

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Myrtis Dightman

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dightman, Myrtis, 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman,
Dates:	May 10, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	4 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:26:10).
Abstract:	Bull rider and Myrtis Dightman (1935 -) was a seven-time qualifier for the National Finals Rodeo and the third African American inductee to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Dightman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 10, 2010, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_023
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Admired cowboy and pioneer in bull riding, Myrtis Dightman was born on May 7, 1935, in Crockett, Texas. Dightman grew up on a ranch with his siblings. As he grew older, he left school to work on the ranch. His first introduction to the Prairie View Trailride was in 1957 and in 1958-1960, he worked as a bullfighter. It was not until 1960 that Dightman began bull riding for the first time with the help of James Francis, Jr. Francis and Dightman founded the Prairie View Trailride Association in 1957 with an emphasis on the well-being and development of agriculture.

In 1966, Dightman became the first black cowboy to qualify for the Professional Rodeo Association National Finals. He went on to qualify six more times, missing just once between 1966 and 1972. Dightman finished third in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association World Standings in 1967 and 1968. He also won the Calgary Stampede in 1971 before appearing in the movie *J.W. Coop* with Cliff Robertson as himself. The following year, Dightman won the bull riding competition at the Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo and competed in his last Pro Rodeo Association National Finals, placing seventh overall. He also had a small role as himself in *Junior Bonner* starring Steve McQueen. In 1987, Dightman began working at the American Hat Company which manufactured and sold “Myrtis Dightman signature” hat designs.

After retiring from bull riding, Dightman was inducted into several Hall of Fames including the Texas Rodeo Hall of Fame as its first living African American, and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in 1997. In 2001, Dightman was inducted into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame and in 2003, he entered the National Cowboys of Color Museum and Hall of Fame. On top of these inductions, in 2003, he was also inducted into the Professional Bull Rider’s Ring of Honor. In tribute to his accomplishments, a bronze statue of Dightman is being erected in the PorthAgricultural Indoor Arena in Crockett, Texas, where they hold an annual rodeo named after him.

Myrtis Dightman was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 10, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Myrtis Dightman was conducted by Denise Gines on May 10, 2010, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 4 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Bull rider and Myrtis Dightman (1935 -) was a seven-time qualifier for the National Finals Rodeo and the third African American inductee to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Dightman, Myrtis, 1935-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dightman, Myrtis, 1935- --Interviews

African American cowboys--Texas--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Finals Rodeo (1965:Oklahoma City, Okla.) National Cowboy Hall of Fame

Occupations:

Bull Rider

HistoryMakers® Category:

SportsMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman, May 10, 2010. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman, Section A2010_023_001_001, TRT: 0:29:01 ?
Myrtis Dightman was born on May 7, 1935 in Crockett, Texas to Ada Polk and Odie Dightman. His maternal grandmother, Lizzie Rhodes Neal, worked at a hotel in Crockett, while his maternal grandfather, Will Neal, was a farmer.

Dightman's parents raised him and his five siblings on a ranch located two miles outside of Crockett. They belonged to the Pine Grove Missionary Baptist Church, and Dightman attended the Pine Grove School, Center Grove School and then Crockett High School. He preferred mustering cattle to classwork, and eventually left school to work as a ranch hand full time. At eighteen years old, he moved to Houston, Texas with aspirations of becoming a ranch owner. He worked at a gas station and car repair shop, and as a truck driver. In 1957, he and James Francis, Jr. founded the Prairie View Trail Ride Association, Texas' first all-black trail ride group. Dightman went on to join Francis' rodeo team, where he worked as a bullfighter for two years.

African Americans--Texas--Social life and customs.

Ranches--Texas--20th century.

Bullfighters--African American--20th century.

Trail riding--Texas--Houston Metropolitan Area--History.

Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman, Section A2010_023_001_002, TRT: 0:28:08 ?

Myrtis Dightman cofounded the Prairie View Trail Ride Association with the support of the Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. The year after its founding in 1957, the organization integrated Houston's Memorial Park during the annual trail ride to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. In 1961, Dightman began competing in rodeos nationwide. He frequently slept in his car, as he was barred from most hotels. He also faced discrimination from stock owners, who often forced him to ride last, after spectators left the tournament. Despite these obstacles, Dightman received high marks in the rodeos, and became the first African American to qualify for the National Finals Rodeo in 1964. During his career, he met and mentored Charles Sampson, who became the first African American bull riding champion in 1982. He also befriended Dallas Cowboys football player Walt Garrison, who convinced him to appear in Marlboro commercials. Dightman went on to appear in films like 'J.W. Coop' and 'Junior Bonner.'

National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center.

Professional Bull Riders, Inc.

Trail riding--Texas--Houston Metropolitan Area--History.

Rodeos--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman, Section A2010_023_001_003, TRT: 0:21:41 ?

Myrtis Dightman and James Francis, Jr. established the Prairie View Trail Ride Association in 1957, and later served on the board of directors. In addition to his appearances in films like 'J.W. Coop' and 'Junior Bonner,' Dightman was a guest on the television show 'To Tell the Truth.' He retired from bull riding in 1989, and started the Myrtis Dightman Annual Labor Day Rodeo at the Crockett Lions Club in his hometown of Crockett, Texas. He also worked for Texas Bus Sales as a bus transporter, and designed hats for the American Hat Company, Inc. In 1997, Dightman was inducted to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He was married to Fannie Criswell, and had five children: Pamela Dightman Craft, Vanessa Dightman Brown, Myrtis Dightman, Jr., Gregory Dightman and Darryl Dightman. He reflects upon his life and legacy, and shares a message to future generations. Dightman concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Calgary Stampede.

African American cowboys--Texas--History.

Prairie View (Tex.)

Trail riding--Texas--Houston Metropolitan Area--History.

Bullfighters--African American--20th century.

Racism--United States--20th century.

Rodeos--Alberta--History.

Rodeos--United States.

Garrison, Walt

Robertson, Cliff, 1923-2011

Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman, Section A2010_023_001_004, TRT: 0:07:20 ?

This tape replicates the last seven minutes of tape three and is the video of Myrtis Dightman's showing his photographs and articles.