

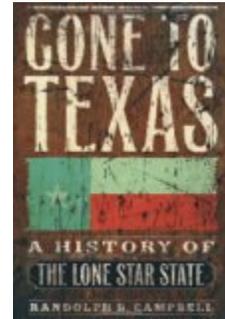
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Randolph B. Campbell. *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. xii+ 500 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-513842-9; \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-513843-6.

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Gone to Texas by Randolph B. Campbell, professor of history at the University of North Texas and past president of the Texas State Historical Association, is a worthy successor to the long-time standard *Lone Star* by T. R. Fehrenbach. Written in a crisp, direct style by a recognized authority, Campbell chronicles the full sweep of Texas history beginning with the earliest native migrants and Old Three Hundred to the northern carpet-baggers and modern-day immigrants. According to the author, the great majority came to Texas lured by land or driven by financial hardships. Regardless of why they came, all either literally or figuratively wrote “GTT” on their crude homes and covered wagons and, in the process, helped settle the land called Texas, a Caddo word meaning “friend.”

Not all groups, however, came voluntarily to Texas. The black slave, brought to the region by the Anglo-Americans, arrived as chattel property deemed crucial to the production of cotton. Many of these former southern planter viewed the peculiar institution as an economic necessity that was “of greatest importance” to Texas. Without slavery, Texians believed that they could not attract settlers or make a profit. As Campbell, the leading authority on slavery in Texas, observed, “Most Texas immigrants had generations of experience with slavery and held racist views that allowed them to see nothing wrong with the practice...” (p. 111). As a consequence, “GTT” held a vastly different meaning—and future—for African-Americans.

In *Gone to Texas*, Campbell conforms to the standard chronology of earlier Texas histories with an emphasis on the nineteenth century. Devoting a full ten chapters to that era, he focuses on the epic events that trans-

formed Texas from a Spanish frontier, Mexican province, and independent Republic to a newly annexed state, Confederate supporter, and then reconstructed state. In the early chapters he describes Texas as a forgotten province within the Spanish empire, attempting to deal with threats posed by the French, the British, and the Americans. Eventually, Spanish rule gave way to Mexican independence. Faced with a remote northern frontier, Spain and then Mexico encouraged Anglo-American immigration that potentially threatened loss of control, even revolution. Ultimately, Mexico could not sustain its hegemony and the restless Texians secured their independence.

One of the strengths of the book over the Fehrenbach volume is that Campbell weaves major historiographical interpretations into his narrative. For example, his discussion of the causes of the Texas Revolution offers varying explanations. He convincingly dispels several conspiracy theories and slavery arguments as either unsupported by the evidence or an oversimplification of the events. He also discounts ethnic and cultural differences as too limiting since Anglos living in East Texas “had only limited contact with Mexicans” (p. 133). Furthermore, he accurately points out that a sizable number of Tejanos fought alongside Anglos in the conflict. In the final analysis, he concludes, the Texas Revolution resulted “from a special complex of combustible conditions,” namely Anglo-American immigration, a remote central government, and Santa Anna’s move towards centralism (p. 133).

The period of Reconstruction has also been revised to incorporate recent scholarship. Campbell argues that the traditional interpretation of Reconstruction is replete

with errors. Carpetbaggers did not rule tyrannically over the majority of white Texans, thereby requiring the Redeemers to free the state from arbitrary, outside rule. Rather, the majority of the men who led Texas were scalawags—native southerners—and most of the economic elite did not lose their lands or wealth. While “Reconstruction alone did not shape the future of political life in Texas,” it did, Campbell contends, contribute to the lack of concern for civil rights and its historic opposition to “tax and spend” policies (p. 289).

One theme that permeates the entire book is the identification of Texas as a southern rather than a western state. From the earliest Anglo migrants of the Old South, who implanted an agricultural, slave-holding economy and held political control of the state, to the secession crisis and alignment with the Confederacy, Texas retained its strong southern roots. Its western past, Campbell asserts, was short-lived (1865-1885) and represented only a minority of Texans. By the close of the frontier (1890), Texas had more in common with southern cotton farmers than western ranchers and cattlemen.

Whether southern or western, many Texans have claimed a special identity or uniqueness to the state—one almost resembling “another country.” Its large concentration of European immigrants, its southern border with Mexico, and its Indian wars certainly separated Texas from other states in the South. But is Texas distinctive or more like the rest of the United States in the twenty-first century? Clearly, diversification of its economy and population has made it less exceptional in the new millennium. Yet its unique history and size has given rise to an exaggerated vision, or “mystique,” of Texas as a special place. As Campbell observes, Texas history has embodied many of the ideals and emotions shared by many

Americans, that is, a devotion to personal liberty, rampant individualism, and economic opportunity. Herein lies the charm and lure that attracted generations of immigrants who had “Gone to Texas” to seek new opportunities and continues to excite millions even today.

Readers interested in the full tapestry of Texas history, however, will find an unequal treatment of the state’s history. *Gone to Texas* tells the story of Texas largely from “the top down,” focusing more on its political and economic events than its social and cultural development. Politics, revolution, war, economics, and diplomacy still form the basic framework of the narrative. Nevertheless, at times Campbell demonstrates his ability to construct good social history. His discussion of antebellum Texas, particularly descriptions of farm and slave life, are noteworthy. While women and other minorities are represented in the text, gone are Suzanna Dickinson, Elizabeth Ney, Anna Pennybacker, Jane McManus, Katherine Anne Porter, Janis Joplin, Babe Dedrikson Zaharias, and others. Furthermore, Campbell adheres to the standard periodization of the state’s history, devoting only four chapters to the rise of modern Texas. Although Texas may be less distinctive by the twentieth century, as Campbell suggests, the pivotal events of the modern age—oil, urbanization, population diversity, Republican resurgence, education, welfare, and the environment—require an in-depth treatment, perhaps more than a one-volume study can provide.

Gone to Texas is both an authoritative and interpretative account of the Lone Star state. Despite the absence of footnotes, academics and the general public will find the book a welcome addition to Texana. It will henceforth be a standard reference to the history of Texas for a long while.

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