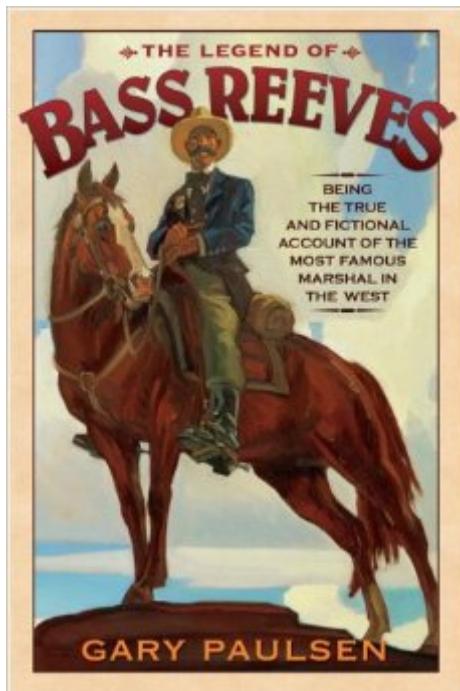


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# The Legend Of Bass Reeves: Being The True & Fictional Account Of The Most Valiant Marshal In West



## **Synopsis**

Born into slavery, Bass Reeves became the most successful US Marshal of the Wild West. Many "heroic lawmen" of the Wild West, familiar to us through television and film, were actually violent scoundrels and outlaws themselves. But of all the sheriffs of the frontier, one man stands out as a true hero: Bass Reeves. He was the most successful Federal Marshal in the US in his day. True to the mythical code of the West, he never drew his gun first. He brought hundreds of fugitives to justice, was shot at countless times, and never hit. Bass Reeves was a black man, born into slavery. And though the laws of his country enslaved him and his mother, when he became a free man he served the law, with such courage and honor that he became a legend.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I was recently at the ALA Conference in New Orleans sitting in on a Random House presentation at an hour that, to me, was far too early. As a result, I was having difficulty keeping awake, and only the stack of goodies on my seat (free books and the like) were keeping my eyes occupied. Still, all the upcoming books from Random House sounded good. There were some favorite authors I'd been wanting to read and some new names I wanted to check out. But it really wasn't until I heard someone explain what *The Legend of Bass Reeves* by Gary Paulsen was that I found myself awake and all my cylinders clicking. When I heard the story behind this book it was akin to an electric current in my bloodstream. Bass Reeves. Perhaps the only truly heroic man to bring law and order to the Old West. A man who never shot first, never was wounded in a gun battle, and was renowned for his steady trigger finger. Now here's the kicker. Not only was this man real, but he was a former

slave as well. I was hooked then and after reading this book I'm still as hooked as ever. I may have some quibbles with how Paulsen chose to present his information, but you cannot get around the fact that there's some juicy info and child-friendly tidbits filling up this fabulous children's title. Now think of some heroes of the Old West. Kit Carson. Wild Bill Hickok. Billy the Kid. We know them from their movies and their legends. Trouble is, even the tiniest bit of scrutiny will reveal how lame these so-called heroes really were. Kit Carson was an egomaniac killer with a posse of other killers by his side. Hickock was an alcoholic loser who died drunk when he was shot while gambling. And Billy the Kid... heck, my own great-grandmother was scared to death of the sociopath when she was living in Oklahoma, back in the day. Nope, there's just one guy who might be truly considered a "hero", and you've never even heard of him. His name was Bass Reeves. Taking his life into his hands, Paulsen reconstructs the life Reeves could have led. We see the boy living with his mother and owner (a man he simply calls, "Mister") in Texas, scraping out a life as best he can. When Bass's dignity gets him into trouble he leaves home and lives in the wild for a couple of years. After joining up with a Creek tribe he eventually became a U.S. Marshall, and his legend was without comparison.

Whether the book is riding fast on the trail of a murderous horse stealer, or showing Bass rescuing a child from rabid wolves, the book is anything but dull. When authors want to bring to life African-American lives from the past, they often find themselves in a bit of a bind. What with poor record keeping, racism, and time itself, records of blacks from the past are spotty at best. Unless you're dealing with someone recent or incredibly well-known, you're not going to be able to find much information. If you're an author, what recourse do you have? Well, you might want to try your hand at publishing a work of non-fiction. *Maritcha* by Tonya Bolden is an excellent example of an author bending over backwards to put an African-American girl from the 1800s in historical perspective. That's one way to go about it. The other is to do what Gary Paulsen has tried here. Fictionalize the life of this person, all the while interweaving your story with the facts that we know. In this way the book is split between three sections that tell us facts about the real Bass Reeves and three sections that imagine what his life might have been like. It was surprising to find that Paulsen choose to spend so little time concentrating on Reeves's life as a lawman. Instead, the real focus of the book is of Bass as both boy slave and free young man. Paulsen says as much in his Author's Note when he writes, "The part about his boyhood is the longest because to me it was the most important part of his life, the fire that forged him". It was a good idea to do this, in retrospect. Kids may enjoy reading about a hero, but they're going to identify with him more readily if they see him first as a boy. As always, Paulsen is adept at slipping with seemingly little effort into the rough and tumble world of the Old West. His writing falls gracefully onto each and every page. At one point

Bass must run away from his owner and his mother bestows on him the advice, "don't stop until you have a man call you Mister". Trust Paulsen to make succinct an emotional powderkeg or two. I would have enjoyed the book a little more thoroughly if not for a few unexpected inklings here and there. There is the presentation of the Native Americans to consider. In, "Bass Reeves", Paulsen has taken to showing the Comanches at the height of their violence. In this book they scalp, torture, and basically terrorize the white settlers. It was a peculiar sensation, reading a children's book that featured this kind of Indian representation. There are lines that gave me pause too. When Bass sees a Comanche warrior close by the book says, "He felt like he was looking at some ... some wild being that had never been broken, never been tamed". I get a mite bit testy when any human in any book is compared to an animal. Now let me clarify here that Paulsen is very very careful not to lump all Native Americans into one big old group. The Comanches are always referred to as Comanches. They aren't called just "Indians" or are seen to represent all native peoples. Paulsen is careful to relate the history of the Native Americans under the hand of the U.S. Government, including an in-depth section on The Trail of Tears. He draws an elegant comparison with the Bataan Death March which fits nicely into the narrative. Still, I wish I could have been more comfortable with his Native American characters. When Bass rescues a little girl who was attacked and bitten by wolves the story says, "though he knew she must be in considerable pain, she was absolutely silent in his arms". A bit of the old stalwart Indian stereotype or just how this particular girl reacted to her situation? The stilted language of the Creek Tribe did the same thing to me. A stereotype of Native American speech or an accurate replication of how they would sound with an unfamiliar English language? At the very least, it'll make you sit up and think. But then there's the book's remarkable take on Reeves's life. Paulsen plays up the man's heroism beautifully. Consider the passage, "He'd ride alone into what many men called the center of hell and bring the men out - alive, if possible, or, if necessary, draped dead over a horse. He did this three thousand times". And the guy started doing this when he was fifty-one. Fifty-one! By the time he's seventy and tracking down his own personal Moriarty you're absolutely with the novel 100% This is amazing, fabulous, exciting stuff. The stuff of legends, if legends had to be made out of any one man. So with all this fascinating subject matter I was more than a little put out to find that this book hadn't even the slightest hint of a Bibliography or listing of sources. What gives? Gary Paulsen didn't pluck Reeves's life from the breeze. He didn't turn on his faucet and pour these facts into a cup. He didn't conjure them in the dead of night under a tawny yellow moon. So why aren't we allowed to learn more about Bass on our own? The answer, I guess, must be that Paulsen didn't want to confuse the child readers into thinking that the fictionalized parts of this book were factual. Honestly, this is the only answer I can

come up with. I left this book wanting to know more more more. It's not a child's biography, but kids wanting to know more about Mr. Reeves may wish to check out the well-reviewed, "Black Gun, Silver Star: The Life And Legend of Frontier Marshal Bass Reeves", by Art T. Burton, for further insights. It wasn't quite the book I wanted it to be, but don't let any of this make you think that "The Legend of Bass Reeves" isn't still just the best rousing action laden, exciting, hero-inspiring Gary Paulsen work to trot down the line in the long long time. And as Old West children's fiction goes, this is the book I'm going to pull out each and every time when a kid asks for historical Old West fiction for a book report. It's got more spirit and energy than any other book of its kind. A well-written tribute to a too little known man. Reeves never had a movie made about him. Hopefully someone will read this book and take a little notice.

Just finished reading this aloud to my 5th grade students, and they absolutely loved it! Page after page they were biting their nails, sitting on the edge of their seats, and grabbing every word that I read. Granted, I had to delete the occassional curse word, but this little book was packed with history. My students learned about the Trail of Tears, the Indian Territory, Judge Isaac Parker, and the little heard of before Bass Reeves. We found additional and supporting information about Mr. Reeves on-line, including he and his family listed in the 1880's Census in Crawford County, Arkansas. I have no doubt that the next time my students are asked to write about a hero, they will all be writing about Bass Reeves.

Great reading. Bought the book after seeing a segment on TV about Bass Reeves. The TV Segment didn't follow the book in that there was a discrepancy regarding his childhood and a the campfire shooting. That being said however, there's no denial Bass Reeves' character and commitment as a officer of the law was remarkable. And because Reeves did team up with an Indian partner may have, in part, contributed to the fictional character of the Lone Ranger as has been suggested.

Saw the special about him on the History channel. Got this for my husband who was interested in learning more. As he is a non-reader I was surprised and thrilled to see him avidly reading. He enjoyed it and is almost finished. It's not a thick book and is full of interesting bits.

A fine book for preteens and younger. The author has a unique agenda. He in the first chapter belittle all the great names of the Old West as a variety of scoundrels and village idiots all of them

being caucasian Americans. Then in his book with 30% of it a sheer fantasy he tries to explain how Bass Reeves became one of the greatest lawmen in the West. I agree with all the factual data about this awesome and amazing Afro-American deputy marshal and his fantastic reputation. Definitely a character that was overlooked by history because of race.

A wonderful story about a Deputy US Marshal who started out as a slave and then became one of the greatest lawmen in the Old West. I learned about Reeves from the Bill O'Reilly special on the History Channel. Have ordered a few more books on this man to complete my knowledge and library. He needs to become more well-known for sure.

A great unsung hero given his due. A great snapshot of his difficult early life as a young slave and son of a slave in early 1800s NE Texas. Geared toward Young Adult readers but adults will love it. Only drawback: Wishing there was enough of his story known to make a longer more details book. For African-American dads this is a great book to help you talk to your children about the topic of slavery and what kind of man should be a role model for black males.

First of all I was surprised to find this book written by Paulsen, as I thought I had read them all. Secondly, what a story, about a "hero" that I had never heard of or read anything about. Will be a great addition to my Paulsen classroom library for middle school kids.

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