

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
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman,
Dates:	May 10, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:26:10).
Abstract:	Bull rider and Myrtis Dightman (1935 -) is a seven-time qualifier for the national Finals Rodeo and the third African American inductee into 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, TX, 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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Bull rider and Myrtis Dightman (1935 -) is a seven-time qualifier for the national Finals Rodeo and the third African American inductee into 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

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Myrtis Dightman--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

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 7/2/2012 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, May 10, 2010

Video Oral History Interview with Myrtis Dightman, Section A2010_023_001_001, TRT: 0:29:01
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Myrtis Dightman, born on May 7, 1935, to Adia Lee Polk and O.D. Dightman, discusses his family, growing up on a ranch in Crockett, Texas, and begins explaining how he became a bull fighter and a cowboy. Dightman's grandmother, Lillie Neal, worked at a hotel in Crockett and his grandfather, Will Neal, owned his own farm. Both of Dightman's parents worked on Carl

Litger's ranch. Dightman recalls his earliest and sensory memories before discussing life without electricity. Dightman's father taught him how to be a ranch hand so Dightman also worked at Litger's ranch once he left school. About 1953, Dightman moved to Houston, Texas, to follow his dream of becoming a cowboy. He worked a few odd jobs before driving a truck and meeting James Francis who introduced him to rodeos. Dightman quickly became a bull fighter but still wanted to participate in a trail ride.

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
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Myrtis Dightman discusses trail riding and bull riding. He was instrumental in establishing the Prairie View Trail Ride. In 1961, James Francis convinced Dightman to ride bulls. By 1964, Dightman was the first African American to reach the national finals, which with the exception of 1965, he achieved every year until 1972. Dightman discusses preparation and equipment for bull riding, how rider and bull order was selected, and how judging operated. He experienced no racism from the cowboys but did from the towns and the rodeo stock company. Dightman won many larger rodeos including the Calgary [Stampede] in Alberta, Canada. In [1967 and 1968], Dightman finished third in the world championship. He also mentored Charlie [Sampson], the first African American to win the world championship. In the 1970s, Walt Garrison included Dightman in a Marlboro commercial before introducing him to Cliff Robertson who asked Dightman to cameo in J.W. Coop.

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
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Myrtis Dightman discusses his appearance in film and television. Dightman then discusses the inception of the Prairie View Trail Riders Association in 1957. He was the first African American inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in 1997 and to receive the Professional Bull Riders Ring of Honor. Dightman won numerous other awards and trophies. Dightman shares stories about George Paul and Bobby Berger before he explains why he retired from bull riding in 1989. At his son's encouragement, Dightman began a rodeo at the Lion's Club in Crockett, Texas: Myrtis Dightman Rodeo. Dightman remains close with his ex-wife, Fanny, and they have thirteen grandchildren and five children: Pam, Vanessa, "Ray Jr." [Myrtis, Jr.], Gregory, and Daryl. Dightman discusses his hat project before sharing his message to future generations, dispenses advice to bull riders, and leaves his legacy.

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