



Charles D. Grear, ed. *The Fate of Texas: The Civil War and the Lone Star State*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008. 292 pp. \$37.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55728-883-7.



Reviewed by Angela F. Murphy (Texas State University - San Marcos)

Published on H-CivWar (October, 2009)

Commissioned by Matthew E. Mason (Brigham Young University)

Texans and the Civil War

Charles D. Grear's contribution to the *Civil War in the West* series of the University of Arkansas Press highlights some of the recent research into the role Texas played in the Civil War and, more prominently, into the ways in which the Civil War affected Texas society. Although the volume considers some matters of military strategy, most of the selections concentrate on the war's impact on Texans, not only during the course of the war, but also during its aftermath up to present day. The collection complicates our view of the Civil War by taking some of the common questions and conclusions of Civil War historiography and applying them to Texas society. What did the soldiers fight for? How united were members of society in supporting the Confederate war effort? How did the wartime experience affect soldiers, women, slave-owners, non-slave-owning whites, and slaves? How did it influence relations between these various sectors of society? How has and should the war be remembered? These questions, when applied to Texas, highlight both the ways in which Texans dealt with the same concerns as other Confederate states and the ways

in which Texas stood apart from the rest of the South.

The first chapter of the book, by Joseph G. Dawson III, emphasizes how Texas's location on the Confederate frontier made its role in the war distinctive. Dawson's selection helps to set the context for the rest of the collection by giving the reader an idea of how Texas figured into Confederate war strategy. He argues that Texas played a more prominent role in Jefferson Davis's plans than most realize, pointing out the importance of coastline and border defense and the economic value of Texas cotton. Most interestingly, he draws attention to Henry Sibley's 1861-62 New Mexico campaign to illustrate Jefferson Davis's hopes that Texas could be a launching point for a strategy of westward expansion during the early part of the war. Few scholars have taken much note of this failed campaign, but Dawson convincingly argues that it holds more importance than has been acknowledged. After all, the South's determination to spread slavery westward was a significant motivation for the war. Dawson asserts that it remained a goal after the outbreak of hostilities.

While the book leads with a chapter on military strategy, the rest of the selections concentrate on the way that the war affected Texans of various stripes. Two of the chapters make contributions to the growing scholarship on the character and motivations of ordinary soldiers who fought for the Confederacy. Richard Lowe investigates the family relationships of Texas soldiers in three Texas Civil War units as revealed in letters to and from home. Contrary to some scholarship that insists that many Confederate soldiers were distant patriarchs, Lowe discovered correspondence filled with expressions of intimacy and affection. Editor of the collection Gear also contributes a chapter on Texas soldiers, examining their motivations for joining the war. Gear discusses how the desire to protect home was a guiding force for many Confederates and points out that the question of motivation takes on a new dimension when applied to Texans, for one must ask not only why they fought but why they fought so far from home. He finds his answer in the unique nature of the Texas white population, which was made up primarily of emigrants from other areas. His research shows that many Texans who fought in the eastern theater were in fact migrants from the Southeast who had settled in East Texas. They fought for home, but it was for the hometowns they had left behind.

Other chapters consider how Texans on the home front dealt with the stresses of wartime conditions. Two of these entries consider the question of dissent, for the Texas population was deeply divided on secession and the war. Richard B. McCaslin contributes an essay on "The Great Hanging at Gainesville," a mass lynching that took place in North Texas in which vigilantes hanged forty dissenters with the sanction of local authorities. McCaslin's essay highlights the fact that wartime tensions brought violence not only on the battlefield but to the Texas frontier as the stresses of war provoked fractures between various segments of society, many of which were along class lines. Walter D. Kamphoefner also deals with the question of dissent, examining the Texas German community's reaction to the war. Texas Germans were well known for their strong unionism and antipathy towards slavery, but Kamphoefner points out that recently historians have complicated that picture by highlighting German contributions to the Confederate cause. He cautions against an overcorrection of the narrative, however, insisting that the Unionist spirit was indeed predominant among Germans. Although some Germans fought for the Confederacy and many did not speak out against the war, he reminds us that nativism was rife during this era and that many immigrants did

not vocalize their true opinions for fear of attracting additional hostility toward their community. Thus, just as McCaslin's essay exposes class divisions in Texas, Kamphoefner points out how tensions along ethnic lines heightened during wartime.

In addition to stimulating class and ethnic divisions, the experience of war affected conceptions of gender and concerns about race in Texas. Angela Boswell contributes a chapter exploring how war transformed the lives of women in Colorado County. In particular, she examines financial transactions, legal documents, and wills in order to determine the extent to which women's responsibilities and rights changed as a result of war. Her study reveals that as the war dragged on, women were forced into taking on more responsibility and that this led to a transformation in ideas about gender roles. She points out that it was not only the stress of having Union troops nearby that transformed women's lives in the South. Lives were transformed far from the front as well because of the prolonged absence of men who left home to fight. Dale Baum highlights other stresses in Texas in his examination of the unique way in which the institution of slavery changed in Texas during the war. In his essay on slave refugees, Baum points out that Texas was unique among the Confederate states in that the number of slaves in the state grew during the war as slaveholders fled to the frontier with their chattel. Baum's selection adds to our understanding of slavery in Texas by identifying the Texas regions where the slave population increased, pointing out that far more slaves came into Texas than has previously been recognized, and examining how the influx of slaves exacerbated both fears about race and tensions between slaveholders and the rest of the Texas population during the war.

A strength of this collection is that it also considers the aftermath of the war. A number of the above selections address the Reconstruction years in their discussions of wartime change in Texas, and two of the chapters deal specifically with the years after the war. Randolph B. Campbell contributes an essay on how veterans from Harrison County adapted to postwar Texas society and he notes that, contrary to other scholarship that indicates that Southern veterans were not very politically active, those in Harrison County did participate in politics in various venues. Carl H. Moneyhon takes a wider view of the Reconstruction years and considers the way in which Texas soldiers and leaders accepted the Confederate loss. Contesting the idea that Texans were more defiant during Reconstruction because they didn't feel defeated so far from the main battlefields, Moneyhon as-

serts that Texans expressed humiliation and discouragement at the end of the war. He thus points to a need to find an alternative explanation for the excessive violence in Texas during the Reconstruction era, and McCaslin suggests that future studies focus more on the political situation in Texas following the war.

The final chapters of Gear's collection contribute to the growing scholarship on the public memory of the Civil War. Confederate symbols have been objects of controversy in recent decades as Americans debate whether they are benign expressions of heritage or malignant expressions of hate. In Texas, such a controversy sprouted over statues of prominent Confederates erected on the University of Texas campus in Austin after World War I. Alexander Mendoza's chapter on these monuments reveals the Lost Cause origins of these statues and illustrates how an understanding of how Confederate memorials came to be and what they were intended to represent can help to inform debates over such sites. Julie Holcomb's chapter follows Mendoza's with a discussion of how public historians in Texas can negotiate these types of controversies as they try to educate the public about the Civil War in Texas. The National Park Service has committed itself in recent years

to presenting a balanced view of the Civil War, but the emotional connection that many Southerners, including many Texans, have to the era is a challenge that public historians have continually had to negotiate. Holcombe discusses these difficulties and makes some recommendations about how public historians can negotiate the rocky terrain of the Civil War in Texas.

Most studies of the Confederacy understandably have focused on the areas that saw most of the fighting and where Southerners endured Union occupation, but this book, and the series to which it belongs, indicates the way in which scholars are taking increasing interest in how the war affected frontier areas like Texas. Texans dealt with many of the same stresses endured in other parts of the South, but they also encountered unique challenges associated with their frontier location. In *The Fate of Texas*, Gear has put together a volume that reveals both of these aspects of the Texas experience. The contributors highlight both the distinctively Southern and the uniquely Texan experience of the Civil War and its aftermath in the state, and they ask questions and make conclusions that are sure to provoke future research into the way Texans both affected and were affected by the war.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-civwar>

Citation: Angela F. Murphy. Review of Gear, Charles D., ed., *The Fate of Texas: The Civil War and the Lone Star State*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. October, 2009.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23530>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.