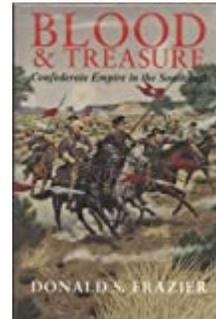


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Donald S. Frazier. *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995. xiii + 361 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89096-639-6.



Reviewed by T. Michael Parrish (LBJ Library, University of Texas)

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If anyone needs proof that we are enjoying a golden age of research, writing, and publishing on the Civil War—with much of the best work coming from young scholars in their 20s and 30s—this book serves as a potent example. An increasingly obvious corollary is the fact that the vast Trans-Mississippi theater has received, during the last decade or so, the visible attention it has always deserved. Again, here is the latest, and in many ways the best, evidence of such excellence.

One of the latest in a long line of Grady McWhinney's sterling students, Donald Frazier (teaching at McMurry University) has produced as definitive an account of the New Mexico Campaign as we are likely to see. He shows superb scholarship and a real talent for telling a stirring tale. Of course, Henry Hopkins Sibley's and John Robert Baylor's dauntless Texans comprising the Confederate Army of New Mexico have received some fairly good scholarly attention over the years, mainly because several classic elements of high drama are present in abundance for the historian to exploit: swelling military ambition on a grand scale; fierce, heroic combat; the strong taste of victory; and ultimately, tragic failure and intense suffering.

Rather than simply covering the same ground and leaning mainly on material used by previous writers, however, Frazier has located virtually every primary

source on the subject and taken a completely fresh approach. Placing the campaign in an expansive context, Frazier asserts that Texas's political and military leaders sought to realize a long-standing dream of forging a grand southern empire across the Southwest. For decades Texans in particular had promoted this vision, claiming a manifest right to secure Mexican territory stretching westward all the way to California and the Pacific. Soon after secession, Confederate authorities were more than willing to see what the Texans could do to achieve their dream by military conquest. Cooperation, they believed, would come from pro-southern citizens scattered across New Mexico and Arizona.

Frazier makes his case most forcefully in the book's Epilogue, quoting Union general Latham Anderson: "The remote and unimportant territory of New Mexico was not the real objective of this invasion. The Confederate leaders were striking at much higher game—no less than the conquest of California, Sonora, Chihuahua, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah—and above all, possession of all the gold supply on the Pacific Coast. The conquest alone of this vast domain, in all probability, would have insured recognition of the Confederacy by the European powers." Reminding us that the South had gone to war over the right to take slaves into the western territories as well, Frazier concludes, "Slavery, and by extension the

Confederacy, required an empire.”

Frazier is at his best in describing the campaign at its most personal level, weaving into the narrative hundreds of quotations from letters and memoirs penned by the participants on both sides, especially the soldiers in the ranks who fought and endured. A patently attractive feature of the book is its splendid cartography, executed by the author himself. (He already enjoys a fine reputation as an innovative digital mapmaker.) Many readers will regret that the publisher allowed only eight maps. Sixteen effective illustrations are also sprinkled throughout the text.

Fortunately, Frazier is already in the midst of crafting a sequel, a work that will describe the shameless Sibley and his Texans in their exploits among the bayous and

swamps of Louisiana. There they would serve admirably under General Dick Taylor. That the Lone Star State was never overrun by Yankees stands as a tribute to Taylor and his small army of Texans and Louisianans. With the grand dream of an empire in the Southwest dashed so early in the war in remote New Mexico, however, a vigorous defense against increasing numbers of Federals offered the only realistic hope of sustaining the Confederate cause in the Trans-Mississippi Department. It is a powerful story, and Frazier has proved he is fully capable of telling it.

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