

H-Net Reviews

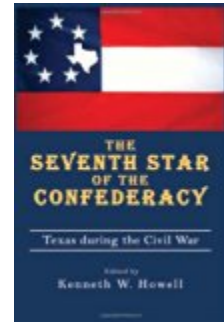
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kenneth W. Howell, ed. *Seventh Star of the Confederacy: Texas during the Civil War*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2009. xiii + 348 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57441-259-8.

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The Lone Star and the Stars and Bars

Almost 150 years since the guns fell silent, the American Civil War continues to fascinate. Countless works on the major battles and participants fill the shelves of libraries, offices, and studies, and the desire to examine the seminal moment in American history never wanes. However, much of this attention examines the Eastern theater or the generalship of Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. Kenneth W. Howell's work, *The Seventh Star of the Confederacy*, attempts to correct this focus.

Howell's book focuses on Texas during the Civil War and incorporates nearly two decades of research since the publication of Ralph Wooster's *Lone Star Blue and Gray: Essays on Texas in the Civil War* (1995). In this collection of seventeen essays, Howell highlights aspects of the Lone Star State while challenging the notion that Texas was nothing more than an insignificant backwater with little relevance to the study of the Civil War. The seventeen essays are broken up into four parts. Part 1 involves a historical overview of Texas and the Civil War, including a very informative and useful historiographical essay by Alwyn Barr and a brief overview of the Lone Star State during the Civil War by Archie P. McDonald. Part 2 contains essays chronicling battles taking place in Texas while part 3 discusses military units from the state. Included in the fourth part is a hodgepodge of subjects, such as the Confederate governors, slaves during the war, and Union dissent.

Quite possibly the strongest part of the book is Barr's historiographical essay. For years, students of Texas his-

tory and the Civil War will reference this essay, which highlights the major studies on Texas during the Civil War published in the last two decades. Also important are essays by Linda S. Hudson and John Gorman, which examine the Knights of the Golden Circle in Texas before the war and the frontier defense units during the conflict. These works go beyond the typical discussions of enlistment and fighting, too often seen in unit histories, and examine the composition of the units through extensive use of the census roles. Such tools allow historians to personalize the war by adding a human aspect that in the past was wanting.

Despite the many strengths of the work, there are a few problems with it as well. Several essays in part 3, which comprises studies focusing on battles within Texas, could have been condensed into one, all-encompassing essay. For instance, Donald Willett's piece on the Union occupation of Galveston, the one by Edward T. Cotham Jr. on the failure of the Union to capture Texas, and Charles D. Spurlin's examination of the Yankees' arrival on the coastal bend, all could have made up one essay. Doing so not only would have captured the various attempts by the North to invade Texas, but also would have provided space for subjects that require more examination, such as Texas's economy during the war or the dissolution of Confederate forces in Texas at the end of the conflict. Covering the latter issue would have strengthened the work, for, at times, some of the essays seem like nothing more than a rehash of Wooster's book.

The fact that some essays are quite similar to those printed in Wooster's is not a terrible deficiency, though, since the availability of these works in one source is quite beneficial, for both students and professors. Nor is it a problem that an essay or two repeats what we already know, such as Ronald E. Goodwin's and Bruce A. Glasrud's pieces on slaves in Texas during the Civil War. The one essay that seems out of place is James M. Smallwood's about the causes of the Civil War. Not only does it fail to incorporate Texas into the events of the 1850s, but the author also turns the essay into a polemic, some-

thing unnecessary in a scholarly work.

Although it does not replace Wooster's work, Howell's edited volume serves as a complement. What Howell has produced is a collection that covers a broad range of subjects. But the importance of these essays goes beyond simply being useful and informative. *The Seventh Star of the Confederacy* achieves its goal of highlighting the people and events of Texas during the Civil War. For that reason alone, this work should be a welcomed addition to the shelf of any student of the Civil War.

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