly Black athletes' contributions were erased from the official record. After his racing career, he remained active in the sport as a bookmaker - someone who takes bets on races, calculates odds, and distributes winnings. He developed early forms of charts to better analyze and predict race outcomes. Oliver Lewis's life was one of brilliance and quiet ingenuity, reminding us that innovation in horse racing — like so much else — has deep African American roots.

Image: Photograph of Oliver Lewis. Courtesy of Churchill Downs.

Isaac Burns Murphy (1861–1896)

Widely regarded as one of the greatest jockeys in American history, Isaac Burns Murphy set standards of integrity and performance that defined the profession. Born in 1861 in Clark County, Kentucky, Isaac began as a stable hand under trainer Eli Jordan and quickly revealed extraordinary talent.

Between 1884 and 1891, Murphy achieved an unmatched record: he won three Kentucky Derbies (1884, 1890, 1891), becoming the first jockey to do so and the first to win back-to-back. His lifetime win percentage — estimated at around 40% — remains among the highest ever recorded. Known for his professionalism, eloquence, clean riding, and impeccable conduct, Murphy demanded respect in an era when Black athletes were often demeaned.

Murphy's talents as the leading rider of his era made him the most sought-after jockey in his day. He was the first jockey inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in 1955.



Image: Photograph of Isaac Murphy. Courtesy of the Keeneland Library.

Willie Simms (1870–1927)



Born in Georgia in 1870, Willie Simms rode for prominent owners William Scott and Philip Dwyer, quickly gaining a reputation for precision and steady judgment in the saddle. He became the only Black jockey to win all three races that would later form the American Triple Crown — the Kentucky Derby (1896, 1898), the Preakness Stakes (1898), and the Belmont Stakes (1893, 1894).

Simms's influence went beyond victories. In 1895, he introduced the "American crouch" — a forward-leaning, two-point riding style — to England, revolutionizing racing technique worldwide. This low, aerodynamic position remains the standard form for jockeys today.

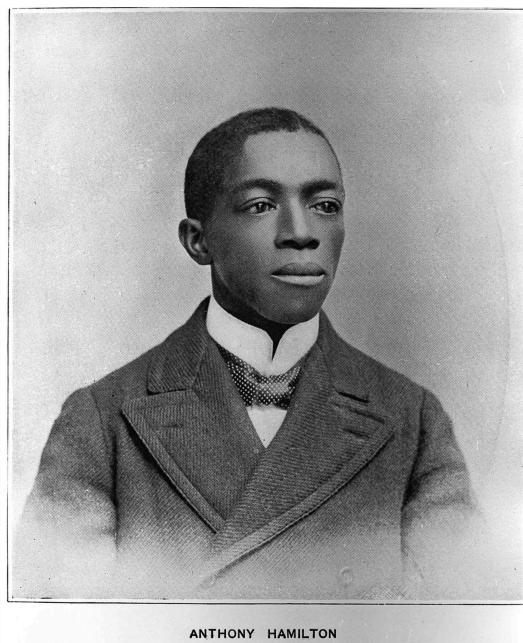
Simms's record of achievement, coupled with his international impact, placed him among the sport's most transformative figures. Yet like so many of his contemporaries, Simms faced shrinking opportunities as oppressive Jim Crow laws tightened their grip on American racing and mounts became more and more scarce towards the turn of the century. His story reflects both the height of Black athletic brilliance and the forces that conspired to erase it. Willie Simms was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in 1977.

Image: Photograph of Willie Simms from Munsey's Magazine, 1900.

Section Five: The Turn of the Century

Anthony “Tony” Hamilton (1869/70–after 1904)

Anthony “Tony” Hamilton was born around 1869 or 1870 and began his career as an apprentice to trainer William Lakeland, a man who immediately recognized his rare combination of speed, balance, and composure under pressure. Hamilton’s skill quickly brought him into the employ of some of the most influential owners of the era, including August Belmont Sr., namesake of the Belmont Stakes.



Throughout the 1890s, Hamilton dominated the country’s most prestigious handicap races — the Manhattan Handicap (1891), Brooklyn Handicap (1889, 1895), Suburban Handicap (1895), and Metropolitan Handicap (1896). He was the only Black jockey to win all four of these elite New York-based events, a feat that underscored both his technical mastery and his consistency. Hamilton’s professionalism earned respect from peers and owners alike. His wedding reception was hosted in the home of fellow jockey Isaac Murphy.

Hamilton, like many Black jockeys in the turn of the century, traveled abroad to continue his racing career after Black riders were forced out of the sport in America. He continued to excel overseas. In 1904, Hamilton’s career ended after a serious fall while racing in Russia — a poignant reflection of the exodus of Black jockeys who sought opportunity abroad when America’s doors closed. His legacy is one of excellence under pressure and perseverance in exile. He was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in 2012.

Image: Photograph of Anthony Hamilton. Courtesy of the Keeneland Library.

Shelby “Pike” Barnes (1871–1908)

Born in 1871, Shelby “Pike” Barnes was a prodigy — one of the youngest and most naturally gifted jockeys in American history. By the time he was just seventeen, Barnes led all jockeys in the United States with 206 wins in a single season, followed by 170 the next year. His rapid rise earned him national fame and the admiration of racing enthusiasts across the country.

In 1888, Barnes won the inaugural Futurity Stakes at Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, New York, the richest race in the nation at the time, aboard *Proctor Knott*. Over the following years, he claimed victories in the Latonia Oaks, Champagne Stakes, Travers Stakes, Belmont Stakes, and Brooklyn Derby, a record that placed him among the sport’s all-time greats.



Despite his incredible success, Barnes’s career was cut short; by 1891, at just twenty years old, he retired from racing after only a few years on the turf. He was the first jockey in history to surpass 200 wins in a year, and was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in 2011.

Image: Portrait of Shelby Barnes.

Jimmy Winkfield (1882–1974)

Born in 1882 in Chilesburg, Kentucky, Jimmy Winkfield began as an exercise rider at seven years old and went on to become one of the most accomplished jockeys in racing

history. His professional breakthrough came in 1899, and within a few short years he had achieved what few ever would: back-to-back Kentucky Derby victories in 1901 and 1902. He remains the last Black jockey to win the Kentucky Derby.



By 1904, however, the sport that had celebrated him began shutting out Black riders. Facing increasing discrimination and violence,

Winkfield left the United States to race in Europe. There, his career continued to flourish — he won championships in Russia, Poland, France, and Germany, becoming an international celebrity. During the Russian Revolution, he led a caravan of 250 horses on a 1,100-mile trek from war-torn Russia to safety in Poland, a feat of endurance as heroic as any of his races.

Winkfield settled in France, where he continued training and remained a beloved figure until his death in 1974. In 2004, he was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, honoring both his triumph and the injustice that forced him abroad. Winkfield's life represents the full arc of the Black jockey's story — from glory, through exile, to belated recognition.

Image: Photograph of Jimmy Winkfield. Courtesy of Churchill Downs.

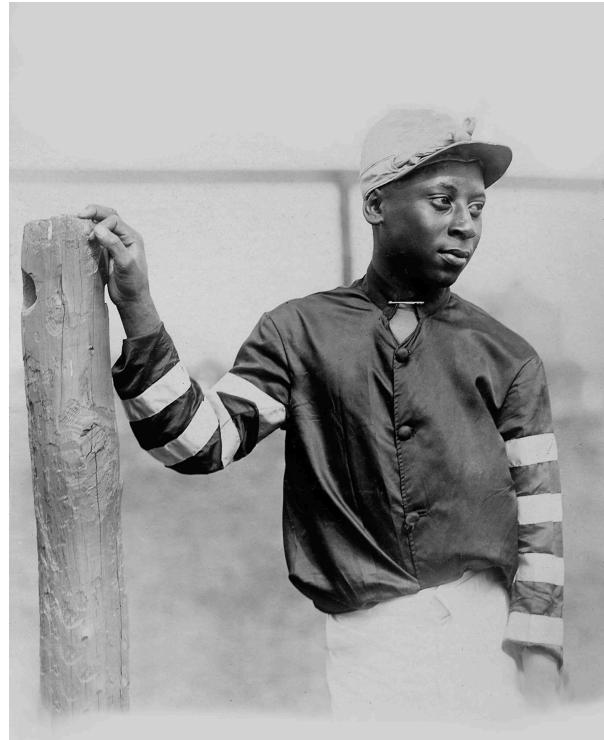
Jimmy Lee (1887-1915)

Jimmy Lee began as an exercise rider in 1901 and quickly rose to national prominence in the years that followed. At this point in racing history, Jim Crow laws were heavily entrenched, and opportunities for Black riders were scarce. Facing the headwinds of racial prejudice, Lee won the Latonia Derby in 1906 on *The Abbott*, signaling his emergence as one of the top riders of his generation. The following year, he made history at Churchill Downs, winning an unprecedented six races in a single day on June 5, 1907 — a feat that has not been matched more than a century later.

Lee's record that season was remarkable: he won 49 races at Churchill Downs, setting a record that stood until 1976. In 1907 and 1908, he added the Kentucky Oaks and the Travers Stakes to his list of triumphs, becoming the last Black jockey ever to win the Travers. But by the end of the decade, as Jim Crow tightened its grip on the sport, Lee and his peers found themselves locked out of the industry they had once dominated.

Jimmy Lee's story closes an era. His victories marked the final moments of Black preeminence in American racing before systemic racism erased their presence from American tracks for several decades.

Image: Photograph of Jimmy Lee. From the Coney Island Jockey Club. Taken 1908.



Between 1865 and 1905, the racetrack became a stage for one of the most remarkable — and too often forgotten — renaissances in American sport. In the years following emancipation, hundreds of Black trainers, grooms, exercise riders, jockeys, and owners transformed centuries of inherited horsemanship into professional mastery. The men featured in this lesson — from Ansel Williamson and Isaac Burns Murphy to Jimmy Winkfield and Jimmy Lee — represent only a fraction of a vast, interconnected Black equestrian community whose labor and talent shaped the golden age of American racing.

These men did not rise in isolation. Behind every champion jockey stood teams of Black grooms, farriers, stable hands, and trainers who prepared the horses, managed their care, and passed down generational knowledge rooted in both African and American traditions. Stables across the country thrived because of this community — men and women who lived and worked in the backstretch, whose expertise was rarely recorded but without whom the sport could not have existed. Their stories may not have been written down, but they are present in every record of a winning horse.

For a brief moment, the decades after emancipation opened a space where skill and merit could triumph over prejudice — where Black horsemen achieved wealth, fame, and respect unmatched in any other profession of their time. But by the early 1900s, that door had begun to close. Racial segregation and Jim Crow laws forced most Black jockeys and trainers out of the sport they had built. Within a generation, the faces of the backstretch changed, and the contributions of these pioneers faded from public view.

Yet their legacy endures. The methods they perfected — from conditioning regimens to riding form — still define modern thoroughbred racing. The history of this era is not just a record of individual brilliance, but of collective achievement — a community of Black excellence that built the foundation of an American tradition. To understand the triumphs of these individuals is to understand the thousands of skilled Black men and women whose names were never recorded but whose hands guided the sport into being.

Comprehension and Recall

1. Who was Ansel Williamson, and why is he considered a foundational figure in American racing?
2. What was significant about the 1875 Kentucky Derby, and who were the key participants involved?
3. Which jockey introduced the “American crouch” riding style, and how did this innovation change the sport?
4. What challenges did Black jockeys face even at the height of their success?
5. How did the Colston family’s multigenerational involvement in horse racing reflect broader opportunities for Black professionals after emancipation?

Critical Thinking and Analysis

6. What do the careers of these horsemen reveal about the nature of opportunity and exclusion during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era?
7. How did the economic and social conditions of the post–Civil War South both enable and restrict Black participation in professional sports?
8. Many of these men gained freedom or independence through their skill with horses. What does this tell us about the relationship between expertise and social mobility in 19th-century America?
9. Compare the experiences of early trainers like Ansel Williamson with later jockeys like Jimmy Winkfield. How did the meaning of success change across these generations?
10. How did racism shape the historical memory of this era?

Community and Culture

11. Why is it important to understand that these horsemen were part of a larger Black equestrian community, not isolated “exceptions”?
12. What roles — besides jockeys and trainers — were essential to the functioning of a racetrack in the 19th century?
13. How might oral traditions and mentorship within Black stables have preserved knowledge and culture even when written recognition was denied?
14. What similarities can you see between this equestrian community and other Black professional or artistic circles that flourished after emancipation?
15. How did Black equestrians mentor and support each other during this era of racing?

Activity Two

In small groups, you will act as biographers and reporters understanding the broader social environment of the postwar era, and the tendency for Black contributors to be erased or forgotten. Choose from one of these suggested equestrians, or with the help of a teacher, select your own:

- Harry Lewis (Trainer)
- Cato (Jockey)
- Raleigh Colston, Jr. (Jockey/Trainer/Owner)
- Eli Jordan (Trainer)
- Albert Cooper (Jockey/Trainer/Owner)
- William Walker (Jockey)
- George "Spider" Anderson (Jockey)

Using primary and secondary source material, students will build biographies of these individuals. Then, in a discussion format, students will compare the experiences of these and other athletes to the experiences of the Black equestrians in thoroughbred racing that we just learned about. Students will also assess how these athletes both competed and collaborated with each other, and formed a part of a broader racing community during their era. How were their experiences similar? How were they different?

Use the internet to conduct your research, write your notes down below, and present your findings.

Biography Of: _____

Lesson Three

This lesson traces the gradual decline and impact of Black equestrians in America throughout the mid-to-late 1900s. Largely swept out of the sport as a result of racist attitudes and aggressive legislation, Black riders and trainers began to vanish from the central story of thoroughbred racing, but remained in a number of other roles throughout the industry. In this narrative lesson, students will learn about the historical context behind this decline, and the key figures that helped to spur new Black participation in racing beginning in the 1950s. Students will also learn about the modern organizations that work to preserve the legacy of Black equestrians and to promote their involvement today.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, horse racing was *the* American sport — and Black horsemen were its soul. From the barns of Kentucky to the grandstands of New York and New Orleans, Black jockeys, grooms, trainers, and owners had built the foundation of thoroughbred racing. Yet, within a generation, they were all but erased from the track.

This lesson tells the story of how that happened — and how, despite systematic exclusion, the Black equestrian community persisted, adapted, and eventually reclaimed its place in the sport it created.

Section One: The Long Way Down

The turn of the twentieth century was supposed to be a moment of triumph. The 1890s had been an era of brilliance for Black equestrians. Men like Isaac Murphy, Edward Brown, and Willie Simms were national celebrities, their names printed in every racing sheet. In this era of American thoroughbred racing, Black riders and trainers were household names and some of America's first sports heroes.

But beneath that veneer of progress, the political and social ground was shifting. In 1896, the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling legalized racial segregation under the doctrine of "separate but equal." What began in train cars and schools soon spread everywhere — including the racetrack. White jockeys' guilds, empowered by racial animosity and emboldened by Jim Crow laws, began excluding Black riders, citing the Supreme Court case as justification for their legal exclusion based on race. Black riders found themselves increasingly victims of violence from white riders and spectators. Even prominent owners who once employed Black trainers found it "safer" to replace them with white ones.

By 1900, the same South that had once celebrated the skill of Black horsemen had turned violently against them. Spectators pelted Black jockeys with stones and curses. Race officials began "forgetting" to license them. In 1902, Jimmy Winkfield — one of the most talented riders of his generation — won his second Kentucky Derby. By 1904, the racist violence surrounding him grew so fierce that he fled the United States altogether, continuing his career in Europe. He never returned.

By the 1920s, despite their utter dominance just a few decades earlier, the image of the Black jockey had vanished from America's racetracks.

Though the headlines no longer carried their names, Black horsemen continued to sustain the sport from behind the scenes. They worked the barns, the breeding sheds, and the farms where champions were born. Their knowledge — refined over centuries — didn't disappear, it just moved into the shadows. Relegated to various backstretch

roles at racetracks across America, Black equestrians could no longer be the stars in the sport they helped build.

The early decades of the twentieth century were defined by quiet endurance. Grooms, farriers, and stablemen, many descended from enslaved horsemen, passed down their expertise through word of mouth and mentorship. The racetrack backstretch — the “invisible city” behind every grandstand — became a world unto itself, where Black workers lived, ate, and labored apart from the cheering crowds.

Among these unsung heroes was Will Harbut, born in 1885 in Lexington, Kentucky. After years of working on farms, Harbut was assigned to care for a chestnut colt that would become the most famous horse of the age: Man o’ War. Harbut tended to Man o’ War from 1930 until the horse’s death in 1946. With respect and showmanship, Harbut led thousands of visitors on tours of the horse’s stable. His smooth storytelling, pride in the horse, and his dignified presence captivated the public. In an era when Black Americans were confined to service roles, Harbut turned that confinement into power. Harbut was always by Man o’ War’s side, and was featured in many publications and famous photographs about the famous racehorse.

Harbut wasn’t alone. Before him, John Buckner had been Man o’ War’s first groom. After Harbut, Cunningham “Bud” Graves took over, preparing the horse’s body for its highly publicized funeral in 1947. Together, Buckner, Harbut, and Graves carried forward a lineage of care — three generations of Black men whose hands held America’s greatest horse.

Across the country, Black horsemen remained indispensable. Marshall Lilly, who worked under Hall of Fame trainer James Rowe Sr., exercised some of the best horses of the early 1900s, including Peter Pan and Colin. Clemon Brooks, a groom at Spendthrift Farm, became so famous for his partnership with the famous racehorse Nashua that tourists called them “Clem and Nashua.” A statue of them still stands at Spendthrift Farm. Each of these men embodied the continued resilience of Black equestrianism in the sport, despite them being taken out of the limelight.

Spotlight On: Man o' War



Man o' War with Will Harbut.

came under the care of John Buckner. In 1930, Buckner was succeeded by Will Harbut, whose voice, dignity, and devotion turned *Man o' War's* stall at Faraway Farm into a place of pilgrimage visited by journalists and fans the world over. He incorporated the horse into tours of the farm, taking pride in his horse for thousands of guests.

Harbut and Man o' War appeared together in magazines and newsreels, their partnership transcending the racial boundaries of their time. When Harbut died in 1947, just weeks before *Man o' War* passed, the nation mourned them both. Newspapers called it "the end of an era."

Image: Courtesy of Keeneland Library.

When Man o' War thundered onto the track in 1919, America was still healing from the trauma of World War I. The country found a hero and an icon in this remarkable horse, who historians still to this day call the greatest racehorse to ever live.

Over two short seasons, Man o' War won 20 of 21 races, setting seven track records and capturing the imagination of the world. To a weary public, he became more than a racehorse — he was a symbol of strength, spirit, and determination.

But behind Man o' War's legendary reputation stood the quiet excellence of Black horsemen.

When the colt retired in 1920, he

Section Two: The Long Shadow

The decades after World War II saw the thoroughbred industry expand into a modern, commercial empire. Racetracks became centers of glamour, attracting Hollywood stars and wealthy owners. Yet the workers who made the spectacle possible — those who fed, walked, and trained the horses — remained largely invisible, their contributions unacknowledged.

Still, on the backstretch, a distinct Black culture thrived. It was a world of long days, shared meals, and oral tradition. Horse care was a craft passed through families — from father to son, sometimes mother to daughter. In 1954, Sylvia Bishop, who began as a hot walker at age fourteen, became the first Black woman to hold a trainer's license in the United States. Her achievement was nearly unthinkable in the male-dominated (and still segregated) racetrack culture of the 1940s.

Eugene Carter, who shadowed Will Harbut as a boy, became an exercise rider and horse breaker, later working at Saxony Farms for more than 25 years. Despite being denied a jockey's license and unable to ride, Carter still built a long, respected career — proof that skill and persistence could endure even in a segregated industry.

In Kentucky, Francis Wilson, Sr. began working as a ringman at Keeneland Sales in 1967. By the 1970s, he had become a fixture of the auction ring, known for his steady hands and quiet confidence as he led yearlings into the spotlight. The corner of the sales ring where he worked is now known as Frankie's Corner, marked by a plaque in his honor. His protégé, Dudley Sidney, known as "The Horse Whisperer," followed in his footsteps, leading thousands of horses through the ring, including yearlings that sold for millions. Their work, though far from the glamour of race day, was essential. They were the first faces buyers saw when purchasing the next generation of champions.

Even as Black horsemen kept the industry running, very few were permitted to hold official licenses. Those who did often worked doubly hard for half the recognition. Oscar Dishman Jr. became one of the few Black trainers to achieve national success as the

leading trainer at Cincinnati's River Downs in the 1960s. By the 1970s, Dishman was training 40 thoroughbreds at a time.

Born in 1923 in Kentucky, Oscar Dishman, Jr. was raised in the historic African American community of New Zion in Scott County. He was introduced to horses through family labor and farm life, and through his father's work on a Thoroughbred farm in Fayette County, where Dishman gained early exposure to horsemanship.

Dishman entered the Thoroughbred industry at age twenty-seven, working as a groom and exercise rider at Keeneland and Latonia Downs before becoming a trainer. In 1961, he earned his first win as a trainer at River Downs. Over the course of a forty-year career, he trained winners of major races including the Ohio Derby, Michigan Mile, Hawthorne Stakes, and the Widener Handicap. Among the notable horses he trained were *Silver Series*, *Golden Don*, and *November Tender*.

Working during desegregation, Dishman spoke openly about the conditional acceptance he experienced as a Black trainer, noting that success often dictated opportunity. His reputation rested on deep practical knowledge gained through years of hands-on work with horses.

Beyond racing, Dishman was a civil rights activist. In 1956, he filed a lawsuit against the Scott County Board of Education, challenging unequal conditions in segregated schools and contributing to local desegregation efforts. He died in 2000 at the age of seventy-seven.

Owners also shaped the racing landscape. Archie Donaldson was a Bahamian physician who entered Thoroughbred ownership in the 1960s and became one of the most prominent Black owners in American racing by the late 1970s. Based primarily in Chicago, his stable grew to more than thirty high-quality horses by 1978.

Donaldson's most successful horse, *Silver Series*, won several major races, including the American Derby and the Hawthorne Derby. Donaldson also held ownership interests in thirteen leading Kentucky stallions, allowing him to participate directly in the breeding side of the industry.

His horses were trained by the aforementioned African American trainer Oscar Dishman, whose expertise contributed significantly to the stable's success. Together, their partnership demonstrated the growing, though still limited, presence of Black ownership and professional authority in Thoroughbred racing during the post-civil rights era.

Georgiana Foster of Long Island, New York, was a prominent African American Thoroughbred owner during the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, she maintained what was widely regarded as the largest African American–owned Thoroughbred stable in the United States.

Foster employed trainer Chester Ross, a prolific African American horseman, to condition her horses. Her stable achieved consistent success at major New York tracks, including Aqueduct and Belmont Park, marking a notable presence for Black ownership during a period of limited access to the industry.

Elsewhere, Black horsemen like Walter Edwards, John Joe Hughes Jr., and Marshall Lilly continued to define excellence behind the scenes. Their work stretched across decades — feeding, training, exercise riding, and hauling horses in every corner of the racing circuit. They worked in a segregated world where they could touch the sport's greatest animals but rarely share its stage.

During these years, racing's leadership began to reckon, however slowly, with its forgotten history. The graves of its early Black champions were rediscovered. In 1967, the remains of Isaac Burns Murphy were reinterred beside Man o' War at the Kentucky Horse Park, symbolically reuniting the sport's two greatest figures — one equine, one human. Later, in 1995, the Isaac Murphy Award was established to honor the jockey with the highest winning percentage each year. During the 1996 Derby Week, Churchill Downs erected a headstone for Oliver Lewis, the Black rider who became the first jockey to win the Kentucky Derby over a century earlier.

Notable riders and trainers were slowly, over the years, recognized by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame. Isaac Murphy was inducted into the inaugural Hall

of Fame class in 1955. His contemporaries soon followed: Willie Simms in 1977, James Winkfield in 2004, and Shelby “Pike” Barnes in 2011, among others.

The racing world had taken notice of how fundamental these early equestrians were to the sport, and the continuing influence of Black riders in the modern era, and began a concerted effort to correct the record.

Spotlight On: Keeneland Sales & Horse Auctions

Every year, the center of the thoroughbred world shifts for a few weeks to a place not far from the roar of the racetrack — the Keeneland Sales Pavilion in Lexington, Kentucky. Here, millions of dollars change hands as young horses are auctioned to the highest bidder. Fortunes and bloodlines change hands in minutes.



A horse auction at Keeneland.

Since its founding in 1936, Keeneland has become the beating commercial heart of the sport — the marketplace where champions are discovered before they ever step onto a track. But the grace and order that make these sales possible depend on a group of professionals rarely mentioned in racing history: the ringmen and handlers who lead each horse into the ring.

One of the most respected of these was Francis “Frankie” Wilson Sr. Wilson began at Keeneland in the late 1960s, leading nervous yearlings before crowds of owners, trainers, and international buyers. His calm authority earned him trust and admiration, and the corner of the ring where he worked became known as “Frankie’s Corner.” There, he helped guide the first horse sold for over a million dollars — a milestone that reflected not only the rising wealth of the industry but also the steady hands of the men who presented its stars.

Image: Courtesy of Keeneland Sales.

Section Three: Reclaiming the Reins

The civil rights movement changed America — and, eventually, it changed racing. By the 1970s, a new generation of Black equestrians began to reappear in the public eye.

Cheryl White, the daughter of a trainer from Ohio, became the first Black female jockey in 1971 at the age of 17. She earned her first win on the racehorse Jetolara at Waterford Park in West Virginia three months later. Her photo on the cover of Jet Magazine that same year announced to the nation that the old barriers could be broken. Over her career, White amassed more than 200 wins and later became a race steward — a pioneering figure who opened doors for both women and people of color in the sport.

In 2000, Marlon St. Julien rode Curule in the Kentucky Derby, becoming the first Black jockey to compete in the race in 79 years. His presence symbolized the burgeoning resurgence of Black equestrianism in America's oldest sport.

Following in his wake came riders like DeShawn Parker, one of only a handful of jockeys in history to exceed 6,000 wins, and Kendrick Carmouche, a third-generation jockey with over 4,000 wins and nearly \$170 million in lifetime career earnings. Carmouche's success echoed the extraordinary success of his predecessors — not just in the saddle, but as an ambassador for representation in racing.

No story bridges the past and present quite like that of the Harbut family. Will Harbut's care for Man o' War made him a legend. His son Tom carried on that legacy, breeding and co-owning the 1962 Derby contender Touch Bar — yet he was barred from being listed in the official program or even sitting in the grandstand because of his race.

Nearly six decades later, Tom's grandson Greg Harbut stood in the owner's box as his horse Necker Island ran in the 2020 Kentucky Derby. The moment came in a year defined by nationwide protests over the killing of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky. Activists called on Black participants to boycott the Derby in solidarity. Greg Harbut chose to stay. According to him: "As an African American man involved in an industry that's not very inclusive to people who look like me, there's no way that I could sit out on

one of the largest race days in the US and not bring awareness to the contributions that African Americans have given to horse racing.”

For the Harbuts, being seen — and being recognized — was itself a victory, generations in the making. Greg would go on to co-found the Ed Brown Society, named for the 19th-century Hall of Famer Edward D. Brown, to create opportunities for young Black students entering the equine industry.

In the 21st century, Black equestrians continue to shape racing from every angle. Trainers like Larry Demeritte, born in the Bahamas, carried forward the international legacy of Black horsemen, starting West Saratoga in the 2024 Kentucky Derby — the first Black trainer to do so in decades. Exercise riders, farm managers, and breeders such as Phillip L. Jones, Jonathan Figgs Jr., and Charles Robinson are the lifeblood of the modern turf.

Other trainers began to reclaim the legacy of Black equestrianism. Born in Jamaica, Charlton Baker was introduced to horse racing through his father, a successful trainer in his home country. In the mid-1990s, Baker followed his family to New York, where his father trained at Finger Lakes Racetrack. Immersed in the daily routines of the track, Baker soon began building his own career in the sport.

He saddled his first winner at Finger Lakes in 1998 and went on to become one of the racetrack’s most successful trainers. Baker also earned recognition for shipping horses from Finger Lakes to other New York tracks, often competing successfully against deeper fields.

That strategy reached a milestone in the fall of 2016, when Baker recorded his first graded stakes victories as a trainer. His horse *Joking* won the Grade 2 True North Stakes and the Grade 1 Vosburgh Stakes at Belmont Park, signaling Baker’s arrival on the national stage. As of 2025, Baker has surpassed 1,850 career wins, reflecting both longevity and sustained success within New York racing.

George Leonard III made history in 2021 as the first American-born Black trainer to enter a horse in the Breeders’ Cup since the event’s founding in 1984. His filly *California*

Angel qualified for the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies Turf after winning the Grade 3 Jessamine Stakes at Keeneland.

Leonard, a longtime trainer based at smaller Midwestern tracks, built his career through hands-on horsemanship and modest resources. His Breeders' Cup appearance highlighted both the persistence of Black horsemen in modern racing and the lasting effects of historical exclusion from the sport's highest levels.

Though challenges remain, a cultural shift is underway. Exhibitions like "The Black Heritage in Racing" at the Kentucky Derby Museum, history projects like the Chronicle of African Americans in the Horse Industry, and the Keeneland Library's "Heart of the Turf: Racing's Black Pioneers" are correcting the public narrative.

From the enslaved horsemen of the seventeenth century to the modern professionals of the twenty-first, Black equestrians have shaped every stride of American racing. Their legacy stretches from colonial plantations to Churchill Downs, from the unseen stables of the past to the televised triumphs of today.

They were the trainers, riders, and caretakers who made the sport possible, even when it refused to see them. Their story is not just one of exclusion, but of endurance, and resurgence.

Spotlight On: DeShawn Parker



Coady Photography

DeShawn Parker in 2025.

DeShawn Parker is not only an accomplished jockey, he is one of the best modern jockeys to ever grace the turf. Born in 1971 (the same year Cheryl White broke barriers as the first Black female jockey) Parker has led an astonishing career. His father, Daryl Parker, worked as a racing steward, and DeShawn loved horses early, growing up around talented thoroughbreds.

Standing six feet tall — unusually tall for a jockey — Parker was told more than once that he would never make it. But he persisted, beginning his career in 1988 on small tracks across the Midwest. For years, he rode wherever he could find mounts, building his reputation through consistency, patience, and hard work.

Then, quietly, Parker began rewriting the record books. In 2010, he led all jockeys in the nation by total wins — the first Black rider to do so since 1895, when James “Soup” Perkins held that title during racing’s first golden age of Black excellence. He repeated the feat in 2011. In 2022, he joined an elite group of just 21 jockeys in American history to surpass 6,000 career victories. In fact, Parker is the winningest Black jockey in American racing history, built on a foundation of excellence first established by Hall of Famers like Isaac Murphy and Willie Simms a century earlier. In 2021, Parker won the George Woolf Memorial Jockey Award, given to riders with exceptional careers and characters that help advance the sport.

Image: Courtesy of Coady Photography.

Spotlight On: Najja Thompson



Najja Thompson is the Executive Director of the New York Thoroughbred Breeders, Inc. (NYTB), the unified voice of Thoroughbred breeders in New York State. NYTB works to enhance the status of New York-bred horses and promote the significant economic impact that Thoroughbred breeding and racing contribute

to the state. As Executive Director, Thompson helps formulate policy, advocates for breeders and program participants, and represents the industry within New York's complex political environment.

Thompson's path into Thoroughbred racing began at a young age. When asked how he first became involved in the sport, Thompson explained that his introduction came through his uncle, an avid horseplayer who later became a small owner and breeder:

“Growing up in Westbury, New York, he frequently took me to Belmont Park and Aqueduct Racetrack, as well as the OTB, to watch races. As early as I can remember, I was hooked - especially watching the horses and jockeys compete.”

As a teenager, Thompson's family moved to South Florida, where his exposure to racing continued at Calder Race Course and Gulfstream Park:

“By then, I had become an avid fan myself and was determined to find a way to work in the industry.”

After graduating from Florida State University, Thompson followed that determination into a career with the New York Racing Association (NYRA), where he spent nearly a

decade working in marketing, communications, and human resources. In 2020, he joined NYTB as Executive Director. When asked what serving in this role means to him personally, Thompson emphasized the responsibility and opportunity it carries:

“Going to work each day to help formulate policy, advocate in the best interests of our members and program participants, and lobby on behalf of Thoroughbred breeding and racing in New York State has been an incredible experience.”

Reflecting on the current state of New York racing, Thompson expressed pride in the resilience of the state’s breeding program, particularly at a time when many regions have seen sharp declines:

“New York has been one of the few areas in North America to reverse the trend of declining foal crops by stabilizing our numbers.”

He credited stallion owners and mare owners across the state for continuing to invest in New York breeding, and pointed to the redevelopment of Belmont Park as a major achievement made possible through collaboration among industry stakeholders:

“Soon [it will] become the premier racing facility in North America for the foreseeable future.”

Beyond his role at NYTB, Thompson serves as president of the Turf Publicists of America and sits on the boards of the New York Racing



Association, the New York Race Track Chaplaincy, the Backstretch Service Employee Team of New York, and the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce. His leadership reflects the expanding presence of Black professionals in positions of influence within the Thoroughbred industry.

When asked what advice he would offer young people interested in racing, Thompson encouraged flexibility and openness:

“What may not seem like the most attractive or direct path into the industry can often provide the experience and foundation you’ll need later in your career.”

Despite the challenges facing modern racing, Thompson remains optimistic about the sport’s future:

“I remain very optimistic about racing because of the passion it brings out in people... You can truly see the love, care, and commitment that exists across every part of our sport.”

Thompson’s story illustrates how leadership, advocacy, and lived experience continue to shape the Thoroughbred industry today, extending the legacy of Black horsemen from the past into the present.

Activity Three

In small groups, you will explore the impact of Black equestrians by researching modern figures and organizations, connecting historical legacy to contemporary efforts, and present your findings. Select a modern figure or organization from the list below to perform additional research, or select your own with the help of a teacher:

- Kendrick Carmouche
- The Ed Brown Society
- Cheryl White
- The Compton Cowboys
- Sylvia Bishop
- Cordell Anderson
- Eddie Sweat

After you've done your research, answer the following questions, and present your findings to your classmates:

- Who is this person or organization, and what is their background?
- How do they work to preserve the legacy of Black equestrians?
- How do their efforts connect to the historical patterns we've discussed?
- Why is their story or mission important today?

Use the internet to conduct your research, write your notes down below, and present your findings.

Subject: _____

Glossary of Terms

Backstretch – The area beyond the racetrack where horses are stabled, exercised, and cared for by grooms, trainers, and stable hands. Sometimes used colloquially to refer to those who care for horses behind the scenes.

Bloodlines – A horse's ancestry or lineage, often used to describe traits passed down through generations of breeding.

Bookmaker – A person who calculates betting odds, accepts wagers, and pays out winnings at races.

Breeder – A person responsible for mating horses to produce foals with desirable qualities such as speed, endurance, or temperament.

Colt – A young male horse, usually under four years old.

Conditioning – The process of training and strengthening a horse to prepare for racing competition.

Exercise Rider – A person who rides racehorses during training sessions to maintain their fitness between races.

Farrier – A specialist who trims and takes care of a horse's hooves.

Filly – A young female horse, usually under four years old.

Foal – A young horse, especially one under a year old.

Groom – A worker responsible for feeding, cleaning, and caring for horses in a stable or at the racetrack.

Handicap – A type of race in which horses carry different assigned weights to make competition more even.

Heat – One of several rounds in a race event. Some races are run in multiple heats.

Jockey – A professional rider who competes in horse races.

Jockey Club – An organization that governs horse racing, sets rules, and hosts official race meetings.

Mare – An adult female horse.

Match Race – A race between two specific horses, often organized for prestige and wagers.

Owner – The individual who owns a racehorse and enters it into competition.

Paddock – The area near the racetrack where horses are saddled, paraded, and viewed before a race.

Purse – The total prize money awarded to the winners of a race.

Racecourse / Racetrack – The oval or circular track where organized horse races take place.

Ring / Sales Ring – The circular area where horses are led and presented for auction during sales events.

Ringman – A handler who leads horses into the sales ring and presents them to potential buyers.

Saddle – The leather seat fastened on a horse's back for the rider.

Stable – The building or group of buildings where horses are housed and cared for.

Stable Foreman – A supervisor responsible for overseeing the daily operations of a stable and its staff.

Stable Hand – A worker who performs general labor in a stable, such as feeding horses and cleaning stalls.

Stakes – High-level races that offer large purses and attract top horses, such as the Belmont Stakes, or the Preakness Stakes.

Stud / Stud Farm – A breeding farm where stallions and mares are kept for producing foals.

Thoroughbred – A breed of horse known for speed, endurance, and agility, developed specifically for racing.

Trainer – The person who conditions and prepares horses for racing, overseeing exercise, feeding, and race strategy.

Turf – The grass surface of a racetrack. Also used colloquially to refer to the thoroughbred racing industry as a whole.