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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Captain James A. Baker of Houston, 1857 – 1941 by Kate Kirkland. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX. 2012. Foreward. Prologue. Epilogue. Appendixes. Acknowledgments. Notes. Works Consulted. Index. Illustrations. 435 Pg. Hardcover. \$30.00.

One can not write a history of the early period of the City of Houston without talking about the omnipresent figure of Captain James A. Baker anymore than one could do the same and exclude Jesse H. Jones. A major biography of Jones was provided by Texas A & M Press in 2011, and now in conjunction with the centennial celebration of Rice University, the same press has presented us with the biography of Baker. The brief Foreward to the book is provided by The Captain's grandson, James A. Baker, III, former Secretary of State and Treasury who is also long associated with Houston. Given that this work was written in conjunction with Rice University's centennial, this book is also a biography of the early period of that institution. Baker, of course, as the Executor of the Estate of William Marsh Rice was instrumental in the establishment and development of that institution. Truth be told, it was largely Baker's vision and tenacity that oversaw Rice's dream of a first rate academic institution established in Houston. The tale of Baker's involvement in the settlement of the Rice estate, the legal battles involving challenges largely created by greedy attorneys who may or may not have been involved in the murder of Mr. William Marsh Rice (Captain Baker was convinced he was), is one of the strong points of the book. Ms. Kirkland digs back into the Baker family history to explain the tradition of serving as administrators and executors of estates the wealthy residents of Texas. Additionally, both of the parents of Captain Baker placed a high value on education, a fact that would impact the later development of Rice Institute.

Another strong point of the work early history of James A. Baker. He was born in Huntsville, raised in Huntsville and Houston in the house of his father, Judge James A. Baker, one time Judge of the 7th District Court in Texas, a founder of the Houston Bar Association and the firm that eventu-

ally becomes Baker Botts, LP, one of the foremost law firms in the Texas, if not the entire country. He gained his title of Captain from the Houston Light Guard, the most successful of the fifteen militia companies organized in Houston in the decades following the Civil War.

In the early chapters of the book, Ms. Kirkland details the background of both Judge Baker and Captain Baker, especially with their experience dealing with the estates of deceased clients, serving and Board Members of Austin College, and Trustees of churches, social professional organizations. These fiduciary positions would prepare the Captain for his career overseeing the Rice Estates and endowment of Rice Institute.

While this is an interesting book, at times it feels as if one is reading the society pages of the Houston Chronicle or the Houston Daily Post. A quick check of the Works Consulted section of the book reveals a section entitled "Private Papers, Correspondence, and Interviews." One finds the names of James A. Baker III and several of his relatives, but nothing of the Captain, nor his wife, Mary Alice Graham Baker. Not until three-quarters of the way through the book does Ms. Kirkland reveal that neither the Captain and Mrs. Baker retained any of their personal correspondence or diaries (267) and then another thirty pages before we learn that the two agreed to destroy their mutual correspondence (206). This unquestionably affected her approach to writing a biography of a public, but at the same time, very private man.

The title would imply that this is a joint biography of the Captain and his city, but in reality the focus is more on the Captain, Rice Institute, and his law firm than it is of the city itself. That is not surprising, as the archives and collections at both Rice and Baker Botts were opened to Ms. Kirkland. Still, it early becomes obvious how important that Captain Baker was to the development of the city through his judicious use of the Rice endowment to move the city forward.

The Appendix attached to the book are helpful. The feature a timeline of the important dates in the life of Captain Baker, a chronological list of the firms that preceded the current Baker Botts, and Genealogical Charts for the Captain and Ms. Baker. The only real criticism this reviewer has of those is that the Genealogical charts seems somewhat disjointed and could have been displayed in a system to make them a little more coherent.

Closer editing could have caught several minor errors; archaic and in some

places ostentatious word style, and a few silly mistakes. A prime example of the latter is the statement that the estate of William Marsh Rice was to be divided in "two equal parts," when ninety percent of the estate was to go to what became Rice Institute (148). Still this is an important book. Pair it with the recent *William Marsh Rice and his Institute* edited by Randall L. Hall, also issued by Texas A & M University Press in conjunction with the Rice University Centennial, or with Steven Fenberg's *Unprecedented Power: Jesse Jones, Capitalism and the Common Good*, also from Texas A & M University Press, for a wider view of the driving personalities of Houston's development. This work should be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in Houston's Economic and Legal History, Rice University, or the impact of Texas on the country.

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Fort Worth, Outpost, Cowtown, Boomtown by Harold Rich. University of Oklahoma Press. 2013. Contents: Illustrations. Tables. Preface. Introduction. Conclusion. Epilogue. Bibliography. Index. Pg. 274. Hardcover. \$29.95.

Harold Rich's story of Fort Worth gives us a long overdue, period history of the city's economic development from 1880 through 1918. Packed with well-researched statistics and appropriate financial analysis, Rich's *Fort Worth: Outpost, Cowtown, Boomtown* offers readers a truly realistic feel of everyday life in Fort Worth as it began to grow into a major national city.

From humble beginnings as a small remote army camp in 1849, Fort Worth's population by 1880 had grown to over 6,600 based on, according to Rich, "the strength of post-Civil War cattle drives and railroads." All was not roses for Fort Worth in 1880 however. Rich makes the important point that Fort Worth during this time was hindered by a limited industrial base; outside the cattle and wholesale trades, the city's poor overall diversity in economic development made its economy vulnerable to uncontrollable events far away in the nation's east.

The economic world in the United States was undergoing rapid and hard-to-understand change by 1880. Fort Worth and other western cities were no longer immune to the consequences of financial events in faraway New York. As the railroads consolidated and New York's dominance over the nation's finances grew exponentially, Fort Worth endured the same nightmares that haunted the rest of the United States. The Panic of 1893 was a prime example of an event completely out of young Fort Worth's control, but the turmoil the panic created was nonetheless devastating locally. The seldom, if ever before, told story of the efforts of citizens such as Boardman Buckley Paddock and John Peter Smith among others to secure a stabilized economic future for Fort Worth after suffering through the late 19th century make this book a must read.

The first chapter focuses on the railroads' arrival as the "economic critical mass" that formed the initial foundation of Fort Worth's future. Subsequent chapters detail the successes and struggles of the people and industries during the rapidly changing and financially turbulent period before World War I. The book is also full of highly interesting and entertaining discussions of the people who lived there, including those residents of "neighborhoods" such as the infamous "Hell's Half Acre."

According to Rich, by 1900, Fort Worth had the best rail service in Texas. The stockyards handled over 400,000 head of cattle that year. By 1904, total livestock, cows, calves, hogs, sheep, horses, and mules had increased stock-

yard activity to over 1,000,000 head. A large, steady supply of cattle, hogs, and sheep entering Fort Worth's stockyards was in part due to the city's reasonable proximity to shipping in the Gulf of Mexico. This steady supply of livestock along with the city's large rail capacity made Fort Worth the ideal contender for regional packinghouses. In a large part due to the city fathers' solicitations, national packinghouses Armour and Swift had opened operations in Fort Worth at the turn of the 20th century and by 1904; these two packinghouses alone employed over 2,000 people. Rich does an excellent job in his realistic critical analysis of the early days of Armour and Swift's growth and their impact on the Fort Worth area's overall economy.

Underlying the economic story, Rich does an equally expert job in discussing and analyzing the plight of the ordinary citizen, including all of Fort Worth's citizens, not just the successful and powerful whites. He does fail to include any reference to the contribution of women during this period of Fort Worth's development, a significant shortcoming of an otherwise thorough perspective of this period. For example, he fails to mention the nationally influential Dr. Mary Ellen Lawson Dabbs, a physician who not only was one of the founders of Texas' first statewide suffrage group, the Texas Equal Rights Association but also was a writer for the *National Economist*, the newsletter of the National Farmer's Alliance. Yet Rich's insight into the difficulties faced by African and Mexican Americans fills a void in the history of Fort Worth heretofore overlooked in detail.

Especially helpful is Rich's wonderful use of local newspapers and an often overlooked resource, closer-to-the-period-of-the-story dissertations and theses. Today we are not able to conduct live interviews with the actual participants. Rich understands the tremendous value of dissertations and theses written during or shortly after the book's time frame as they often include those irreplaceable live interviews with the actual people who shaped Fort Worth.

I strongly recommend *Fort Worth: Outpost, Cowtown, Boomtown* for everyone. I most especially recommend it for all who live in the Fort Worth area. Harold Rich's book has given the citizens of "Cow Town" a wonderful opportunity to better understand the community in which they live.

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Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South by John D. Márquez. University of Texas Press, 2013. Contents. Acknowledgments. Introduction. Chapters 1-4. Conclusion. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pages: 257. \$60.00. Pp. [x], 183.

Professor John D. Márquez of Northwestern University's African American Studies Department and its Latina and Latino Studies Program has crafted a powerful, compelling study of cultural fusion in his *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South*. Márquez analyzes Baytown, Texas and culminates with a recent "activist awakening" by exploited and marginalized communities in response to police violence, echoing the growing protests over racial profiling and the policing of minority neighborhoods today (p. 29). The timing of this 2013 monograph is very prescient and of tremendous interest to scholars who are interested in connecting history to present controversies.

Márquez begins *Black-Brown Solidarity* with an introduction that emphasizes his use of a local, relational sense of cultural hybridity instead of the traditional Latina/o concept of "mestizaje" with its static, genetic implications (p. 16). The author also situates his own experience of having grown up in the area. The first chapter sets down a theoretical and historiographical foundation for the study and the second chapter documents the history of Baytown and its racial politics. The third chapter describes the period of the 1980s and 1990s as one of increasing gang violence and economic hardship, but also as a time of increasing cultural fusion in the daily social interactions of at-risk youth, particularly through rap music. Márquez frames this period as a local manifestation of the crisis of neoliberalism. The book's final chapter and conclusion center on activism against police violence after an infamous murder in the early 2000s, the author's family and their experiences with this activist awakening, and his personal motivations of wanting to "crack back at those elites in my hometown who aimed to condemn and criminalize its moral witnesses of 2002" (p. 198).

A unique aspect of *Black-Brown Solidarity* is the author's insistence upon a high level of theoretical engagement. Márquez's thoughtful exegesis of post-colonial theory, whiteness scholarship, classic Marxist theory, critical race theory, and other intellectual frameworks transform what in most hands would be a simple, linear story into a fascinating rumination of how race works in America and how people today are dealing with racism through collective action in ways similar and dissimilar to activism of the past. While some may find sifting through the multiple theoretical discussions in each

chapter distracting, this reviewer commends Márquez for not segregating the theory to the introduction. Spreading out the more abstract implications heightens the book's intellectual rigor and its utility. The only criticism is the frequency with which the author inserts himself into the narrative. In one needless digression, Márquez disrupts an important narrative of Baytown's experiences with Secession and the Civil War with an anecdote of his having taken the field to the anthem of Dixie as a football player at Baytown's Robert E. Lee High School (p. 73).

Black-Brown Solidarity's most important historical contribution is over the whiteness debate. In stark contrast to narratives that African Americans and Latinas/os cannot or will not cooperate or co-exist without violence and tension, Márquez demonstrates with aplomb that this is simply untrue. He trenchantly critiques prominent scholarship by historians Neil Foley and Brian Behnken as intellectually unfair for judging Black-Brown civil rights movements in ways that can only result in failure and without ever defining success: "According to the logic within Behnken's and Foley's analyses..., all anti-racist movements in the United States, regardless of what activists or forms of activism characterized them, can be declared to be failures, as ineffective, or as failing to generate a kind of wisdom, comprehensive solidarity, and courage among all oppressed peoples that would result in monumental social transformation" (p. 37). While the historians' debate over the African American and Latina/o civil rights movements—whether they were inherently hampered by petty divisiveness and racism or not—tends to focus on debates over the degree of early civil rights cooperation, no one has interrogated historians' interpretive assumptions in this fundamental a manner. While Márquez acknowledges respect for these "useful and admirable" works, Black-Brown Solidarity stiffly opposes scholars who would blame oppressed communities for their own oppression as engaging in the damaging, racist tropes of the powerful who seek to keep subaltern communities down (p. 33).

John D. Márquez's *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South* is an imaginative, challenging, and intellectually stimulating contribution to the subjects of race, class, cultural hybridity, activism, systematic racial oppression, and the demographic and cultural future of America—all in Baytown, Texas. This is an outstanding work of scholarship.

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