

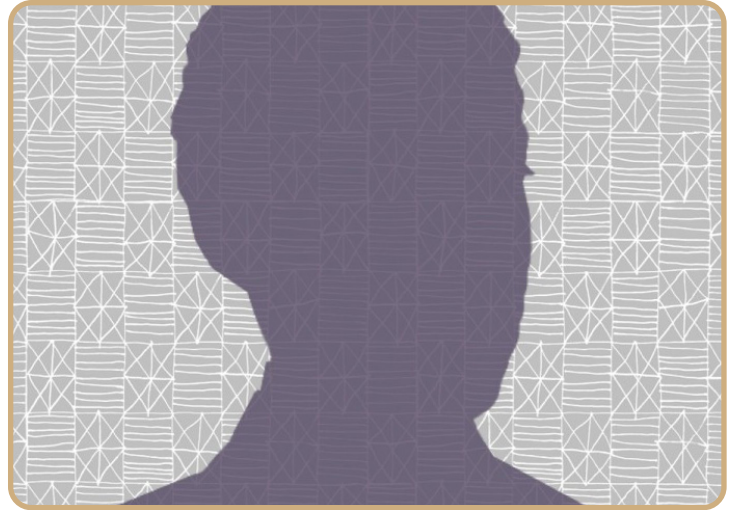
Simon

Author: Emily Libecap,
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Places: South Carolina; Natchez,
Mississippi; Nashville, and Clover Bottom,
Tennessee

Birth: circa 1780 **Death:** June 10, 1833

Professions: Jockey



Childhood and African Origins

Simon was born in West Africa. He was sold into enslavement in South Carolina sometime before 1808. Referred to as “Monkey” Simon, this was a common nickname for both African American and white athletes in the 19th century. Simon was only four and a half feet tall and had a severe hunchback. But this did not stop him from athletic achievement.

Career and Reputation Beginnings

Simon began racing in South Carolina. However, the first recorded mention of his name occurred in Natchez, Mississippi, in 1808. Later, Simon was brought to Tennessee, where he continued racing. By the time he arrived in Tennessee, Simon’s reputation was well-established. The mere sight of him was enough to make a rival trainer forfeit the match and pull his horse from the race.¹

Robert C. Foster, a lawyer in Nashville, enslaved Simon. He was often hired out to Colonel George Elliott, a wealthy Thoroughbred breeder. He was also hired out to other figures in the Tennessee racing world. No matter who Simon was riding for, he was dedicated to success. A contemporary stated that Simon’s only weakness was his obsession with winning.²

Rivalry with Andrew Jackson

Simon is most famous for being part of a four-year long rivalry with future president Andrew Jackson. The race that sparked this rivalry occurred in 1811. Simon, aboard Maria, raced against Jackson’s horse Decatur. Simon and Maria beat Decatur by such a distance that Decatur did not even finish the race. Simon and Maria continued racing and beat Jackson’s horses in four different races over the years. Jackson finally gave up in 1815.

Legacy

Simon raced with few defeats until he died in a cholera epidemic that swept Nashville in June of 1833.³

Source

Hotaling, Edward. *The Great Black Jockeys: The Lives and Times of the Men Who Dominated America's First National Sport*. Rocklin, Calif.: Forum, 1999.

Footnotes

¹Hotaling, *The Great Black Jockeys*, 45.

²Hotaling, 47.

³Hotaling, 51.