



Passionate Nation: The Epic History of Texas

James L. Haley

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Texas has become the most American of all the states. Texas's politics has taken over in Washington, and Texas's passionate sense of itself as a nation is echoed by the fervent patriotism of tens of millions of Americans. Texas is also our most outsized hodgepodge -- of Latino, black, white, Asian; of characters who transcend any category. In so many ways, America today is Texas writ large.

In *Passionate Nation* James L. Haley offers a comprehensive and definitive history of this singular and singularly American state, a history that explains how Texas became Texas, even before it became such a central national symbol for America. Haley peers through the lens of the extraordinary "ordinary" men and women who have streamed to Texas from its beginnings, and created it in their own contradictory, uncontrollable image.

He recovers elements bowdlerized by previous and more prudish generations, such as the discovery, by sixteenth-century explorer Cabeza de Vaca, of Indian warriors living in conjugal relationships with male eunuchs. He presents documents never before published, such as a rare appeal for aid from the town of Gonzales on the eve of the Texas Revolution. He restores to the history important figures who have been allowed to drop from the usual recitation, such as Benjamin Lundy, who almost single-handedly prevented the Texas Republic from being annexed to the United States for nearly a decade. He corrects the record at every turn, starting with the fact that Jane Lundy was not the "mother of Texas." Throughout, he uses great stories to present the passion of people who lived and worried and suffered and laughed.

The first Indians settled in Texas in about 10,000 B.C.; the first Europeans arrived in the early sixteenth century. Since then, the land that is now Texas has belonged to six powers at eight different times: Spain (1519-1685), France (to 1690), Spain again (to 1821), Mexico (to 1836), the Republic of Texas (to 1845), the U.S.A. (to 1861), the Confederacy (to 1865), and the U.S.A. to stay. From Jim Bowie's and Davy Crockett's myth-enshrouded stand at the Alamo to the Mexican-American War to Sam Houston's heroic failed effort to keep Texas in the Union during the Civil War, the transitions in Texas history have often been as painful and tense as the "normal" periods in between. Here, in all of its epic grandeur, is the story of Texas as its own passionate nation, a history that shows that circumstances can radically change, yet culture and character can last for centuries.

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