Review of *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth-Century Experience* by Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith

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Texas Through Women’s Eyes tells the story of twentieth-century Texans who are mostly left out of Texas history texts. Including women of all races and social classes, the book is arranged to make it especially useful for college classes, but is written in a manner nonacademics can enjoy. Each of its four chronological parts (1900–1920, 1920–1945, 1945–1965, and 1965–2000) begins with a lively narrative broken down into several topics, accompanied by a suggested reading list, and ends with a selection of documents pertaining closely to the narrative.

Part 1, “Social Reform and Suffrage in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920,” effectively links reform movements to the women who promoted and benefited from them. Topics include urbanization, labor activism, social housekeeping, food and child laws, and immigration—along with suffrage. Women of color are highlighted in the sections on “The Politics of Woman Suffrage” and “Immigration and Revolution in the Borderlands.” Black and Hispanic women, farm women, even prostitutes find a place in the documents section. Readers are treated to anti- as well as pro-suffrage arguments.

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In part 2, “Post-Suffrage Politics, Depression, and War, 1920–1945,” the New Woman, education, and athletics in the 1920s are juxtaposed with the more radical experiences of women of color. Discussions of the Depression and World War II stress the inclusion of women as a necessity in dealing with these crises, as well as discrimination against women in the workplace. The accompanying documents make actual human situations come alive. The third part, “Conformity, Civil Rights, and Social Protest, 1945–1965,” again includes all sorts of women in all parts of the state and makes it plain that it was the women’s contributions that allowed the various movements to succeed. Contrasting views are revealed in the documents.

“Feminism, Backlash, and Political Culture, 1965–2000,” part 4, includes topics on Titles VII and IX, Chicana feminism, the Equal Rights Amendment, the glass ceiling, and family life at the end of the century. We hear the voices of black and Hispanic women again and, for the first time, Asian women. Both the narrative and the documents show how many more options women had in that era than in previous ones, but it is also clear that women’s choices remained limited.

Though the book is about Texas women, similar experiences could easily be shown in other states in the Great Plains. Texas Through Women’s Eyes would be a great addition to any Texas history course, to any women’s history course, or to the library of anyone interested in U.S. history.

As a Farm Woman Thinks is a compilation of Nellie Witt Spikes’s columns, reminiscences of her childhood in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century tiny boomtowns, published in four small-town newspapers in the Texas Plains. Editor Geoff Cunfer arranges the book topically, then chronologically within topics. Orienting readers with a general introduction, Cunfer also provides historical context at the start of each chapter. Topics range from “Settling the Llano Estacado” and “Small Town Life” to “Drought and Dust Storms,” “Women’s Work,” and “The Modernization of Farm Life.” Within each chapter portions of several columns speak about the topic. Spikes’s writing is self-consciously romantic, with detailed descriptions of everyday events. Photographs, not of Spikes but of the regular people of the Southern Plains, highlight each chapter.

Cunfer intersperses the story of Spikes and her family with the history of the towns where they lived. His introduction and conclusion as well as his chapter lead-ins keep readers aware of the background in which the columns were written. Spikes mentions contemporary (to her) events and uses them as a springboard to remembrances of pioneer days. She does not make them seem easy, nor does she want to return to them, but she does describe them in such loving detail that one can easily be enthralled. She imbues her writing with a strong sense of place—endless Plains under infinite blue skies. Her vivid descriptions of everything from the first bloom of wildflowers to the back-breaking labor of hog-butcher make for lively reading.

The book is especially suitable for readers who enjoy nineteenth-century newspapers or are curious about what life was really like for Southern Plains pioneers. Together, Texas Through Women’s Eyes and As a Farm Woman Thinks present an in-depth look at the work of women in the Southern Plains, whether that work was on a farm, in a club, or in a labor union. Twentieth-century women took part in every imaginable activity. These books allow a wider audience to learn and reflect on that.

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