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Review of *And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freedmen Communities of Austin, Texas, 1865-1928* by Michelle M. Mears

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And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freedmen Communities of Austin, Texas, 1865–1928. By Michelle M. Mears. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2009. x + 233 pp. Maps, illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.

Michelle Mears's book on the rural and urban freedmen settlements of Austin is a welcome contribution to the social history of African Americans in Texas. By considering postemancipation black lifeways at such a small scale, as few existing works do, it offers readers a more comprehensive view of the experiences, struggles, and accomplishments of African Americans within a specific historical context. Mears also achieves a good balance between discussing Austin's historic black communities and situating them within the social, economic, and political processes occurring more broadly within the state and the greater South.

Her research is meticulous, and scholars will appreciate her introduction, with its review of the literature and sources on Texas freedmen. The book then unfolds with a solid demographic analysis and historical synopsis of the fifteen documented freedmen settlements in and around Austin, noting their origins and characteristics. Mears makes frequent use of historic maps, allowing readers to locate and visualize spatially the layout of each community.

Mears's main focus is on how ex-slaves built communities, largely through mutual support and by creating social institutions that served as stabilizing influences. Chapters 3 and 4, the most compelling sections, document the life histories of these communities. Chapter

3 emphasizes the material essentials of freedmen households, including housing, foodways, clothing, and medicinal treatments. Mears's additional coverage of freedmen labor regimes and "safety" as an ever-present challenge for African Americans helps to provide a more holistic perspective of life within freedmen settlements. Next, she tackles the racial uplift efforts of Austin's freedmen, who established educational and religious institutions that served to solidify social networks, attract settlers, and better the lives of freedmen. Throughout the book, she often narrates this history through the biographies of individuals representing a range of experiences across gender, class, and location (rural versus urban dwellers), giving readers a better sense of the heterogeneity of Texas freedmen. Chapter 5 considers the factors (demographic and political, for example) that led to the demise of these communities. Mears's location of each settlement within contemporary Austin, observing what, if anything, of it remains reminds us that some of these communities are not necessarily "gone," but obscured by urban growth and our tendency to forget the past.

And Grace Will Lead Me Home book is a must read for scholars interested in the history of freedmen, regardless of region, and helps to fill the gap in our scholarship on a little understood but central era of U.S. history.

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