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Fall 2005

Review of *Deep in the Heart: The Texas Tendency in American Politics* by James McEnteer

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Keith, Gary A., "Review of *Deep in the Heart: The Texas Tendency in American Politics* by James McEnteer" (2005). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 780.
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BOOK REVIEWS

Deep in the Heart: The Texas Tendency in American Politics. By James McEnteer. Westport, CT: Praeger, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004. 294 pp. Notes, index. \$35.00 cloth.

George W. Bush has spawned a cottage industry of publications about his success in politics. One of the latest entries is James McEnteer's *Deep in the Heart: The Texas Tendency in American Politics*. In the 1990s, McEnteer wrote *Fighting Words* about firebrand journalists who challenged and shook up the Texas Establishment. Now McEnteer has penned his own fighting words about Bush's America. Like others, McEnteer retraces the Bushes' shady business deals. But it is the Alamo, rather than Bush, that serves as McEnteer's touchstone. McEnteer argues that the myth of the Alamo reflects a deep-seated cultural Texanism that has infected the American character. "The Texas tendency was, and remains an American tendency of an earlier era, a vestige of frontier conquest and ethnic cleansing. . . . Texas Alamo values, firm and unwavering, provided a comforting clarity in times of increasing complexity and confusion."

Deep in the Heart is a troubling book. In this post 9/11 world, it is a mirror reflecting the power of fundamentalism and myths. When religious or political fundamentalists come to believe their myths and to act on them as literal reality rather than allegory, freedom and equality are in grave danger. McEnteer recounts the appalling atrocities committed over centuries in the interstices of Texan-Mexican-American clashes—atrocities born out of an abiding racism and feeling of superiority, and a devotion to violence to sustain the pecking order.

McEnteer traces the threads of our politico-social tapestry back, often to Texas wool. He finds Bush-era superiority and preemptive war dynamics rooted in that Texas culture. LBJ cited the Alamo in defending American help for the Vietnamese. The romantic Texas cowboy myth, McEnteer writes, was largely a Hollywood concoction, embodied by non-Texan John Wayne. "These nostalgic mythic values, though leading to disaster in Vietnam, would later be adapted by Ronald Reagan and, less sincerely, by the ersatz Texan, George Bush." Anti-Red Texas Congressman Martin Dies declared in the 1930s that "Either we are for or against our country"; after the September 11 bombings, "Bin Laden described the world as divided into 'the camp of the faithful and the camp of the infidel.' Anyone who stood with America was a 'coward' and an 'infidel.' Bin Laden's rhetoric mirrored that of Bush, who declared, either 'you are with us or against us,' with no middle ground." Yet surely not *every* evil traces back to Texanism; Bin Laden's rhetoric, after all, is not Texan in origin.

The value of *Deep in the Heart* is that it helps us to see that what may seem like current aberrations are, unfortunately, not aberrations at all. Yet the book becomes an over-reaching hodgepodge, rather than a tightly woven narrative. McEnteer throws into the pot the Kennedy assassination conspiracy dynamics, the *Green Berets* movie, Nixon's war on drugs, the Mount Carmel disaster, Pat Buchanan's anti-immigrant rhetoric, Charles Whitman's killings—why not bring in even world oil politics? (He does.)

McEnteer ends stating his fear that our democratic experiment could “end in suicidal bigoted imperial rage.” Perhaps it is the role of saddle-under-the-burr journalism and history to irritate. McEnteer irritates; though, in the end, the discomfort is as much with the hodgepodge as with historical analysis and the prophecy. **Gary A. Keith**, *Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin*.