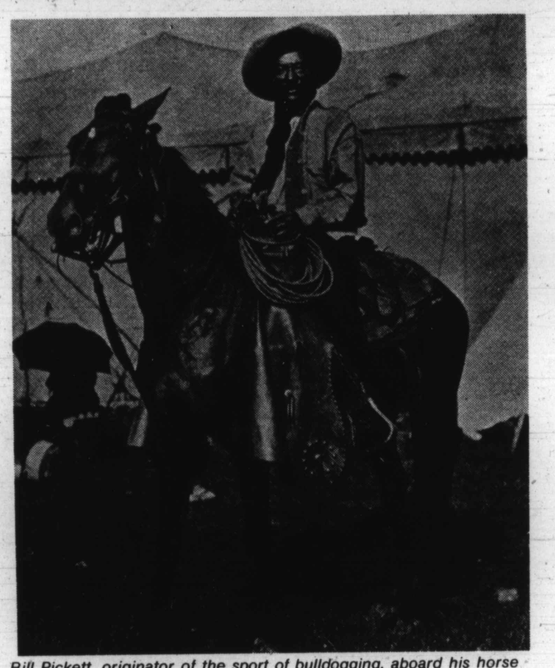
Bill Pickett, the offspring of a Choctaw Indian mother and black father, was acclaimed as one of the greatest cowboy performers of all-time. Shown here holding a lariat, Pickett was often assisted by Tom Mix during his bulldogging act. Later, Mix went on to become a famous cowboy movie star.



Bill Pickett, originator of the sport of bulldogging, aboard his horse Spradley. Spradley and Pickett were a top-notch rodeo attraction both at home and abroad. Visitors to Denver, Colorado, can visit the recently opened Black Western History Museum and learn much more about Black cowboys and the Black West.
(Photos Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Library)

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bulldogging act. And another Hollywood great who assisted Pickett at various times was humorist Will Rogers, who got his start in show business by working in rodeos.

Like Pickett, both Tom Mix and Will Rogers were employed by the 101 Ranch at this time. So was future Hollywood cowboy star Ken Maynard. In fact, from 1910 to 1917, being a star performer in the 101 Ranch show almost guaranteed a call from Hollywood. A number of western films were shot right on the 101 Ranch property.

But Hollywood never got around to calling Bill Pickett. And there can be but just one reason for this glaring oversight—Bill Pickett was a black man.

Called 'Greatest Cowboy'

Certainly no one can say that Bill Pickett lacked the credentials to qualify for a Hollywood call. Zack Miller, one of the three Miller brothers who owned the 101 Ranch, said of Pickett, "He was the greatest cowboy star who ever lived—bar none."

And considering the fact that Zack Miller had seen the likes of Tom Mix and Ken Maynard in action, this statement by him clearly indicates that he thought Bill Pickett was every inch a cowboy superstar. This superstar status, was also shown by the billing the 101 Wild West Show gave to Pickett.

When the show hit the road, Pickett was proudly billed as the World Champion Bulldogger.

As a touring attraction, Pickett's bulldogging act proved to be just as popular in New York's Madison Square Garden as it had been back on the 101 Ranch out in Oklahoma. And since the show also played in both Canada and Mexico, Pickett's title of World Champion Bulldogger had at least some degree of international validity to it, which is more than can be said about the World Series of baseball.

In 1908, while the 101 show was on its Mexican tour, the inevitable happened. A group of Mexico City sportsmen wondered how Pickett would fare against one of their brave Mexican fighting bulls. For five thousand dollars, Pickett's boss said he thought that Pickett would do just fine. So the tequila was poured and the bet was made and by the time the dust had settled in the Mexico City bullfight ring, Pickett's boss was five thousand dollars richer and Pickett was still the bulldogging champion of the world.

But Bill Pickett didn't have the bulldogging spotlight all to himself.

Fatally Kicked at 71

Pretty soon Hollywood stunt men and all kinds of daredevils had gotten into the act. And by the late 1920s, they were bulldogging steers from airplanes, from speeding automobiles, and from just about anything else that would move. But strangely enough, it was usually the bull and not the bulldogger who got the worst of it.

In 1931, at the dedication of an airport in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, Milt Hinkle, stunting under the name of the South American Kid, attempted to bulldog a steer from a low flying airplane and his shoulder hit the bull with such force that the impact broke the bull's neck. As usual, it was the bull who really got hurt and Hinkle got up and walked away with just a slight limp.

But no stunt man or competitor ever approached the skill and ease with which Bill Pickett bulldogged a steer. And coincidentally, it was during the height of the bulldogging high-jinks that death came to him. In 1932, at the age of 71, Pickett was kicked in the head by a horse and he died eleven days later of a fractured skull.

Another Side Of Curacao

By Arthur W. Murphy

Tourists can visit the Hilton Hotel on the island of Curacao and live in sumptuous splendor, sipping morning cordials full of sweet fruits and exotic flavors, swimming in a fanced-in protected pool, stroll along gas lit walkways protected from the evening rains by swaying palm trees pruned by full-time gardeners.

But there is an island beyond the confines of the tourist haven of Willemstad, capital of this finger island. There is an island of people, people who must live close to the ground on soil abused from years of overcultivation now barren, unable to produce anything but the thorniest of bushes, elephant trees and cacti.

Beyond Willemstad, beyond the smoke and slime of oil refineries, there lies a flat desolate island that aches of centuries of Dutch, Spanish and French colonial abuse.

The fumes of the refineries turn the dark blue-green evening skies into a fluid deep blood-like red. Oil spills have made many of the life giving lagoons into dead seas.

Tourists must leave the city to see a different rural life style

The calcium phosphate mines, essential for the production of enamel, procelain, and toothpaste, have raped the east coast of the island having leveled acres of land turning magnificent hills to piles of pebbles and dust. But this is progress and the industries of mining and refining have put money in many pockets. For this, urban dwellers are grateful.

A traveller must leave the city going northward to see a very different rural life style. Major paved arteries narrow into roughly half paved paths. There are no roads where there are no industries.

Centuries ago, the Spanish used this island as a huge cattle farm. Slave traders and soldiers of fortune were quite dependent on the island of Curacao for meats and other provisions. There are few cattle now. They have been replaced by goats and sheep tended by starving dogs and the children of slave ship cargoes.

Youth no longer talk about leaving the Island, but talk is change and independence

Outside of the cities beyond the sun-lit beaches are the farms that produce little. The fields that starve for more than the normal twenty inches of rain per year and there are children — distended stomachs, loosely clad and barefoot.

Those who can not eke out a meager existence on the land turn to the waters on rebuilt abandoned boats or on the edges of deserted piers. Cobblers make sandals from discarded tires and still others, mostly children, hustle the few rural tourists in broken English, "... take my picture for a guilder, mister."

Life in the colonies goes on. But there is a new current of discontent among the children of this former slave colony. Signs and posters reveal the words Black Power and many women have ceased to straighten their hair — an outward sign of an inward discontent. Many of the youth no longer talk about leaving the island — the talk is of change and independence.

A fire smoulders in this Dutch Colony of Curacao but the coals have yet to be fanned.

Beyond the haven of Willemstad is an island of people who must live close to the ground

GLORY VAN SCOTT
'Miss Truth'

POETIC TRIBUTE

Sojourner Truth

By John W. English

Multi-talented Glory Van Scott sings, dances and acts in the title role of "Miss Truth," a lively and emotional musical drama she composed and wrote.

Miss Van Scott created the show as a poetic tribute to Sojourner Truth, a former slave who led the anti-slavery and feminist movements in the 19th Century, when she was a student in the arts at Goddard College. She is currently performing the musical's dozen tunes with gospel-like theatricality and inspiring energy on a national tour prior to a New York opening.

"Most of my professional life, I've played sexy bombshell parts which is only one side of women," says the shapely former Chicagoan. "Miss Truth brings out the monumental aspect of great women."

Miss Van Scott's previous Broadway and Off-Broadway credits include such hits as "The Great White Hope," "Finian's Rainbow," and "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope." She has also toured Europe and the Middle East with productions.

As a dancer, she's performed with the American Ballet Theatre, the Katherine Dunham company and is currently with the Agnes DeMille Heritage Dance Theatre.

In addition to her active show business life, Miss Van Scott is pursuing her doctorate at Union Graduate School. Her academic work focuses on the training of young, multi-gifted children and she's conducting a series of workshops to learn as well as teach.

Another facet of her talent is children's books and Miss Van Scott has written "Baba and the Flea" and is winding up her second book.

"I feel I owe children something because we all have a debt. If we have health, brains and a good life, we have to pass on our gifts. Giving something is far better than receiving," Miss Van Scott concluded.