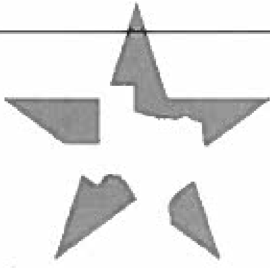

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Author(s): Walter L. Buenger
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The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in downtown Austin opened in the spring of 2001, and the decisions made about what to include and exclude in the museum raise questions about what is presented to the public as "the story of Texas." *Photograph by J. Griffis Smith, Texas Department of Transportation.*

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Notes and Documents

"The Story of Texas"? The Texas State History Museum and Forgetting and Remembering the Past

WALTER L. BUENGER*

ON FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2001, I TOURED THE NEW BOB BULLOCK TEXAS State History Museum for the first time. Accompanying me were my wife, daughter, son, and one of my son's friends. Each of us reacted in very different ways to the museum, proving that the place really does offer something for everyone. For teenagers it offers a few innocent thrills and a chance to show off their mastery of Texas history trivia. For younger children there is enough to stave off the cry of "I am bored" for about an hour. For adults with interest in and knowledge of Texas history there is sure to be something captivating. For historians the museum offers a puzzle and a chance to reflect on the making of public history or memory in the twenty-first century.

Davis Buenger and his friend David Miranda truly enjoyed "The Star of Destiny" narrated by a larger-than-life Sam Houston. They roared with laughter when an imitation rattlesnake struck the bottom of their seats during this technologically sophisticated rendition of the high points of Texas history. The two thirteen-year-old boys had just completed the seventh grade and taken the required course in Texas history. Having that wonderful combination of teenage arrogance and massive confidence in their academic prowess they also enjoyed combing the exhibits for small errors and delighted in discovering what they considered an overly large estimate of the number of Texans trapped in the Alamo in 1836.

* Walter L. Buenger, professor of history at Texas A&M University, has written extensively on the history of Texas and the American South. Among his recent works are *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), and "Texas and the South," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 103 (Jan., 2000), 309–326.

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This depiction of the "come and take it" incident at the battle of Gonzales during the Texas Revolution suggests the celebratory nature of the museum. *Photograph courtesy the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum.*

Erin Buenger enjoyed the life-sized longhorns. She was glad there were three of them because three meant a mama, a papa, and a daughter. Even this display of family values could not hold a four-year-old's attention long and she soon begged to go swimming or to go to the playground.

Vickie Buenger admired the architecture. She liked the floors, liked the walls, and liked all the special effects. She found several exhibits interesting, particularly those that highlighted the unique characteristics of Texas, and noted the numerous clever marketing gimmicks. As we left she commented, "This place is just like cotton candy. It melts in your mouth and is gone." It was fun and hard to resist but had little nutritional value.

I laughed at her crack, but found myself unable to move beyond amazement that anyone presumed to tell "the" story, by implication "the one and only" story of Texas. Had the state's love affair with conservative Republicans somehow transported us back to the happy history and consensus of the 1950s?

On one level the answer to that question is no, for by emphasizing the history of women, cultural topics, prominent Tejanos, and African

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American Texans the museum clearly reflects post–1950s historiography. On the first floor was an entertaining temporary exhibit entitled "It Ain't Braggin' if it's True." Besides an amazing rhinestone Cadillac, the exhibit included photographs, artifacts, and a brief history of a wide variety of Texans including black artists, Mexican ranchers, women educators and civic leaders, and modern-day sports heros. This section included a higher percentage of objects created by past humans than the rest of the museum and until it closed in December offered a good place to begin your tour.

Another set of exhibits on the first floor is called "Encounters on the Land." These exhibits cover roughly 1400 to 1880 and include relatively few items that might be termed "museum pieces." Those artifacts included in the exhibit are displayed in Neiman Marcus fashion—isolated, uncluttered, and attractively lighted and laid out. The encounters section is mainly interpretive and organized around the idea that "the story of Texas is one of people and the land." Entertaining five- to seven-minute videos describe the lifestyle and motives of the Spaniards and Indians who struggled to control the land. The video on the Comanches carefully includes the Indian point of view and includes comments from contemporary descendants of Quanah Parker, the last great Comanche war chief. Buffalo soldiers and other frontiersman from the United States also get some attention in this section.

On the second floor designers of the museum tell the story of Anglo Texans and other migrants from the United States in "Building the Lone Star Identity, 1821–1936." Again, modern technology and artful presentations displace artifacts. The years 1821 to 1865 receive the greatest attention in this area of the museum, but there is an interesting video and a few photographs and posters from the 1936 Texas Centennial. This and other videos follow the same five- to seven-minute format found on the first floor. The video on the Civil War includes quotes from women; from Santos Benavides, the only Tejano general in the Confederate army; from slaves; and from Anglo soldiers. Images and events from the Texas Revolution and the republic visually dominate the second floor. After entering through a facade patterned after the Alamo viewers encounter a video on the revolution ostensibly narrated by Juan N. Seguín, who speaks of his inability to remain both Texan and Mexican. There is a good eight-panel display on the republic era that highlights the great questions of the day. One of these is "Who can be citizens of the Republic?" Here Juan Seguín resurfaces, and the point is made that "Tejanos found life in Texas increasingly difficult."

In most instances the "Lone Star Identity" section of the museum assumes a celebratory air. Texans of all types overcame problems to

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make steady progress, and brutal conflict between groups of Texans gets a whitewash. For example, after commenting that southern white males regained authority and power at the close of Reconstruction the designers of the museum quickly add the following summation of the years 1876–1936. "Meanwhile, immigrants from other states, Mexico, and Europe poured into Texas. They, along with women and African Americans and Mexican Americans resolutely demanded a greater share in the opportunities Texas offered. Despite resistance from the old order these groups began to expand and redefine the Lone Star identity." Thus is summed up an era that included a brutal upsurge in lynching, violent suppression of Populism, intense controversy over prohibition, and a rise and fall in the status of women.

Besides the identity exhibits, the second floor also has a large lobby, a "Texas Time Line," the "Texas Spirit Theater," and a café. A life-sized statue of Bob Bullock with the quote "God Bless Texas" emblazoned on the wall behind the statue dominates the second-floor lobby. On the other side of the wall a large curved screen displays the "Texas Time Line." Major chronological divisions in the time line are 1528–1820, 1820–1836, 1836–1860, 1860–1900, 1900–1945, and 1945 to the present. More than half the items in the time line fall in the nineteenth century, another indication that the romantic period still dominates conceptualizations of the Texas past. Romance vies with slapstick humor in the Texas Spirit Theater, where a giant Sam Houston waxes on about an Alamo that in reality he wanted abandoned and storm winds add to the ambience created by fake snakes striking the bottom of your chair. While "The Star of Destiny" covers other "stories of courage and perseverance," Houston's presence clearly gives this approximately twenty-minute presentation a mid-nineteenth-century emphasis. The café offers a pleasant spot to pause while exploring the museum and should be especially appreciated by families with a four-year-old.

After pausing in the café the stairs to the third floor seem less steep. On the top floor of the museum are exhibits called "Creating Opportunity" and other exhibits covering Texas in the twentieth century. Oil dominates the economic history section of the museum. Walter Cronkite narrates the video on black gold and the approximately fifty yards of exhibits on petroleum dwarf the five yards of exhibits on cotton. Exhibits on ranching, which steadily declined in relative importance in twentieth-century Texas, occupy about thirty-five yards. Cotton, of course, remained far more important than oil or ranching to the average Texan until after World War II, but the "Creating Opportunity" exhibits have little to do with either reality or the average Texan.

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This divorce between reality and image turns out to be the major theme of one of the most interesting sections of the museum, the video and other visual images that deal with Hollywood's creation of an alternative picture of Texas. Narrated by Fred Whitfield, a black cowboy and world champion roper, this seven-minute video highlights both changes in how movies depicted Texas and how the movies simplified the story of Texas in order to convey morality lessons. What emerges from this process is "two histories, one made in Texas and the other made in Hollywood." Movie buffs will especially enjoy the scenes from their favorites—including Slim Pickens riding a nuclear bomb down to its target from *Dr. Strangelove.*

On the whole the third-floor exhibits are the least coherent part of the museum. All the exhibits on the floor allegedly fit under the rubric of "Creating Opportunity," but it is difficult to tell just how Hollywood created opportunity for the citizens of the state. Hollywood created identity or better yet blurred identity. Exhibits on Texas between 1920 and 1960 also do not easily fit under the umbrella of creating opportunity. Interesting treatments of sports and music stand alongside those on World War II and "Texans on the National Stage." There is also an exhibit depicting all the places to learn more about the state's history (and in the process spend tourist dollars to create economic opportunity around the state).

Among these diverse exhibits the most thought-provoking and the one that best encapsulates the entire museum is "Texans on the National Stage, 1930–1960." Five prominent white male Texans are deemed worthy of inclusion on this list: Morris Sheppard, Sam Rayburn, Lyndon B. Johnson, John Nance Garner, and Jesse H. Jones. All held elective office except for Jones, the appointed head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and Secretary of Commerce. In keeping with a top-down approach to the past, creators of this exhibit sum up Jones's contribution by saying, "Because of his considerable influence Texas expanded its industries and built a modern infrastructure to support economic growth." This unqualified attribution of credit for prosperity to the elite few is bound to raise questions among historians.

As I left the museum after that first visit I pondered how it does and does not reflect the historiographic trends of the past fifty years. Creators of the museum carefully included prominent Tejanos, blacks, and women. Yet their approach to the Texas past is just as much from the top down and just as simplistic and celebratory as fifty years ago. The consensus approach looks different on the surface because it includes minorities and women, but in key areas it remains the same. Over time everything grew bigger and better. Texans increasingly lived happily together.

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A comment from the second-floor Reconstruction-era exhibit epitomizes this neo-consensus viewpoint. After saying that some blacks left the farm for the city after slavery's end, the exhibit's creators insist "many other African Americans stayed on the farms even when their owners could not afford to pay them." Even if this was just a poor choice of words and the creators of this exhibit understand that whites no longer owned blacks after June 19, 1865, without explanation this sentence does much the same thing as the 1930s book and movie *Gone With the Wind*.[1] It depicts whites and blacks as one big happy family headed up by a paternalistic white master, and it obscures or ignores primary source material. For example, Andrew J. Hamilton, the provisional governor of Texas wrote in 1865 that he had received "painful accounts of the shooting and hanging of Negroes by the half dozens at a time, for the crime of leaving their former masters."[2]

In weeks to come as I thought about this neo-consensus mind-set, question after question came to mind, and in that sense the museum offers the readers of this journal something important. It provides a chance to think about the role of history, especially public history, in the twenty-first century.

After two more visits to the museum later in the summer, these key questions remain. Have we entered a new historiographic phase? After the 1960s understanding the complexity of the state, teaching history from the bottom up, and depicting members of each group as having some control over their own destiny required dividing the state's people into German Texans, African American Texans, Mexican Texans, Czech Texans, Slovak Texans, and 101 other types of Texans.[3] Have we abandoned those efforts and forgotten what they demonstrated?

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[1] For an interesting look at Margaret Mitchell, the author of *Gone with the Wind*, see Darden Asbury Pyron, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Also see Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). For an introduction to the historiography on Texas see Walter L. Buenger and Robert A. Calvert (eds.), *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991).

[2] A. J. Hamilton to Andrew Johnson, July 24, 1865, Andrew Johnson Papers, Manuscript Division (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

[3] In the 1960s Terry G. Jordan gave the study of the diverse nature of the Texas population new vigor. See Terry G. Jordan, *German Seed in Texas Soil: Immigrant Farmers in Nineteenth Century Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966); Terry G. Jordan, "The Imprint of the Upper and Lower South on Mid-Nineteenth Century Texas," *Association of American Geographers, Annals*, 57 (Dec., 1967), 667–690; Terry G. Jordan, "Population Origins in Texas, 1850," *Geographical Review*, 59 (Jan., 1969), 83–103; Terry G. Jordan, "The Texas Appalachia," *Association of American Geographers, Annals*, 60 (Sept., 1970), 409–427; Terry G. Jordan, "The German Settlement of Texas after 1865," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 73 (Oct., 1969), 193–212. In the 1970s and 1980s the Institute of Texan Cultures published a series of books on various immigrant groups. See for example, Thomas W. Cutrer, *The English Texans* (San Antonio: Institute of Texan Cultures, 1985); Sylvia A. Grider, *The Wendish Texans* (San Antonio: Institute of Texan Cultures, 1982); John Brendan Flannery, *The Irish Texans* (San Antonio: Institute of Texan Cultures,

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Discovering the varied groups that could call themselves Texans was part of a larger process of moving away from a linear history that stressed wars, generals, captains of industry, political leaders, and white males. In the mid-1990s textbook authors clearly revised their work with this process in mind. In the preface of the second edition of *The History of Texas* Robert A. Calvert and Arnoldo De León insisted that "all peoples make history." In revising *Texas: The Lone Star State*, Adrian Anderson sought a "more complete and meaningful understanding of the past" by placing increased emphasis on "the contributions and roles of minorities—women and other groups—which have been ignored or inadequately recognized in the past."[4] What derailed this thirty-year effort by historians to explore the nuanced meanings of race, ethnicity, class, and gender?

In recent years some of the best work by historians has focused on the relationship between past and present. Did the creators of the museum ignore the more than decade-old study of public expressions of memory?[5] This work often suggests that conservative elites used the past to

1980). Also see T. Lindsay Baker, *The First Polish Americans: Silesian Settlements in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1979); Ralph A. Wooster, "Foreigners in the Principal Towns of Antebellum Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 66 (Oct., 1962), 208–220. In the same period scholars also focused more seriously than ever before on Mexicans and African Americans in Texas. See Arnoldo De León, *The Tejano Community, 1836–1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821–1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of Negroes in Texas* (Austin: Jenkins, 1971); James M. Smallwood, *The Struggle Upward: Blacks in Texas* (Boston: American Press, 1983); Walter L. Buenger, *Secession and the Union in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Arnoldo De León, "Texas Mexicans: Twentieth-Century Interpretations," in Buenger and Calvert (eds.), *Texas Through Time*, 20–49; Alwyn Barr, "African Americans in Texas: From Stereotypes to Diverse Roles," in Buenger and Calvert (eds.), *Texas Through Time*, 50–80. Like much of the writing on Texas history, works on racial and ethnic groups in Texas tended to stress the nineteenth century, but for a broader view see Terry G. Jordan, "A Century and a Half of Ethnic Change in Texas, 1836–1986," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 89 (Apr., 1986), 385–422.

[4] Robert A. Calvert and Arnoldo De León, *The History of Texas* (2nd ed.; Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1996), vii; Rupert N. Richardson, Adrian Anderson, and Ernest Wallace, *Texas: The Lone Star State* (6th ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1993), xii. A comparison of the two earliest editions of the Richardson text, 1943 and 1958, with the post-1993 editions suggests just how much new approaches to history have influenced the study of Texas. For perspective on the impact of new hsitory on the study of Texas see Fane Downs, "Texas Women: History at the Edges," in Buenger and Calvert (eds.), *Texas Through Time*, 81–101; Walter L. Buenger and Robert A. Calvert, "Introduction: The Shelf Life of Truth in Texas," in Buenger and Calvert (eds.), *Texas Through Time*, ix–xxxv. For recent examples of work sensitive to race, ethnicity, class, and gender see Shelley Sallee, "'The Woman of it': Governor Miriam Ferguson's 1924 Election," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 100 (July, 1996), 1–16; Thad Sitton and Dan K. Utley, *From Can See to Can't: Texas Cotton Farmers on the Southern Prairies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893–1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

[5] For a good starting point in understanding the recent emphasis on the relationship between history and memory see Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagran: Storytelling in a Family's Past* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998). Also see Tamara Plakins Thornton, "Timely Reminders," *Reviews in*

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solidify their power, wealth, and status in the present.[6] Beyond the clear attempts to promote history as tourism and to turn the museum into a profit center, does the museum's message reflect the ideology and politics of a conservative white elite?

I cannot answer these questions fully in a review essay and perhaps cannot answer them at all. My purpose is to raise them and suggest ways to put the questions and the museum in perspective. Perhaps the best starting point in this quest is to go back a hundred years and look at other attempts to capture and preserve the past. In the early twentieth century communities all over the South turned to history to define their locale and cash in on tourist dollars. They invented or created a distinctive culture by drawing selectively on the past. As one commentator put it "cultural producers exercised historical amnesia as much as historical memory."[7]

In other words, between 1900 and 1940 creating rough equivalents of the Texas State History Museum required both forgetting and remembering the past. This process minimized confrontation, threw out ambiguity, told the story from the elite perspective, tended to conserve and protect the cultural and political power of the elite by quieting controversy in politics and in society at large, and emphasized that history could turn a profit.[8] Much the same can be said about the new Texas State History Museum.

Absent from the museum is any real sense of the conflicts that often raged between Texans. In particular there is nothing to indicate the level

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American History, 26 (Dec., 1998), 793–798; Thomas P. Slaughter, "Aliianagran's Loss," *Reviews in American History*, 26 (Sept., 1998), 475–481; "The Uses of Memory: A Round Table," *Journal of American History*, 85 (Sept., 1998), 409–465; John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); John Bodner (ed.), *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Don Graham, *Cowboys and Cadillacs: How Hollywood Looks at Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1983); Don Graham, "Remembering the Alamo: The Story of the Texas Revolution in Popular Culture," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 89 (July, 1985), 35–66; Susan Prendergast Schoelwer, *Alamo Images: Changing Perceptions of a Texas Experience* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985); David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2002); "AHR Forum: World War II and National Cinemas," *American Historical Review*, 106 (June, 2001), 804–864.

[6] Besides the works cited in note 5 see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Richard R. Flores, "Memory-Place, Meaning, and the Alamo," *American Literary History*, 10 (Fall, 1998), 428–445; Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monuments in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[7] Stephanie E. Yuhl, "Rich and Tender Remembering: Elite White Women and an Aesthetic Sense of Place in Charleston, 1920s and 1930s," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage (ed.), *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 242.

[8] The creation of Colonial Williamsburg in the 1920s is perhaps the best known example of this trend. See Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 342–443; Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*, 253–260.

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differences. Twenty-five years ago, entrepreneur Eddie Childs starred in his own commercials whose punch line was "If you don't have an oil well get one." All Texans were alike, all Texans had an equal opportunity to strike oil. Not surprisingly, oil gets more square footage in the museum than any other component of the economy. It fits the image of rags to riches, equal opportunity, one big strike and you reach the top.

While this rags-to-riches image is near to the heart of the Texas rich it seldom fits reality. Instead the story sometimes involves rising from the middle class to the elite, but more often the rich got richer. Take the case of Jesse H. Jones, one of the five white males highlighted on the "Creating Opportunity" floor of the museum. Despite the often repeated myth, Jones never was poor and he started his business career under the tutelage of an exceptionally wealthy uncle, M. T. Jones. He used the connections made through his uncle and through his position as executor of his uncle's estate to build up a large fortune. Jones displayed unusual business ability, but he was far from a poor boy made good.[11]

Emphasis on Jones and the elite few—telling the story of Texas from the top down instead of the bottom up—is another example of the strange way the museum ignores three decades of historiographic trends that emphasize ethnic diversity and the role or women, minorities, and the working class. Yet presenting the elite as seizing special opportunities available to men with a Texas-sized ability to wrest a fortune from the wilderness does much more. It quells tension among those who believe their race, gender, class, or ethnicity denied them an equal opportunity. Special men with special talent deserved the wealth they gained, just as their descendants deserve cultural and political power.[12]

This slant on the past sets up a self-justifying loop. The rich and politically powerful can call the shots on the content of the museum or any other public expression of memory of the past because their wealth demonstrates character and talent.

For a state that claims as another part of its heritage a massive affection for the common man, for the everyday Texan, the tone and tenor of the museum is an affront. It also increases the risk of creating a closed society in which elite cultural and political power is seldom challenged, for the central message of the scholarship on memory is that the two go together. As one commentator on elite activity in North Carolina

[11] Walter L. Buenger, "Between Community and Corporation: The Southern Roots of Jesse H. Jones and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation," *Journal of Southern History*, 56 (Aug., 1990), 481–510.

[12] For a particularly interesting example of the uses of the past by the patrician class see Catherine W. Bishir, "Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past in Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1885–1915," in Brundage (ed.), *Where These Memories Grow*, 139–168.

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between 1890 and 1910 put it, "the history they spelled out and the social and political system they had established took on an aura of permanence." Perhaps this would not matter very much if it did not impact daily life, but it does. North Carolina's foremost historian Paul D. Escott argued: "Undemocratic attitudes and practices more fundamental even than racism were also deeply rooted in the state's history. They, too, must be overcome if the Old North State is to become, as its official toast proclaims, a place where 'the weak grow strong and the strong grow great.'" Memories of the past, a closed and uncontested sense of "the" history of a state, undergird those undemocratic attitudes and limit both the political power and the economic opportunity of non-elites. Ironically the heavy hand of the past—even a past that celebrates oil—limits innovation, limits risk taking, limits democracy, and limits economic opportunity.[15]

Attempts to seize an economic opportunity, however, obviously built momentum for state funding of the Texas State History Museum. Like so many of its early twentieth-century counterparts it is meant to turn a profit by catering to tourists. In another example of irony, despite their clever examples of Hollywood's characterizations of Texas and Texans the creators of the museum do not seem to realize that they are engaged in much the same process. They simplify and alter the image of the state to give the paying public what they believe it wants. They want to sell tickets instead of challenging the public to think about the past. A Disneyland or *Gone with the Wind* approach to the past has seldom yielded anything near thought-provoking and multifaceted history, and so we should expect what we get from the Texas State History Museum. Still, ask yourself how many of your students or others that you know formed their impression of Davy Crockett from Walt Disney or their conception of the relationship between master and slave from *Gone With the Wind*? To say that this is all we can expect does not minimize the potential impact of the museum. To say it was done without thought is worse than admitting intent.

Ignorance is seldom an excuse, but is a particularly weak excuse at a time when examples of controversy about the past abound. One apt recent example of conflict over the presentation of the past occurred in another former Confederate state. In February 2000 the Georgia Historical Society and the University of Georgia parted ways. The editor of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* held a tenured position in the

[15] Bishir, "Landmarks of Power," 164 (1st quotation); Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 267 (2nd quotation). For a fuller development of these ideas see Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 225–260. For a recent example of controversy over control of museum exhibits by wealthy donors see "Smithsonian Institution: Control over Exhibit Design and Content," *OAH Newsletter*, 29 (Aug., 2001). You may find this at: http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2001aug/smithsonian.html.

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University of Georgia history department. The GHS and the University of Georgia shared the nurturing and support of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, a journal that enjoyed a stellar reputation before its "hostile takeover" by the executive director of the GHS.[14]

Some members of the GHS Board of Curators evidently objected to the journal's "focus on all the negative things about the South." This was particularly true of the husband of one member of the board, an owner of textile mills, who reportedly "threw the issue on labor in the garbage as soon as he saw it." There were also objections raised about the failure of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* to make a profit or break even, but critics in the history profession charged this was merely a ruse used by a Savannah-based elite to seize control of the organization. Despite objections from historians the executive director repeatedly attempted to limit the editorial control of professional historians and eventually ended the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*'s long affiliation with the University of Georgia history department.[15]

While a more extreme example, events in Georgia are part and parcel of the same tendencies that spawned the Texas State History Museum. They demonstrate that control of public conceptions of the past by elites and attempts to present happy and profitable history remain a part of life in the twenty-first century. Some may take the vitality of these tendencies as a cause for despair and resignation. Yet, dispirited practitioners of the craft of history who have given up on ever swaying *Gone with the Wind* notions of the past should remember that events in Georgia and the Texas State History Museum were contested. They have not been accepted without comment or complaint, and that is very different from what happened in the former Confederacy a hundred years ago.

In a work that helped intensify interest in the relationship between the past and present historian John Bodnar commented, "The shaping of a past worthy of public commemoration in the present is contested and involves a struggle for supremacy between advocates of various political ideas and sentiments." A worthwhile public past comes from competition not hegemony. In that sense historians who have long struggled to raise public awareness of the role of slavery in Texas, the real history of Reconstruction, the horrors of lynching in Texas, or the history of labor conditions do a civic service. They foster competing views of the past and limit the hold of orthodoxy. They do more. Because public conceptions of the past, culture, politics, and economics are all linked, a contested past allows for a more fluid and dynamic present. Intellectual flexibility,

[14] Robert Cohen and Sonia Murrow, "A Case of Censorship?" *OAH Newsletter*, 28 (Aug., 2000). You may find this at: http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2000aug/cohen-murrow.html.

[15] Ibid.

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economic innovation, and the continued struggle for political equality depend in part on rejecting "the story" of Texas.[16]

Instead of simply commenting or complaining, however, historians can foster a more useful and more accurate public conception of the past by encouraging the creators of public history to follow a few simple rules. First, recognize and admit ambiguity and the contested nature of the past. This should start by substituting "a story" for "the story." Second, politics always plays a role in the creation of public history and that is especially true of groups who rail about revisionist history or multiculturalism. Conservative Republicans, for example, probably would discourage mention of the role of Allan Shivers in slowing desegregation because it highlights how championing white supremacy contributed to the creation of the modern Republican party in Texas. Third, profit and accurate history do not always mix, and especially in the case of state-funded institutions accuracy should win out. You cannot sell coonskin caps and even come close to portraying an accurate history of the Alamo. Fourth, face up to color prejudice and white-on-black violence. Ignoring this reality does the same thing as Japan's refusal to acknowledge its World War II crimes against the Koreans and the Chinese. It allows historical amnesia to poison contemporary relationships between different groups of people.[17] Fifth, rely on original sources. This old-fashioned notion should undergird all types of history. Cut through something written thirty years after emancipation. Cut through something informed primarily by theory, theology, or ideology. Go back to information generated at the time and you will be less likely to produce a rehash of *Gone With the Wind*.[18]

[16] Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 15. For additional comments on and examples of the connection between past and present, between history or memory and culture, politics, and economic development see Walter L. Buenger, "Texas and the South," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 103 (Jan., 2000), 309–326; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, xv–xxvi, 253–260.

[17] On Japan's use of history see Steven C. Clemmons, "Recovering Japan's Wartime Past—and Ours," *New York Times*, Sept. 4, 2001, op/ed section.

[18] Going back to the sources does not mean simply telling the same old story or lining up the facts like so many note cards. The art of history remains selecting and presenting what is relevant about the past in a compelling manner. The science remains ensuring that what you present is accurate. For a recent example of the skillful mixing of art and science see Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

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