



A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and Memory

By Randy Roberts, James S. Olson

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In late February and early March of 1836, a Mexican army led by General Antonio López de Santa Anna lay siege to a mission known as the Alamo, held by a small band of rebels that included Davy Crockett, James Bowie, and William Travis. In the dark early morning of March 6, all inside the fort were dead -- and one of America's most enduring legends was born.

Randy Roberts and James S. Olson retell the story of the Alamo from both the Mexican and the American perspectives, delving into the historical accuracy of such myths as Bowie's famous line in the sand, Crockett's celebrated fight to the death, and the common portrayal of the Mexicans as ruthless killers. Separating fact from fiction, they trace how and why those fictions grew, from the rapid spread of the rallying cry "Remember the Alamo!" to the "patriotic" depictions of battle in American films and television to the potency of the Alamo as a symbol in Texas politics and American culture today.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In *John Wayne, American*, the authors brilliantly explicated the American myths embodied by Wayne as much as they shed light on the man himself. This book does the same thing, but for a less directly anthropomorphic metaphor: the Battle of the Alamo. Roberts and Olson, historians at Purdue and Sam Houston State respectively, do not think the Texas Revolution of 1836 was motivated by racism and ethnocentrism, as many recent scholars do, but find it legitimately rooted in conflicting views of political freedom and individual rights. The Texans' rebellion against Mexican dictator Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna had many contemporary counterparts elsewhere in Mexico, undertaken for similar political principles, but forgotten because they failed. After addressing the details of the siege (including Davy Crockett's death), they turn to Alamo myth making, from Adina de Zavala's "near religious love for Texas and its heroes" to the familiar 1954-1955 Disney TV series that made the Alamo a national shrine. For Cold War viewers, they argue, the Alamo and Davy Crockett in particular symbolized truth, justice and sacrifice for a noble cause; Wayne's 1960 feature film *The Alamo* cemented the image. The authors' account of the continual conflicts over the physical and the mythical elements of the legend establishes the Alamo as a focal point of a wider struggle to define, and therefore to control, America's past. (Jan.) Forecast: *John Wayne, American* generated plenty of television and text punditry on the actor's place in the American mythos. While the Alamo is a less seductive subject, it remains a contentious site. This book will be well reviewed, and could certainly play a role in the closer examination of Texas that the possible (as of this writing) Bush presidency would bring.

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From Booklist

The trouble with the past is that it keeps changing, an affliction especially true of symbols that some venerate and others denounce. "Remember the Alamo"--as all Texans do--may keep history alive, but what one remembers elides easily into one's politics. In a vibrant two-part treatment, historians Roberts and Olson present a solid summary of the Texas Revolution of 1835-36, followed by a critique of the cultural afterlife of the bloody battle at San Antonio. As the authors argue, many of the details popularly believed about the battle are historiographically suspect, yet they are crucial to the conception of William Travis and his comrades as defenders of liberty. As distilled vessels of virtue, Travis, Crockett, and the others were ready-made for the mass-marketing purposes of Walt Disney; and John Wayne's *The Alamo* (1960) verily proclaimed the Duke's conservative political outlook. Astute and pointed, the authors' appraisal of such uses of the battle proceeds to its contemporary life as a football in the Tejano-Anglo politics of Texas. An exceedingly well written and thought-provoking cultural history. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

Dan Rather *The Wall Street Journal* Rich in historical and biographical detail...one of the strongest accounts I've read of the drive for Texas independence.

David Uhler *San Antonio Express-News* A rare overview of historic Alamo controversies and a thorough examination of the reasons why the Shrine of Texas Liberty has been elevated to the status of worldwide icon.

The New Yorker Enjoyable, innovative....Roberts and Olson do a commendable job of re-creating the murky circumstances of the battle.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Fiscus:

What do you in relation to book? It is not important with you? Or just adding material when you need something to explain what yours problem? How about your free time? Or are you busy man? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is gives you the sense of being bored faster. And you have spare time? What did you do? Everybody has many questions above. The doctor has to answer that question because just their can do which. It said that about guide. Book is familiar on every person. Yes, it is right. Because start from on kindergarten until university need this particular A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and Memory to read.

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