and reports that assert that the Mexican cavalry inflicted most of the defenders’ casualties as the Anglo Texans exited in three large, unorganized groups.

Tucker avoids almost wholly the temptation of excessive debunking. His approach is factual and objective, and he does not attempt to make cowards of those traditionally regarded as heroes. Instead, he documents the lax discipline and divided leadership of the volunteers as well their flawed strategic vision and fatal absence of central coordination. He views Mexican military commander General Antonio López de Santa Anna as a creature of extremes—bold and lackadaisical, driven by motives of both personal glory and national destiny.

This book has the virtue of being a dispassionate treatment of a subject given so often to xenophobic excess. At the same time, it has many flaws. The introductory section is a long rehashing of revisionist views of the origin of the Texas revolt, with emphasis on the significance of the role of protecting slavery. The author here contributes nothing new while posing as though he has made some kind of original contribution. The narrative is uninspired and frequently repetitious, and the elaboration of the book’s essential thesis emerges two-thirds of the way through. Tucker has not used many original Mexican manuscript sources from the Department of War, though these materials hold out the potential to make his conclusions definitive.

Finally, the book contains entirely too much conjecture. The attackers surprised the defenders because the “pickets and sentries . . . were most likely either bayoneted by enlisted men or sabered by officers” (p. 204). No trumpeters broke the silence at the outset of the attack, as reported in some Mexican memoirs, because “Santa Anna would not have issued such orders” (p. 205). Commander William B. Travis “evidently felt that he had only one recourse—suicide,” a conclusion based on reports that he suffered a clean shot to the head, not the kind of wound that a Mexican musket would have inflicted (p. 230). “What has been overlooked,” Tucker concludes, “is the fact that Travis’ suicide—if it indeed occurred—was completely understandable under the circumstances” (p. 232).

This tendency to mix fact with conjecture and a general failure to develop conclusions based on careful weighing of varied evidence make this work something less than authoritative. In the end, discerning readers are likely to doubt some of the more stunning assertions of the book—for example, that Mexican casualties were relatively light and mostly inflicted by random musket fire from their comrades, or that the defenders scarcely put up a fight at all.

Thus, the tale of the battle for the Alamo has yet to find its final narrator. Strangely, as so many have noted, this iconic battle continues to resemble some ancient myth, as if its mysteries defy the conventions of history approached as a social science.

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Bryan Edward Stone has written a fine book with relevance to many audiences: not only those interested in southern history but also those in western
history and American Jewish history. This broad scope is a function of his
topic, for "Texas," as he notes, "is sometimes southern, western, or southwest-
erm" (p. 15). For all these audiences, his interpretative construct will be thought
provoking.

"Frontier" is a concept, Stone argues, as crucial to the Jewish histori-
cal experience as to the American experience. Drawing on the work of such
scholars as Stephen Aron and Sander L. Gilman, Stone defines the frontier
as a process, an encounter of cultures, rather than as a geographical fixity.
Negotiating this process of cultural encounter has shaped "the evolution of
[Jewish Texans'] sense of themselves as particular kinds of Jews and particular
kinds of Texans" (p. 20). Texas Jewish identity is defined, on the one hand, by
its relationship with the American Jewish mainstream and, on the other, by its
relationship with the Anglo majority in the state. Over the years, Texas Jews
"constructed a distinctive local and regional sense of themselves as Texans while
still identifying strongly with other American Jews and with world Jewry in
general" (p. 124).

Stone sees the negotiation of the frontier at work throughout the centuries
covered by his narrative, sometimes in more obvious ways (the earliest Jewish
settlers in Mexican, republican, and early statehood periods) and later in more
metaphorical ways. Specialists in southern history will be most interested in
the chapters on the Texas Jewish response to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in
the 1920s and to the civil rights crises of the 1950s and 1960s. Attempting to
balance economic, political, and moral concerns, Texas Jews exemplified the
liminality of being both insiders (whites) and outsiders (non-Christians) that
characterizes the frontier experience.

Stone, a fourth-generation Jewish Texan, deemphasizes the role of region-
alism in American Jewish history. But, as he acknowledges, "whether or not
[regional] distinctions [among Jews] can be confirmed through objective
analysis . . . , they are quite real in the minds of individuals and in the self-
identifications of groups" (p. 101). The fact that certain episodes in Texas
Jewish history, such as the debate over Zionism, highlight the dynamic of
the American Jewish experience as a whole does not negate the importance
of region in explaining this experience. (Stone incorrectly uses the term
non-Zionist to refer to active Jewish opponents of the Zionist movement in
the pre-State of Israel period. These were in fact anti-Zionists. Non-Zionist
refers to those individuals, like Louis Marshall, who did not support the idea
of a political state but cooperated in the development of the land or to those
organizations, like the American Jewish Committee, that were officially
neutral.)

Jewish historians have fruitfully applied the idea of frontier as cul-
tural encounter to many regions and times, from (to give only American
examples) the early-nineteenth-century Ohio River Valley to twentieth-
century Alaska. It is certainly possible to use the concept so broadly that it
becomes nonfunctional, and Stone flirts with this danger. But he has done an
important service in suggesting creative new ways that the concept can be
deployed.

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