

Thomas Bahde, *The Life and Death of Gus Reed: A Story of Race and Justice in Illinois during the Civil War and Reconstruction*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014. 226 pp. \$79.95.

Thomas Bahde's second scholarly work on the wartime Middle West seems, upon first examination, to offer a critical analysis of one man's experiences as he travelled through the criminal justice system. Gus Reed's story would make any historian sit up and take note, for it offers insight into what happened to an African American who made his way out of slavery and into the free state of Illinois. But, as part of Ohio University Press' Series on Law, Society, and Politics in the Midwest, Bahde's work examines a much larger and more intricate picture of what historians are just now beginning to understand in full. Reed was a petty thief, but his life ended in the Illinois State Penitentiary at the age of thirty-two. He had been sent to solitary confinement, cuffed to his cell door for two days, and beaten. His punishment for the robbing the home of a Springfield attorney resulted in his lungs hemorrhaging as he screamed. He died with a wooden and leather gag harnessed to his face. Although an investigation found the prison guards liable for Reed's death, they were merely dismissed from duty.

Gus Reed was at once ordinary and extraordinary: a man born in slave state (Georgia, 184?) who absconded to a free state (Illinois, 1864). As Bahde explains, the book is not a biography, but a "framework on which to hang a larger story of the evolving relationship between race and justice" (2). *The Life and Death of Gus Reed* makes some substantive claims about the connections among midwestern whites who might have been ambiguous about slavery and slaveholders, but whose belief in white racial superiority signaled their belief that free blacks lacked the ability to live under freedom. In the study of race relations, emancipation, and citizenship rights in the Midwest, this is a key point, because it means that while midwestern whites might have had a slightly more sophisticated approach to the "problem" of black settlement, they would still fight mass migration in the form of Black Codes. While white southerners choose outright lynching for their handling of perceived African American criminals, white midwesterners advocated for a merciless penology. Both approaches, as Bahde points out, included torture and dehumanization. In this way, Bahde asks us to reconsider the limitations of newfound freedom. While this question is not necessarily new, each community study which either moves away from the Confederate South and the slave-holding Border States or integrates the midwestern or

western states promises a more precise retelling of the black experience on a national level.

Bahde organizes his research in a careful manner, using Reed's life as a gauge for the chronological changes occurring in the Midwest during and following the war. Chapter 1, on "Georgia Roots," analyzes the changing nature of white supremacy in the South and in the Midwest, as whites and blacks alike continued to battle over the tone and nature of permanent black settlement. Here Bahde offers a statement which a teacher or scholar might use to succinctly sum up the disappointment of black migration: "Had Gus Reed known the troubled history of race relations in his new home, he might have thought twice about staying" (17). The ugly secret of the so-called "free" Midwest (deemed so by the Northwest Ordinance) was that very few black people in the region had any reasonable access to citizenship rights. As we know from the infamous Dred / Harriet Scott case, slaveowners were protected anywhere they traveled in the United States, while even freeborn and freed African Americans lived in constant fear of being sold into southern slavery. Lacking the benefit of Reed's own voice, Bahde cleverly uses records from emancipation-seeking black groups to help understand how Gus might have envisioned taking part in the democratic process. Chapter Two, called "Illinois Wartime," picks up the same theme, examining especially the political intra- and inter-political party squabbling among whites. Chapter three, titled "Black Springfield," is an engaging community study of black activists who fought for emancipation at the local, state, and national levels. Chapter Four, "A White Man's Country," is the story of how miserably many of those activists lost their battle as whites failed again and again to welcome African Americans into their communities. Even as midwestern states like Illinois discarded their Black Codes, fear and suspicion of blacks mitigated nearly all of the small successes.

In his final two chapters, "The Underworld" and "The Penitentiary," Bahde traces white treatment of black crime, criminalization, and recidivism (as in Gus's case), and brutal incarceration in Illinois. The whites charged with an inmate's livelihood not only routinely ignored his constitutional rights, but brutalized and dehumanized him in incomprehensible ways. Finally, Bahde pulls his story in the direction of fin-de-siècle America, a moment which signaled the near-maturation of Jim Crow in the South. By the time of the 1908 Springfield riot, some former slaves (interviewed as part of the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s) were now claiming that

they had been better off under slavery. The situation in Illinois was no better, with rampant allegations against so-called black criminals thriving in a racist white judicial system. For young men like Reed, who stole flour, started fights, and roamed with gangs, incarceration was the direct outgrowth of white fear of black freedom and free labor. Claims of “worse than slavery” should have astounded white residents in the Midwest, had they possessed a less myopic and xenophobic mindset. It is curious that in this section, Bahde never directly labels the post-emancipation Midwest as “Jim Crow,” although that is most certainly what it is. Similarly, in Chapter Six, Bahde discusses late-century scientists’ insistence on “deep-seated black criminality” (151) and their attempt to “install a scientific state” (153), but never describes this as part of the eugenics movement.

Historians of African Americans and of emancipation will welcome *The Life and Death of Gus Reed* for a variety of reasons. Two themes signal new approaches in nineteenth-century American social history. First, Bahde offers a more intimate portrait of the ways in which everyday individuals experienced the American Civil War. Those individuals, in this study, included free blacks and runaway slaves, antislavery whites, proslavery whites, and all manner of midwesterners who found themselves at a crossroads. That Bahde chose to focus on Reed, a character with piles of courthouse papers, shows that black history is not suffering for paucity of sources after all. Second, Bahde challenges our assumptions about the history of criminalization and incarceration of African Americans in an age when our society now has no choice but to face the ghosts and demons of our own brand of raced justice.

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John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 676 pp. \$35.00.

John Boyer has served for over two decades as dean of the College at the University of Chicago, a position that gave him the central historical insight that informs and structures his impressive history of the University—namely, that the University, though widely recognized for its graduate and research programs, has in fact thrived and foundered depending on the