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Review of *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* By Gary Clayton Anderson

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875. By Gary Clayton Anderson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. x + 494 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

The struggle between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans in Texas was a long and violent one. Beginning with the arrival of the first settlers to Stephen F. Austin's colony in the 1820s, when the area was still under Mexican rule, it would continue largely unabated until the U.S. Army's campaign against the western Plains tribes in the 1870s. In his latest book, Gary Anderson reexamines this collision of cultures, and in doing so challenges the triumphalist, Anglocentric narrative that has long dominated the historiography of the state.

In seeking to provide a new paradigm for the racial conflict that spanned half a century along the Anglo-Texas frontier, Anderson borrows from the nomenclature of more recent cases of state-sponsored violence, arguing that the campaign of forced removal employed by Texas elites against Native Americans constituted a policy of "ethnic cleansing." Anderson's use of a term that did not come into widespread usage until the 1990s is not meant simply to be provocative. The activities of the Texas Rangers, he argues, are in many respects analogous

to the use of paramilitary groups as an instrument of terror in the former Yugoslavia. Anderson gives short shrift to the traditional, heroic image of the Texas Rangers portrayed by Walter Prescott Webb, offering instead a grim picture of Indian fighters run amok, who kill indiscriminately and with impunity, employing the kind of savage warfare ascribed to their adversaries. By contrast, Anderson argues, Indian depredations were infrequent and considerably less brutal than those perpetrated by whites. Those that did occur were greatly exaggerated by local elites as part of a successful propaganda effort to justify policies of forced removal.

Anderson stops short of using the term genocide, since Texans generally seem to have sought as their primary objective the expulsion of Native peoples, not their extermination. Nonetheless, the conflict was deeply rooted in white notions of racial hierarchy. Accommodation would have been possible, he contends, in light of Indian inability to resist white encroachment. That it did not occur can be attributed to the racism of westward moving Americans, for whom the "seeds of cultural supremacy had been too deeply sown to allow for compromise and negotiation." In addition, Anderson pays close attention to the economic dynamics of the conflict, suggesting that the Indians of Texas were the victims of a policy conceived by elites for land and implemented by unpaid volunteers for plunder (one of the more lucrative activities in the financially-strapped Republic).

While the broad outlines of this story are well known, *The Conquest of Texas* provides a wealth of material on Anglo-Indian relations that will be new to many students of the state's history. More than a grim compendium of violent acts committed against indigenous peoples (although it is certainly that), Anderson's work offers a fresh perspective on familiar events by elevating Native Americans from the margins to center stage. This is particularly in evidence in his analysis of the Texas Revolution, when rumors of an Indian alliance with Mexico helped fuel the hysteria that gripped the Anglo-Texan population in the early months of 1836.

Although some of Anderson's arguments are bound to stir debate, this is an ambitious work, well researched and well crafted, that sets a new standard for scholarship on the Native American experience in nineteenth-century Texas.

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