



Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans

T.R. Fehrenbach

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T.R. Fehrenbach is a native Texan, military historian and the author of several important books about the region, but none as significant as this work, arguably the best single volume about Texas ever published. His account of America's most turbulent state offers a view that only an insider could capture. From the native tribes who lived there to the Spanish and French soldiers who wrested the territory for themselves, then to the dramatic ascension of the republic of Texas and the saga of the Civil War years. Fehrenbach describes the changes that disturbed the state as it forged its unique character. Most compelling is the one quality that would remain forever unchanged through centuries of upheaval: the courage of the men and women who struggled to realize their dreams in The Lone Star State.

Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans Details

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From Reader Review Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans for online ebook

Charles Hall III says

Comprehensive. From pre-human to nearly current, Fehrenbach covers Texas completely. This is a good book, and written with clear affinity for the Texas mystique and ethos; a must read for any Texan.

Derek says

It only took me about 4 1/2 months, but I finally finished this mammoth book. At 750+ pages, sometimes I felt like I was reading *War and Peace*, but it hardly ever lagged, and was persistently well-written and informative.

Having moved to Texas a few years ago, this book answered many questions that I once had about this state and its inhabitants. Questions such as:

- Where did all of these street and city names come from? (Austin, Houston, Travis, Lamar, San Jacinto, etc.)
- Why are we supposed to remember the Alamo? (Answer: William Travis was a badass)
- Texas fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, right? How did that go? (Spoiler: not so well)
- Who were the Texas Rangers? (Spoiler: no mention of Chuck Norris in this book)
- All that Wild West, cowboys-and-Indians shootout stuff is just myth, right? (Answer: no, and you wouldn't have lasted two minutes there, you lily-livered horse thief)
- What happened to the Indians? (Answer: the story of the Comanches will make you rethink everything you hold sacred)
- What's the deal with all that Texas Pride? (Answer: *veni vidi vici*, suckers)
- Why do people keep voting for Rick Perry? (Admittedly, still somewhat of a mystery to me)

I had one small complaint about the book, which is probably due to my status as a non-native Texan living in the year 2011. To Fehrenbach's credit, he doesn't fall victim to historical presentism by passing too much judgment on the ethics of Texas's past. But I feel that the author crosses a line at a certain point when he begins to talk of these controversial practices and events (for example, slavery and Indian extermination) as not only understandable, but "logical" (he uses this word) responses to the situations and needs of the time. It's one thing to understand it, but quite another to endorse it.

The author does force you to imagine yourself in the same situation as these early Texans: If you were living on the frontier, at constant threat from either wars with Mexico on one side or Indian attacks on the other and you had been brought up in a culture that believed it was morally and racially superior (as many cultures do), wouldn't you have acted in the same way? It's difficult to pass too much judgment when you think about it in this light (even though they were still wrong). Fehrenbach definitely has a more realistic and pragmatic approach to history than I'm used to reading, and at times, it made me a little uncomfortable (a good thing, I believe).

All in all, an entertaining and informative read. Well worth it!

Scott Martin says

Read the 2000 version. I had this book on the shelf for a long time, but finally got around to reading it. Relearned a few things long forgotten from 7th grade history and picked up some new facts. For this book, you can tell it was written by someone from Texas and the South. The American Civil War is always referred to as the War Between the States. His focus centers on the land and the role of land in Texas. Fehrenbach doesn't take the approach that Texas is the greatest land on earth, nor does he slam the state and those who have lived in it for its flaws. The population of Texas, from the tribes who first settled Texas (Karwankawas, Comanches, etc) to the Spanish/Mexicans/ and Americans, has always been tied to the land. Whether it was for political purposes or farming, owning the land and tending all associated with Texas drives the actions of the state. The mindset of the people centers on land and resources. Much of his time is spent on the pre-1900 parts of Texas history, as nations and tribes fought over the land. Once 1900 rolls around, Texas is not really the "frontier" and its history moves into the realm of that of a settled establishment. This is not a quick read, but this is a good read for someone who wants an in-depth perspective on Texas history.

Bryan Alkire says

Excellent history of Texas

Dac Crossley says

Lone Star is an excellent history of the state of Texas. Fehrenbach was born in San Benito - has to know what he is talking about! He has written a dozen or so historical works, and was head of the Texas History Commission (I forgot the exact title of the organization).

I read this book on my iPad. This is the 1968 edition, revised in 2002. Wish he would revise it again - he must be in his mid-eighties. I will keep it on my iPad because I'm sure to refer to it from time to time.

If you're going to buy a history of Texas - this is the one.

Amy says

Yikes! Seriously in-depth history of Texas. It took me like a year to read through the mission period, alone. Still, once you've slogged your way through a bit, you realize exactly how amazing Texas is. Umm, sorry to those of you who think Texas is less than amazing. Read this, and maybe it will change your mind.

Hope says

Book Challenge Category: A Book With More Than 800 Pages

I love Texas. I love the land and the people. But, it is also important to face the uncomfortable parts of our history-- honestly and forthrightly. But this book is not one to do this.

I love the descriptions and personalizations of Austin and Houston. And the level of detail in this book gives so much more context than my Texas History books in school. But, I have no patience for sympathy towards slavery, demonization of Native people, and I can not abide "The War Between The States" (as opposed to the Civil War). So, this book made me realize how much I don't know about the history of my beloved state-- but I need to find a better volume.

Ayne Ray says

It can be argued that Austin is to Texas what Lawrence is to Kansas (for all my Kansas brethren, you know what I mean), and I'll admit that I had many stereotypical ideas about Texas before I moved to its capitol city. But I've found it to be a truly unique state with a fascinating history, and Texans have a rather singularly deep appreciation for the sense of place and identity the state stamps upon its citizens. So forget what you think you know, and take a look at Texas with a pair of fresh eyes; what you'll find is a state with a rich and varied cultural tapestry that is unlike any other. While I consider myself a Midwesterner more than simply a Kansan or a Texan (although there's a little Southern in there as well, thanks to North Carolina), I've learned to love this place and can't imagine calling anywhere but Austin home. Hook 'em!

Houston B says

Texas, Our Texas! all hail the mighty State!
Texas, Our Texas! so wonderful so great!

While I am aware Texas isn't perfect, I'm very thankful to call it home and to be a 7th Generation Texan. While James Power wasn't the most influential Texan, I'm proud to call him family.

Very interesting history of my unique state.

Michael Holm says

I have lived in Texas most of my life and finally this book explained it to me. Fehrenbach not only tells the history of Texas but explains the character of Texas and Texans. This book should be the textbook in public school Texas History classes. He is partial to Texans being one himself, but he is very thorough and even-handed. An excellent book.

Matthew Nevish says

Lots of good history about Texas, but a lot of racism as well. Lots of referring to black people as "negroes" and by the n-word as well as referring to Native Americans as "barbarians" and saying that black people in Texas were "racist". Otherwise, a good historical overview of Texas.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

Lone Star is seven hundred sixty-seven pages of fascinating stories about Texas. It's all here---the original peoples, the Spanish explorers, the Mexican settlers, the American settlers, the wars, and Texas as part of Mexico, Texas as an independent nation, and Texas as part of the United States. As I read along, I kept thinking how much reading these stories explains a lot about the way Texas is now---the conflicts on the border today mirroring conflicts on the border many years ago, the desire of Texans to be independent of a central government, the way the rainfall on the land has shaped the agriculture and ranching of the state. A compelling read.

James says

As big and brutal as the land it's about, 'Lone Star' is a comprehensive, poetic history. Ferenbach shows centuries of violence, opines why they were inevitable and why many of the greatest of Texans were the most violent. No one comes off well, from the First Nations to the assorted Europeans who either betrayed them, failed them, or fell in war with them.

Did I say 'brutal'?

This book is worth reading, but not quick. Don't let the dated racial terminology throw you off. Read, review think for yourself. But if you want a comprehensive history of Texas, this should be your first stop.

Matt says

Like Michener's novels, T.R. Fehrenbach starts at the beginning. I mean the *beginning*. As in the Ice Age. This makes *Lone Star* a broad, ambitious history, but also saps its strength towards the end. Up to and through the Civil War, there is a lot of great detail, fascinating personages, and rollicking stories. Then we get to the last couple hundred pages dealing with Texas in the 20th century and we get broad strokes, no personalities, and vague racism. (The book was originally written in 1968, but updated in 2000. As far as I can tell, the only thing that was updated was a mention that George W. Bush became president Whohoo!).

I liked *Lone Star* a great deal, but my joy is duly tempered. The greatness of the first half just barely supports the sub-par second half. As the author admits, Texas history up till the Civil War is a great adventure. Once the Civil War and Reconstruction rolls around, the moral atmosphere becomes cloudy. It's less easy to view segregation and Indian hunting through the prism of adventure.

This book's great attribute is the skill of its writer. Fehrenbach has never gotten the acclaim of a Shelby Foote (perhaps because he never appeared on a kick-butt documentary), but he shares a lot of Foote's abilities. He is a great writer. Take a load of this passage:

The land, the climate, the sense of endlessness yet constant change made all who came there hospitable, patriotic, violent, and brave. In the Indian it produced mysticism, as he wailed his death songs to the earth, the cold moon, and sun. In the Hispanic breast it made a communion with Nature, a poetry, a willingness to ride the broad vistas, pause under moss-hung oaks, and be. The Anglo had no eye for beauty, less feel for rock-ribbed soil. Yet the land was too big even for big men to develop and destroy. He fenced it, damned it, threw his cattle over it in prodigal hordes; he farmed it, and in drought and shattering hail and cold, cursed Nature and Nature's God. Yet all these acts were in their own way acts of love. The Anglo-Saxon laced his soil with his own and other men's blood; it would take his bones, and monstrous artifacts, and still remain. The sun would remain, while men must die. The moon would rise again, while civilizations fell. In the end would be the earth. Texas, under any name, would go on forever.

It's high-blown, overly generalized, and clearly ethnocentric. It's also interesting, powerful, vigorous. Or take this brief, weighted description of William Travis, the young lawyer-turned soldier who commanded the Alamo:

Buck Travis was one of those most fortunate of men; on the grim stone walls of the Alamo he had found his time and place. He was between twenty-five and twenty-seven years of age.

Lone Star traces Texas from the dinosaurs, through the Texas Revolution, its short-lived status as a Republic, and its history as an independent-minded state. I loved the writing. I loved how he made certain characters come alive: Travis, Sam Houston, Texas Ranger Jack Hays.

I quibble a little with the historical facts. For instance, Fehrenbach clings to the old chestnut that the Alamo was defended by 180 men, a figure that comes from San Antonio's alcalde, who counted bodies inside the fort. This number doesn't count those who attempted to escape, and were cut down by Ramirez y Sesma's lancers (in total, it seems there were some 250 defenders).

Also, Fehrenbach relates some truly unbelievable casualty figures. He relates numerous battles where the Texas Rangers met with the Comanche, and the Comanche end up losing 30 dead or 60 dead warriors. Come on! Be critical of your sources. For instance, there is one Ranger attack on a village of 60 families with 125 warriors. Two warriors per family? Really? Indian demographics have never allowed for such a thing. Nor for the ability to sustain the kind of losses that Fehrenbach reports, undoubtedly relating verbatim the wide-eyed reports of the Rangers (and could there be a worse witness than a man under the duress of battle who also happens to be virulently racist and have a vested interest in inflating the casualty lists?)

Another big problem I had was the treatment of blacks and Mexicans throughout the book. It's not overtly racist; indeed, Fehrenbach does seem to try for fairness in a 60's sort of way. However, there is constant patronization of these groups, especially blacks. I read these passages without anger, calmed by the presidency of Barack Obama and hopes for a post-racial, enlightened America. Still, some of the crap

Fehrenbach is peddling - about how integration is against human nature - is ignorant garbage no matter what era you're in. For instance, at one point, Fehrenbach chides the Federal government and the Supreme Court for its "dangerous experimentation." At this point, I nearly quit. That's what you call integration? I'm sorry, for a second there, I thought that laws forcing employees to pay their workers, allowing people the right to vote and own property, and to enter public buildings, were a good and noble thing. You know, basic human and legal rights. I guess I was wrong. They were dangerous experiments.

Okay, so maybe these parts made me a little angry. They are incredibly ignorant. I'll chalk it up to the period in which this book was originally written.

On the whole, this is a good story well told.

I think of Texas as a sort of American Jerusalem. It is the place you can go where your sins will be forgiven and you can begin anew. The Anglo men who originally swarmed over its borders were failures: they ran from broken marriages, lost loves, failed businesses, lost elections. They were men like Travis, a modest lawyer looking for greatness; or Houston, who'd lost his chance for the presidency after his wife left him; or Crockett, who dared challenge Andy Jackson and lost his place in Congress. By any measure, these were middle aged losers who found, inconceivably, a second chance to reach for the stars. Texas gave them a chance for success, for immortality. The State embodies the American ethos that the smallest among us can reach great heights; that it is not who you are, but what you might become; and that while you are alive, there's still a second chance out there. Or a third. Or a fourth.

Cris says

This book is about a lot more than Texas. Fehrenbach tells a history of colonization in North America from about 1500 onward. The emphasis on Texas is interesting because it was a boundary area where Spanish, Anglo-Celtic, and Amerind cultures fought it out (not being a history buff, this book gave me a much better understanding of terms like Amerind and Anglo-Celtic). All the races had strengths, made mistakes, and had the great courage required to live on a frontier. All the people lived in an environment where decisions were often made based on how to kill or avoid being killed. In my mind, the phrase "Remember the Alamo" has been replaced by "Remember Texas"--rather than remembering a single battle, this book fills in a story that took place over centuries.
