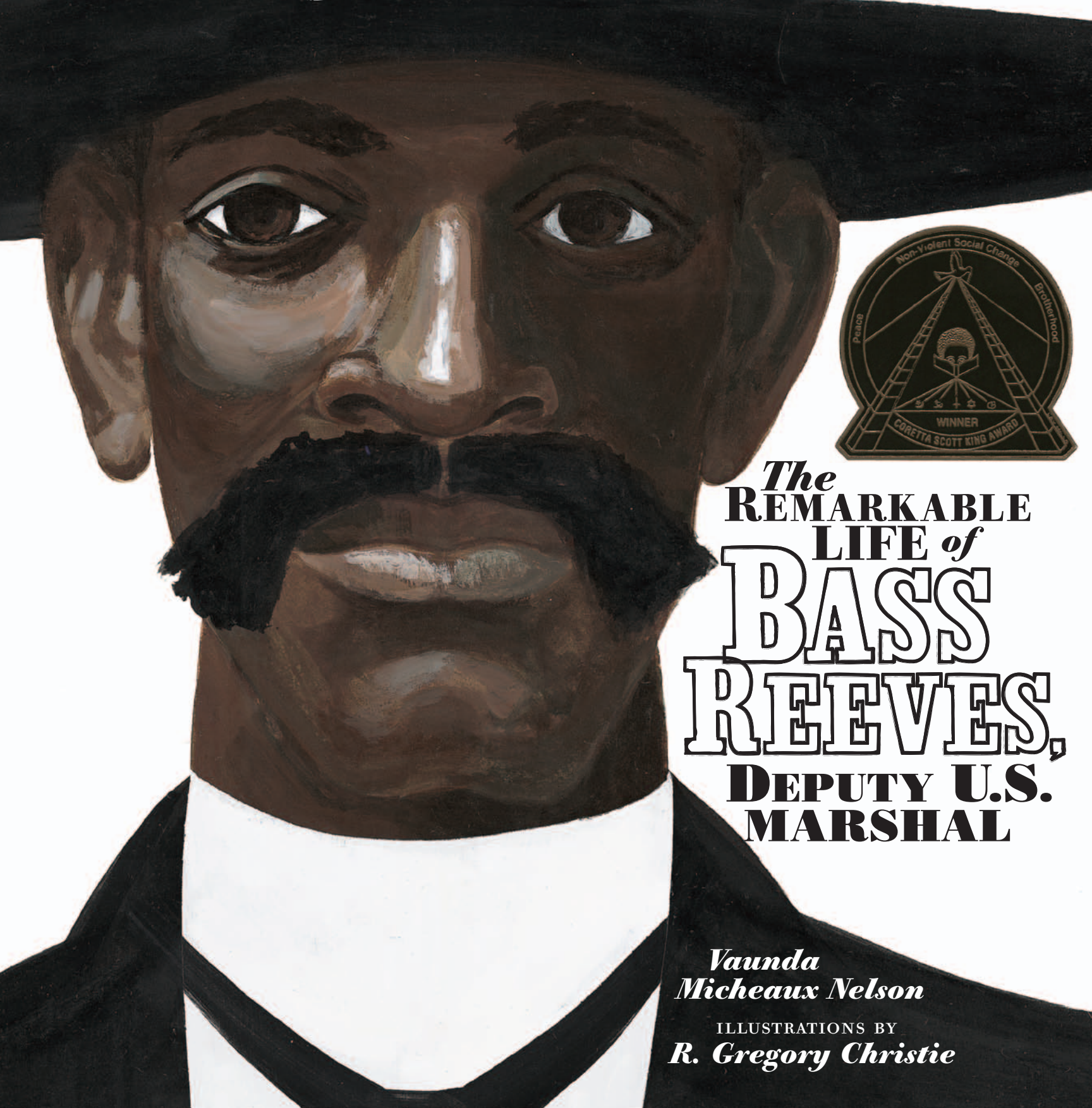


# BAD NEWS *for* OUTLAWS



*The*  
**REMARKABLE**  
*LIFE of*  
**BASS**  
**REEVES,**  
**DEPUTY U.S.**  
**MARSHAL**

*Vaunda*  
*Micheaux Nelson*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
*R. Gregory Christie*



*I'm much obliged to historian Art T. Burton for sharing his knowledge and for his fierce commitment to giving Bass Reeves the recognition he so deserves. To my editors, Shannon Barefield and Mary Rodgers; my agent, Tracey Adams; and to pals Kris Sporcic, Stephanie Farrow, Lucy Hampson, Katherine Hauth, Uma Krishnaswami, Jeanne W. Peterson, Lori Snyder, Marilyn Schroeder, and Stephanie Zaslav, I say thank you kindly. Most of all, I'm beholden to my husband, Drew, with whom I'll go to the end of the trail.*

—V.M.N.

Text copyright © 2009 by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson  
Illustrations copyright © 2009 by R. Gregory Christie

All rights reserved. International copyright secured. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of Lerner Publishing Group, Inc., except for the inclusion of brief quotations in an acknowledged review.

Carolrhoda Books  
A division of Lerner Publishing Group, Inc.  
241 First Avenue North  
Minneapolis, MN 55401 USA

For reading levels and more information, look up this title at [www.lernerbooks.com](http://www.lernerbooks.com).

The images in this book are used with the permission of: © iStockphoto.com/Selahattin Bayram (jacket flaps and interior background); Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries, p. 35; Courtesy Fort Smith National Historic Site, p. 38 (top); © SuperStock, Inc./SuperStock, p. 38 (bottom).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nelson, Vaunda Micheaux.

Bad news for outlaws : the remarkable life of Bass Reeves, deputy U.S. marshal / by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson ; illustrations by R. Gregory Christie.

p. cm.

ISBN: 978-0-8225-6764-6 (lib. bdg. : alk. paper)

ISBN: 978-0-7613-5712-4 (eBook)

1. Reeves, Bass—Juvenile literature. 2. United States marshals—Indian Territory—Biography—Juvenile literature. 3. United States marshals—Oklahoma—Biography—Juvenile literature. 4. African Americans—Oklahoma—Biography—Juvenile literature. 5. Freedmen—Oklahoma—Biography—Juvenile literature. 6. Frontier and pioneer life—Oklahoma—Juvenile literature. 7. Outlaws—Indian Territory—History—Juvenile literature. 8. Outlaws—Oklahoma—History—Juvenile literature. 9. Indian Territory—Biography—Juvenile literature. 10. Oklahoma—Biography—Juvenile literature. I. Christie, R. Gregory. II. Title. F697.R44N45 2008 363.28'2092—dc22 [B]

Manufactured in the United States of America  
9 – PC – 7/1/14

**Acknowledgments for quoted material:** p. 7, D. C. Gideon, *Indian Territory* (New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1901), 117–118; p. 14, Richard D. Fronterhouse, “Bass Reeves: The Forgotten Lawman,” Western History Collections (seminar paper, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1960), 2; pp. 18, 34, Art T. Burton, *Black, Red and Deadly: Black and Indian Gunfighters on the Indian Territory, 1870–1907* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), 156, 216, 179; p. 38, Time-Life Books, *Gunfighters of the Old West* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1974), 149.



# WESTERN WORDS

**chuck wagon:** a wagon carrying food and supplies for cooking meals on the trail

**Colts:** firearms

**desperado:** a desperate and reckless outlaw

**didn't cotton to:** didn't like

**dry-gulch:** to lie in wait and attack someone by surprise

**forked:** straddled

**holed up:** hiding out

**lynching:** the crime of killing someone, often by hanging, without the approval of the law. A group of people that commits a lynching is called a lynch mob.

**on the dodge (also called on the lam):** moving from place to place to avoid capture by peace officers

**peace officer:** a marshal, sheriff, police officer, or other person whose job is to protect people and make sure that laws are followed

**pluck:** spirit or courage

**posse:** a group of people appointed by a sheriff or marshal to help with law enforcement, such as capturing outlaws

**put down stakes:** to claim a piece of land and make a home there

**right as rain:** honest and true

**running muddy:** going badly

**shooting irons:** firearms

**sorrel:** a light reddish brown horse, often with a light-colored mane and tail

**spread:** a ranch, or farm

**square shooter:** a fair and honest person

**squatters:** people who settle on land without a legal right

**tumbleweed wagon:** wagons for transporting prisoners. Tumbleweeds are dried weeds that tumble across the prairie as the wind blows. People thought that a tumbleweed wagon seemed to wander across the prairie in one direction and then another, like a tumbleweed.

**vittles:** food

**warrant:** a written document issued by a court directing an officer of the law to arrest someone or to search or seize someone's property



## TIMELINE

### JULY 1838

Bass Reeves is born into slavery in Arkansas but grows up in Texas.

### EARLY 1860s

During the Civil War, Bass escapes to Indian Territory.

### APRIL 1865

The Civil War ends. Slavery is outlawed. Bass becomes a free man.

### MAY 1875

Judge Isaac C. Parker hires Bass as a deputy U.S. marshal.

### JUNE 1884

Bass kills Jim Webb in the line of duty.

### JANUARY 1886

Belle Starr surrenders after Bass gets her warrant.

### APRIL 1889

The Indian Territory is opened to white settlement.

### NOVEMBER 1896

Judge Parker dies in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

### JUNE 1902

Bass arrests his son Benjamin.

### NOVEMBER 1907

Oklahoma earns statehood. Bass's career as deputy U.S. marshal ends. He accepts a job on the Muskogee police force.

### JANUARY 1910

Bass dies of Bright's disease.

### MARCH 1992

Bass Reeves is inducted into the Hall of Great Westerners of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

## FURTHER READING AND WEBSITES

Fort Smith National Historic Site

<http://www.nps.gov/fosm/index.htm>

Located in Fort Smith, Arkansas, near the Oklahoma border, this park maintains the courthouse and other buildings from the time of Judge Parker. Starting in 2011, the park will host the U.S. Marshals Museum.

Kent, Deborah. *The Trail of Tears*. Danbury, CT: Children's Press, 2007. This book describes the forced march of Native Americans into Indian Territory.

Markel, Rita J. *Your Travel Guide to America's Old West*. Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2004. This book gives readers an idea of what to eat, what to wear, and what life was like in the American West.

Oklahoma Historical Society

<http://www.okhistory.org/kids/index.htm>

The kids section of this website has information, games, and photos about Oklahoma's history.

Paulsen, Gary. *The Legend of Bass Reeves*.

New York: Laurel-Leaf, 2008. This book contains an imagined tale of Bass Reeves's boyhood and a fictionalized account of his later life.

Underwood, Deborah. *Nat Love*.

Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 2008. This story of Nat Love, an African American cowboy, is based largely on his autobiography.

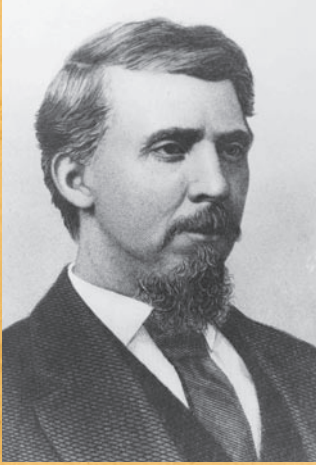
U.S. Marshal Service

<http://www.usmarshals.gov/usmsforkids/index.html>

This site gives an overview of the long history of U.S. marshals.



## MORE ABOUT JUDGE ISAAC C. PARKER



During his twenty-one years at the federal court at Fort Smith, Judge Isaac C. Parker tried 13,490 cases and sent 79 lawbreakers to the gallows to be hanged. Though feared by many, Judge Parker was a just man who opposed the death penalty. But he believed in strict obedience to the law—and the law said that some crimes had to be punished with death. Judge Parker told prisoners, “I do not desire to hang you men. It is the law.” While Indians generally resented white people, they saw the judge as their friend and protector. In 1896 Congress closed Judge Parker’s court at Fort Smith. Six weeks later, he died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-eight.

## MORE ABOUT INDIAN TERRITORY

Indian Territory became home to Native Americans who, in the 1830s, were forcibly moved there by the U.S. government. The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole came to be known as the Five Civilized Tribes because they adopted white ways. For some this included schools, housing, clothing, and even keeping black slaves.



Not all blacks in Indian Territory were slaves. And, in general, the Indians treated their slaves more kindly than whites did, sometimes like family members. Indians and blacks married and had children. Still, the slaves were not free.

After the Civil War, some Indians gave land to their former slaves. Many of these new landowners, along with other blacks who had migrated there, formed their own communities. By 1870 there were five black towns in Indian Territory with more to come. Although whites were not supposed to settle there, many moved into the territory illegally.

Before Judge Parker arrived, tribal police and a few deputy U.S. marshals enforced the law. But Indian police had no power to deal with lawbreakers who were not Indian. And there weren’t nearly enough marshals to control the huge area. The scarcity of peace officers attracted outlaws, gamblers, whiskey peddlers, swindlers, and squatters. Because government officials secretly wanted whites to settle Indian Territory, they didn’t make the squatters leave. Instead, they sent Judge Parker and his deputy U.S. marshals to make the area safe.



## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

While information about Bass Reeves is considerable, some details of his life were difficult to verify. His date of birth and the story surrounding his escape from slavery are examples. In these cases, I used the most reliable material that current scholarship has uncovered. The facts of Bass's life, including all dialogue, are supported by documented sources.

### *Selected Bibliography*

#### BOOKS

Brady, Paul L. *The Black Badge: Deputy United States Marshal Bass Reeves from Slave to Heroic Lawman*. Los Angeles: Milligan Books, 2005.

Burton, Art T. *Black, Red and Deadly: Black and Indian Gunfighters on the Indian Territory, 1870–1907*. Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991.

———. *Black Gun, Silver Star: The Life and Legend of Frontier Marshal Bass Reeves*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006.

Gideon, D. C. *Indian Territory*. New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1901.

Katz, William Loren. *Black People Who Made the Old West*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977.

Shirley, Glenn. *Law West of Fort Smith: A History of Frontier Justice in the Indian Territory, 1834–1896*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1957.

Teall, Kaye, ed. *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book*. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971.

Trachtman, Paul. *Gunfighters of the Old West*. With the editors of Time-Life Books. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1974.

West, C. W. "Dub." *Outlaws and Peace Officers of Indian Territory*. Muskogee, OK: Muskogee Publishing Co., 1987.

#### ARTICLES

Littlefield, Daniel F., Jr., and Lonnie E. Underhill. "Negro Marshals in the Indian Territory." *The Journal of Negro History*, April 1971, 77–87.

Mooney, Charles W. "Bass Reeves, Black Deputy U.S. Marshal." *Real West*, July 1976, 48–51.

Williams, Nudie E. "Bass Reeves: Lawman in the Western Ozarks." *Negro History Bulletin*, April–June 1979, 37–39.

———. "Black Men Who Wore the Star." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Spring 1981, 83–90.

#### MANUSCRIPTS

Fronterhouse, Richard D. "Bass Reeves: The Forgotten Lawman." Seminar paper, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman, 1960.

Williams, Nudie E. "A History of the American Southwest: Black United States Deputy Marshals in the Indian Territory, 1875–1907." Master of arts thesis, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, 1973.

#### INTERVIEWS

Burton, Art T. (professor of history, South Suburban College, South Holland, IL). Interviewed by the author at his home in Phoenix, IL, June 24, 2005.



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

### *Finding Bass*

**I was first introduced to the Old West by the television and movie westerns of my childhood.** My siblings and I watched them all—*The Lone Ranger*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, *Roy Rogers*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Rifleman*, *Bonanza*—anything that involved good guys, bad guys, horses, and shootouts.

We spent hours playing cowboys, eating beans from a can around a make-believe campfire, and straddling whatever we could imagine was a horse. Looking back, I remember an occasional black character in these shows, but never in the roles *we* aspired to play. I came to believe there were few blacks in the West and none who did anything I would have called important.

When I grew older, I learned about the bravery of buffalo soldiers and about black cowboys like Bill Pickett and Nat Love. Then one day in 2003 my husband, an admirer of the Old West, introduced me to Bass Reeves, a black deputy U.S. marshal. I immediately wanted to know more, and my search began.

I found information about Bass in books and articles. But there was nothing factual for children except two pages in a book called *Rough and Ready Outlaws and Lawmen* by A. S. Gintzler. Thanks to historian Art T. Burton and others who are keeping Bass's story alive, I am able to help pass it on.

Many of the western heroes we idolized as children were fictional characters, dramatized by Hollywood. But Bass Reeves was real. How different my childhood view of myself might have been if, when choosing who got the best parts, we'd fought over who got to play Bass Reeves.

Bass's story is so incredible it comes close to sounding like a tall tale. But it isn't. It's true. And I've done my best to tell it true.



## **VAUNDA MICHEAUX NELSON**

photograph by Drew Nelson



is the author of numerous fiction and nonfiction books for children, including *Almost to Freedom*, which received a 2004 Coretta Scott King

Illustrator Honor Award, and *No Crystal Stair*, which received a 2013 Coretta Scott King Author Honor Award. In addition to writing books, she has also been a teacher, newspaper reporter, bookseller, and children's librarian. She lives in Rio Rancho, New Mexico.

---

## **R. GREGORY**



## **CHRISTIE**

is an award-winning illustrator of numerous picture books and is a three-time recipient of the Coretta Scott

King Illustrator Honor Award for *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*, *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth*, and *The Palm of My Heart: Poetry by African American Children*. His work has also appeared in *The New Yorker* and on music CD covers. He lives in New York City.

---

*Jacket art © 2009 by R. Gregory Christie*



**CAROLRHODA BOOKS**

*A division of Lerner Publishing Group*

241 First Avenue North • Minneapolis, MN 55401

[www.lernerbooks.com](http://www.lernerbooks.com)

Printed and bound in USA



*Winner of the Coretta Scott King Author Award*



*"Nelson's well-researched biography reads much like a tall tale or frontier legend. . . . Christie's bold full-page paintings echo the heroic spirit. . . . Here, children can saddle up with a genuine Western hero in a narrative that hits the bull's-eye."*

*—starred, Kirkus Reviews*



*"This captivating biography [is] told in language as colorful as Reeves's career."*

*—starred, The Horn Book Magazine*



*"The text is chock-full of colorful turns of phrase that will engage readers who don't 'cotton to' nonfiction. . . . Christie's memorable paintings convey Reeves's determination and caring, while rugged brushstrokes form the frontier terrain. Youngsters will find much to admire here."*

*—starred, School Library Journal*



*"With lively language and anecdotes, Nelson (Juneteenth) chronicles the life of African-American lawman Bass Reeves in a biography that elevates him to folk hero."*

*—starred, Publishers Weekly*