

[Crowe on Liles and Boswell, 'Women in Civil War Texas: Diversity and Dissidence in the Trans-Mississippi'](#)

Discussion published by Jessie Frazier on Thursday, December 13, 2018

The following book review from H-Texas may be of interest to some H-Women list members.

Author:

Debbie M. Liles, Angela Boswell, eds.

Reviewer:

Rebekah Crowe

Debbie M. Liles, Angela Boswell, eds. *Women in Civil War Texas: Diversity and Dissidence in the Trans-Mississippi*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2016. Illustrations, maps. 336 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57441-651-0.

Reviewed by Rebekah Crowe (Wayland Baptist University) **Published on** H-Texas (December, 2018) **Commissioned by** Linda Powell (Amarillo College and Wayland Baptist University)

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One of the first lessons for budding historians is that their research needs to fill holes in the historical record. This volume is an excellent example of how to do just that. Deborah M. Liles and Angela Boswell set out to demonstrate that, despite a perceived lack of primary sources, scholarly work on women in Texas during the years of the Civil War is possible. To that end, they collected essays on diverse populations of Texas women from a variety of historians.

Women in Civil War Texas is incredibly useful. Undergraduates and graduate students alike will appreciate its straightforward simplicity, finding the information in this book easy to digest, yet fascinating, and applicable in a wide range of courses, including those on the Civil War, Texas history, and/or women's history. Boswell's introduction contains exemplary examples of both historiography and a strong thesis argument with supporting evidence. Boswell also addresses the conundrum of Texas head-on—is it West? South? a battle site? a frontier?—and encourages readers to think in terms of how much more complicated the Lone Star State, indeed any historical situation, is to fit into one or two research boxes.

The essays that follow in roughly chronological order fit together but also stand alone as inspiring scholarly works. Their lengths are impressively compact considering the large number of specific examples contained within. Each essay situates a particular community of women within the larger scope of American history, Texas history, women's history, and Civil War history, demonstrating that history does not occur in a vacuum and that the most effective history acknowledges what already has been written on the subject, as well as what remains to be done.

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Vicki Betts argues that Texas women supported first secession and then the war in myriad ways, even before Texas voted to join the Confederacy. Dorothy Ewing uses Caroline Sedberry's experience as wife of a Texas Confederate politician to show how Texas women, not unfamiliar with taking care of business during the absence of men, gained confidence in their own abilities and made more decisions on their own. Letters passed between Texans during the Civil War are more than just invaluable primary sources for historians today. Beverly Rowe demonstrates that such correspondence provides great insight into how male and female Texans experienced the Civil War on an everyday basis, as well as how the war changed Texas and Texans forever. Brittany Bounds looks at Texas women's activities during the Civil War, arguing that Texas women were able to keep themselves and their minds busy enough to maintain hope better than Confederate women living in other states.

Bruce Glasrud's essay provides an overview of the tenuous existence of African American women in Texas during the Civil War, women for whom the Civil War was clearly about freedom. Linda Hudson continues the discussion of African American women by exploring how they used the Texas state court system to greater degree than has been studied previously. Jerry Thompson and Elizabeth Mata contribute research on *Tejanas*, who participated in the Civil War much more than the oft-told version of the story indicates. Judith Dykes-Hoffman takes on a group of immigrant women—German Texan Unionists. These women, living in a frontier region of Texas, not only faced the same upheaval as their Confederate supporting neighbors but also lived in the midst of great hostility, struggling to keep themselves, their families, and their menfolk safe.

Rebecca Sharpless also discusses Unionist women, this time focusing on the small north Texas town of Gainesville. She argues that the story of the violent deaths of some of the men in Gainesville who supported the Union during the Civil War had to go underground for many years, leaving the women who survived to grieve, unsupported, in silence. Some of the women who experienced the Civil War in Texas came as refugees from other parts of the Confederacy once the war broke out. Candice Shockley demonstrates that this group of elite women had to adjust their impressions of themselves as "southern ladies" and that they did so without a unified model to which they could look. Deborah Liles returns to the subject of the Texas frontier in the last essay of the volume. She explores the lives of women living isolated lives on the cattle frontier of Texas, where raids by Native peoples constituted one of the most present dangers during the Civil War.

The images the editors selected help bely the assumption that few visual primary sources exist on mid-nineteenth-century Texas women. Starting each essay with an image, usually a portrait, gives the reader a face to have in mind while working through the information in that essay. Likewise, the standardized maps assist readers in locating themselves within the geographical area. The authors of the essays in this collection model for students of history how to extrapolate information from secondary sources on topics related to the subject at hand as well as best practices for analyzing a wide variety of primary sources, such as local, regional, and national newspapers and other periodicals; journals, diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies; census reports and other government documents; and material culture.

It will be interesting to see what other research and analysis *Women in Civil War Texas* will inspire, particularly on such topics as the experiences of indigenous women in Texas during the Civil War, the role of religion (of various types) in the Civil War, rape/sexual assault as a method of warfare, and a

comparative study of centers of higher education for Southern women and their Northern/Union counterparts.

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