

Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800–1850. By Andrew J. Torget. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Pp. xii, 353. \$34.95.
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The admission of Texas into the Union in 1845 marked the culmination of a circuitous political journey. In less than a decade, the region transitioned sequentially from remote northern province of Mexico to an independent yet troubled slaveholding republic, to annexed U.S. state at the western reaches of the cotton frontier. Andrew J. Torget's *Seeds of Empire* situates Texas's singular past within the broad context of borderlands history as it argues for the centrality of slavery and cotton culture to its growth and development.

Tejanos, Comanche Indians and other native peoples, southern cotton planters and their slaves, and the governments of Mexico, the United States, and Great Britain were all significant actors in the Texas borderlands of the early nineteenth century. Masters in the U.S. South recognized Texas's natural advantages for the cultivation of cotton. The demands of the global cotton economy and promises of great riches prompted some U.S. slaveholders to risk relocation to Texas. The first three of Torget's six chronologically arranged chapters chronicle the Austin family's speculative ventures in northern Mexico, Anglo colonization of Texas cotton lands, and Tejano efforts to encourage the migration of U.S. slaveholders to populate the thinly inhabited territory and deter Indian raids. Unfortunately for American expatriates in Texas, Mexico's unsettled political climate meant that protections for slave property were never fully guaranteed. Torget traces the fate of slavery from the overthrow of Iturbide in 1823 to the Constitution of 1824, the Coahuila-Texas state constitution of 1827, and Mexico's final abolition of slavery in 1829. Anglo settlers consistently rejected out-of-hand any political constraints imposed upon slave ownership, and despite the emancipation decree, they remained adamant that slave-based agriculture was the only path to economic success in Texas.

Chapters 4 through 6 chronicle Texas's separation from Mexico, the challenges of independence, and the failure of Texas to survive as a nation. Anglo-Texan commitment to slavery, Torget explains, bred a preference for state sovereignty and federalism over the rising forces of centralism within the Mexican government, personified by Santa Anna. By 1836, the preservation of slavery demanded Texas's independence, and its new constitution assiduously protected the institution. Ironically, however, Texas's devotion to slavery poisoned its ability to persevere as an independent republic. The collapse of global cotton markets with the Panic of 1837 devastated Texas's monocrop economy and left the nation hamstrung by fiscal woes throughout its existence. Moreover, amid rising international hostility to slavery, Texas failed to gain the diplomatic recognition of Great Britain despite the latter's voracious appetite for cotton. According to Torget, "the political liabilities attached to being a slaveholding nation outweighed the economic advantages of being cotton country." For independent Texas, "cotton as a diplomatic weapon crashed . . . against the hard politics of slavery" (p. 215). Britain, in fact, had designs to transform Texas into a free-labor producer of cotton that would compete with the American South. Annexation to the United States, long opposed by northern congressmen fearful of both slavery's expansion and a possible war with Mexico, gained wider support once it became clear that doing so would prevent Britain from gaining a foothold in Texas. Ultimately, Anglo-Texans preferred

incorporation into the United States with slavery to independence without slavery under British protection.

A volume in the David J. Weber Series in the New Borderlands History, *Seeds of Empire* jettisons the narrative of American exceptionalism that undergirds the “manifest destiny” framework for understanding American expansion and instead locates Texas’s history within the larger story of the global cotton economy examined in the current scholarship of Edward E. Baptist, Sven Beckert, and others. Torget breaks through traditional scholarly boundaries by weaving together the intertwined histories of Native Americans, Mexico, Britain, and the United States in the Texas borderlands. Still, Indians and slaves as people are barely visible, lurking as background forces in an account devoted primarily to the political struggles over the legitimization of slavery in Texas. Torget’s frank acknowledgment of slavery as foundational to Texas’s history in the first half of the nineteenth century, though not as original as he claims, offers a refreshing antidote to the frequently romanticized, sanitized accounts of the state’s past.

Torget marshals an array of archival evidence from both Mexico and the United States, newspapers, travelers’ accounts, and other sources to craft his story. Three wonderfully rendered and useful maps, a pair of tables, a few graphs, and a variety of illustrations augment the text. The six chapters, divided into three parts, are long but well written. The book’s pacing quickens in Part III, with the creation of the independent Republic of Texas.

“The emergence of the Republic of Texas is best understood,” Torget contends, “as an effort among Anglo-Texans to establish a haven for American cotton farmers in a world increasingly hostile to slave labor” (p. 182). To underscore this point, Torget might have emphasized more than he does Anglo-Texans’ overwhelming support for annexation in 1836 and the controversies over slavery that prevented it from happening. Texas’s failed experiment with independence, Torget continues, exposed the limitations of cotton diplomacy, a lesson that the later Confederacy neglected to absorb. Torget speculates counterfactually that, had the Confederacy survived the Civil War intact, plummeting postwar cotton prices would have dealt the South the same economic catastrophe independent Texas suffered two decades earlier.

Seeds of Empire will appeal to political and diplomatic historians; scholars of slavery, capitalism, and global economics; and those interested in Texas and the southwestern borderlands. Who really ought to read this book are the modern-day Texas secessionists who have no clue that the U.S. government once rescued the independent republic from chaos, insolvency, and its own inept government.

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Old Wheelways: Traces of Bicycle History on the Land. By Robert L. McCullough. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015. Pp. xv, 367. \$34.95, cloth.
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The few economic historians who have written about the bicycle have focused on various aspects of its industrial development. For instance, Bruce Epperson (*Peddling Bicycles to America: The Rise of an Industry*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2010) examined the growth and decline of the Pope Manufacturing Company. Roger