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*The Fall of a Black Army Officer: Racism and the Myth of  
Henry O. Flipper* (review)

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as he might have been, Ringo, contends Johnson, was more tragic than bad. His verdict draws from the Tombstone *Epitaph* that eulogized Ringo as “a strictly honorable man” whose “word was as good as his bond” (278).

In making his case, the author, highly regarded among the Western Writers of America, takes on the lingering image of Ringo that emerges from the sanctification of Wyatt Earp in the fictionalized writings of Walter Noble Burns (*Tombstone: An Iliad of the Southwest*, 1927) and Stuart Lake (*Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal*, 1931). He also differs with Jack Burrows (*John Ringo: The Gunfighter Who Never Was*, 1987) regarding Ringo’s early life, his role in the Hoodoo War, and his family’s view of him. Convinced that interest in Ringo has “blossomed” (268) over the past half century, Johnson undertook prodigious research, the basis of a remarkably detailed study that should constitute the last word on an individual whose place in southwestern history is both secure and minor. Burdensome, however, are incessant and overly long block quotes that carry the story and deaden an otherwise solid narrative. Another distraction is the repetition of “Earp apologists,” “supporters of Earp,” and “proponents of Earp” in the author’s successful attempt to demonize Wyatt Earp.

Nevertheless, Johnson has filled factual gaps regarding the Hoodoo War, offered a more balanced assessment of the Brocius-Clanton-McLaury cowboy element, and sharpened the debate over Ringo. His book should move briskly at the Rose Tree and other Tombstone bookstores during Helldorado Days.

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JAMES A. WILSON

*The Fall of a Black Army Officer: Racism and the Myth of Henry O. Flipper.* By Charles M. Robinson III. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. Pp. 216. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780806135212, \$29.95 cloth.)

This book examines the military trial in 1881–82 at Fort Davis, Texas, and subsequent dismissal from the U.S. Army of Second Lieutenant Henry Ossian Flipper, the first African American to graduate from the West Point military academy. Other than brief descriptions at the beginning and end of the book, respectively, of Flipper’s life before and after the court-martial, the bulk of the work—seven out of the total twelve chapters—is devoted to a narrative account of the trial proceedings, which resulted in the young African-American lieutenant being found not guilty of embezzlement but guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer. The author sets out to demonstrate that, despite subsequent claims that the defendant was the victim of institutional racism, Flipper was accorded a fair trial, handed a just sentence, and was largely the architect of his own downfall. At various points in the book, Robinson alludes to the irony of the fact that the black West Pointer’s belated rehabilitation, in the form of a presidential pardon in 1999, was achieved in no small part through the efforts of social activists representing an African-American community that Flipper himself generally held in disdain and shunned other than at times when he wanted its help. Although Flipper’s character flaws and his relationship with other African-Americans are essential elements in Robinson’s argument, they are not dealt with extensively in the book.

The narrative succeeds in showing that, while more than a few of the white officers involved in the Flipper case and trial were clearly racists, racism itself played little if any role in either the issuance of the charges against the young black officer or the decisions arrived at by the court-martial. In short, Robinson contends that while racism was rife in the late nineteenth-century U.S. Army, the Flipper case is not a good example of that phenomenon and, if anything, the attention it has attracted over the years has only "served to obscure" the "genuine cases of racism in the army of the period" (xvi). The author supports this assertion by frequently comparing the Flipper affair with some of those "very real cases of racism" (11), most notably that of the West Point cadet Johnson Whittaker.

Extracts from the trial transcripts, which run to over 600 pages, take center stage in Robinson's account, but these are supported by ample references to alternative sources, such as memoirs, letters, and assorted official documents. This pithy volume may not be the last word on the Flipper controversy, but it has certainly thrown down the gauntlet to the aggrieved black officer's many defenders and clearly identifies the points they must challenge in order to prove the case for racial discrimination playing a determining role in the trial's outcome.

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JASON J. McDONALD

*From Guns to Gavels: How Justice Grew Up in the Outlaw West.* By Bill Neal. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2008. Pp. 384. Preface, acknowledgments, photos, maps, chronology, chapter notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780896726376, \$29.95 cloth.)

Lawyer Bill Neal's second book, *From Guns to Gavels: How Justice Grew Up in the Outlaw West*, is an effort to identify the historical timeframe when frontier justice, as practiced in the wild and woolly West, transitioned to a legalistic ritual based on constitutions, statutes, precedents, and the assortment of other modern-day regulations that pass for orderly courtroom procedure. As an experienced trial lawyer, Neal makes a convincing case as to when and why this occurred, but he did not persuade this juror with his evidence as much as he did with his argument.

Frontier justice developed in the post-Civil War era when southerners, stripped of wealth, land, respect, and civility, went west and imposed a code of honor that redressed wrongs, real or perceived, through self-defense killings and public lynching. Politicians who held legislative and judicial posts, as well as citizens who served on grand and petit juries usually administered justice irrespective of the courts. It was not until the spectacular advancement in transportation and communication technologies after World War I that a sea change occurred in the public's outlook towards the administration of justice. These changes, coupled with a change in the manner newspapers covered vigilante justice, imbued a change in the way the public viewed violence and judicial integrity.

Neal relies on "anecdotal [lessons] . . . about the origin, development, and the maturation of our criminal justice system" to make his case (77). He employs two criminal trials with strikingly similar fact situations to advance his polemic, but these cases also had conspicuously different circumstances that negate his argu-