



Texas

James A. Michener

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Spanning four and a half centuries, James A. Michener's monumental saga chronicles the epic history of Texas, from its Spanish roots in the age of the conquistadors to its current reputation as one of America's most affluent, diverse, and provocative states. Among his finely drawn cast of characters, emotional and political alliances are made and broken, as the loyalties established over the course of each turbulent age inevitably collapse under the weight of wealth and industry. With Michener as our guide, *Texas* is a tale of patriotism and statesmanship, growth and development, violence and betrayal—a stunning achievement by a literary master.

Praise for *Texas*

“Fascinating.”—*Time*

“A book about oil and water, rangers and outlaws, frontier and settlement, money and power . . . [James A. Michener] manages to make history vivid.”—*The Boston Globe*

“A sweeping panorama . . . [Michener] grapples earnestly with the Texas character in a way that Texas's own writers often don't.”—*The Washington Post Book World*

“Vast, sprawling, and eclectic in population and geography, the state has just the sort of larger-than-life history that lends itself to Mr. Michener's taste for multigenerational epics.”—*The New York Times*

Texas Details

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From Reader Review Texas for online ebook

Vern says

Enjoyable read, but a heck of a slog. It is a loooooooooooooooooooooong book. I am assuming it was historically accurate, which makes it educational, interesting, surprising, awesome, as well a awful and appalling at times. Only the truly committed and hard men and women survived the early years, and then not even all of them. The characters were delightful, though even some of those with redeeming values certainly had qualities that that were less than admirable. The bias and prejudices displayed by supposedly leaders of the community really was disturbing by most standards. I must admit though, that after reading this book I can understand why Texans feel such a proud attachment to their state. If you are ready and willing to devote many evenings to this book, and understand that there is language used that you will likely find offensive, but are willing to accept the literary purposes necessary for the language used, I say go for it. If not, you will not like it and there is a good chance you will not finish the book.

Michael Finocchiaro says

I believe this is one of the first behemoth books I ever read. It was certainly my first Michener book. I remember pretty vividly the anecdotes of the origins of Texas, the standoff at the Alamo, the struggles for independence and the capitulation with generous conditions to Washington. I read it before I moved to Texas back in '93 (I lived in Austin from '93-'95 and LOVED it) and it served as sort of a cultural guide. I know, hard to believe because one does not associate Texas with culture beyond bigots and barbecue, but there is diverse culture there if you know where to look for it, and as a professor at UT, Michener certainly took his time and exhaustively researched this book and uncovered a treasure trove of history and stories.

Two anecdotes:

I recall reading about Texas' oldest church in the small town of Nacodoches which is on the way to Dallas coming from Austin. So on a trip up to see a Rangers game (crappy Dubya-owned stadium with obstructed view for the plebes because of the proliferation of luxury boxes for Bush family cronies) and I stopped in the town of Nacodoches and asked directions to the church. "What church are ya talkin about?" "You know, the old church, like the oldest one in Texas?" "Umm, church you say?" "Yes, an old wooden church built about when Texas joined the Union." "Oh, yeah, well hell, that church burned down last Ji-une if I reckon right. The one that Michener book talks about you say? Yeah, I read sumthin in the paper about that last year. Shame. Well, you have a great day now y'hear."

Back in the halcyon days of having some money and no kids, I went to Hawai'i for a month and had a blast. I didn't like Honolulu much (too many luxury hotels and herds of Japanese tourists with cameras (selfie sticks had not been invented yet but had there been, I would probably have had my eye put out)) and spent most of my time on the Big Island where it turned out I had distant relatives. Anyhoo, when I get back, I read a lot about Japanese Ukiyo-e painting because I am a huge Hiroshige and Hokusai fan, and I read in one of them that one of the largest and most diverse collections of Japanese Ukiyo-e prints is in....the collection that Michener donated to Hawai'i and is in a dedicated building in Honolulu. Argh, missed it :(

Anyway, the book was great and left a long lasting impression and I can highly recommend it.

Greg says

This book is the reason I've read so few others this year. At 1322 pages (and small type), it beats "Atlas Shrugged" as the longest novel I've ever read. It's a sweeping epic of 850 years of Texas history that's part "Lonesome Dove" and part "One Hundred Years of Solitude." It begins in 1535 with Coronado leading the first Europeans from Ciudad de México into what would become Texas on a quest to discover the Seven Lost Cities of Gold, and ends in the mid 1980s with a longhorn auction and the art museums of Fort Worth.

Generations of various fictional families weave in and out of the narrative - the Garzas, Quipmers, Rusks, Allerkmeps, Cobbs and Macnabs - usually representing some Texas archetype: the Spanish loyalist, the cowboy, the transplanted Southerner, the German immigrant, etc. Every 200 pages or so could be a novel in itself; some chapters begin in Scotland, Germany, and antebellum South Carolina, with 100 or so pages dedicated to descriptions and narratives before the characters immigrate to Texas.

If Michener were able to update this book, he's surely include things like the Bushes, Ross Perot, the continued immigration debate to the degree that Texas could eventually become a solid blue state, and probably even the San Antonio Spurs dynasty.

Michener has written eponymous novels about "Alaska," "Hawaii," "Chesapeake," "Iberia," "Caribbean" and "Poland," as well as one on Jews and Jerusalem called "The Source." If they're as well-researched, captivating and epic as "Texas," I'm going to have to read them as well.

Monica says

4 stars because Mirabeau Lamar got a serious spit shine (gleaming glory-style); education in Texas (actually it's an impressive attribute of the state's citizenry) gets short shrift; and because the rich history of achievements and contributions by Texas blacks and women goes unrecognized. Overall, a most enjoyable read for someone who typically shuns historical fiction because of the unnecessary license taken with fact and fancy.

Laura Jean says

I think Michener did a good job of tackling the various ethnic groups as well as the entire historical and geographic scope of Texas. He covers armadillos, the immigration issues and Texas football as well as the Comanche, Texas Rangers and other more historic things I assumed he'd include.

Danny says

This is my favorite book by Mitchner. I read it right before we took our family to Texas to San Antonio to see the Bomans, to Austin to see Debby and Len, and to Houston to visit Doug and Diana. It affected me emotionally. Especially the accounts of the first settlers along the Red River, and how they survived on

pecans the first winter after crop failure.

When I actually visited the Alamo and San Jacinto I got choked up and every time I saw one of those huge Lone Star flags, or saw the blue bells growing along the freeway, I felt a part of something grand.

Mark Stephenson says

Published in 1985 in the aftermath of Reagan's decisive re-election victory over Mondale this demonstrates the ability of Michener, a loyal Democrat, to understand and to sympathetically report on the ideas and motivations of his Republican fellow citizens. Ransom Rusk, the main character of the latter chapters, is a hard working and patriotic Texas billionaire who evolves into a philanthropist. Rusk's grandparents are also major and heroic characters who throw light on the very troubled relations between the Anglo-Saxon settlers of Texas and the American Indians they displaced. By far the most amusing segment is the twelfth, The Town, with its hilarious tale of Texan high school football. The Hispanic heritage of this great and influential state is also vividly brought to life through the characters Benito Garza, Eloy Muzquiz and his daughter Enriqueta, among others.

Sarah says

As a lover of historical fiction, I knew I would love this book. And, I was not disappointed. I loved how Michener set up this story--a task force has been selected to research the curriculum that will be taught to schoolchildren regarding Texas history, and the history is told through the stories of their families (not the heroes--despite them being mentioned as well).

Michener's research in the affairs of Texas is astounding, and his writing was brilliant throughout. The earlier characters are well defined--you understand why they do the things they do and why they think the way they think. I especially liked the character Otto Macnab--you follow his development from a very young age until his death, and it is quite a ride.

The major characteristics of Texas shine through the novel--the Alamo and the battle for independence are well told, and the shifting beliefs and culture with the discovery of oil is very believable. The sensitive subjects--blatant racism, slavery, religious fighting--are all told through the point of view from whoever's story is being told, and for each there is a counter--someone who believes something completely different. At times, it feels as if Michener is being a little cynical or joking in pointing out some of the hypocrisies that present themselves throughout the story, and I really liked this!

The only complaint I had about the book was the last Task Force meeting. This did not seem like a valid conclusion to such a great masterpiece (although I did think the very last line was fitting), but this one complaint was not enough to hide the fact that he seems to have captured the essence of Texas and of Texans.

David says

It took me a long, long time, but the book was still excellent. Not the best Michener I've read, but entertaining and as relevant as ever.

texast says

FINALLY! It took me so long to read this book. I mean, it's a big one. Weighs five freakin' pounds. Anyway, I really loved this book up until they started talking about Texas football (more than halfway through). I skimmed over that part, most of the bits about Houston real estate, and some of the randomness toward the very end. The last section of the book didn't feel that cohesive to me, while the rest of the sections addressed very specific subjects like war, immigration, politics, slavery, farming, etc.

As a native Texan, I grew up learning a pretty one-sided view of Texas history. This book tells both/all sides, and it's fascinating. I am surprised by how much I enjoyed it. My favorite part is about the armadillo:

"How beautiful, how mysterious the armadillos were when one took the trouble to inspect them seriously, as Mr. Kramer did. They bespoke past ages, the death of great systems, the miracle of creation and survival; they were walking reminders of a time when volcanoes peppered the earth and vast lakes covered continents. They were hallowed creatures, for they had seen the earth before man arrived, and they had survived to remind him of how things had once been."

Vikas Datta says

Again a tale of men (mostly) at their most heroic, resilient, and innovative and also at their most ignoble, unreasonable, greedy and grasping and (brutally) intolerant as it provides a broad pageant of history of what is now Texas... The framing device of the task force is again Mr Michener at his most inspired and serves to create a viable lens for the stories of the Lone Star state down the ages - from the first Spanish settlements, the Americans' arrival, war and Independence, the Civil War, and the troubled legacy afterwards - Ku Klux Klan, oil discovery and the like. At one ends, it leaves you disgusted at the callous disregard of human life and vibrant difference and the lack of ethics in business, but on the other, the larger-than-life characters and activities compel some sense of awe. Characters are, again as usual, drawn very well and the appearance of historical figures is woven seamlessly - especially Sam Houston, and Ulysses Grant's cameo...

Simon Robs says

This is my 3rd Michener read, the others so long ago I forget except the titles. Texas is a big state with a big history that is amenable to whopper size telling too and JM is at it here as he traverses 4-plus centuries of border(s) type contrast and conflict which even now, maybe moreso than ever a reflection of shifting dynamics coursing for inexorable change.

Michener uses narrative characters past and present, lineage some factual some not, all aimed at the various Texas expansion from exploration through mid-80's real estate boons and broke. He separates long chapters each with a special focus that make up the kaleidoscope of Texas, some of these issues are as relevant today as hundreds of years ago. It's a big long travelogue of years chockfull of colorful personalities and lore, myths, legends. The Texas Rangers.

Well, I had a negative reading experience with a book (recently) mostly lauded and so, enjoying this book, its thickness of scope and straightforwardness of prose for me, is just better, I 'got' what was there for getting and left with a smile and some questions to ponder. Ya'll.

Karen says

I first picked up Michener's Texas because I am a fan of Edward Rutherfurd. Both authors tell the story of a specified place through the interlocking stories of certain families through the ages, a method which I usually enjoy. This novel then, is meant to be a fictional narrative of Texan history. Michener examines important events like the battle at the Alamo and the Civil War and factors like religion, the immigration of various different ethnic groups, oil and American football and examines how they affected the Texan spirit.

At first I thought I was reading an okay, fairly slow book. About halfway through I realised I was really enjoying it. This was despite usually not liking the characters. Being English and someone who has hardly ever seen a gun in real-life some of the stories and personalities made me feel almost like I was reading about an alien species. I think I am meant to feel like that as well.

I really enjoyed some chapters, in particular The Mission and The Fort. However you don't always find out what happens to all the characters - in particular the female characters - for example Franziska Allerkamp Macnab and Emma Larkin Rusk. Either that or I blinked and missed it. I would have liked to find out more about what happened to the family of Mordecai Marr as they could have made an interesting example of an Hispanic-American family as compared to the all-Hispanic family of the post-Benito Garzas. I think there could have been more Native American and black viewpoints and stories as well. The weakest parts of the book were the chapters set in the twentieth century as it becomes harder to make an adventure out of arrogance, optimism and greed in times within many reader's memories.

Overall, I would recommend this book. In view of political events which post-date this book I found it particularly enlightening. I wonder what Michener would have thought, but we will never know as he passed away in 1997.

Benjamin Thomas says

I have read most of Michener's work, and I rate Texas among the big three, not only in size but in quality. (The other two are Centennial and Chesapeake). I particularly like the way Michener presents the entire history of Texas, and yet focuses on the key aspects of change that make this region so interesting. We see how cotton, cattle, oil, barbed wire, football, etc have changed the very culture of the people of Texas. Each long chapter is another window from which we can see the evolution of the landscape and the people. We see the hearty characters that made Texas what it is today and examine the very heart of the issues which shape the modern day Texan. For all of this, it is a novel, with the sweeping epic qualities of *Gone With the Wind* or Michener's other great works. Don't let the size stop you. The novel is as big as the state itself, and worth every minute of the ride.

Thomas Ray says

Texas, James A. Michener, 1985, 1096 pp. ISBN 0394541545

Fictionalized history of Texas, 1535 through 1984.

No likeable characters.

Michener writes with worshipful admiration of men who steal, defraud, and murder, in pursuit of their own freedom to do as they will, to others' cost. (p. 276, 648–649)

Men who casually steal their neighbors' cattle, then murder those neighbors who return the favor.

The heirs of wealth gained by theft, murder, fraud, and corruption are here at the end of the story. They use their billions to gamble in asset markets—inflating bubbles they know will burst; rushing to get out before the bust; leaving someone else to take the loss; then preying on the holders of distressed assets. (p. 1076)

Michener admires these people. When his billionaire says, “Those who own the country ought to govern it,” Michener in his own voice calls this, “truth.” (p. 1072)

Michener sees the absurdity of empowering the occupant of the big house in a mid-1800s German town, to decide who may and may not marry; and of the king of Spain in the 1500s being the only authority able to grant a missionary a new robe. The ascension of Michener's vile brand of politics is recreating just such an aristocracy of wealth. Michener is blind to it.

Michener descends to xenophobia, saying bilingual education will make the U.S. “worse than Canada.” (p. 1021) Dozens of times he calls unauthorized workers “illegals” and “wetbacks.” (pp. 914–922, 930, 1022, 1023, 1037, 1050–1055)

Lisa says

Quite a long time ago, I lived in Texas for a while.

That is how I came to understand my distinctly European identity and education. For Texas was different. Very different. I walked to the supermarket with my baby in a stroller. You don't do that in Texas. You take a car. I bought food for a day or two. You don't do that either. You buy for months in advance, loading your giant truck full with groceries. I tried to explore the city centre of Dallas. Well, there is none - not in the European sense of the word. After a couple of weeks in the unbearable heat, I felt strangely out of touch with the world, and lost in translation.

Someone suggested to go on a road trip to the monasteries around San Antonio, to see the roots of Texan culture.

Great advice! On the trip I brought Michener's monumental tale of Texas, spanning the centuries from the Spanish discoveries and settlement over the Alamo to modern oil and real estate empires.

Reading and driving, I began to understand what surrounded me. The stockyards in Fort Worth, the ghost towns to the west of Dallas, the NASA in Houston, the beach in Galveston, the government in Austin, the JFK museum and the Southfork Ranch in Dallas, the beauty of San Antonio and the Spanish monasteries, the harsh nature, the sudden rain that could drown a road, the tornado that cut a garden in half, the HEAT!

I imagine Michener trying to explore Texas to write its history, and the obstacles that he might have

encountered. The hard surface of Texas is not offering much of a narrative in the beginning. But Michener's genius lies in the way he imagines the relationship between country and individuals, and their mutual interdependence. Texas is Texas because of individuals who built their lives in the area over the course of 400 years, and the individuals are what they are because they adapted their dreams to the strange country that they inhabited.

To me, stranger in a strange land, the only way to solve the mystery of Texas was to read about its journey towards present times. It made my stay in Texas easier to grasp intellectually and emotionally.

It is a Texas-style brick of a book, but definitely worth reading for whoever is interested in the story of one of the most peculiar places I have ever been.

Christopher says

"Resistance if futile." This was a chore. Honestly. A book nearly as big as the state which, unless you already love it, is somewhat impenetrable and unknowable.

There's a meta-narrative within the book of a liberal family that moves to TX from Michigan and is "in, but not of" yet over a slow battle of attrition, eventually becomes so thoroughly Texan that they end up voting straight Republican while their now baton-twirling daughter marries a hulking Dallas Cowboys lineman and all is just about perfect.

That's what I felt this book was trying to do to me, instead of making me appreciate, understand, or even LIKE Texas--it was trying to convert me. It failed.

The novel never quite succeeded as either history or fiction. The history was shoehorned into the fiction as MAMMOTH exposition dumps and the fiction lacked real drama (despite telling some otherwise interesting tales) because the characters were given some horribly awkward dialogue and due to the aforementioned history dumps.

I knew it was a lost cause when chapters described HS football with the same level of gravitas as the Alamo. I'm out.

Garrett says

Kind of hard to get through. Very dense stuff. There are some jewels in here, and the way he choose to structure the book is very interesting: the story within the story.

Well, after about 2 years I have finally managed to complete this one.

The first third was very hard to get through (remember that the entire book was over 1300 pages). The middle part was really pretty good and enjoyable. The last third was just OK. I read the final two thirds in 4 months. However, I only read it here and there when I was in the mood.

I'm not sure how to rate this book. Is it a historical? Is it historical fiction? What is the author's angle of

vision/slant on this? How accurate were the accounts? I really don't have anything to base or judge these questions.

So, I'll forego my usual analysis of character, setting, plot, and conflict. Instead, I just want to talk about my reactions.

Obviously, I have trouble getting into it. The most interesting time period for me was the late 1700s to early 1800s. I grew to admire the spunk of some of the people he wrote about. Some I detested even though they were praised in the book. I think the early part of the book was so difficult for me to get through because nothing seemed important or to matter. There didn't seem to be a point - no overarching message or topic (except, of course, Texas).

I can say, after reading this, that I am glad that I've never lived in Texas and I will definitely not consider it in the future (which may have been the opposite effect from what the author or other Texans would anticipate). Sure, some of the history was compelling and interesting. But, I can't say that I felt proud of the accomplishments of Texas. Maybe it's the hauteur, maybe it's the forbidding landscape, maybe it's the provincialistic nature of the people there. I just know that the author did not paint a captivating enough picture for this reader.

Would I recommend it? Not really. If you are interested, listen to the abridged audio - it will be less painful to get through.

Rachel says

I finally finished it. Not quite history, not quite fiction, this book was... well, historical fiction. And it really taught me why I don't like historical fiction. Many of the made-up historical "facts" are pointless, the characters are one-dimensional, and *everything* about Texas has to make it into the plot, no matter how unrelated. Armadillos... football... hunting... Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders... chicken-fried steak.

That said, there were reasons I kept reading this 1096-page behemoth. Since moving to Texas three years ago, I have become curious about Texas history and culture, and this book familiarized me with both, and gave me perspective on the character and political views of Texans. It had just enough plot to keep me reading, on a cheap level. But that's about it. Some of the sentiments, while perhaps true in the minds of many Texans, had no place in a historical work:

"[Scottish descendants:] would govern India and South Africa and New Hampshire, and wherever they went they would leave schools and hospitals and libraries, for they were the seeds of greatness and of civilization."
p. 269

"When it seemed that Santa Anna... was about to trap the fleeing Houston and his entire ragtag of defenders, one of those romantic miracles occurred which still convince Texans that God is on their side."

"The slave, Cobb reflected, lived well, under the loving care of kind masters." p. 592

"Around the world, in all times and places, whenever men go on an ethical rampage they feel that they must discipline women. 'Your dresses are too short.' 'You tempt men.' 'Your behavior is salacious.' 'You must be put in your proper place.' This stems, of course, from the inherent mystery of women, their capacity to

survive, their ability to bear children, the universal suspicion that they possess some arcane knowledge not available to men. Women are dangerous, and men pass laws to keep them under restraint..." p. 853

Um, may I propose that it actually stems, of course, from the inherent aggressiveness of men and their need to feel superior to women? I mean, whose perspective are we coming from here? Sometimes Michener expresses such sentiments as thoughts of the characters, but sometimes they come from the anonymous narrator. It is clear that such quotes, while hopefully not representing the attitudes of Michener or of modern Texans, represent primarily the attitudes of white male Texans throughout Texas history. Yes, there is positive discussion about women, Indians, slaves, and Mexicans, but the unseen narrator is decidedly a white male. This aspect of the book left me with a bad taste in my mouth.

All in all, I would prefer to read my history from a history book. But the Alamo chapter was great.

Eric says

Michener, as always, is long on tooth, but in "Texas" he broke up the time periods very nicely, by reverting to a modern day committee formed to research Texas history and propose guidance for the teachings of Texas history. So, for the breaks in time, you come back to characters you know and which are still being developed. The interesting twist is that the committee members are decedents of those you read about in the historical fiction. The book covers 1540 AD through 1983 AD. Michener points out in an introduction where history is factual and where the stories are fiction. Was fun to go back to that introduction after I finished the book.

At 1400 pages, classify "Texas" as a tome. This was first published in 1985.
