

Women In Civil War Texas: Diversity And Dissidence In The Trans-mississippi

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Review

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Ed. Liles, Deborah M. and Ed. Boswell, Angela. *Women in Civil War Texas: Diversity and Dissidence in the Trans-Mississippi*. University of North Texas, \$29.95 ISBN 9781574416510

“A Long Way from Tara”

This anthology addresses a neglected aspect of Texas Civil War historiography, the experiences of women during the conflict. Co-editors Deborah Liles and Angela Boswell are well qualified for their task, with combined backgrounds in Texas, Southern, Women’s, and Civil War history. The authors they have included, in turn, provide a broad perspective on the lives of women swept up in events beyond their control and the wide variety of their responses to such circumstances.

Like their compatriots throughout the Confederacy, Texan women faced multiple hardships during the war, although not as passive victims. The first chapter, by Vicki Betts, demonstrates that women actively promoted secession and supported recruitment. Others assumed duties outside their traditional gender roles as circumstances compelled them to take on the responsibilities of absentee husbands and fathers. Dorothy Ewing illustrates this reality through a biographical sketch of Caroline Sedberry, wife of a Texas politician and Confederate army officer. In his absence, Mrs. Sedberry was forced to manage their farm, negotiating the family’s business while still attending to all the traditional work expected of nineteenth-century women. Other authors also argue that many women clung to activities such as letter writing and organizing patriotic festivities and solemn commemorations to maintain some semblance of normality amid the chaos of war.

One of the book’s major strengths emphasizes that the Confederate States were no more completely unified than the United States; not all women shared allegiance to “the cause,” and their lives differed markedly from those of Southern loyalists. Black women—the vast majority of them enslaved—are the

subject of two excellent chapters. Both Bruce Glasrud's "Black Women and the Freedom War" and Linda Hudson's "Black Women and Supreme Court Decisions during the Civil War Era" constitute important contributions to the study of African Americans' experiences of the conflict. Three more chapters speak to the difficulties of Unionists attempting to survive in Confederate Texas. Mexican-Texas women, for example, faced suspicions regarding their ethnicity as well as their loyalty, according to Jerry Thompson and Elizabeth Mata. Those living on the frontier had a particularly hard time, Judith Dykes-Hoffman points out, living under constant threat of attack by "bushwhackers, scalawags and outlaws," (188), as well as raiding Comanches. Similarly, Home Guard and partisan units in North Texas murdered violators of Confederate conscription laws and those even suspected of Union loyalties. Candice N. Shockley writes that by the war's waning days, even elite refugees fleeing the Yankee armies from other besieged states to Texas' comparative calm were seen as disloyal and a burden on the population, writes Candice N Shockley.

This is a strong collection of essays, although a few weaknesses exist. In an apparent copyediting error, the reference notes for the introduction fall out of sequence, beginning on page 3. Fortunately this is not the case in subsequent chapters. The quality of the prose varies from chapter to chapter, a characteristic of most anthologies. And while some these essays—those by Glasrud, Hudson, and Shockley, for example—contribute significantly to the scholarship of Civil War Texas, others are more derivative, confirming previous, general studies of women in the Confederacy with specifically Texan examples. Nevertheless, this book remains a useful and long overdue examination of women's experiences in Civil War Texas, whether as a general introduction to the topic or a potential source for deeper inquiry.

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Roger Tuller's current research covers the Sherman, Texas, lynching and race riot of 1930. He is the author of "Let No Guilty Man Escape": A Judicial Biography of "Hanging Judge" Isaac C. Parker (University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), as well as anthology chapters on such varied topics as Nineteenth-Century "Buffalo Soldiers," U. S. Supreme Court obscenity cases, and the legendary Texas Ranger, Frank Hamer.