

of the Anglo American West. Free blacks joined the '49'ers for the usual reasons, but there were slaves in the mining camps too.

In goldrush California, Archie Lee, an 18 year-old slave brought from Mississippi to work the mines, was liberated by the free black community of San Francisco who hid him in a black-owned hotel. "We are a liberty-loving people," they announced to the the city, "and we will leave no means untried to accomplish his freedom."

After emancipation, the tide of blacks heading west increased, and with it new struggles. After a racist cowboy shot a black soldier in cold blood, his fellow 10th cavalry riders--Buffalo Soldiers as the Indians called them--fought a shootout with the cowboy and his partners in a San Angelo, Texas saloon. Famed western artist Frederic Remington captured the incident on canvas.

In other parts of Texas, however, thousands of African Americans, over 25 percent of the state's cowboys, worked for equal pay--though rarely in managerial positions--in integrated range and trail crews. The rodeo sport of bull-dogging was invented by black cowboy Bill Pickett, mentor to Tom Mix and Will Rogers.

Into the lawless vacuum of the old West rode less reputable characters like black cattle rustler Isom Dart, gunslinger Cherokee Bill and conman Ben Hodges. When the town safe in Dodge City overturned and valuable records could not be recovered, conman Hodges saw his opportunity. Posing as a Mexican 'grandee', he sold cattle and land he didn't own to unwary greenhorns.

There are literally thousands of these little-known stories, many of them chronicled in word and image. **RED, WHITE, AND BLACK**, however, is more than a random collection of colorful anecdotes about the black West. It accomplishes what the historical documentary is supposed to do. It challenges established myths, adding a new perspective on a familiar story.

Yet, as informal surveys of current black and white high school and college students reveal, an important part of that story has been forgotten. For the closing of the frontier in the late 19th century corresponded with a period that W.E.B. DuBois has called the 'nadir' of black life in America. Jim Crow and lynch law ruled the nation and they spread westward with the arrival of white families, white women, and white rule.

As for the myth of the old West, it was reserved for whites only. For even as the frontier was being settled, it was being sold as entertainment to white audiences back East. While black cowboys were still riding the range and black farmers still pioneering the prairies, fiction writers and later Hollywood ignored and even suppressed their stories. Like the popular lithographs of black explorer Jim Beckwourth in 19th century magazines, a 1951 Hollywood bio-picture depicted him as white.

The times, however, are changing. The myths of the old West are being challenged and Hollywood is releasing its first crop of black westerns. As a documentary, **RED, WHITE, AND BLACK** provides the documentation, analysis, and historical context that Hollywood films are not intended to do.