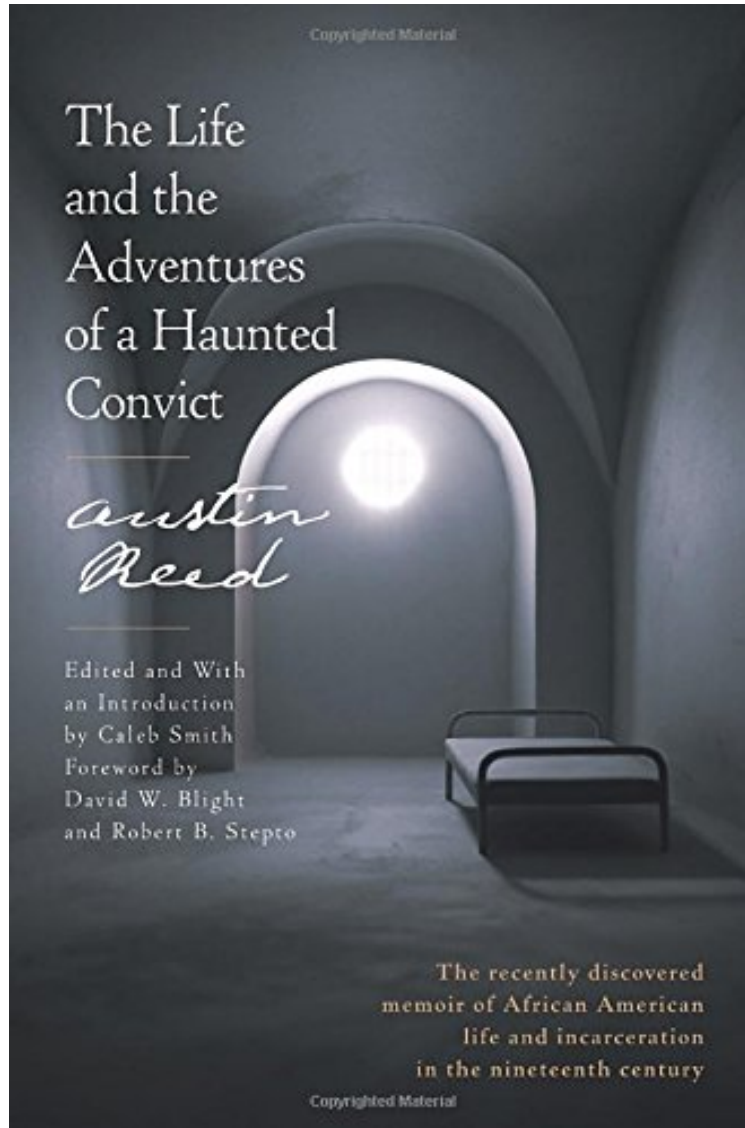


(Download pdf ebook) The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict

The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict

Austin Reed

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Austin Reed : The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating window into the past By Trevor Adams Caleb Smith has done a wonderful job piecing together a well intended autobiography of an often convicted felon from pre-reconstruction era New York. The man clearly reformed himself in old age and judging from the time frame that he wrote in, he intended to reform himself repeatedly and simply failed to do so. The aspects of this particular book that I enjoyed the most are the detailed tortures in the various institutions at the time. I also dig the author's tone. It's a very

warm and inviting look into his personal demons. Very macabre. Not for everyone.³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. This is an amazing diary written by a 'colored' young man about his ...By CustomerThis is an amazing diary written by a 'colored' young man about his stay at the Manhattan House of Refuge and Auburn Prison, all in New York State. The book is well-footnoted and the diary is well analyzed. It is especially meaningful to me, a researcher in Rochester, New York, the place of birth of Austin Reed, who wrote this diary on his unsettling life.⁴ of 4 people found the following review helpful. One for your collection!By Ammonia DeeInteresting to travel back in time only to discover that some things about our prison system have remained the same.

The earliest known prison memoir by an African American writer recently discovered and authenticated by a team of Yale scholars sheds light on the longstanding connection between race and incarceration in America. [A] harrowing [portrait] of life behind bars . . . part confession, part jeremiad, part lamentation, part picaresque novel (reminiscent, at times, of Dickens and Defoe). Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE In 2009, scholars at Yale University came across a startling manuscript: the memoir of Austin Reed, a free black man born in the 1820s who spent most of his early life ricocheting between forced labor in prison and forced labor as an indentured servant. Lost for more than one hundred and fifty years, the handwritten document is the first known prison memoir written by an African American. Corroborated by prison records and other documentary sources, Reeds text gives a gripping first-person account of an antebellum Northern life lived outside slavery that nonetheless bore, in its day-to-day details, unsettling resemblances to that very institution. Now, for the first time, we can hear Austin Reeds story as he meant to tell it. He was born to a middle-class black family in the boomtown of Rochester, New York, but when his father died, his mother struggled to make ends meet. Still a child, Reed was placed as an indentured servant to a nearby family of white farmers near Rochester. He was caught attempting to set fire to a building and sentenced to ten years at Manhattans brutal House of Refuge, an early juvenile reformatory that would soon become known for beatings and forced labor. Seven years later, Reed found himself at New Yorks infamous Auburn State Prison. It was there that he finished writing this memoir, which explores Americas first reformatory and first industrial prison from an inmates point of view, recalling the great cruelties and kindnesses he experienced in those places and excavating patterns of racial segregation, exploitation, and bondage that extended beyond the boundaries of the slaveholding South, into free New York. Accompanied by fascinating historical documents (including a series of poignant letters written by Reed near the end of his life), *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict* is a work of uncommon beauty that tells a story of nineteenth-century racism, violence, labor, and captivity in a proud, defiant voice. Reeds memoir illuminates his own life and times as well as ours today. Praise for *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict* One of the most fascinating and important memoirs ever produced in the United States. Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Washington Post* Remarkable . . . triumphantly defiant . . . The books greatest value lies in the gap it fills. O: *The Oprah Magazine* Reed displays virtuosic gifts for narrative that, a century and a half later, earn and hold the readers ear. Thomas Chatterton Williams, *San Francisco Chronicle* [The books] urgency and relevance remain undiminished. . . . This exemplary edition recovers history without permanently trapping it in one interpretation. *The Guardian* A sensational, novelistic telling of an eventful life. *The Paris Review* Vivid and painful. NPR Lyrical and graceful in one sentence, burning with fury and hellfire in the next. Columbus Free Press

[A] harrowing [portrait] of life behind bars . . . part confession, part jeremiad, part lamentation, part picaresque novel (reminiscent, at times, of Dickens and Defoe) . . . Though [Austin] Reeds book suggests he found some solace in the act of writing, it is also a chilling reminder to the reader of the roots of an American prison system that has grown no more humane. Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* One of the most fascinating and important memoirs ever produced in the United States. Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Washington Post* Remarkable . . . triumphantly defiant . . . The books greatest value lies in the gap it fills: As writer and historian Edward Ball notes, the mosaic that is the history of the common man has many missing tiles, and Reeds book places an important piece into that mosaic. O: *The Oprah Magazine* Reeds book is a wild, propulsive romp. . . . A charismatic and idiosyncratic voice in perpetual rebellion, . . . Reed displays virtuosic gifts for narrative that, a century and a half later, earn and hold the readers ear. Thomas Chatterton Williams, *San Francisco Chronicle* [The books] urgency and relevance remain undiminished. . . . This exemplary edition recovers history without permanently trapping it in one interpretation. *The Guardian* A sensational, novelistic telling of an eventful life. *The Paris* What Reed left is a poetic and unflinching account that forces readers to contemplate an enduring spectacle: men behind bars in a system bent on breaking them. He describes himself as haunted, and his memoir should haunt us with its exposure of a process designed at its origins to reduce men, whatever their color and their crimes, to worthlessness to ruin them for life in freedom. Conditions and treatment that are still pervasive in the prisons of the United States can be traced back to a time before the blood of more than 600,000 Americans was spilled to end one peculiar institution. No one should underestimate the challenge, or the urgency, of transforming another. *The Atlantic* Reeds is a powerful narrative to resurface in 2016. Its a ghost resurrected from the archive. . . . *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict* belongs on a bookshelf next to

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from a Birmingham Jail, George Jackson's Soledad Brother and other prison writings. It is a powerful reminder that those populations who many think of as silenced did and will continue to speak out. Austin American-Statesman Lyrical and graceful in one sentence, burning with fury and hellfire in the next. Columbus Free Press Startling, instructive, and disquieting . . . The book holds both archive and mirror for the present antagonisms about racism, policing, and mass incarceration, contributing to the ongoing exploration and debates concerning American democracy and racial identity built upon black captivity. The Boston Vivid and painful. NPR Reed's fascinating story speaks movingly in rough-hewn, utterly distinctive prose of the many unfreedoms in American history that are overshadowed by the story of slavery: indentured servitude, reform school, prison. Reed himself emerges as a resilient, defiant figure, rejecting the logic of an institution that supposedly builds character and reforms the soul. . . . The best respect we can pay him is to let go of our expectations and listen. The Chronicle of Higher Education That this is the earliest known prison memoir written by an African American, just one year after the Dred Scott decision and on the eve of the Civil War, alone signifies its singular historical importance. But Austin Reed's *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict* does far more than challenge the timeline of the black literary tradition. Its stories, as engrossing as they are horrific, invite us to peer behind the bars of a prison system at its developmental stage, when the lines between liberty and slavery, punishment and servitude, were as bent as the justice meted out by its practitioners. This extraordinary first-person account, from New York's House of Refuge to the Auburn State Prison, exposes the roots of a prison culture that continues to haunt far too many black families today. We owe a great debt to Reed for writing it and to Caleb Smith for unraveling the mysteries of identity and authentication after its discovery a century-and-a-half later. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, Harvard University The discovery story behind this memoir by a black prisoner written 150 years ago and hidden for generations is a modern gumshoe plot, and the tale it tells of perennial jail for the crime of blackness reads like a case study from today's age of mass incarceration. Edward Ball, author of the National Book Award winner *Slaves in the Family* The voice of Austin Reed, a black man in early nineteenth-century America who was incarcerated at the tender age of ten, rises up and speaks to us now, in artful, picaresque tones, to tell of his own unbelievable suffering. He's a riveting figure. Reed's testimony, plucked from the void, found by chance at an estate sale, reminds us, forcefully, that people are not functions of historical narrative the prisoner in prison, the slave in slavery but singularities. Rachel Kushner, author of *The Flamethrowers* [A] compelling and haunting story. WXII [A] candid and stirring autobiography . . . Reed's unique story is highly recommended to anyone interested in African American history or the history of crime and punishment in the United States. Library Journal (starred review) A moving, significant narrative that affords both an elegantly produced glimpse of nineteenth-century prison life and a new chapter in African-American history through a convict's eyes. Kirkus s Reed's account of his troubled youth, written in the nineteenth century but never before published, provides a fascinating look into the prison system of antebellum America. . . . A remarkable accomplishment [and] a remarkable discovery. Publishers Weekly About the Author Austin Reed was born in Rochester, New York, in 1823. He wrote this memoir around 1858-59, during his incarceration in Auburn State Prison. The date of his death is unknown. Caleb Smith is a professor of English at Yale University and the author of *The Prison and the American Imagination* and *The Oracle and the Curse*. David W. Blight is Class of 1954 Professor of American History and director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University. He is the author of *Race and Reunion*, *A Slave No More*, and the forthcoming *Frederick Douglass: A Life*. Robert B. Stepto is a professor of African American studies, American studies, and English at Yale University. His publications include *From Behind the Veil*, *Blue as the Lake*, and *A Home Elsewhere*. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter I The bright sun was just a shining into the window of my father's cottage when I was called by the voice of a female to come and take the last look of my dying father. I was then at the age of six. After taking the last look of the dying man, I turned from the dying scene, leaving the angel of death to finish the last and awful work: but oh, who could describe the feelings of my boyish heart, when I saw my father laid cold and lifeless in the coffin? Then, that was the hour when all the fond recollection of my dying father came rushing in my mind. His last look, his last dying advice, i.e., his last prayer and his last blessing, that I might be kept from all the snares and temptations of the world, and that I might grow up and become a useful man, that I might be a help meet to my mother when she should be bowing down beneath the weight of old age. How often in my boyish days, when the bright sun was just about to sink beneath the mountain tops, and the night hawks were hovering over my head, have I stolen away from the cottage and from the side of my mother, and gone and sat for hours at the grave of my beloved father, all unnoticed to him, and there wept like an infant. How fresh does the dying scene yet impress upon my memory, although my father has now been dead for nearly twenty years, and in yonder old grave yard in the city of Rochester lies the cold remains of my father, moldering away to dust. 1 While the feet of the traveler have trampled over his grave, unmindful of who the slumberer is that lies beneath his feet, the cold winter winds are howling and playing over his grave, yet there he lays, unmindful of those northern blasts that come whistling over his tomb. Chapter II No sooner had the cold clouds covered the remains of my father before I forgot his last blessing and dying prayer with all of his advice. I soon broke through the restraints of my mother and fell a victim to vice and crime. 'Twas a beautiful summer's morning that my mother put fifty cents into my hand and bade me to go to the

grocery and get her four pounds of sugar. I took the fifty cents and went off to the bank and got it change all into coppers. I then steered my way behind an old barn where a lot of boys was pitching pennies. I fell into the game with them and soon found that they both was pitching against me. I left their company, and being the winner of three cents I then went to the grocery and bought the sugar and returned home. As I entered the door my mother ask me if I had been making that sugar. She order me to be seated in one corner of the room and not to leave the House again during the day. While she went out to the well to draw a pail of water, I slip out of the back door and made my way to the city, a loitering round the street until night overtook me. I then steered my way for Home. The dim light of a candle was burning in the House. I crept softly under the window, and there I laid a listening and shivering with fear of an awful punishment the moment I entered the room. As I laid there under the window, I could hear my mother talking to my brothers and sisters² in the following manner That boy will surely be the cause of bringing my gray hairs with sorrow down to the grave. As she said them words, I rose and went to the door, and giving a genteel rap, my mother bade me enter. I opened the door and went in and saw the scolding tears come a rushing down my mother cheeks. She order me off to bed, where I turned in and slept away the gloomy hours of the night. It was a long time after breakfast before I arose and went down stairs. There sat my mother with her needle and thread, all alone, while my brothers and sister were gone off to school. My mother now took me into the bedroom, and with all the affection and the tears of a mother she talk to me in the following manner My son, I see since your father has been dead that you are beginning to cause me a great deal of trouble. Remember that if you follow the paths of sin that you will surely come to some bad and awful end. With these and many other words of instruction did my mother try to bring up before my mind and to implant the truths of religion in my heart. She then gave me a severe whipping and sent me off to school. On my way to school I met several boys who ask me to join their company that day, that they was goin to have some fun. I stuff my book into my pocket and joined their company but alas that days fun proved the dearest fun to me than ever I witness before in my life, for we were no sooner together before we jump over into a mans orchard and cut down several of his fruit trees and made our way for the city. It was three days afterwards before my mother found it out. The farmer came up to my mothers House and informed her all about the deed. My mother bursted out in a full flood of tears and predicted that if I went on in this way, regardless of my fathers dying advice, that I would one day or another become the felon of a cell, and that it would be better for me if I was laying in my grave aside of my father. As she uttered those sacred words and the name of my father, the prayers, the blessing, and the advice of my dying father all sprung up afresh into my mind. My mother told the farmer that I should be punished right on the spot for the deed, that she wouldnt allow her children to destroy other folks property if she knew it. As she said these words, she took a rawhide from the mantelpiece and ordered me to strip off my coat. I jump for the ax that stood behind the door and, raising it at my mothers head, told her if she struck me one blow with that rawhide that I would sliver her brains out on the floor. The old farmer arose to take the ax from my hand, to which I threw it at him with all my might, which left a deep cut in his leg. I then ran out the door and went into the city and was gone from Home three days. Chapter III It was a wet drizzly day in the month of July as I was strolling the street, and had been gone from Home three days, that the heavy hand of a constable was laid upon me to restore me back to my mother. As I went along through the streets, I was stared at by every one that went along. Shivering with the wet and cold and pinched with hunger, I soon gain the threshold of my mothers cottages door, covered with rags and dirt. There sat a rich old farmer in the House who lived out to Avon Springs, ready to take me away. Oh how I wept, how I cried, how I beg my mother not to let me be separated away from her. With what fair and faithful promises did I make to my mother for the time to come, if she would only let me stay with her at Home. My promises, my tears availed me nothing. My mother had firmly made up her mind that I should be sent from a city life and live a country life. After striking a bargain with the old country hound, the day was appointed to which I was to start for the country. My mother wash me and gave me something to eat and then took a bed cord and made my hands and feet fast to keep me in custody until Mr. Lad (for that was the farmers name) came after me.³ At night my mother unloosed me and sent me off up stairs to bed, taking good care to lock the door to keep me safe. The next morning before my mother was up my youngest sister came up stairs and told me that the farmer would be after me that day at ten oclock, and that mother had got my Sunday clothes ready for me to put on. She advise me not to stir a step with him, for if I did I should never see my Home nor her again. The tears came from my sister eyes as she said those words to me. The call of my mother soon brought her from my bed side, telling her to make haste and get the House cleaned up, for she expected Mr. Lad along very soon. My mother then called me up and wash me from head to foot, put a new suite of clothes on me which I use to wear Sundays. While my mother was getting me ready, I casted my eyes out of the window and saw a splendid carriage driving up to the door. Wonder who is there! exclaimed my sister in an angry tone. Why, it Mr. Lad and his daughter, said my mother with a smile. The horses was made fast at the fence and the carriage flung open, while my mother stood ready to take the hand of a beautiful country female to help her from the carriage. There me and my sister stood in the door, both bathe in tears. The country girl made a low bow to my sister, to which she got an ugly sour look for her compliment. My mother then took me into the bedroom, and kneeling down she implored the blessing of the almighty to go with me and be with me, to protect me and to be the guide of my youth. She then arose, a putting a pocket bible into my hand, beg me to read it and to take it as the man of my counsel, and that if I obeyed it precepts, it would do me

good in after life. There me and my sister stood, hand in hand, bathe in tears of grief and sorrow. My mother then imprinted a kiss on my cheek and told Mr. Lad that I was now all ready to start. As the old man and his daughter arose, my sister told me not to stir from the House one step, that she would protect me. By this time my elder brother came in and, seeing me and my sister bathe in tears, could not bear to witness the scene of separation and the grief and sorrow between me and my sister. Are you goin to take my brother away? exclaimed my sister. Yes, said the countryman. By whose authority? said my brother. We will give you to understand, said my sister, that he is not a goin with you. Who knows, said my brother, but what he is goin into the hands of some slave holder? Not at all! exclaimed the country girl. His work will be easy and light, and at the end of every three months he may return Home. My mother all this time during the conversation stood on the floor with one hand up to her face, not knowing what to say. I suppose, mother, said my sister, that you think it hard to see your children arising up and interfering in your business. I do, said my mother. The city will surely spoil that boy if he stays Home. Unless that man can prove before me by good and substantial witnesses that he is no slave holder, said my brother, he cant go one step with him. I think it proper, said my sister, that we should know where he is goin and into whose hands he is goin into, and I think my mother has taken a very improper course in this matter, and I think it my duty as a sister to interfere into this matter, before our brother is torn from his Home. Well, said Mr. Lad, I live out to Avon Springs, and it is getting quite late in the day, and I have twenty miles to go. I would like to have the boy, for he looks like a smart boy. The old man whispered something into my mother ear and drove off without me. Early the next morning, the tramp of horses and the rattling of a carriage was heard at the door. Peeping out of the window, I saw Mr. Lad and his daughter standing at the gate. He had a new pair of shoes into his hand, while his daughter held a new cap in her left hand. He had bought those things for me for inducement, to get me to go Home with him. As he entered the door, he said that he was in a hurry and ask me if I had made up my mind to go Home with him. I told him that I would let him know in a few minutes. I then left him and called my sister out of doors and talk the matter over with her, to which she consented I should go, providing that I should be sent Home every three months. The bargain being struck, the old farmer drove off with his prize, and I soon found myself seated under the roof of a lordly mansion at Avon Springs. Chapter IVTwas in the year of 1833 that my troubles commenced. I now found myself under the roof of a new Home at Avon Springs. With a sad and a heavy heart I went out under the wood shed, and seating myself on a pile of wood, I began to repent that ever I had left the Home of my nativity, while ten thousand thoughts came pouring into my breast, with fond recollections of those brothers and sisters at Home, of the advice of my dying father, the tears which my sister shed before I left my Home, the prayer which my mother had offered up the day before I left. After pondering over those things with deep feelings, I drew the little pocket bible which my mother had given me before I left Home from my pocket, and there I saw the handwriting of my mother, and the little prayer which she had wrote there for me to learn. After reading a few of its contents I closed the little book, and have never open it from that day to this, but still my mothers handwriting still stands against meth the prayer, the tears, the griefs and her sorrows.