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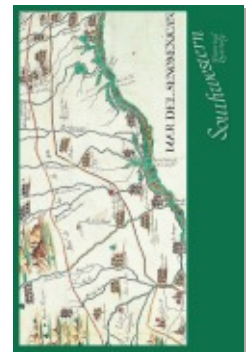
*Betting on Horses: Racing as an Economic Development Tool in
Frontier West Texas, 1886–1896* by Preston Lewis (review)

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ership of these men. In chapter eight, the author explores how these units also represented a way for Black men to assert and fulfill their own notions of masculinity in relation to broader societal norms and national ideas about masculinity during *this era*.

Overall, Blair has produced a well-written, effectively organized, and exhaustively researched monograph that fills an important gap in our understanding of this period. Blair successfully demonstrates both the persistence of these units' existence into the first decade of the twentieth century, as well as how many members used service in these units to assert political rights and cultural values in the face of growing discrimination and violence. The work would likely have benefitted from more discussion of how the economic changes in the South during this time affected the men of these units, as well as more focus on the politics of preserving these units. Nevertheless, Blair's work stands on its own as a significant contribution to the history of the post-Reconstruction South, African American history, and American military history during the Gilded Age.

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CAMERON SINCLAIR

Betting on Horses: Racing as an Economic Development Tool in Frontier West Texas, 1886–1896. By Preston Lewis. (San Angelo: Bariso Press, 2024. Pp. 311. Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index.)

As the railroad crossed West Texas in the last decades of the nineteenth century, existing towns prospered and new ones emerged. Places like Abilene, Lubbock, Amarillo, and San Angelo eventually grew into major cities. Author Preston Lewis selected Tom Green County and its seat, San Angelo, as the focus for his case study of how horse racing impacted this area's economic development. The arrival of the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railroads in 1888 meant that the decade Lewis chose for his study, 1886–1896, is particularly significant. This book looks at how the racing industry enhanced the growth of San Angelo in the 10 years covered.

Lewis uses the pages of the *San Angelo Standard* as the foundation for his story. The newspaper appeared in 1884 and carried articles about everything related to horses. J. G. "Pat" Murphy, the co-editor and co-proprietor of the paper, and Frank Lerch, "a local land agent and flamboyant promoter," were "atop the list of Tom Green County racing empresarios during this period" (p. 36). Promoters recognized that racing could be a way to stimulate economic development in both the city and county.

Organized racing required two ingredients: a jockey club and horses of recognized breeding. The San Angelo Jockey Club started in 1885 and men in the county began to raise "successful homebred racehorses" (p. 46). One of the most successful breeders was Georgia-born John Richard Nasworthy, who arrived in Texas in 1872. Eventually settling in the county, his Mesquite Stables, valued at

\$100,000, sent racers to tracks across the state and Midwest. He is just one of many men that the author discusses who helped put San Angelo on the map of places an owner could test his entry's speed.

By 1889, the Concho Valley Fair Association, which included Tom Green County as well as Irion, Concho, Menard, Coke, and Runnels Counties, built a racetrack and fairgrounds. San Angelo's peak racing years fell between 1891 and 1894, and in 1895 the Association held its last fair. Locally bred horses began competing elsewhere, from Dallas to the Midwest.

Gambling, of course, went hand in hand with racing. Influencing the outcome of races was a problem anywhere horses crossed the finish line and "ultimately damaged the popularity and acceptance of the sport itself" (p. 170). Lewis discusses common methods of fixing a race and the rise of bookmakers. The death of organized racing came when legislators in Austin prohibited betting on the horses.

For readers interested in local Texas history, this meticulously researched study provides a snapshot of how the sport impacted one town and the surrounding area. Horse races proved the attraction that drew visitors to San Angelo, spurring economic growth. For those interested in the history of racing, it looks at the sport's brief success in one specific region of the state.

Fort Worth

ANNE J. BAILEY

Building a House Divided: Slavery, Westward Expansion, and the Roots of the Civil War. By Stephen G. Hyslop. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022. Pp. 328. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index.)

The Civil War was the inevitable and necessary outcome to a series of fatal decisions made by American statesmen from the very beginning of the republic. This reaffirmation of the unavoidable conflict thesis, on which author Stephen Hyslop briskly elaborates in less than 270 pages of exposition, stands athwart the old argument (made most recently and persuasively by historians such as Michael Holt) that the conflict was the result of more proximate blunders and might otherwise have been avoided by more skilled statesmen like Henry Clay. The result is a fast, fresh, and sweeping account of the context for the Civil War that is reminiscent of David M. Potter's (completed by Don E. Fehrenbacher) enormously gripping—and narrower—*The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (1976).

Hyslop weaves his argument around the consequential careers of four slaveowners who were decidedly not hellbent on disunion and secession—Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and Stephen Douglas. His exploration sweeps in a wide cast of ancillary characters—including Sam Houston, William Henry Harrison, Thomas Hart Benton, and John C. Frémont. That these men were not rabid pro-slavery apologists, and that they "sought instead to maintain equilibrium between free state and slave states, an effort that falters as the national expansion they pursued set northerners and southerners increasingly at