H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joel H. Silbey. *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. xx + 230 pp. $28.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-513944-0.

Reviewed by Mark Stegmaier (Department of History and Government, Cameron University)
Published on H-SHEAR (April, 2006)

Texas Annexation Redux

"Texas annexation turned out to be another sudden, resounding fire bell in the night, one that rang longer and louder and ultimately with more effect, than any that had preceded it." These last lines of Joel Silbey's *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* fittingly conclude this well-known political historian's rendition of the oft-told story of Texas annexation and its consequences. The book is a part of Oxford University Press's "Pivotal Moments in American History" series. Professor Silbey describes the Texas annexation struggle in just that way, as the "pivotal moment" that transformed the slavery issue in American politics from an occasionally disruptive annoyance usually quieted by the cross-sectional Jacksonian party system into a relentlessly dominating political topic which gradually and inexorably pushed the nation down the road to civil war.

Silbey tills ground which many other political historians have plowed before, most notably in recent years William Freehling and Michael Holt. Silbey himself treated the subject in his recent biography of Martin Van Buren, although the present book contains a much broader and detailed coverage of the political history of Texas annexation and its consequences. The book does not contain any startling revision about the importance of its subject and is not the result of any new, basic research. What the book does contain is a well-written account of this very significant issue and the politicians who made it and fought over it at the national level. Following a brief summary of the American colonization of Texas, the book proceeds through the Tyler and Polk administrations' efforts to annex Texas to the United States, the political repercussions of that annexation in the Wilmot Proviso, the rise of slavery expansion as the dominant political issue, the destruction of the Jacksonian party system, and finally the disruption of the Union itself. Professor Silbey presents all of these points in clearly organized chapters, in a pleasant, very readable style, and effectively synthesizes his own scholarship as well as that written by others. For graduate and undergraduate students eager to learn abut the Texas annexation issue and its importance in national politics, this is the best single book available.

The book does have some defects, however. The emphasis of this work is almost entirely on the national political scene. The Texas leaders themselves, who played a significant role in the struggle to have Texas annexed to the United States, are hardly mentioned, and the Mexicans who contested first the independence of Texas and then its annexation to the United States, are all but invisible. Professor Silbey is an expert on Jacksonian party politics, but for this book he should have familiarized himself with the early history of Texas and its leaders to give his work wider perspective and completeness. That effort might also have saved Silbey from the error in misnaming Anson Jones, the last president of the Texas Republic as "Ansel" Jones (p. 91). Another problem this reviewer had with the book is that, while Professor Silbey tries to deal fairly with the various political factions on Texas annexation and the Wilmot Proviso, his focus is clearly on the Democrats and more especially on the Van Buren wing of the Northern Democrats. Silbey's sympathy for Van Buren's position is understandable but his lengthy effort to explain the shifts in Van Buren's politics and those of his fellow Barnburners somewhat unbalances the account. Despite these reservations, however, anyone interested in the politics of Texas annexation and its aftermath will find this an informative and engagingly written book.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Mark Stegmaier. Review of Silbey, Joel H., *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War*. H-SHEAR, H-Net Reviews. April, 2006.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11650

Copyright © 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.