



PROJECT MUSE®

*Flood on the Tracks: Living, Dying, and the Nature of
Disaster in the Elkhorn River Basin* by Todd M. Kerstetter
(review)

Thomas W. Haase

Great Plains Quarterly, Volume 40, Number 1, Winter 2020, pp. 114-115 (Review)



Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2020.0014>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/747076>

But Yankee women, Egge concludes, were only successful in achieving the vote because they “pitted native-born women against [the] foreign-born,” manipulating “long-standing ethnic wariness into outright discrimination.” They helped make “conformity, not diversity, a hallmark of Midwestern identity” (183–84).

This important study will be useful to scholars and students of suffrage and women’s history and the history of the Great Plains and Midwest. It is a welcome and accessible contribution to public discourse about the politics of gender, citizenship, and nativism as we commemorate the centenary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 2020 and beyond.

KIMBERLY JENSEN

Department of History
Western Oregon University

Flood on the Tracks: Living, Dying, and the Nature of Disaster in the Elkhorn River Basin.

By Todd M. Kerstetter. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2018. xi + 198 pp. Illustrations, notes, sources, index. \$29.95, paper.

Flood on the Tracks provides a thoughtful analysis of the dynamic relationship shared between the natural features of the Elkhorn River basin and the humans who have called this region their home. Kerstetter opens this easily accessible book by providing readers with an overview of the Elkhorn River basin, a riverine system located in northeast Nebraska. Within this system flows the Elkhorn River, which begins as a trickle south of Newport, Nebraska. As the Elkhorn River meanders to the southeast, it grows as it accumulates water from runoff and feeder streams before it merges with the Platte River southwest of Omaha, Nebraska. What

seems to be a tranquil environment, however, can become disrupted by snowmelts, ice jams, and sudden rainstorms. Natural events such as these can cause the Elkhorn River and its tributaries to swell beyond their channels, bringing forth death and destruction.

Drawing on a diversity of primary and secondary sources, Kerstetter argues that the contemporary history of the Elkhorn River basin has been shaped by attempts to use technology to harness and control the Elkhorn River. This stands in contrast to the experiences of the region’s Indigenous populations, who “built their homes above the floodplain and likewise kept most of their possessions out of the river’s reach” (67). In contrast to the Indigenous populations, Kerstetter reveals how the modern-day inhabitants of the Elkhorn River basin exploited the river’s benefits (1822 to 1930s); sought to contain and control floods through the construction of levees, drainage districts, and local protection projects (1930s to 1940s); and finally, after a series of increasingly devastating floods, began to adopt a more holistic perspective on how to interact with the riverine system (1944 to present). Driven by the realization that human ingenuity and technology has its limits, communities that follow this holistic perspective seek to manage runoff, facilitate the flow of water down the Elkhorn, and limit human incursions onto the floodplain (136–37).

Although some might question the generalizability of its conclusions, this exploration of a river system in northeast Nebraska reminds readers that unrestricted development that does not respect the power of nature can only lead to what Kerstetter calls “unnatural disasters.” The good news is that hope abounds, as Kerstetter goes on to suggest that communities in the Elkhorn River basin have begun to set aside the assumption that nature can be

conquered. To this end, these communities have begun to explore policies and practices that are expected to help humans to better live with the ebbs and flows of nature. In terms of the volume's contributions to our understandings of disaster events, the lesson derived from this well-researched book is that the adaptive behaviors emerging in northeast Nebraska will become increasingly relevant for communities around the world. This will especially be the case as communities start to confront the consequences of climate change and realize they need to rethink their relationship with the natural environment. Given the book's substantive content, those interested in disaster management, urban planning, ecology, and community resilience may find *Flood on the Tracks* to be a valuable resource.

THOMAS W. HAASE
Department of Political Science
Sam Houston State University

Women in Texas History.

By Angela Boswell. Foreword by Nancy Baker Jones and Cynthia J. Beeman. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018. vii + 334 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$37.00, cloth.

Angela Boswell offers the first comprehensive narrative of Texas women's history with *Women in Texas History*. Her primary aim is to challenge the myth of Texas history that omits women and their experiences in favor of independence fighters, cowboys, and oil tycoons. Boswell synthesizes a large number of secondary sources to cover hundreds of years of history, focusing on four guidelines to frame the analysis. First, she concentrates on Texas specifically, eschewing a regional focus. Second, she selects topics relevant to women's

history, which allows her to revise the standard periodization. Third, she places her work into the field of women's history, using it to examine the ordinary ways women shaped their own lives and the lives of others. Finally, she strives to include as many women as possible and their racial, ethnic, religious, class, political, and sexual identities.

Boswell covers a lot of ground in ten chapters. From the Native American, Mexican, and Spanish women who created a racially and culturally diverse borderlands in chapter 1 to the activities and consequences of the 1960s and 1970s feminist movement in Texas in chapter 10, the book examines a wide range of women's experiences. Chapter 2 traces the influence of southern women in the Texas borderlands in the early nineteenth century while chapter 5 investigates how Native American, white, and Tejana women shaped West Texas and its ranching industry during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapters 6 and 7 delve into the period between the 1870s and the 1920s, assessing women's activism and women's work cultures, respectively. Within chapters, Boswell often bounces among identity groups to tell the story. For example, when examining women's activism from the 1870s to the 1920s in chapter 6, Boswell engages with religious groups, the Farmers' Alliance, white women's clubs, African American women's clubs, Tejana women's organizations, heritage societies, and suffrage associations. She ends with a brief discussion of post-suffrage activism and the rise of the New Woman. This approach allows for easy comparison while giving an expansive and inclusive assessment of women's activism of the time. But each group receives a short assessment, and the overall narrative is sometimes lost amid the subheadings.

Women in Texas History serves as an im-