

The Black West: Reinventing History, Reinterpreting Media will be explored in a symposium April 22-23 at UCSD

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THE BLACK WEST: REINVENTING HISTORY, REINTERPRETING MEDIA WILL BE EXPLORED IN A SYMPOSIUM APRIL 22-23 AT UC SAN DIEGO

The first and only black singing cowboy ever to appear on the silver screen during the heyday of the singing cowboy movies the Roy Rogers and Gene Autry era will take the stage once again in celebration of an agenda dedicated to the Black West.

Herb Jeffries, who starred in four singing cowboy movies in the late 1930s and later went on to a multi-faceted performing career including as jazz singer with Duke Ellington, will be the keynote speaker at The Black West: Reinventing History, Reinterpreting Media, a symposium, film festival and youth forum sponsored by the African and African-American Studies Research Project (AAASRP) at the University of California, San Diego.

The symposium will be held April 22 and 23 in UCSD's Price Center. All events are free and open to the public.

Jeffries, whose films include Two-Gun Man From Harlem and The Bronze Buckaroo, will speak on The Black Western, A Performer's Perspective, at 2 p.m. April 22 in Gallery A and B of the Price Center. The octogenarian's contributions to the black cowboy lore of the Old West are represented at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. and at California's Gene Autry Museum. His movies will be screened during the symposium's film festival.

Jeffries' participation is just one facet of the far-reaching exploration, investigation and reflection of the Black West symposium, according to Bennetta Jules-Rosette, professor of sociology at UCSD and the director of AAASRP.

"The symposium will examine how African-Americans have been depicted in American historical narratives and media images of the West," Jules-Rosette said. "It will focus on the men and women who were the builders, cowboys, heroes, villains and pioneers. The symposium discussions will be linked to the film festival screenings that cover early images of black settlements, race relations and the adaptation of African-American vaudeville traditions to the Western."

Scholars representing various specialties in African-American history and culture from UC Davis, UC Santa Cruz, UC Santa Barbara, California State University-Fullerton and the University of Southern California, as well as UCSD, will participate in symposium discussions.

Also participating will be Simon Njami, editor-in-chief of Revue Noire, France's leading African art magazine, and Filip De Boeck, director of the African Research Centre at the University of Leuven, Belgium.

The two-day symposium will consist of four sessions. The opening session at 9 a.m. April 22 will deal with Black Settlements in California History. John Stewart, director of African-American Studies at UC Davis, will chair. The afternoon session beginning at 2 p.m. will address the topic of Media Images of the Black West, extending from black silent Westerns to recent productions. Singing cowboy Jeffries will speak from the performer's perspective. George Lipsitz, UCSD Ethnic Studies Department, will chair.

The morning session beginning at 9 a.m. April 23 will address African and Diaspora Images and the Western. The session will include discussion of reggae and rodeos, Western images of the African frontier, and uses of the American West in Caribbean and African- American popular culture. UCSD's Jules-Rosette will chair. The afternoon session at 2 p.m. will explore the relationship between African-Americans and American Indians. It will examine historical interrelationships between these groups and contemporary issues pertaining to cultural and media images. Ines Talamantez, Department of Religious Studies, UC Santa Barbara, will chair.

Complementing the symposium discussions will be the Black Western Film Festival. Films of the West featuring black cast members or an all black cast will be screened from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day of the symposium in the Davis/Riverside Room in the Price Center. More than 20 films will be shown, including Jeffries' The Bronze Buckaroo, Silverado with Danny Glover, Posse with Mario Van Peebles, Buck and the Preacher with Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte, and Unforgiven with Morgan Freeman.

Robert Cancel, UCSD associate professor of literature, will host a special Black Western Film Festival screening from 5 to 7 p.m. April 22 in the Price Center's Gallery B. He will offer commentary and lead discussion.

The film festival finale will be from 5 to 11 p.m. April 23 in the Price Center Theater.

The Youth Forum, a community outreach program, rounds out Black West activities. The 10 best essay writers in a contest on the settlement of the Black West and its media heroes will participate in a forum on the Black West beginning at 3 p.m. April 22 at UCSD. The contest was sponsored by the Boys & Girls Clubs of San Diego, the Sojourner Truth Academy of San Diego and Upward Bound, an after school program for youths in the South Bay. The winners will attend lectures on black history and the media, a screening of black Westerns, tour the UCSD campus and be honored at an AAASRP awards banquet where the top two students in the essay writing contest will receive awards.

The Black West: Reinventing History, Reinterpreting Media is among the research and outreach programs sponsored by UCSD's AAASRP. The AAASRP's mission is to promote research and intellectual understanding of the issues that face African-Americans and the African diaspora populations today from the perspectives of the humanities and the social sciences. The project sponsors public events that bring diverse groups of people together, both to foster a comparative and interdisciplinary environment and to share information and exchange scholarly ideas on these topics.

For further information on The Black West: Reinventing History, Reinterpreting Media call Jules-Rosette at (619) 534-4790.

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