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The Robertsons, the Sutherlands, and the Making of Texas
(review)

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North and South that followed the elimination (or the beginning of elimination) of slavery north of the Mason/Dixon Line and Ohio River during the era of the American Revolution. The North won this war, pulling ahead of the South, as Wright points out, in population, infrastructure, and technology. Wright indicates the ways in which slavery contributed to these failings in southern economic development, but, probably as a result of the time/space constraints of the lecture format, he pays little attention to other explanations. For example, he deals briefly with the role of geography as it affected certain aspects of the South's economy, but he does not consider how geography probably retarded the growth of industry. Steeply falling rivers in the New England states offered abundant waterpower for factories. Texas, where the rivers flow sluggishly to the Gulf, had no comparable source of energy for industry.

Nitpicking aside, Wright's book forcefully reminds us of how slavery affected economic development in the United States. Slaves, as property, were forced to work in ways that wage laborers would not work. This gave the South an early advantage in developing its agricultural economy, but it contributed to a lack of economic development in other ways and to a less dynamic society then and in the future.

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RANDOLPH B. CAMPBELL

The Robertsons, the Sutherlands, and the Making of Texas. By Anne H. Sutherland. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006. Pp. 222. Preface, acknowledgments, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1585445207. \$29.95, cloth.)

Combining memoirs, family history, and an impressionistic essay, anthropologist Anne H. Sutherland describes her forebears' experiences in Texas and examines the Texan group identity they developed during the Republic era and sustained through six generations. In so doing, she stresses two themes: the significance of families and religion in the settlement and development of Texas and the paramount importance of the Texas Revolution in forming a Texas identity. She develops those themes by looking at, and writing from the perspectives of the families of two of her great-great-great-grandfathers: George Sutherland, a leader of the Alabama settlement in Austin's colony, and Sterling Clack Robertson, empresario of Robertson's colony. By avoiding moral judgments and placing her family's experiences in the broader context of America's westward movement, she fashions a generally unbiased, interesting combination of well-known Texas events and more obscure occurrences.

Almost all of the author's focus on a Texas identity comes in the first twelve of her book's twenty-two chapters. In the first four chapters, she explains her own acquisition of a Texas persona, discusses a variety of historical writings, and introduces two sets of primary sources on which she strongly relies. Those sources consist of her private collection of the Sutherland family's letters, manuscripts, and other writings; and the published, nineteen-volume *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas*. The next seven chapters chronologically cover the roles of the Robertsons and Sutherlands in the American colonization of Mexican Texas and emphasize

their participation in the Runaway Scrape and the battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto. Chapter Twelve then consists of a speculative essay in which Sutherland argues that participants in the Texas Revolution acquired a unique identity that included a sense of Texas as a place, as well as a loyalty to the idea of a sovereign Texas. That identity arose, she asserts, because the revolutionaries and their families derived from the revolution a "meaning [that] is analogous to the emotional and structural experience of a rite of passage" (p. 106).

In subsequent chapters, the author covers her family's activities from the revolution through the early 1900s. As she does for the earlier period, she stresses the strength her family found in their religion and kinship ties. Her chronological coverage ends with the marriage of her paternal grandparents, a great-granddaughter of Sterling Robertson and a great-grandson of George Sutherland. She then concludes with a chapter that describes how storytelling and Sutherland family reunions assisted in intergenerational transfers of a distinctive, collective self-perception.

Sutherland's extensive primary sources, as well as secondary sources that include early histories of Texas and local histories of two Texas counties, enable her to make several aspects of her work particularly interesting. In particular, her summary of fascinating details about both familiar and lesser known individuals entertainingly confirms the human-tradition premise that history is a mosaic of many lives. By extensively quoting many of those people, in effect allowing them to speak for themselves, she also substantially adds to her narrative's apparent realism and authenticity. In addition, she includes a number of well-placed, humorous anecdotes that increase her writing's appeal.

Scholars may find Sutherland's primary sources of some interest and see in her emphasis on families and religion points of departure for further study. Nevertheless, her work seems intended primarily for a general audience, and anyone who is curious about the self-perceptions of Anglo Texans or the lives of Anglo Texans during the nineteenth century will find the book informative and enjoyable.

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900 Miles from Nowhere: Voices from the Homestead Frontier. By Steven R. Kinsella. (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006. Pp. 216. Illustrations, map, notes. ISBN 0873515722. \$29.95, cloth.)

For those moving to America's Great Plains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it often seemed that they were living 900 miles from nowhere. No matter where they looked, the entire horizon often seemed a treeless sea of grass. From the Canadian border to the Rio Grande, the Great Plains included one million square miles. Life in the region was marked by extremes. During the severe, frigid winters, the mercury plummeted to thirty below zero. In the blazing hot summers, it topped 100 degrees. Rainfall varied from thirty inches a year in the east to less than fifteen in the west. Out on the western plains and prior to the introduction of widespread irrigated agriculture, the unpredictable, semiarid environment forced many farmers to call it quits and move back East.