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Review of *Black Gun, Silver Star: The Life and Legend of Frontier Marshal Bass Reeves*. By Art T. Burton

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Black Gun, Silver Star: The Life and Legend of Frontier Marshal Bass Reeves. By Art T. Burton. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. xix + 346 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

Art T. Burton's study of African American lawman Bass Reeves contributes to the growing body of work on the black experience in the West. Burton does a fine job of sorting through the fact and fiction surrounding the marshal's career. Although an engaging character, a full-length study of the marshal did not exist until now. Burton's *Black Gun, Silver Star* provides insight into the place of race in the Southern Plains in the late 1800s. Burton argues that the significant number of black federal law enforcement agents in Indian Territory "was truly unusual in American history."

Reeves's "accomplishments are all the more meaningful" when examined in the racist context of his lifetime. He escaped bondage in Texas and took refuge among Native Americans in

Indian Territory while a teenager. Although illiterate, his ability to speak Muskogee afforded him a skill few white federal law enforcement agents possessed. Additionally, "many Indians didn't trust white lawmen." At a time when Jim Crow was evolving in the South, he became a respected and feared gunman throughout the Great Plains and Southwest. His use of disguises, ploys, and trickery in apprehending felons for crimes ranging from illegal distribution of alcohol to murder exemplified his cunning. Reeves was a superb detective, captured perpetrators of all races, and collected bounties which made this a lucrative profession for a former slave.

Reeves worked well with white lawmen and other representatives of the court and earned the admiration of all races. Black and white colleagues often asked him to join their posses. Still, Reeves encountered instances of disrespect from civilians and criminals and, on occasion, had to defend himself against charges of abuse of power and murder. Burton concludes that "there is no evidence that . . . [Reeves] deferred to anyone on the basis of status, wealth, ethnicity, or religion."

Burton's volume is mostly a collection of trial records, newspaper articles, interviews, eyewitness accounts, and folklore describing Reeves's exploits and experiences. It is not a standard biography; rather, the primary sources are grouped by categories with headings. Burton's asides, explanations, and interpretations provide insight into events and substantiate that Reeves was talented and successful in his chosen career. The study also provides information on Reeves's personal life, such as his marriages and family, and the folklore describing his physical strength, good nature, love of animals, and marksmanship. The use of primary sources and Burton's analysis help to make Reeves's story more fact than fiction. It also gives us more insight into the intersection of race and law enforcement on the frontier.

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