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‘RIDE ME’ A RIVER
Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo

Words by
MARIA MUKARANDA

Forty years is an impressive amount of time, by any stretch of the imagination. It is long enough for a generation to be born, grow up and have children of its own. It’s long enough for a cultural movement to rise, change the way we dress, listen, speak and see ourselves and then become history. The world as it was four decades ago would be unrecognizable today. Still, some things endure.

For over 40 years, the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo has brought Black cowboys and cowgirls together across the United States, giving them a place to compete, then a place to build and then a place to carry forward a history that has been relegated to the marginalia of the histories of the American West. Named after Bill Pickett, the celebrated Black cowboy and rodeo performer whose name is an inextricable part of the history of the American West, the BPIR was founded in 1984 by Lu Vason—who saw an absence in the professional rodeo circuit and decided to do something about it. Belonging is something that can be difficult to imagine in the absence of evidence. Their history is one of riders who have climbed into the saddle, waited behind the gate patiently, felt the nerves all the same and then—they have ridden. Consistency of such caliber is not to be mistaken for stagnation because as rodeo itself has evolved, so have its riders. The people coming through its gates today are doing more than competing in a sport with a long history behind it. Many of them now, as young as three years old, are negotiating with what that history means today.

PARIS WILBURD
Age: 17
City: Cabot, Arkansas
Events: Ladies Breakaway / Ladies Steer Undercorating / Barrel Racing

Flowy Off-Shoulder Ruffled Long Dress and Skirt in Shiny Blue Iconic Organic Silk, Moschino Hat and Belt *Talent's Own*

A wise man once said that courage is the act of feeling fear in the face of an obstacle and proceeding nonetheless. Yet a wise woman also once said, "You never know what you're going to be confronted with." That wise woman goes by the name of Valeria Howard-Cunningham, whose four decades with the BPIR have taught her a thing or two about what awaits on the other side of the gate. That is why, once the gate opens, courage is only the beginning: what comes next demands instinct, adaptability and an ability to respond to whatever the arena throws your way. Every animal has its own temperament, every run its own rhythm, and every second asks something different of the person in the saddle.

We all know the Cowboy—or at least the tales we have been told about him. He is to be tough, to be solitary and to be fearless. He rides into danger without hesitation, only to emerge without showing too much of what it cost him. From the outside, on the other side of the gate, the self-acclaimed Greatest Show On Dirt looks like pure grit—and is: boots in the mud, bodies reckoning with huge beasts, crowds roaring as riders race against the clock or fight to stay mounted. But a little digging reveals a more complicated picture. Fear is not absent from the sport. It is all part of the calculation—and failure is, too.

Howard-Cunningham remembers one young cowgirl who was crying before a barrel race—the crowd had intimidated her.

She asked the girl whether she knew what she was doing.

"Yes ma'am, I'm barrel racing."

Could she do it?

"Yes, ma'am, I'm good at it."

Her advice was simple: ignore the stands. Look at the barrels.

The girl went out and completed the run flawlessly. The crowd had not changed, nor had the barrels. She had simply stopped allowing the audience to become the most important thing in the arena.

Rodeo is bigger than its riders, its beasts, and physical courage; much of it is a game of emotional control. A rider grows to know not only their limits, but how not to let them define them, too. That is why, impressive as their historical significance may be, reducing the riders to just this alone runs the risk of overlooking what happens once the gate opens. They must compete.

Howard-Cunningham remembers another such moment from a *Rodeo for Kidz Sake* event in Memphis, Tennessee. Thousands of children had come to watch when one little boy wandered towards the arena. Dressed in boots, jeans, a shirt and a cowboy hat, he stopped, put his hands on his hips and looked out at the cowboys and cowgirls.

"Oh my God, I can't believe this," he said. "There really are Black cowboys."

Howard-Cunningham was moved to tears.

For a child, seeing someone who looks like you doing something they had never imagined themselves doing can collapse the distance between fantasy and possibility. Suddenly, the arena is not somewhere that belongs to somebody else. It belongs to you, too.

Ask a cowboy or cowgirl how they came to ride, and the answer, it seems, rarely begins with the arena itself. It begins somewhere earlier: a childhood encounter, a horse, a parent, a mentor or the sight of someone who made the possibility of becoming a rider feel real.

BPIR's riders spend much of their lives traveling. Season after season, they return to the same community, carrying the highs and lows of competition with them. The road can be exhausting, but it also creates a particular kind of intimacy. These are people who understand the nerves before a ride, the disappointment of a bad run and the strange exhilaration of getting everything right. They are a group that compete against one another while also carrying one another.

Today sees a newer, mainstream iteration of the Cowboy, which can be seen everywhere from Pharrell Williams' Western fantasia for Louis Vuitton in Paris to Post Malone in Nashville and Beyoncé's record-breaking *Cowboy Carter* tour. The renewed fascination with Western culture can therefore be an opportunity. If people are looking at the cowboy again, perhaps they can also be encouraged to look more closely at the history behind the image.

So a rider's legacy may be a championship. It may be a young person they mentor. It may be the child who sees them ride and decides to learn. It might be a scholarship, a community program or simply the knowledge that they entered an arena that once seemed impossible to reach and competed there on their own terms. The BPIR Foundation now extends that philosophy through scholarships, youth development and community initiatives. The purpose of the organization therefore stretches beyond producing competitors.

It is producing possibility.

Perhaps that is the clearest way to understand what has changed in more than 40 years.



JAH'VON ARMSTEAD
Age: 20
City: Cedar Bluff, Mississippi
Event: Ranch Bronc Riding

Quilted Blouson in Nappa Leather, Straight Pants in Corduroy Velvet and Belt in Leather VERSACE
The Yves Socks in Black Cotton and Polyamide COMME SI
Shirt *Stylist's Own*
Hat and Necklace *Talent's Own*

Red Flannel Shirt and Midi Skirt in Navy Blue Leather MM6 MAISON MARGIELA
Braided Wide Standard Belt 1.5" in Black and Silver Vegetable-Tanned Leather MAXIMUM HENRY
Hat and Boots *Talent's Own*

Straight Pants in Corduroy Velvet and Belt in Leather VERSACE
T-shirt *Stylist's Own*

In conversation with
MARIA MUKARANDA

Valeria Howard-Cunningham

(CEO and President of The Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo)

There's a lot to be said for The Greatest Show on Dirt – otherwise known as the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo. For 42 years, the organisation has been bringing Black cowboys and cowgirls, music, history and culture together in arenas across the United States, creating a space where competition and community sit side by side. But the story of the BPIR is about far more than what happens once the gates open.

Now, as the Black cowboy has found a new visibility in music, fashion and popular culture, the BPIR finds itself at a particularly interesting juncture: what happens when something you have been doing for decades suddenly becomes part of the zeitgeist? For Valeria Howard-Cunningham, it's less a question of watching the moment unfold than being the one at the forefront shaping it.

The BPIR has expanded beyond the arena, bringing together rodeo, music, fashion, education and community in an organization that feels increasingly reflective of the breadth of contemporary Black Western culture. There is the sport, of course—the competition, the cowboys and cowgirls, the prizes and the pursuit of a championship—but there is also the history, the storytelling and the question of who gets to define what the West looks like.

MARIA MUKARANDA. What stood out about your work with the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo is your commitment to historical storytelling, not just the sport itself. How have you balanced top-tier athletic competition with the rodeo's role as an educational platform?

VALERIA HOWARD-CUNNINGHAM. So the way I would answer that is we have to go back to the beginning and look at why the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo was created. My deceased husband, Lu Vason, was the founder of the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo. He went to a rodeo in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and while he was there, he realized he didn't see anybody who looked like him. That intrigued him—and caused him to do a lot of research to find out why that was. In his research, he found out that Black cowboys existed back in the beginning of time. One in four cowboys in the development of the West was Black. But if you looked at television, you never saw a Black cowboy. If you looked at movies, you never saw a Black cowboy—and they did not talk about it in the history books. So he felt—well, you know what? There are thousands of Black cowboys and cowgirls across the United States. We need to start telling that story. So he felt a way to do that was to create an African American rodeo association, which is what he did by creating the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo.

His vision was that we could educate communities about the history of Black cowboys and cowgirls while entertaining them, introducing them to rodeo and allowing them to perform on platforms that they were never given before. So that's how it all started. You know, it's like planting a little seed. It started very small, but it has grown into a national and international phenomenon now because people have been enlightened; they have learned that one in four cowboys in the early development of the West was Black. As a result of that, things have just continued to grow. So I kind of say, we brought history to the forefront, meaning we brought it to everybody's attention. Then we started creating new history so people could see that Black cowboys and cowgirls do exist and that they are real.

M.M. When you took the helm after Vason passed away, how did you navigate stepping into that leadership role, particularly as a Black woman in a field where you had already seen the obstacles he faced?

V.H.C. Well, if I am to be honest with you, it was not something that I just automatically assumed. What I mean by that is after he passed away, the reality hit. You know, if the legacy is going to continue, I'm going to have to be the one to do that, right? Being a female and being a Black female, I must admit, I was very scared because I had seen the obstacles that Lu Vason had gone through as a Black man. So I knew for me it wasn't going to be any easier—and probably much more difficult. But the ladies, the cowgirls that were involved in the rodeo, gave me so much encouragement because Bill Pickett meant so much to them. They didn't want to see it go away. So they gave me a lot of encouragement, saying to me, " We're behind you. We have your back. We will help you with anything." Then I received phone calls, letters and emails from people all across the United States sharing their personal stories about how they had experienced the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo, how they introduced it to their children and surrounded their children with the event.

They wanted their children to be able to do that same thing with their grandchildren. You began to see and feel that this meant so much to the community that they felt they had something that they could claim as their own, and they wanted it to continue for generations to come. I would be at the rodeos, and people would come up to me and share their personal stories. I would see people coming into the rodeo in their wheelchairs, their walkers and their crutches. You know, it didn't matter—whatever their age, their disabilities or whatever their physical conditions were, they came to the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo. Because it meant that much to them. When I saw that, it convinced me that I couldn't just let this go. I had to move it forward no matter the struggle.



Lucas Overshirt in Cognac Vachetta Leather and Double-face Recycled Cashmere GABRIELA HEARST
Pants and Belt *Talent's Own*

Flowy Off-Shoulder Ruffled Long Dress and Skirt in Shiny Blue Iconic Organic Silk Mousseline CHLOÉ
Belt *Talent's Own*

Austin Top in Optic White ALTUZARRA
Hat *Talent's Own*

MEIKI JAKEL AVANT
Age: 18
City: Calhoun City, Mississippi
Event: Ranch Bronc Riding

Carson Jacket and *Tassel* Shoes in Brown Suede BODE
Garl Tank top in Black Organic Cotton and Elastane HERMEN BIARRITZ
501® Original Men's Jeans in Dark Stonewash Denim LEVI'S
Very Slim Oval Belt in Vegetable-Tanned Leather, Dark Brown and Brass MAXIMUM HENRY
The Yves Socks in white, Cotton and Polyamide COMME SI
Hat *Talent's Own*

M.M. What were your immediate priorities when taking over? Were there things to do differently from the way they had been done before?

V.H.C. Well, it was a combination of all of that. You know, one, I had to learn a lot. While I had been in the background, I was operating things from more of a financial standpoint, on the back end. So there were a lot of things I didn't know—such as rodeo terminology and how certain things work. So I had to educate myself. You know, you've heard the saying before about trying to repair an airplane while it's flying. That's kind of how I felt. I was flying this airplane, but learning at the same time how to fly it. It was an incredible experience because while I was learning, it allowed me to be creative and decide how we could approach things differently and how we could set things up. You know, when I took over, all the paperwork and everything was still pretty much paper, maybe Excel spreadsheets and stuff. We took the rodeo into a new generation where all the entries are now done with a rodeo system called NextGen, and this was something that our cowboys and cowgirls were not familiar with. People were saying, "That's not going to work in Black rodeo."

I was saying, "Yes, it can work," and now it works beautifully. It has been working for years. So that is just an example of the mindset we had. That tells you that no matter what it is that you're doing, you can do it, and you can learn at the same time and become a professional in it. That's what I had to do with a lot of support. I would ask a lot of dumb questions. "What are they doing? What does that mean?" Because I didn't know. But if you are afraid to ask, you will never learn, correct? So it was just an overall experience to learn, create at the same time and find new things and new ways to take the organization forward.

If I could just share a little story—in certain cities, we do what is called *Rodeo for Kidz Sake*. It's an abbreviated rodeo that we do on Friday mornings for the schools- the elementary and middle schools- because the reality is that a lot of the kids in the community never leave their communities.

They never go outside of their immediate community. They don't have those experiences. So we created this, and we were doing a rodeo in Memphis, Tennessee: *Rodeo for Kidz Sake*. All these kids were coming in—thousands of kids—and I saw this one little boy who had kind of ventured off from his classroom and got closer and closer to the arena. I was just kind of walking behind him and watching. He got to the arena. He was dressed so cute—boots, jeans, shirt, little hat–the cutest little cowboy. He stopped in his tracks, put his little hands on his hips, and he said, "Oh my God, I can't believe this. There really are Black cowboys." I stood there, and tears were just coming down my face because that validated that what we were doing needed to be done so people knew the history, learned the history and also got to see our Black cowboys and cowgirls compete as they've never competed before. All of this was teaching me that we have an obligation: that whatever we do, we have to be the best at doing it, and that we need to make sure we are creating an opportunity for the cowboys and cowgirls to excel.

That's the reason why we have an association. The cowboys and cowgirls must be members of our association because we have finals, like a national championship, at the end of the season. So we did our last rodeo this past weekend in Texas for 2026. That's part of this tour. We're headed to Upper Marlboro, Maryland, to do our national finals. The cowboys and cowgirls compete all year, hoping that they are going to be one of the top 10 to make it to the finals. There are extremely great prizes, lots of money for them to win and a chance for them to try to become the 2026 event champion and all-around cowboy and cowgirl. So we created this engine that allows them to be the best at what they do so that they can receive the title.

M.M. Did you do much riding yourself when younger, or did the relationship with rodeo really begin upon meeting Vason?

V.H.C. Before I even knew what a rodeo was, I lived in Fort Worth, Texas, and a friend used to drag me along to ride horses. I had never been on a horse before, but we did it on the weekend in Mineral Wells, Texas—streams, flowers, just a leisurely thing. I did that for a while, but no, I never rode competitively.

When I met Lu, he told me he was getting ready to do his first rodeo, and I sat there acting like I knew what he was talking about. I had to go back, look up what a rodeo was and study it to understand. Now I've come full circle, producing what we call the Greatest Show on Dirt. You never know what you're going to be confronted with. It's okay to have fear, but you must have faith that you can overcome it. Here we are celebrating 42 years of history.

M.M. Vason has previously been described as the visionary, and yourself as more of the businesswoman. Is there a sense of becoming more of a visionary over time, or is it now a balance of both roles?

V.H.C. Absolutely, you have to. As you receive more recognition in the rodeo world, people reach out about different ideas, and you have to keep an open mind. Last year, the clothing brand Spyder reached out and said, "We want to do a rodeo around fashion." If you had a closed mind, you would say no, but we talked and created the Sweet Tooth Rodeo in Houston. Spyder brought fashion and rodeo together; the cowboys and cowgirls modeled custom outfits in the arena before competing. It was so much fun.

In 2021, the PBR approached us about doing a rodeo in Las Vegas called the Showdown in Vegas. We brought our top Black cowboys and cowgirls to Vegas, and it became the first African American rodeo televised on national TV. It aired on Juneteenth—the same year President Biden made Juneteenth a national holiday. Dubai has also reached out to us about bringing the Bill Pickett Rodeo to their country, and we are researching that now. You have to be open to creating new visions. Lu was a true visionary. He would stay up talking, reading, studying and creating new ideas. He started writing his life story about transitioning from the music industry into rodeo, called "Under the Western Skies: *Lu Vason: From Dreamer to Visionary to Pioneer*." It gives a lot of insight into his vision for Black cowboys and cowgirls.

M.M. Do you think of rodeo primarily as a sport, a cultural tradition, a form of storytelling or a combination of them all?

V.H.C. It's a combination of them all. It is a professional sport, and we hold it to the highest level so our cowboys and cowgirls are recognized as the elite competitors they are. Next month, we will be crowning our 2026 champions.

While the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo doesn't get the millions of dollars in corporate backing that events like the PRCA or NFR receive, we are the cream of the crop in African American rodeo. Over the years, when other Black rodeos cropped up, I was initially upset, thinking everyone was trying to copy us. But someone reminded me of a quote from LeBron James: "When you are first, nobody can take that away from you."

I changed my mindset and began supporting other people who wanted to put on Black rodeos. The Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo can't be everywhere, so the more people who learn about Black cowboys and cowgirls, the more we accomplish the original mission Lu created.

M.M. Black cowboy and Western culture have increasingly entered the mainstream through music, fashion and social media, particularly through artists like Beyoncé and Lil Nas X. Do you feel that the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo has contributed to that shift—and have you seen the organization itself benefit from this renewed interest?

V.H.C. Absolutely. A couple of years ago, we partnered with Beyoncé's nonprofit foundation to identify local Western agricultural projects in the cities where we hosted rodeos. When she released "*Cowboy Carter*," we were thrilled because it added momentum to what we were building. Everyone got on board with Western culture, which enhanced what we were already doing.

It's a combination of things coming together: 42 years of the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo, the success of "*Cowboy Carter*," and songs like "Boots on the Ground." It's all working in the spirit of creating our own culture, telling our own stories and making our rodeo uniquely ours.

When Lu first started, he insisted on playing Black music and featuring Black country singers at the rodeo, which people were very critical of back then. Now, when you come to a Bill Pickett rodeo, it's a celebration of our culture—our music, our competitors and our heritage. That's why we call ourselves the greatest show on dirt.

M.M. Are there any specific films, television shows or songs that you feel significantly contributed to this movement?

Paris is wearing
Puff Sleeve Trucker Jacket in Cotton and Nolita, and Long Sleeve Bow Shirt in Sky Blue Cotton Poplin 7 FOR ALL MANKIND
501® Original Women's Jeans in Medium Wash LEVI'S
Boots *Talent's Own*

Jah'Von is wearing
Quilted Blouson in Nappa Leather, Straight Pants in Corduroy Velvet and Belt in Leather VERSACE
Shirt *Stylist's Own*
Hat and Necklace *Talent's Own*

Rodeo Bodeo Tee, *Barathea* Tuxedo Pants, Cummerbund and Patent Opera Pumps BODE
Hat and Necklace *Talent's Own*

Quilted Blouson in Nappa Leather VERSACE
T-shirt *Stylist's Own*
Hat and Earrings *Talent's Own*

Asymmetrical Top in Optic White and *Calloway* Skirt in Black ALTUZARRA
Hat *Talent's Own*
Boots *Stylist's Own*

V.H.C. A recording artist named Aries Howard Johnson learned to rodeo with us and wrote the official "Bill Pickett Rodeo Song." We play it before and after every rodeo; it has become a staple for us.

Additionally, my National Marketing Director, Margot Wade-Ledrew, had a concept for over 20 years called the Soul Country Music Star competition. Three years ago, she brought it up again, and I told her, "Stop talking about it and make it happen." We partnered to integrate it into our rodeo tour.

In almost every city we visit, we host the Soul Country Music Star talent competition. Local winners are selected by professional judges to compete at the Soul Country Music Festival in Hollywood each autumn. We call the combined experience the Soul Country Rodeo Weekend.

It opens doors for cowboys and cowgirls on the rodeo side and musical artists on the performance side. Just three weeks ago in Atlanta, the competition winner wrote a new song about the Bill Pickett Rodeo that truly captured its heart. It's all about pulling these concepts together to create a full cultural event for our community.

M.M. As Black Western culture becomes more visible in fashion, film and music, how closely do you think those portrayals reflect the lived experience of the people within the culture? Are there things you feel the mainstream still gets wrong or misses?

V.H.C. I don't think they get it wrong. Everybody is different, and new ideas come from people experimenting. I love that people are exploring Western music, fashion and culture because it shows how much others want to be part of it. However, you don't have to embrace everything. For instance, I don't embrace overly revealing fashion because that doesn't teach our kids something to be proud of. A business, like a person, gets to choose what standards it stands for.

We've been approached numerous times about doing a movie script around the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo. We explored it, but producers wanted to add violence, fighting, and cursing. I chose not to participate because that would be disrespectful to the Black cowboys and cowgirls who pride themselves on who they are. All money isn't good money. Everything should be done with pride and integrity; if you lose that, you have nothing. Eventually, we will do a film or series, but it will complement and uplift our story.

M.M. As a woman leading the organization, do you recognize yourself in the young women coming through today? Do you think their experiences present a different set of challenges from those faced by your generation?

V.H.C. When I see the younger generation coming up, I make it a point to recognize them, give them exposure and build their self-confidence.

I remember one young cowgirl sitting on her horse crying before barrel racing because the crowd intimidated her. I asked her, "Do you know what you're doing?"

She said, "Yes, ma'am, I'm barrel racing."

I asked, "Can you do it?"

She said, "Yes, ma'am, I'm good at it."

I told her to ignore the stands and focus strictly on the barrels. She went out, executed it flawlessly and came back beaming with confidence. Moments like that make everything worthwhile. We even have three-year-old kids riding in our grand entry. Seeing young children gain the confidence to wave to thousands of people from atop a horse builds hope, inspiration and courage.

M.M. From the outside, rodeo can sometimes appear quite male-dominated, with an emphasis on machismo, stoicism and physical toughness. Does that reflect your experience of the rodeo community, or has your perspective changed since first becoming involved?

V.H.C. When I first started, I felt that way, but I don't anymore. We have three dedicated women's events—ladies barrel racing, ladies steer decorating, and ladies breakaway—and women work on our arena teams. My top administrative rodeo staff is majority women. My late husband Luu always surrounded himself with women because he said women pay much more attention to detail, and he was right. Some men initially assumed I didn't know what I was doing because I'm a woman, but that happens everywhere in life. It comes down to how you approach things and what you accept. I choose to build a balanced team of men and women.

Kids find out about us when parents bring them to rodeos, and both boys and girls express the desire to learn how to ride, rope or wrestle steers. We then connect them with mentors to support their development.

M.M. How do young people typically find their way to the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo? Do you see equal interest from young boys and girls wanting to get involved?

V.H.C. Absolutely. As I said before, when their parents bring them to the rodeo and they see what's going on, it doesn't matter whether they're girls or boys. Their parents say, "Oh, my son wants to learn how to ride," or "My daughter wants to learn how to ride."" My son wants to be a calf roper or steer wrestler," you know. And so that says we're making an impression, right? We connect them to the right people who can help with their development.

M.M. What is the one piece of advice you would give to someone, young or old, who wants to start in rodeo?

V.H.C. Have a passion, pride and integrity for what you do, and surround yourself with knowledgeable people who can guide you. Life is a continuous learning experience—I don't know everything today, and I won't tomorrow. Stay in a learning mode, listen and ensure you operate at the highest level of professionalism and integrity.

M.M. As the BPIR moves beyond its 40-year legacy, what future chapters are you most excited to write?

V.H.C. I'm evaluating succession planning and asking what the rodeo should look like for the next generation. After a long time, formats can become dated, so you need fresh approaches. Having led this for so long, I'm actively exploring how to pass the reins down and whether our operational model needs to evolve to match modern shifts.

M.M. The theme of this issue is emotional turmoil—the moments, memories and experiences that shape who we become. Looking back on your life, what moments have shaped you most profoundly, and how have challenges influenced your journey with the BPIR?

V.H.C. Everybody has a story filled with high points and struggles. You are supposed to learn from every experience. I am a 39-year-old breast cancer survivor. When I was diagnosed, I wasn't angry; I asked myself what I was meant to learn from the journey.

In 2015, right after Luu passed away, I was diagnosed with a rare blood disease. At first, I asked, "Why me?" But surviving it taught me stamina, resilience and faith.

Running a rodeo requires a strong backbone because people criticize you from every angle. I tell my staff: "Don't take it personally, and if you bring a problem, bring a solution with it."

M.M. After everything you've experienced, both in life and throughout your years with the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo, is there a part of yourself that has remained unchanged?

V.H.C. Who I am as a person. My parents established a strong foundation centered on kindness and gratitude. My mother always taught me to give back whenever people give to you—whether through a hug, a thank you or simple appreciation.

The community, sponsors, cowboys and cowgirls built the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo, and we owe our existence to them. Kindness and holding onto your core values are essential. If you start compromising who you are, you disappear.

We run the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo Foundation. In every city we visit, we award college scholarships to graduating high school students. We also focus on community health awareness—partnering with organizations to share information on colon cancer screening, heart health, prostate care, hypertension and mental health awareness. We host youth workshops covering emotional intelligence and agricultural career pathways. Educating and giving back to our communities validates that everything we do has lasting purpose.



Special thanks to BILL PICKETT INVITATIONAL RODEO, MICHELLE JOHNSON and MARGO LADREW