



How Myth Became History: Texas Exceptionalism in the Borderlands

John Emory Dean

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The myth of Texas origin often begins at the Alamo. This story is based on ideology rather than on truth, yet ideology is the foundation for the U.S. American cultural memory that underwrites official history. The Alamo, as a narrative of national progress, supports the heroic acts that have created the “Lone Star State,” a unified front of U.S. American liberty in the face of Mexican oppression.

How Myth Became History explores the formation of national, ethnic, racial, and class identities in the Texas borderlands. Examining Mexican, Mexican American, and Anglo Texan narratives as competing representations of the period spanning the Texas Declaration of Independence to the Mexican Revolution, John E. Dean traces the creation and development of border subjects and histories. Dean uses history, historical fiction, postcolonial theory, and U.S.-Mexico border theory to disrupt “official” Euro-American histories.

Dean argues that the Texas-Mexico borderlands complicate national, ethnic, and racial differences. He makes this clear in his discussion of the Mexican Revolution, when many Mexican Americans who saw themselves as Mexicans fought for competing revolutionary factions in Mexico, while others who saw themselves as U.S. Americans tried to distance themselves from Mexico altogether.

Analyzing literary representations of the border, How Myth Became History emphasizes the heterogeneity of border communities and foregrounds narratives that have often been occluded, such as Mexican-Indio histories. The border, according to Dean, still represents a contested geographical entity that destabilizes ethnic and racial groups. Border dynamics provide critical insight into the vexed status of the contemporary Texas-Mexico divide and point to broader implications for national and transnational identity.

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