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True Women and Westward Expansion (review)

Francelle Pruitt

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The book does fall short in some ways. Cobia depends heavily on speculation to connect the dots of what is known to have happened, and where the evidence leaves off. While speculation is inevitable in this instance, many historians may have trouble accepting the degree to which the author puts this into practice in his work. Also, Cobia often does not make his own opinions clear. He frequently quotes postmodern historians and historical theories concerning Crockett, yet it is often unclear as to whether he agrees or disagrees with their ideas.

Those criticisms aside, Cobia has produced a first-rate analysis and synthesis of the subject that will doubtless become one of the major works on the subject. He uses a vast array of both primary and secondary literature and works each equally into his own analysis. *Journey into the Land of Trials*, then, emerges as a remarkably well-organized study of a man and his times. The early days of the war for Texan independence come alive. Ever cognizant of the broader picture of what is going on throughout Texas and the United States, Cobia's account of the last great adventure of Davy Crockett is a significant addition to Crockett literature.

Auburn University

RICHARD HALL

True Women and Westward Expansion. By Adrienne Caughfield. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005. Pp. 190. Preface, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 158544409X. \$32.95, cloth.)

True Women and Westward Expansion is a welcome addition to the small but growing collection of scholarly monographs that address the history of Texas women. With this study, Adrienne Caughfield places the experiences of Texas women during the nineteenth century within the context of national social paradigms. Specifically, Caughfield examines the ways in which Texas women participated in westward expansion and uses gender to add nuance to our understanding of the concept of Manifest Destiny. Here Texas women are viewed as contributors to the national expansionist impulse and participants in the American "cult of true womanhood."

As the topic demands and as sources dictate, this study is primarily limited to literate white women who migrated to Texas from the United States. And, as the author freely acknowledges, the ideal of domesticity was largely associated with the white middle class. Within the limits of the subject group, Caughfield has ferreted out some interesting conclusions about the intersection of domesticity and manifest destiny in the lives of Texas women. However, it should be noted that the degree to which most Texas women adhered to such concepts is debatable, particularly given the prevalence of southern, agricultural backgrounds among Texas settlers.

The author argues that nineteenth-century women participated in the public arena of politics more often than we might expect and that this statement is true especially when it comes to expansionism. She uses examples of the ways frontier women participated in the Texas Revolution and promoted patriotic fervor as evidence of their belief in the appropriateness of expansion and their desire to spread civilization and American republicanism. Caughfield also points to women

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