



PROJECT MUSE®

*Faces of Béxar: The History of the State's Most Enduring
Tejano Community* by Jesús F. de la Teja (review)

Light Townsend Cummins

Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 120, Number 2, October 2016,
pp. 258-259 (Review)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2016.0068>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/631007>

Faces of Béxar: The History of the State's Most Enduring Tejano Community. By Jesús F. de la Teja. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016. Pp. 240. Notes, bibliographic essay, index.)

The author of this volume has earned a stellar reputation over the last three decades as one of the most accomplished historians specializing in Spanish colonial and Mexican Texas. The ten essays contained in this book present examples of his best work; each one is a previously published book chapter or journal article written between 1991 and 2009. All of the essays examine some aspect of the rich history of San Antonio de Béxar as a Tejano, Spanish-speaking town. In that regard, an overriding point of the book is that the story of Spanish and Mexican San Antonio has been historiographically obscured by an Anglo American and institutional frame of reference that has traditionally dominated studies touching on colonial Texas, especially the settlement at Béxar.

This book provides a needed corrective to that viewpoint by examining political, economic, social, and cultural developments at San Antonio de Béxar from an explicitly Hispanic frame of reference, an orientation especially noteworthy in the essays dealing with the arrival of English-speakers in the early nineteenth century and also with the Texas Revolution. In that regard, the essays are firmly rooted in the colonial and independence-era history of Mexico. They consider Texas primarily within that context in an inclusive and comprehensive manner. The essays all focus in some fashion on the lives and labors of the settlers at Béxar and their worldview. The specific topics of the essays range from a general introduction to Spanish Texas and the settlement at San Antonio, the environmental history of the upper San Antonio River Valley, the history of the military garrison located at Béxar, and the political loyalties of the Tejano residents across time as part of the Spanish colonial empire. Additional topics include an assessment of the economic importance of the Saltillo trade fairs to Texas, marriage patterns and class structures among the residents, and the importance of recreational activities in the life of the town. The final essays examine the influx of Anglo Americans and the pressures this migration created, culminating in the break from Mexico in 1836.

It must be noted that, although the essays in this volume were written across almost twenty years, they provide as book chapters a seamless presentation making for a well-integrated narrative that flows with uniformity. An introduction by the author further ties the essays together. It also makes explicit for the reader the volume's interpretive orientation and its potential usefulness to understanding the Spanish settlement at San Antonio, the latter of which is accomplished very successfully. The book includes a review of the latest historical literature dealing with Spanish and Mexican Texas, which contains an up-to-date assessment of academic works on the subject, thus further increasingly its utility. This volume has

the potential to become an important book for university-level courses in Texas history; it should be embraced by all readers desiring a deeper understanding of the colonial and early nineteenth-century history of San Antonio de Béxar.

Austin College

LIGHT TOWNSEND CUMMINS

Privateers of the Americas: Spanish American Privateering from the United States in the Early Republic. By David Head. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015. Pp. 224. Maps, photographs, tables, notes, index.)

In the early nineteenth century, the United States saw itself as the world's foremost neutral carrier in a world of economic and international uncertainty. While legitimate commerce flourished, privateering, piracy, smuggling, and the slave trade ran amok during the same period. The chaos of the Napoleonic Wars, the War of 1812, and the subsequent Spanish American revolutions of Central and South America provided opportunities for commercial activity spanning all ranges of legality. David Head's *Privateers of the Americas* offers a detailed account of the act of privateering against the Spanish American Empire and, in doing so, he reveals how this maritime activity connected the Atlantic world to the world of the early American republic through diplomacy and economics.

Privateers—or armed private commercial ships licensed with a letter of marque from a revolutionary government that provided the legal authority to attack enemy vessels—sacked Spanish ships, transported their cargoes to bases in Baltimore, Amelia Island, New Orleans, and Galveston and sold it to an appreciative public. These seemingly nefarious individuals included sea captains, sailors, merchants, suppliers, financiers, and others who believed they could make a quick profit. Yet many saw themselves in grander terms—as international freedom fighters advancing the ideology of independence and freedom. Some instead were trying to provide for their families and communities. Others, still, simply were opportunists taking advantage of an uncertain world and were committed to nothing other than themselves.

Among the hotbeds of illicit activity, Galveston emerged after the War of 1812 as a center for privateering and filibustering. Outside the jurisdiction of the United States and operating under the auspices of a revolutionary government, successive leaders issued decrees and official papers that the United States acknowledged as legitimate. Whether it was French privateer Louis Michel-Aury or smugglers Jean and Pierre Lafitte, the United States waited to preserve neutrality and favorably settle its relationship with Spain. Meanwhile, from 1810 to 1820, eleven filibustering forays passed through Galveston and each provided a chaotic opportunity to prey on Spanish shipping and commerce. By the time of the last filibus-