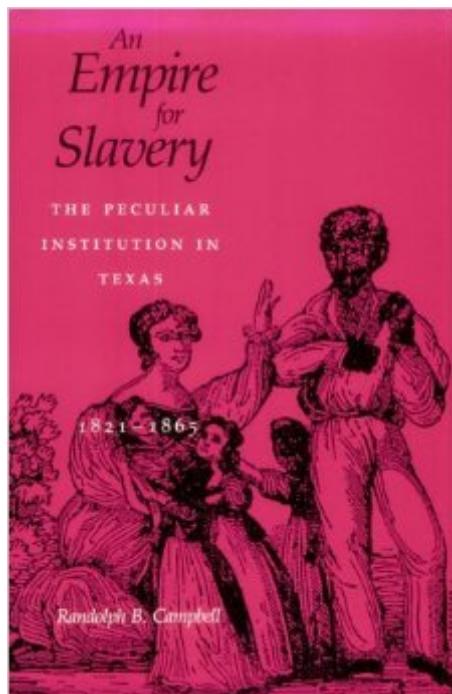


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An Empire For Slavery: The Peculiar Institution In Texas, 1821--1865



Synopsis

As Texas emerged from the Western frontier relatively late in the formation of the USA, it is frequently and incorrectly perceived as fundamentally Western in its political and social orientation. In fact, most of the settlers of this area were emigrants from the South, and many brought with them their slaves and all aspects of slavery as it had matured in their native states.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Mexico lost Texas by vacillating over slavery." "Texans revolted against Mexican rule in order to protect slavery." Both of these inflammatory simplifications were advanced by contemporary writers in Spanish and English, according to Randolph Campbell, the author of this excellent state history. Campbell is never guilty of oversimplification, though he is to be commended for keeping his scholarly language simple enough for non-professional historians. It's true, as Campbell demonstrates amply, that Mexico vacillated in extending its abolition of slavery to include Texas. Mexico had freed its small population of slaves immediately after independence, but in the 1820s, when Americans began to move into Texas with slaves, Mexico's oft-changing governments were both unable and unwilling to take effective action. But did Mexico lose Texas, or did the American Texans ever truly intend any loyalty to Mexico? Campbell is careful to give thoughtful consideration to both hypotheses. Certainly Mexico's too-late attempts to restrict American immigration, with or without slaves, and to impose effective customs and duties were the immediate precipitants of the Texan rebellion. But Campbell makes it very clear that the slave-holding leaders of the

Anglo-Texans regarded the security of their slave ownership as the highest priority in their relationships with Mexico. Once Texas gained its independence, the passage of a constitution that established slavery as a permanent and privileged institution, and the immediate efforts to recruit slave-owning settlers from the American South, clearly expose the underlying motivations of their betrayal of their hosts.

I had first intended to only skim and consult this book as background reading for a chapter I was writing on slavery in Galveston, TX, but the author's research, writing, and arguments were so compelling I read it from beginning to end. I am not a native Texan and although I lived there for a couple years during elementary school I never took Texas history. For me, the first few chapters of the book were an excellent primer on Texas's founding, independence as Republic, path to statehood, and decision to secede...the first few chapters were also a revelation for on every page and in every step from founding to secession the founders of Texas made clear how important slavery would be to its settlement and future growth and did everything possible to insure the "Peculiar Institution's" survival. The workings of the Mexican government and legislature in the 1830s and 40s was very interesting, indeed. The sections on the lives of slaves - the breakup of families, religion, music, work conditions, etc. - was taken from slave narratives as much as possible. I would have liked to have seen much more material on the medical care of Texas slaves, a subject which merits only a page or so in this book, but that is due to my own special interests and not an obligation on the author. There is little comparison between the lives of slaves in Texas and other slave states, but the author maintains that is because there was little difference, and - in a statement that made a great impression on me - he declares that it matters little whether slavery was better or worse in Texas than elsewhere...the argument is "morally pointless": "the moral nature of a system that held human as property would remain the same" whether conditions were "better" or "worse" in Texas.

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