

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1988

Review of Alamo Images: Changing Perceptions of a Texas Experience

Robert A. Calvert
Texas A & M University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Calvert, Robert A., "Review of Alamo Images: Changing Perceptions of a Texas Experience" (1988). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 511.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/511>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Alamo Images: Changing Perceptions of a Texas Experience. By Susan Prendergast Schoelwer. Dallas, Texas: DeGolyer Library and Southern Methodist University Press, 1985. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xii + 223 pp. \$24.95.

Alamo Images is a catalog to accompany an exhibition of artifacts, artworks, books, broadsides, ephemera, memorabilia, pamphlets, motion picture posters, and other items relating to the Alamo that were displayed at Southern Methodist University in 1985 and 1986. The stated purpose of the book and of the exhibition was to "help explain both the Alamo of historical fact and the Alamo of our imagination" (p. 17). The general intellectual assumption behind the book was that the myth of the Alamo had evolved into such a historical icon of patriotism that any attempt at sorting out truth from fanciful fiction would lead defenders of the myth to see fact finders as betrayers of Anglo-American values.

To explain how the battle of the Alamo changed from a military engagement to a cultural symbol, the authors wrote four essays, documented by both traditional historical sources and visual materials, that weave together historical facts with current perceptions of the engagement. In "The Search for the Alamo," Susan Prendergast Schoelwer outlined how the location and design of the site were selected and protected. She pointed out that those who preserved historical sites in the

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were more interested in celebrating a sense of "historical accomplishment" (p. 56) than in achieving any architectural purity. Thus the mission became not a historical site but rather a historical event. In the second essay in the book, Tom Glassner detailed an excellent account of the battle. He concluded that because there were no accurate or definitive accounts of the battle the ambiguity allowed a host of legends to develop. These legends also continued such value-laden questions as who surrendered and who did not; why the Texans defended the Alamo; or why Santa Anna decided to attack it. In the third essay Schoelwer described how Travis, Bowie, and Crockett became the familiar heroes of the present generation and how the other 180 or so defenders have been largely forgotten. Why do Anglos remember the name of the commanders of the Mexican armies but forget the names of Tejanos who served inside the Alamo walls? The last essay, and the shortest and least satisfying, is entitled "Memory and Mirage." In this piece Schoelwer considered how insignificant the actual site seems to visitors who grew up on Alamo lore and what the contrast of largeness of the myth to the physical environment of the monument means to contemporary Texas.

The catalog is beautifully crafted. The black and white reproductions of illustrations, artworks, photographs, etcetera are sharp and clear. The seventeen color plates are excellent examples of fine printing techniques. Any collector of Texana will wish to own the volume. The essays, however, move the volume from being simply an attractive book to a valuable one for serious scholars of Texas history. The interdisciplinary approach to the subject raises provocative questions about cultural symbols and myths and the destructive nature that they can have on a multi-cultural state and its history.

ROBERT A. CALVERT
Department of History
Texas A & M University