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Review of *The Blacks in Oklahoma* By Jimmie Lewis Franklin

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The Blacks in Oklahoma. By Jimmie Lewis Franklin. *Newcomers in a New Land.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Illustrations, bibliographical essay. 79 pp. \$2.95.

The history of black people in Oklahoma is both typical and atypical of the black experience in America. Some black Oklahomans had a slave experience, but they were mostly the slaves of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Indian Territory. When emancipation came, these freedmen, unlike the former slaves in other slave-holding areas, shared in land distribution. Blacks were also among the Sooners who participated in the land rush when the Oklahoma Territory was opened to settlement.

For a time many Afro-Americans were led

to hope that the millenarian black nationalist dream of an all-black state, which had not been realized in Kansas in the 1880s, would come to pass in Oklahoma. By the time Oklahoma became a state, however, this dream had faded, and black Oklahomans were faced with a system of racial repression and Jim Crow laws like that in the states of the former Confederacy.

The history of blacks in Oklahoma in the years after statehood is typical of black experience in America. It is the story of struggle against inequality in education and for integration in higher education and later the lower schools. It is the story of the fight against disfranchisement and of efforts to use the ballot to bring about change. It is the story of lynching and racial violence, epitomized by the infamous Tulsa riot.

Nevertheless, the history of blacks in Oklahoma is also positive. It is the chronicle of a people building strong institutions to sustain them in their struggles. It recounts the exploits of courageous men and women who provided leadership in the fight for first-class citizenship. It is an inspiring story, in the best American tradition, of persons such as John Hope Franklin, Melvin Tolson, and Ralph Ellison, who battled against great odds and succeeded in enriching the life of the nation.

Jimmie Lewis Franklin has done a masterful job of presenting the history of blacks in Oklahoma for the general reader. His presentation contains a good mix of institutional history and human interest. This slim volume is a worthy part of the series of studies treating the history and contributions of the major ethnic groups comprising Oklahoma's population. Franklin has shown that the black experience in Oklahoma is an exciting chapter in the history of black Americans.

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