HORSE RACING

Horse racing was initially hugely popular, America’s initial national pastime, attracting hundreds of thousands of fans in pre-Civil War days and in the first half of the twentieth century. Within a year of taking possession of New York from the Dutch in 1664, the British established a racetrack in what is now Nassau County, Long Island. More than a dozen racetracks existed in Virginia before 1700, and South Carolinians founded the Jockey Club of Charleston in 1734. British artist Benjamin Robert Haydon once noted, “Wherever the British settle, wherever they colonize, they carry, and will always carry, trial by jury, horse racing and portrait painting.”

Traveling from New York to New Orleans between 1832 and 1872, Edward Troye immortalized in paintings many of America’s greatest race horses, with their black jockeys and trainers. After the American Revolution anti-nobility sentiment led to attempts to abolish horse racing—the “sport of kings.” Fundamentalist religious leaders opposed to frivolous sports and sinful gambling pressured governments to enact repressive legislation. Ironically, black lawmakers during Reconstruction unsuccessfully proposed prohibiting horse racing on Sundays, continuing the assault on racing. Boston, Philadelphia, and New York banned racing in 1802. However, the sport continued to flourish in the South. Although New York lifted the ban in 1821, racing’s stronghold remained in the South until the Civil War. Racing boomed in the 1830s in Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

African-American jockeys competed side by side with white jockeys predominantly in the South, which boasted sixty-three official racecourses compared to six tracks in the Northeast at the end of the 1830s. Blacks dominated American horse racing as jockeys, grooms, and trainers from the early 1700s until the 1910s. In the South, professional jockeys were mostly slaves who grew up on plantations caring for horses. By 1800, the South had produced the majority of black jockeys seen at the major racetracks. Recognized for their skills with horses, the jockeys traveled alone and across state lines—despite slave laws—to ride in races. Even during the Civil War, racing continued at the Metairie racecourse in New Orleans until December 1861 and in Kentucky in 1862, as well as in Paterson (New Jersey) and Saratoga (New York) in 1863, with southern black jockeys riding at all the tracks.

After the Civil War, some of the wealthiest jockeys were African American. In the first Kentucky Derby, in 1875, the majority of the fifteen riders were black. Black jockeys, most of them from the newly crowned racing center of Kentucky, won the Derby fifteen times in its first twenty-eight years. Black trainers conditioned five of those winners. Not until 1989 did another black trainer, Hank Allen, start a horse in the Derby. Within the sporting newspaper, Spirit of the Times, and the mainstream paper, New York Herald, coverage of the feats of African-American jockeys, while often couched in racist terms, conveyed admiration for their professionalism and expertise. Reporters routinely interviewed the prominent black jockey Isaac Murphy.

The rise of Jim Crow laws at the turn of the twentieth century began driving blacks from Kentucky and Tennessee horse farms to seek other forms of employment in ur-
HORSE RACING

urban areas and excluded African-American trainers and jockeys from the leading racetracks in the South. Starting around 1894 in other areas of the country, most black jockeys were denied state licenses to ride at the major racetracks. The Ku Klux Klan targeted some prominent black jockeys, and increasing Klan violence may have frightened some away. Higher purses attracted more white riders. Racism as well as outright rough riding discouraged trainers from using black jockeys, whose white counterparts would gang up during a race to prevent them from winning. Premier black jockey Jimmy Winkfield would recall, “In the old days, when if you ran twelve horses, from six to eight of the jockeys were always black. And it remained that way until more money got in the game. Now, then, when a lot of money got in the game, the white men then, like they do now and like they’ve always been, wanted his people to have, not only the money, but also the reputation.” The last time a black jockey won a major-stakes race was 1984, when Jimmy Lee took the Travers at Saratoga. The Kentucky Derby had not had an African-American rider between Henry King, tenth in 1921, and Marlon St. Julien, who finished seventh in 2000. Some former jockeys became trainers or rode in steeplechase races when they could no longer keep their weight down, but these career paths also dead-ended for African Americans. Ex-jockeys Jimmy Winkfield and his son Robert became successful and prominent trainers—in France.

Farm-trained Kentucky jockeys faced increasing competition from new urban jockeys. Coney Island, New York, trainer Bill Daly ran a jockey school for immigrants’ children and boys from orphanages. He turned out some of the meanest riders in the business; they gradually replaced the more skillful black riders. Without ethics or loyalties, these newcomers were easily bribed and did whatever it took to win—or lose—even if it meant abusing their horses. Racing’s higher profile among the moneyed elite and the general public and the rise in financial stakes associated with racing contributed to the easing out of black jockeys out as purse money and jockeys’ shares increased.

With the decline in participation by African Americans as jockeys and trainers, the racing world came to see black faces only on the backside of racetracks as grooms, hot walkers (hired to keep the horses in condition), and exercise riders. By the end of the twentieth century, black involvement in horse racing as owners was the exception, with the most notable example being Oaktown Stable’s Lewis Burrell and his sons Louis Jr., Chris, and Stanley (rap singer M.C. Hammer) during a brief period in the early 1990s. Hispanic jockeys began to overtake whites in the 1960s, while women broke the gender barrier in 1973. The few African-American jockeys riding at the turn of the twenty-first century work the small tracks in Louisiana and Texas, dreaming of one day getting their shot at the Kentucky Derby.

Susan Hamburger

FURTHER READING

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117 fights that Lewis had been knocked out. He never fought again. Lewis was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1994.

*Dennis Gilda*

**FURTHER READING**


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**William Henry LEWIS**

*Born* November 28, 1868, Berkeley, Virginia  
*Died* January 1, 1949, Boston, Massachusetts  
*Football player, attorney*

Lewis was the son of freed slaves, Ashley H. Lewis (a Baptist minister) and Josephine Baker Lewis. A graduate of Amherst College (B.A.) and Harvard Law School (LL.B), Lewis was a well-known college football player, lawyer, and politician in Massachusetts. He also served as U.S. attorney for Boston (1903–1906) and as an assistant attorney general of the United States (1911–1913).

The first center in football to block, Lewis was also the first African American to be elected captain of the football teams at Amherst and Harvard, although his Harvard captaincy was only for the 1893 game against the University of Pennsylvania. His feats on the field earned him a spot on Walter Camp’s “All-American Football Team” in 1892 and 1893; he was the first African American to be so listed.

After graduation Lewis continued to pioneer as a coach and as an arbiter of the game. His nearly ten years as an assistant coach with Harvard made him the country’s first black coach at a predominantly white university, while his book *A Primer on College Football* (1896) is one of the
African Americans in Sports

Volume 2

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many years in New York a corporate basketball tournament that features former N3A players and raises funds for the Boys and Girls Club of Northern Westchester, New York.

Murry R. Nelson

See also: Coaches and Managers.

FURTHER READING
NBA Global (global.nba.com/history/stras_bios.html).

★★★★

Ozzie SIMMONS

Born June 22, 1914, Gainesville, Texas
Died September 26, 2001, Chicago, Illinois
Football player

Simmons, the son of Bennie Jones and his wife, Frances Jones Simmons, was a graduate of the University of Iowa (B.S.) and earned a graduate-level teaching certificate from Chicago Teachers College. A star halfback and defensive back at Iowa in the mid-1930s, Simmons was one of the first black All-American college football players. Dubbed the “Ebony Eel” for his ability to outwit and outrun his opponents, Simmons rushed for 1,544 yards and scored fourteen touchdowns in his three-year collegiate career (1934–1936). However, his success and his race made Simmons a target on and off the field. Opposing players sometimes teamed up to injure him intentionally.

Simmons’s quick getaway, fast pickup, and stop-and-go tactics made him an All-American and All Big Ten honoree in 1934 and 1935. In 1935 and 1936 he was Iowa’s top rusher, and he led the team in scoring in 1936. His other honors include induction into the Bob Douglas Black Sports Hall of Fame (1984) and the National Iowa Varsity Club Hall of Fame (1989).

Denied a professional football career because of racial segregation, Simmons played two years with the minor league Paterson, NJ, Panthers before becoming a physical education teacher in Chicago, Illinois.

Murry ’Lo Binker

FURTHER READING
Author telephone interviews with Eutopia Morsell Simmons, October 1, 2001.

★★★★

Willie SIMMS

Born January 16, 1870, Augusta, Georgia
Died February 25, 1927, Asbury Park, New Jersey
Jockey

The son of former slaves, Simms ran away from home as a teenager to become a jockey. He worked in New York for C.H. Pettingill for two years, until Congressman William L. Scott’s trainer discovered him in 1887–1888 riding at a small track in Clifton, New Jersey. In 1891, he rode successfully at Saratoga Springs, New York, as a freelancer. Simms rode for Philip J. Dwyer in 1892 before moving to the Rancocas Stable, staying from 1892 through 1894.

Michael F. Dwyer signed Simms in 1895 and sent him to England for four months. One of the earliest Americans to ride in En-
gland, Simms pioneered the American style of racing, crouched down low over the horse's withers. Not until two years later, when the white American jockey Tod Sloan copied Simms's style and consistently bested English riders, did they adopt his more efficient riding style. In 1893 and 1894, Simms won five of his six races at Sheepshead Bay, New York, won the Belmont Stakes, and was named the national riding champion. Simms won many other major stakes races, including the Kentucky Derby in 1896 and 1898 and the Preakness in 1898. He earned $20,000 a year in 1895 and, with wise investments in real estate, became one of the wealthiest jockeys in America, with career earnings of $300,000. After retiring as a jockey in 1902 Simms trained racehorses until 1924. Simms never married. He died of pneumonia at his mother's home.

Susan Hamburger

FURTHER READING
New York Times, March 1, 1927

O.J. SIMPSON
Born July 7, 1947, San Francisco, California
Football player

The son of Eunice Simpson, Orenthal James ("OJ") Simpson graduated from Galileo High School and the University of Southern California (USC). A professional football player who retired in 1979, he later worked as a sports commentator and actor. Simpson was considered one of the greatest running backs in the history of professional football. At USC, Simpson had earned All-American honors and had been selected as the nation's top college football player and a Heisman Trophy winner. As the number-one draft pick in the NFL in 1969, Simpson joined the Buffalo Bills. He topped 1,000 yards rushing five consecutive years (1972-1976) and led the National Football League four times in rushing titles, with a career record of 11,236 yards rushing, 203 receptions, 990 yards in kickoff returns, and 14,368 combined, net yards. In 1973 he became the first player to rush for over 2,000 yards, and was the 1973 Pro Bowl Most Valuable Player. He retired from professional football in 1979 to pursue a career in television commercials and work as a sportscaster.

Simpson's entertainment career ended in 1994 when his estranged second wife was murdered. Simpson was charged with the murder but was acquitted after a lengthy trial.

Simpson was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 1985 and the Galileo High School Hall of Fame; Galileo High's football field is named in his honor.

Doris R. Corbett

See also: Films.

FURTHER READING
Biography.com (www.biography.com).
Deford, Frank. "What Price Heroes?" Sports Illustrated (June 9, 1969): 33-34, 37, 40
Most Valuable Player in the College World Series.

Leaving the University of Minnesota a few credits short of graduation in 1973, Winfield was drafted by four professional teams in three sports, but he elected to cast his lot with baseball and the San Diego Padres, with whom he played in the outfield for eight seasons. During his last four years with the Padres, he averaged .292, twenty-six home runs, and ninety-nine runs batted in.

Despairing of the Padres becoming a contender, Winfield opted for free agency, signing in December 1980 a lucrative ten-year contract with the New York Yankees worth approximately $25 million dollars. Although Winfield achieved considerable success in a Yankee uniform, he often quarreled with team owner George Steinbrenner.

In 1990, the Yankees traded Winfield to the California Angels. Again testing the free-agent market, in December 1991 Winfield signed with the Toronto Blue Jays, playing a leading role in the franchise’s 1992 world championship. Winfield spent the 1993 and 1994 baseball seasons in Minnesota before closing out his career in 1995 with the Cleveland Indians.

During his twenty-two major league seasons, Winfield batted .285, slugged 465 home runs, stole 223 bases, and accumulated 3,110 hits. Since his baseball career, Winfield has devoted considerable time to the David M. Winfield Foundation for underprivileged children.

Ron Briley

FURTHER READING

Jimmy WINKFIELD

Born April 12, 1883, Chilesburg, Kentucky
Died March 23, 1974, Maisons-Laffitte, France
Jockey

Jimmy Winkfield was the last great black jockey to race in America. As one of only four jockeys to win back-to-back Kentucky Derbies, he was also the last African American to win the Derby in the twentieth cen-

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tury. Throughout his thirty-two-year career, Winkfield rode about 2,600 winning races in America and Europe.

In the spring of 1897 Winkfield started work as a stable hand, progressing to jockey the next year. In 1900 he finished third in the Kentucky Derby and ranked third among jockeys at the New Orleans Fairgrounds. At Chicago's Harlem track that August, white riders, jealous of successful black jockeys, crowded Winkfield and his horse into a fence, injuring both.

Winkfield won Kentucky Derbies in 1901 and 1902, ranking fourteenth nationally among jockeys, but the next year he failed to win his third straight Derby. Later in 1903, Winkfield reneged on a riding contract; the enraged trainer threatened to have him banned from racing. He accepted an offer to ride in Russia and forged a successful and profitable European career, winning the 1904 Russian National Riding Championship. Turmoil following the Russian Revolution forced Winkfield to flee the country in April 1919; he resumed riding in France in 1920, retiring in 1930.

He bought a small estate in Maisons-Laffitte and became a trainer. When the Nazis invaded France he brought his wife and two children to Aiken, South Carolina, where he worked with racehorses until returning to France in 1953. He last visited America for surgery in 1960 and to attend the 1961 Kentucky Derby.

Susan Hamburger

See also: Horse Racing.

FURTHER READING

Kellen WINSLOW
Born November 5, 1957, St. Louis, Missouri
Football player

A graduate of East St. Louis High School (Illinois), Winslow was drafted in the first round (thirteenth overall) into the National Football League (NFL) by the San Diego Chargers in 1979, out of the University of Missouri.

The San Diego Chargers had traded up to acquire Winslow with their first-round pick. He was considered the final weapon the Chargers needed to gain “aerial supremacy” in the NFL.

Winslow, however, had an average first season, one that was hampered by injuries. He missed two weeks of training camp with a torn hamstring and then broke his leg weeks into the season. He had only twenty-five catches and two touchdowns when his first year as a pro ended after seven contests. Having much to prove to himself and his teammates, Winslow had a stellar, league-leading second season in 1980, his best year as a pro. He led the NFL in receptions with eighty-nine, thirty more than the next-best tight end. He gained 1,290 yards with nine touchdowns and averaged 14.5 yards per reception. He was considered too fast for linebackers to cover and generally found himself checked by defensive backs. A big tight end, Winslow broke tackles with relative ease. He was hard to bring down by any single player; it usually took several players to bring him to the ground. “When you think about Winslow, you think Superman,” said Miami Dolphins head coach Don Shula in a press conference in 1982. The superlatives about Winslow were numerous. He was once said to have defied the “All Pro” classification—he was “All Universe.”