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Review of *The Texas Book: Profiles, History, and Reminiscences of the University*. Edited by Richard A. Holland

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The Texas Book: Profiles, History, and Reminiscences of the University. Edited by Richard A. Holland. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. vi + 256 pp. Photographs, notes. \$29.95.

The Texas Book is an extensive—and exhaustive—collection of essays about the University of Texas at Austin in celebration of its hundred-and-twenty-fifth anniversary. In his introduction, editor Richard Holland explains that the book is “not a beginning-to-end narrative history” but a selection of essays whose purpose is to “bring to life a handful of notables who have walked the Forty Acres.”

Opening with an essay on J. Frank Dobie, perhaps one of the foremost writers and speakers of Texas and the Southwest from the early 1900s until his death in 1964, the volume ends with two speeches by Barbara Jordan, the first African American state senator in Texas in the twentieth century and the first African American woman from a southern state to be elected to Congress. With these selections and the many in between, Holland effectively tells the story of those “notables” who have made the University of Texas one of the most important institutions in the United States and beyond.

One of my favorite essays is Walter Prescott Webb’s “The Search for William E. Hinds.” Best known for *The Great Plains* (1931) and *The Great Frontier* (1952), Webb relates his search for information about William E. Hinds, a benefactor from New York to whom he believes he owes “a great debt.” After reading Webb’s May 14, 1904, letter to the editor of *The Sunny South* in which

he wrote about his desire “to be a writer, to get an education,” Hinds wrote Webb offering to send him some books. Webb accepted Hinds’s initial gift, and Hinds would later send checks helping Webb pursue his B.A. degree. “What he saw in me I have never been able to understand,” Webb writes, “but the fact that he saw something, that he seemed to believe in me, constituted a magnetic force that held me on the road.”

More than fifty years after that first letter, Webb still sought the man in New York City who “could reach far down in Texas, pluck a tired kid off a Georgia stock in a stumpy field, and stay with him without asking questions for eleven years.” Webb is forever grateful for what Hinds did for him, and he regrets that Hinds did not live long enough to see that “the investment he made was not a bad one.” Though Webb spent a more than fifty-year career at the University of Texas in a way that would gratify Hinds, Webb wanted to ensure that Hinds would be remembered “to encourage others to follow his example, and thus to perpetuate his influence.” This essay in particular—and this book in general—serves as a monument to those whose support has served to “retain the greatness” of the University of Texas.

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