



**Nicholas Keefauver Roland.** *Violence in the Hill Country: The Texas Frontier in the Civil War Era.* Clifton and Shirley Caldwell Texas Heritage Endowment Series. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021. 288 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4773-2175-1.

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**Published on** H-CivWar (September, 2021)

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For more than a century after the end of the Civil War, a simple monument in Comfort, Texas, claimed the sad honor of being the only public memorial to Unionists that stood within the former Confederacy. It honored nineteen men killed during and after an engagement with Confederate troops on the Nueces River in August 1862. Some called this a battle, but more remembered it as a massacre since many were shot after they had been captured. Regardless of perspectives, this event and its monument symbolized the violence that swept the Hill Country frontier during the war, setting it apart as one of several regions that experienced the dark side of Confederate nationalism. In this book, Nicholas Keefauver Roland provides a good narrative of what happened in the Hill Country, and he should be commended as the first to place these well-known violent events, especially the aptly named Nueces River Massacre, within a broader historical context. Questions arise, though, in his analysis of these atrocities, specifically in explaining why there was an increase in violence during the war that eclipsed what occurred both before and after. Unfortunately, a failure to consult many good secondary works produced in the past twenty years or so further weakens his analysis and leads to some factual errors, which will annoy some readers but

should not distract from the great contribution this book makes.

The author's well-written, detailed narrative of events before, during, and after the Civil War, from roughly 1850 to 1880, focuses on twelve Texas counties within or partially within the Hill Country, all of which were noted for wartime violence. Readers may agree or disagree with his county selection and question whether making choices by level of violence may taint his sample, but in so doing Roland does manage to include the major events in the region during the period, and he thus defines an effective geographic context for his discussion. After correctly declaring that "specific historical conditions" led to violence, Roland discusses four primary factors: conflicts between settlers and Indians, banditry, weak political institutions, and efforts by the Confederate States of America to win the war (p. 3). Time after time, the readiness of parties on all sides to use violence created a volatile culture that imploded when the Confederacy mandated support from the local populace during a time of economic collapse and military defeat. From 1862—when new laws for taxes, conscription, and impressment made criminals of dissenters—to 1865, more than eighty men died within the white community in the Hill Country, which more than doubled the annual number

of deaths per one hundred thousand residents before the war, exclusive of Indian raids. Interestingly, a resurgence in Indian raids after the war, together with the demise of the Confederacy, led to a decline in violence within the white community, which united to fight the raiders. This distinguished the Hill Country from other areas of Texas that endured more Reconstruction turmoil.

Roland discusses many other factors that contributed to wartime violence in the Hill Country. These include geographic isolation; poverty due to a lack of marketable resources and arable land; the fluidity of herding culture (livestock, especially cattle, provided the most income); the departure of the United States Army; and several characteristics that apparently are unique to Anglo males: a culture of honor, a sense of racial superiority, hyper-masculinity, a “tradition of vigilantism,” and a “robust martial tradition” (pp. 5, 6). To link all of these, and the previously mentioned four primary factors, together in a coherent analytical framework, the author uses David Kilculen’s model, which he developed to explain urban insurgencies, as a useful paradigm for analyzing conflict in the isolated, rural Hill Country. He thus defines the violence as a fight between Confederates and Unionists for power. But perhaps the wartime clashes that are the focus of his book were the result of Confederate efforts to impose order and compel support on a frontier where the most active prewar governmental institution, the United States Army, focused its efforts on controlling only the Indians, while local government agencies collected few taxes and apparently did little to enforce the law. What if the source of Hill Country violence was not a fight between two groups for control but instead a rejection by a significant part of the population of an external attempt to impose power through taxes, draft, and impressment? Previously there had been no such laws. And the conflict became violent because participants on both sides had become used to such measures, for many of the reasons the author discusses.

According to Roland’s appendices, partisan violence claimed the lives of eighty-eight men in the Hill Country from July 1862 to May 1865. While a loss of less than half a percent of the population was far less than that suffered by many other American communities in this era, the death of so many men in such a sparsely settled region still had a horrific impact, which can be better under-

stood by looking, as the author asks, at the historical context. If that is done, then the imposition of martial law by Brigadier General Paul O. Hebert, the Confederate department commander for Texas, in May 1862 becomes the primary factor in sparking Hill Country violence. Before Richmond authorities ended martial law in Texas almost five months later, forty-seven men died in partisan violence in the Hill Country, most of them German settlers killed during or after the Nueces River Massacre. Three-fourths of the forty-one victims of partisan violence in the Hill Country from November 1862 through the end of the war were targeted as opponents of the Confederacy by military units operating under Confederate authority or vigilantes who took advantage of the fact that anyone accused of dissent lost the protection of the law. Arguably these killers followed a template established under martial law, and postwar events proved them right, as few were ever convicted for their crimes. Furthermore, the secession referendum in the Hill Country, which preceded the imposition of martial law, and the first year of the war proceeded relatively peacefully, emphasizing the impact of the tragic decision made by Hebert in May 1862.

Roland does an excellent job of using a variety of primary resources—including government records, newspapers, letters, and memoirs—to create a thorough narrative. But his declaration that his analysis of Hill Country violence during the Civil War can serve as a case study for understanding similar events elsewhere in the United States at that time is undermined by his apparent failure to consult many good secondary works on Civil War violence elsewhere in the country. While he occasionally remarks on how partisan violence in the Hill Country is similar to Union operations in the border states of Missouri and Kentucky, and even Tennessee, he does not cite works on those topics. Nor does he cite recent works on Confederate suppression of dissent throughout the South. Finally, he does not mention violence against those who dissented against the Confederacy in

other parts of Texas, even though the cover art for his book is drawn from a contemporary account of the Great Hanging at Gainesville, in which more than forty alleged Unionists lost their lives. Using more secondary sources on wartime events to provide an effective context, especially those that focus on martial law in the Confederacy, would have made this work a better case study to employ in analyzing Civil War violence elsewhere, and it might have improved his insights into why such events occurred in the Hill Country during the war.

A greater use of secondary sources would also have helped Roland avoid some errors that may only matter to specialists. Comanches were not the only Indians who clashed with Hill Country settlers, with whom they shared the distinction of being invaders, having arrived about one century earlier, as well as a sense of racial superiority and masculine honor that led to violent actions. To write that Germans were peaceful and had “no honor culture to speak of” invites harsh criticism that can overshadow the more important points made in this work (p. 6). The same can be said of Roland’s claims that the Rio Grande border was peaceful until the outbreak of the Civil War and that other regions of Texas with large pro-Union populations remained relatively quiet during the conflict. Finally, the strong possibility remains that many of those in the Hill Country whom he labels as “Unionist” just wanted to be left alone. But despite these quibbles, and the likelihood that a more thorough review of the secondary literature and a reshuffling of contributing factors might have led to a better analysis, this is a good scholarly work on the violence in the Texas Hill Country during the Civil War. It also happens to be a first book from an author with a distinguished academic lineage. Roland is a great-nephew of the late Charles P. Roland, the fine southern historian from the University of Kentucky, and this work began as his dissertation. I think his great-uncle should be proud.

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**Citation:** Richard B. McCaslin. Review of Roland, Nicholas Keefauver. *Violence in the Hill Country: The Texas Frontier in the Civil War Era*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. September, 2021.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=56330>



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