

By: Gonzales

H.R. No. 1066

R E S O L U T I O N

1           WHEREAS, William Pickett, a pioneering African American  
2 rodeo cowboy, endured the prejudices of his time to etch his name in  
3 the annals of rodeo history, and his life and legacy are indeed  
4 worthy of reflection and praise; and

5           WHEREAS, The son of former slaves Thomas Jefferson and Mary  
6 Virginia Elizabeth Pickett, Bill Pickett is believed to have been  
7 born on December 5, 1870, in the Jenks-Branch community north of  
8 Austin; as the second oldest of 13 children, he went to work on a  
9 ranch after acquiring a fifth-grade education; there, he was  
10 inspired by the instincts of herding dogs to invent "bulldogging,"  
11 a technique that involved wrestling a steer by the horns and  
12 subduing the animal with a bite to its upper lip; and

13           WHEREAS, Mr. Pickett practiced and perfected this method and  
14 was soon performing exhibitions of his skill while passing a hat  
15 around for donations; he and his brothers went on to open a  
16 horse-breaking business in Taylor, where he entered his first rodeo  
17 in 1888; while in Taylor, he served in the National Guard and was a  
18 deacon at the First Baptist Church on Robinson Street, and in 1890  
19 he married Maggie Turner; and

20           WHEREAS, Billed as the "Dusky Demon," Mr. Pickett became a  
21 star at rodeos and fairs throughout Texas and the West,  
22 demonstrating bulldogging and witnessing the rise of its popularity  
23 among his fellow showmen; he performed with the renowned 101 Ranch  
24 Wild West Show in Oklahoma for more than 25 years, a time that saw

1 him entertain the president of the United States and foreign  
2 dignitaries such as the king of England; during off-seasons, he  
3 competed against other rodeo cowboys in various shows, some of  
4 which required him to conceal his true heritage as an African  
5 American and instead be billed as an Indian in order to be accepted  
6 as a contestant; and

7       WHEREAS, When this legendary cowboy passed away on April 2,  
8 1932, at the age of 61, his death was announced on the radio by his  
9 friend, Will Rogers, who spoke warmly of him as a man who "never had  
10 an enemy"; in 1972, he became the first African American to be  
11 inducted into the National Rodeo Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, and  
12 in 1989, his career was immortalized in the ProRodeo Hall of Fame  
13 and Museum of the American Cowboy in Colorado Springs; a historical  
14 marker was placed in 1992 in Taylor, where his homestead remains  
15 standing today; and

16       WHEREAS, Through his daring and innovative feats, which live  
17 on to this day in the exhilarating practice of steer wrestling, Bill  
18 Pickett helped to shape the evolution of rodeo and blazed a trail of  
19 achievement for other cowboys to follow, and his remarkable story  
20 remains an enduring source of inspiration; now, therefore, be it

21       RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 84th Texas  
22 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the life of William Pickett and  
23 honor the unique and lasting contribution he made to the sport of  
24 rodeo.