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## 36th National Cowboy Poetry Gathering Celebrates Black Cowboys

**Elko, NV** - For 36 years during the heart of winter, thousands have traveled to Elko, Nevada to listen, learn, and share stories of ranching and the rural West through poetry, music, and stories. The [National Cowboy Poetry Gathering](#), presented by the [Western Folklife Center](#), has been called the most honest and open-hearted festival in America. With hands-on garmaking, cooking, dancing, and writing workshops; live poetry and music performances; exhibitions, talks, films, and story-telling sessions; and plenty of socializing amongst performers and attendees alike, Western community and tradition is alive and well at "the Gathering."



The artwork for the 36th National Cowboy Poetry Gathering poster is the quilt *Trail Blazers* (2013), by textile artist **Marion Coleman**.

People of all backgrounds identify with the beauty and challenges of the cowboy lifestyle, from the Mississippi Delta bayou to Buckaroo country, Oklahoma rodeo grounds to the streets of Oakland and Los Angeles. This year the Gathering will feature men and women from these ranching and horseback communities to explore and celebrate the often under-represented historic contributions and contemporary culture of Black cowboys, from bull-doggin' to blue-yodellin'.

[Dom Flemons](#), known as "[The American Songster](#)," will return to Elko for his third appearance at this event. His GRAMMY-nominated album, *Dom Flemons Presents Black Cowboys*, was released in 2018 on the Smithsonian Folkways record label in conjunction with the National Museum of African-American History. "I am so proud to celebrate the legacy of the Black cowboys at the 2020 *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* in Elko, Nevada," says Flemons. "In 2016, I was invited to the Gathering and I was inspired by this incredible community of cowboy poets, musicians, artists, and historians. I'm honored that the Elko community helped me spread the powerful message of these true American heroes to diverse audiences worldwide!" Fellow musician-historians [Pipp Gillette](#), [Lloyd Wright](#), and [Andy Hedges](#) (host of the podcast [Cowboy Crossroads](#)) will join Flemons to highlight the influence of Black cowboys on Western music and culture.

The importance of rodeo as a place where people come together will be celebrated with shows like "Straight Chutin' Champions" featuring Oakland Black Cowboys favorite Miko Marks, Rodeo poets Paul Zarzyski and Henry Real Bird, and bull-riding musician Cat Clifford. There will also be storytelling sessions where barrier breaking bull rider Myrtis Dightman (the first Black cowboy to compete at the National Finals Rodeo) and other rodeo competitors will talk about their experiences in and out of the arena.

Representing the South is Creole cowboy and rancher [Geno Delafosse](#) from southwest Louisiana. Geno and his band [French Rockin' Boogie](#) will join [Wylie and the Wild West](#) and [Corb Lund and the Hurtin' Albertans](#) for "Battle of the Bands" and lead the [Friday night zydeco dance](#).

The Wiegand Gallery of the Western Folklife Center will feature exhibits centering the African-American experience. [Vintage Black Heroes: The Chisholm Kid Exhibition](#), a display of the first color-print comics to feature a Black hero, and the first about a Black cowboy, travels to Elko from the [Museum of Uncut Funk](#). Created for the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1950, *The Chisholm Kid* pays homage to the 5,000 to 9,000 Black cowboys who drove cattle along the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Kansas after the Civil War. Award-winning artwork from [Marion Coleman's Blacks in the West](#) quilt series and [Rory Doyle's "Delta Hill Riders"](#) photography project will also be on display during the Gathering.

Film, stories and talks scheduled throughout the week will bring focus to both the historical and contemporary, rural and urban. Catch a glimpse of the complexities of Compton's cowboy culture in the film [Fire on the Hill](#). Explore the cultural phenomenon of Lil' Nas X's "Old Town Road" and the *yeehaw agenda*. Hear about the heritage of African-Americans in the West through talks, presentations, and films presented throughout the weekend.

These are just a few of the exciting things happening at the Gathering in 2020. You can follow the *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* and the Western Folklife Center on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) for more announcements and exclusive content you won't find anywhere else.

[Tickets](#) to the 36th *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* are now on sale. [Choose](#) a Single-Day Pass or 3-Day Deluxe Pass to enjoy the 90+ intimate and informal daytime poetry, music, and storytelling sessions, film screenings, discussions, and open-mics. Supplement your pass with tickets to themed [shows](#) and [workshops](#).

The 36th *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* is supported by the Nevada Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, Nevada Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the City of Elko and the Elko Recreation Board.



The mission of the Western Folklife Center is to use story and cultural expression to connect the American West to the world.

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