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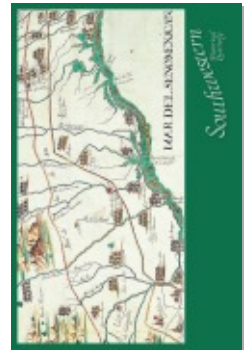
Inside the Well: The Midland, Texas Rescue of Baby Jessica
by Lance Lunsford (review)

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Inside the Well: The Midland, Texas Rescue of Baby Jessica. By Lance Lunsford. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2024. Pp. 270. Index.)

When eighteen-month-old Jessica McClure fell down a narrow, rusty well in Midland, Texas, on October 14, 1987, much of the United States and world turned its attention to the tragedy. Lance Lunsford, in fourth grade at the time, is a journalist whose grandparents were neighbors with “Baby Jessica.” His book, *Inside the Well*, details the harrowing 58-hour rescue in addition to the long-lasting impact the experience left on those involved, most notably police, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians. The author also presents the saga as a critical moment in the development of Cable News Network (CNN) and uninterrupted reporting.

Inside the Well provides a commendable overview of Midland, Odessa, and much of West Texas at the time of the rescue of Baby Jessica. The Permian Basin region endured difficult years in the late 1980s as the oil boom busted and banks suffered the savings and loan crisis. A growing sense of desperation hovered over the people of the area and added to longstanding tension between the more white-collar Midland and mostly working-class Odessa. Yet the emergency of saving a young child brought residents together. The battle against time, fatigue, and difficult geological conditions profoundly impacted the rescuers at the scene, as did media attention and fame following the saving of Baby Jessica. Interspersing vignettes about the later lives of the first responders as he narrates the 58 hours at the well site, Lunsford illustrates that the dramatic events left deep impressions on the participants. He especially focuses on the troubled experience of Robert O'Donnell, a firefighter who traveled down the makeshift tunnel created parallel to the well to help free the baby.

The author argues that the story of Baby Jessica significantly affected journalism. A reporter himself, Lunsford provides a valuable analysis of this subject. *Inside the Well* originated from an assignment he researched and wrote for the *Midland Reporter-Telegram* on the fifteenth anniversary of the rescue. As a child watching from his grandparents' home, Lunsford marveled at the dramatic media coverage. Indeed, people from all over the world followed the harrowing episode live on CNN as the network kept its cameras rolling unburdened by commercial interruptions. Lunsford discusses CNN founder Ted Turner's vision for building a 24-hour news network. By relying on cable subscriptions, CNN could keep its coverage going while the traditional news stations cut away due to financial necessities. Jessica's breathtaking saga became an early example of CNN's success in this type of format, which continues to dominate the way we receive our news to the present day.

Inside the Well is a captivating and at times upsetting read. Lunsford vividly describes the dangerous conditions Jessica endured trapped in the well and the difficulty of her rescue. The author's exploration of the event's influence reminds us of how community tragedies bring long-term trauma. The book only includes a brief essay on references and would benefit from a more detailed notes section

and bibliography. Yet this omission does not detract from the overall success of this important work. Lunsford's *Inside the Well* brings critical context to a complicated story that will not soon be forgotten in Midland and beyond.

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The Mexican American Experience in Texas: Citizenship, Segregation, and the Struggle for Equality. By Martha Menchaca. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022. Pp. 352. Photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index.)

The scope of the coverage accorded in this book on the history of Mexican Americans in Texas is wide; the timeline extends from the Spanish colonial era to the present. In it, author Martha Menchaca explains how political and social currents within the Lone Star State determined the development of Mexican American citizenship. She elaborates: “Specifically, I wanted to understand how Mexican Americans challenged segregation and how their political rights as citizens evolved over time” (p. 5).

The Mexican American Experience in Texas begins by chronicling how the Anglo American government after the Texas Revolution limited opportunities for ethnic Mexicans, considering them unworthy of full citizenship because of their racial makeup. But the monograph also emphasizes the many initiatives and campaigns that Mexican Americans undertook to achieve economic, political, and social success, and ultimately equality.

The study is an exhaustive work focusing on almost every aspect of political life affecting Mexican Americans in Texas. It broadens the vast scholarship that defines the field of Tejano history while expanding upon topics yet to be fully researched. Menchaca brings to light the many laws enacted by the U.S. Congress and the Texas legislature, as well as court decisions intended to control Tejanos. Much is added to such subjects as segregation and desegregation. Her discussion of the 1930 *Salvatierra* case, for instance, augments what the published literature already says about that pivotal Del Rio lawsuit. The author uncovers the aims of the Catholic Church to institutionalize its own version of school segregation. The chapters on the post-1945 era, which include much about the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, unearth key facts and details heretofore unstudied or not known at all. Closing the book is an assessment of the current state of the Mexican American population, showing its important successes in employment, education, and politics. But, the author cautions, continued upward mobility remains obstructed by racist beliefs about Latinos.

The Mexican American Experience in Texas completes its look at the Texas-Mexican narrative by focusing directly on the subject of politics and how the dominant society used legal mechanisms and approaches to obstruct Mexican American progress. To buttress her argument, Menchaca relies upon the most recent secondary sources, on archival documents, and, more impressively, on an array of official government records.