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The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City
(review)

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These reservations aside, *Cemeteries of Ambivalent Desire* remains a rewarding read, highlighted by incisive textual analysis, and propelled by the belief that we, as the living, must confront the ghosts of the past if we are to understand the world we inhabit and all of its injustices and possibilities.

Indiana University

CHRIS STONE

The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City. By Harvey J. Graff. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Pp. 400. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, index. ISBN 9780816652693, \$34.95 cloth.)

This is a peculiar book, and the author admits that it is experimental. Harvey J. Graff, a social historian of literacy who spent twenty-three years teaching at the University of Texas at Dallas, sees Dallas as poorly defined, insecure, and in denial of its own history. The city basically has failed to offer justice for minorities, create a distinct culture, or end segregation. It has not promoted an outstanding research institution of higher education, and the downtown architecture, according to Graff, lacks originality. For Graff, Dallas is a second-rate city.

The deficiencies result from people and leaders forgetting their own history and accepting controlling myths. Among others, Graff focuses upon two myths about the founding of Dallas—that it was a place destined for greatness and thus inevitable, or on the other hand, that it was an accidental, self-made city and therefore has no history or limits. He is not explicit about who accepts these myths or how they are carried into public life. Graff rejects both of these myths as non-historical and misleading; however, and he blames local historians for their lack of corrective information. He attacks historian Michael Hazel's conclusion in a brief history of Dallas (*Dallas: A History of "Big D,"* Texas State Historical Association, 1997), for example, that the city was no accident but rather the result of individuals working to exploit their location in a period of rapidly expanding transportation. Hazel seems to offer a reasonable interpretation. But for Graff, Hazel only conflates the obscuring myths of destiny and accident.

Graff often exaggerates, repeats, and makes polemical statements without supporting evidence. He includes a thin chronology and an outline of historical development as appendixes and then refers to them after he makes his declarations. For example, "Dallas's achievements have come at great human, environmental, cultural, and political costs. (See the appendixes.)" (p. 94). There is no guidance or support for the statement and the reader, seemingly, is expected to search the appendixes to fill in the blanks. The endnotes, in contrast, usually provide adequate citations along with extensive "see also" bibliographic references. These indicate that Graff has looked broadly at the writings about contemporary Dallas. This is a peculiar book.

Readers who want some pointed comments about recent Dallas might find this study insightful, and people who hate Dallas might embrace it for its criticisms. For others, particularly those who prefer objective narrative history, the book will prove of little use.

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