

Name _____ Date _____

Bass Reeves

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Bass Reeves was born into slavery in 1838 in Arkansas. After enlisting with his enslaver to fight in the Civil War, Reeves managed to run away. It's unknown how he escaped and it remains a mystery to this day. Reeves found himself in modern-day Oklahoma, which used to be part of an area called the Indian Territory. Many Indigenous nations, including Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, and Chickasaw, were forced to move to this area as a result of westward expansion. Reeves found refuge in the Indian Territory, picking up different Indigenous languages and becoming familiar with the landscape. He learned how to track and developed his firearm skills; he was an incredible ambidextrous marksman. After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Reeves moved back to Arkansas as a free man, where he became a farmer and started a family.

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Notes

2. b'

Notes

When Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, the country looked very different. The states and territories only went as far west as the Mississippi River. A part of the land west of that had been claimed by France and Spain. The territory all the way to the northwest had not been claimed by anybody. The idea of Manifest Destiny played a large part in encouraging settlers to move west and explore new lands. Manifest Destiny was the belief that the US was destined to expand across North America.

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As more settlers moved westward, frontier territories became increasingly populated. To keep the peace and enforce laws, US marshals were sent to patrol these regions and capture outlaws. In 1875, Reeves was appointed as a US marshal to the Indian Territory, becoming one of the first Black US marshals. For the next 32 years, Reeves captured many criminals over 3,000 outlaws and even some of the most notorious fugitives. In 1907, Oklahoma became a state. The same year, Reeves became an officer of the Muskogee Police Department. He served for two years before his health declined. Bass Reeves died on January 12, 1910.

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3. b'

Notes

On May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law. The main purpose of this act was to open up land for White settlers and for the country's growth. But the land that the government was trying to open up was home to many Indigenous tribes. This act marked the beginning of forced removal of Indigenous tribes, pushing them to give up their territories and move west of the Mississippi River.

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Many nations, including the Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw, had to leave their lands and were forced into Oklahoma. The journey across the country, also known as the Trail of Tears, was brutal. Many Native Americans made this journey on foot and faced harsh conditions, including extreme weather and diseases. Thousands of Native Americans died on the Trail of Tears.

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