

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1992

Review of Texas: A Modern History

Janet Schmelzer

Tarleton State University

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



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

Schmelzer, Janet, "Review of Texas: A Modern History" (1992). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 733.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/733>

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.

Texas: A Modern History. By David McComb. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989. Preface, illustrations, maps, afterword, references, index. vii + 197 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

In *Texas: A Modern History* David G. McComb, professor of history at Colorado State University, wanted to provide the "adult reader" with a "brief, narrative history" that would capture the "ethos," "flavor," and "rhythm" of Texas (p. vii). He has succeeded. In seven short chapters (or 186 pages) he has spanned a myriad of historical subjects from the earliest Indian tribes, the Spanish conquest, the Alamo, and the cattle and oil industries to the present-day social, political, and economic complexities. At the same time he has woven into his story the humanness of Texans and Texas. Moreover, he has enhanced the narrative with anecdotes (such as the "Bowie Knife," "Quanah Parker," and the "Astrodome"), photographs (including an offshore oil derrick, Jean Lafitte, and Houston freeways), as well as maps (such as the major state railroad systems). Without question, he has crafted a popular history that should appeal to a wide audience.

Even so, *Texas: A Modern History* has a few distractions. McComb sometimes has fallen victim to mixed metaphors and clichés—for example, "Lamar cared not a fig for annexation and turned a hard face toward the Indians" (p. 50), "the liberal-conservative fire within the Democratic structure smoldered," and "the heavy hand of the oil depression could not be entirely lifted" (p. 183). And whereas he has concluded that "the old [Texas] myth" cannot be "sustained or trusted" and that "Texans have to look for a new mystique" (p. 184), the long-

enduring Texas myth and Texas mystique are in fact an inescapable part of being a Texan. As Texas writer-philosopher Craig Edward Clifford so aptly writes in his book *In the Deep Heart's Core: Reflections on Life, Letters, and Texas* (Texas A & M University Press, 1985): "without the continuing reality of its history, Texas would be nothing—and that history is full of myths and itself survives through the making and remaking of myth, through the telling of that history" (p. 15).

JANET SCHMELZER
Department of Social Sciences
Tarleton State University