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Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to
Civil War (review)

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Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 110, Number 1, July 2006,
pp. 135-136 (Review)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2006.0012>

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like Mary Austin Holley and Jane Cazneau, who actively and publicly promoted Texas immigration. The visible roles of women such as Holley and Cazneau were exceptions, to be sure. Nonetheless, their examples demonstrate the outer limits of respectable female activity and the degree to which women's advocacy of a political or social cause might have been taken seriously in a public forum.

Yet it was from within the domestic sphere that the Texas women most strongly demonstrated their adherence to the philosophy of manifest destiny. Church activities, temperance goals, education endeavors, and other attempts to establish comfortable and safe communities were outgrowths of their dictate to spread civilization through domesticity. Unfortunately, the evidence for this argument is less tangible than the written words of Holley and Cazneau, and much of the conclusions are implicit rather than explicit. We can indeed surmise that the effects of women's activities helped promote the social concepts associated with American expansionism that were rooted in the assumption of Anglo-Christian superiority. And it is reasonable to assume that women no less than men accepted these ideas. Drawing direct links, however, between the intentions behind women's community activities and their direct desire to promote manifest destiny is problematic. Nonetheless, the author has done an admirable job of bringing our attention to the often silent half of Texas history and of conceptualizing Texas women's history within the larger paradigm of United States history.

Journal of Southern History

FRANCELLE PRUITT

Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War. By Joel H. Silbey. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 252. Editor's note, preface, prologue, illustrations, map, notes, bibliographic essay, acknowledgments, index. ISBN 0195139445. \$28.00, cloth.)

A volume in Oxford University Press's Pivotal Moments in American History series, Joel H. Silbey's *Storm over Texas* argues that conflict over the annexation of Texas and the political fallout from that controversy "has fair claim to be considered as *the* critical base point on which the rest of the crisis of the Union grew" (p. xvii). Silbey, a much-published expert on American politics during the antebellum years, provides a deft description of the rise of annexation as a sectional issue and how the resulting angry divisions would not go away. Above all, he contends, the insistence on Texas annexation by southern Democrats alienated northern Democrats led by former president, Martin Van Buren, leading the latter to think that their party had been hijacked by followers of John C. Calhoun. The decline in party unity brought a corresponding rise in national disunity, and the South moved on toward secession in 1860–1861.

Silbey is a careful historian, and he admits that there are difficulties in sustaining his thesis. Annexation of Texas soon led to war with Mexico, and the acquisition of territory resulting from that conflict brought on a serious sectional crisis in 1849–1850. To this point, his argument holds. However, the Compromise of 1850 quieted conflict between the sections and, in Silbey's words, "for a time thereafter confidence returned" (p. 179). Sectional calm prevailed for nearly four years, but then

Stephen A. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act destroyed the Whig Party, bitterly divided the Democrats, and led to violence that extended from Kansas to the Senate Chamber in the national capitol. There would be no more compromises as the nation moved toward secession and war. So, given how sectionalism calmed from 1850 to 1854, was the annexation of Texas truly the "pivotal moment" on the road to secession, or did the Kansas-Nebraska Act constitute the pivot? Silbey's answer is that in 1854 "memories of Texas were again brought to the surface of public affairs," and the nation "found that it had moved very far along the road toward the sectionalizing of its politics, both rhetorically and behaviorally" (pp. 179–180). Thus, the argument is: Texas annexation was a pivotal moment in American history, but it may not have been without the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Storm over Texas may disappoint Texas history enthusiasts in that Sam Houston, the state's best-known leader who served in the United States Senate through most of the period that Silbey discusses, has virtually no role in the story. Houston strongly and consistently supported the Union during the 1850s, and his opposition to extremism should have provided at least some measure of proof to northern Democrats that Calhoun-style southerners had not taken total control of their party. Perhaps one person, even one as spectacular as Houston, could make little difference, but given the book's focus on how Texas annexation divided the Democratic Party, his role probably should have received more attention. (One minor error that is likely to make Texas readers flinch is a reference to the last president of the republic as "Ansel" Jones.)

Storm over Texas may strain to maintain its argument that annexation constituted a pivotal moment in American history and will likely leave Texas readers wishing for more emphasis on Texans. However, it is a readable overview of the ways annexation of the Lone Star State moved the nation along the road to the Civil War.

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The Western River Steamboat. By Adam I. Kane. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. Pp. xx+188. Foreword, acknowledgments, illustrations, appendices, glossary, notes, bibliography, illustration credits, index. ISBN 1-58544-322-0. \$39.95, cloth. ISBN 1-58544-343-3. \$19.95, paper.)

Written by a nautical archeologist who has learned well the research methodologies of historians, *The Western River Steamboat* chronicles the evolution of steamboats on western rivers between 1811 and 1860. In the context of this study, "western rivers" are those west of the Appalachian Mountains, for the vessels studied operated primarily on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and their tributaries.

Author Kane states in his introduction that "The steamboat was the primary agent in transforming the trans-Appalachian West from a sparsely settled wilderness into an economically significant region of the country." Most historians of the West will agree with this declaration, as few developments can compare with the steamboat in their economic impact on the region.

Historians have written volumes on steamboats and steamboating because of this significance, but few of them have understood the details of their evolution