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Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850.* Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2015, 368 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4696-4556-8.

Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850 is an engaging study of how commodities and their labor demands can transform frontier spaces. From its first pages, *Seeds of Empire* is interested in disrupting familiar narratives that center the racist ideology of manifest destiny in accounting for Anglo settlers' westward migration. While Torget acknowledges the Anglo settlers' prejudices, he questions whether the ideology of manifest destiny alone was the driving factor for westward expansion. Instead, he argues that Anglo migration, particularly to Texas, was spurred by global economic forces and government policies that depicted Texas as a land of opportunity for the cotton industry and slavery. Central to his story are Anglo settlers, Tejano politicians, and abolitionists who presented competing visions of the economic and social transformations that the cotton industry and slave labor could bring to the Texas borderlands. Ending with the onset of the US-Mexico War, Torget weaves an absorbing narrative that details the irreconcilable rift between Anglo-Tejano factions, who grew increasingly hostile due to threats of abolition, and Mexican officials who resented Anglo settlements.

Seeds of Empire is divided into six chapters, each tracing the evolving relationship between Anglo settlers, Tejanos, and Mexican officials. The first chapter provides background on the poor conditions of Spanish settlements in Texas before independence. As Torget illustrates, the economic issues that peripheral communities such as San Antonio faced were beyond the grasp of government officials in Mexico City. The demand for cotton also drove the migration of thousands of Americans south and towards the Texas border, where colonial authorities were largely powerless to stop the growth of illegal trading posts and violent Indian raids. As Mexico declared itself free from Spanish rule in 1821, Anglo frontier settlers such as Moses Austin envisioned the economic opportunities that Texas could bring. The region had long growing seasons, access to ports, and rich soil, and Austin proposed creating a colony of hundreds of American families. In turn, the newly formed Mexican government faced the question of whether it would honor the colonization contracts made by the Spanish government and begin to open their northern territories to Anglo settlers.

The second chapter uses the figures Erasmo Seguín and Stephen Austin to explore the alliances between Anglos and Tejanos and their role in establishing colonies in northeastern Mexico. An 1823 law signed by Emperor Iturbide opened the doors for new settlements and mandated a gradual end to slavery in these territories. While the antislavery movement in Mexico outlasted Iturbide, Austin's colonists, many of them from areas where slavery was legal, quickly began transforming the region's landscape with slave labor. Austin soon began petitioning Mexican officials for a seaport in Galveston that he argued would enrich the inhabitants of the area and create a European market for their cotton. Tejano leaders embraced Austin's visions of economic and technological development that could open the region to trade and create a sense of security on the frontier.

By 1825 the alliance of Anglos and Tejanos had firmly established American colonization, and also deepened the divide between their communities and Coahuilan politicians who firmly rejected the southern model of slave labor. This debate is the focus of the third chapter, where Torget meticulously traces the ideological, social, and economic debates around slavery in Texas. Anglos and Tejanos understood that for the cotton trade to thrive in Texas, they would require more than the begrudging consent of the Mexican government, as abolitionists in Mexico City were a constant threat to slavery in the region. In 1827, liberal Coahuilan politicians pushed for greater measures that would lead to abolition and proposed a state constitutional revision known as article 13 that outlawed slavery with only a vague promise of compensation to slaveowners. While liberals in Coahuila had a positive view of American business interests in Texas, they viewed chattel slavery as altogether incompatible with the democracy they were attempting to build. American news sources reported on these developments, and would-be settlers wrote to Austin alarmed about the possibility of losing their slave labor force. Slave owners in the region also protested the possibility of losing their slaves without any compensation. Austin and his allies rallied against these proposals, arguing that the success of their ongoing colonization projects and the cotton trade depended on the continuation of slavery in the state. The final version of article 13 declared that no one in the state would be born a slave, and the introduction of new slaves would be outlawed within six months. While the finished article was a compromise on abolition, the debates and tensions that arose between abolitionist Mexicans and pro-slavery Anglos and Tejanos were only the beginning.

The fourth chapter examines the role of slavery in the Texas Revolution. As Torget demonstrates, two interpretations have prevailed in the historical scholarship: one emphasizes the ideology of slavery as the primary reason why Anglos rebelled against the Mexican government, and another highlights irreconcilable cultural differences between the two groups. Torget finds both interpretations lacking and argues that proponents of the Revolution were concerned with the state's social and economic development. Slavery and its preservation were seen as crucial to any future economic progress. The book's penultimate chapter shows how the Republic of Texas emerged as a space where cotton planters existed free from any threats of abolition. This further encouraged the growth of Anglo settlements, along with a boom in cotton production. The forced migration of slaves to Texas from 1837 to 1842 also increased the slave

population from five thousand to nearly twenty thousand. As a single-crop economy, however, Texas's economic fate was bound to the global cotton market, making the economic collapse of the late 1830's particularly disastrous for the young republic. Slavery also strained diplomatic relationships and further delayed US recognition of Texas as an independent republic.

The final chapter explores how Texas failed to survive as a slaveholding republic and the state's gradual annexation by the United States. Conflicts between Texas and the governments of Mexico and Great Britain only encouraged planters to preserve slavery at the expense of their newly formed republic. Pushing for annexation, Anglo-Texans argued, would prevent Britain's sphere of influence from growing and definitively end any claims Mexico had to the future state. While there was widespread Texan support for annexation, Houston's administrative government needed to carefully manage diplomatic relationships to avoid Mexico's potential invasion. Despite their efforts, by 1844, the United States was on the warpath with Mexico, whose officials considered any possibility of annexation a threat to their sovereignty.

Seeds of Empire concludes with an epilogue that reflects on the role Tejanos such as Erasmo Seguín played in transforming the Texas borderlands. However, they could not have imagined the conflicts that would emerge between newly arrived Anglo settlers and Mexicans that negatively impacted Tejano-Anglo alliances. These issues were further exacerbated by the one crop Texan economy that was unable to adequately sustain itself through political and monetary crises. In many ways, the debates in Texas over slavery foreshadowed the conflicts that would soon lead to the US civil war.

Torget's robust study is grounded in an array of archival sources both from the United States and Mexico, and since its publication it has rightly won several awards. His arguments are a welcome contribution to the extensive literature on the US-Mexico borderlands and the US West more broadly. Written in an engaging and easily accessible manner, it is easy to envision this text being taught in both undergraduate courses and graduate seminars. There is, however, a missed opportunity that cannot be overlooked in this study. While *Seeds of Empire* illuminates many voices in the debates around slavery in Texas, indigenous and Black communities' perspectives are largely missing. While enslaved peoples and indigenous tribes appear briefly in the first couple of chapters, they remain minor characters in a story that primarily centers the perspectives of Anglo colonizers such as Stephen Austin. While these omissions may be the result of the archival sources Torget was using and their limitations, they leave the door open for future research that can illuminate indigenous and Black experiences. The appendices in the text detail the evolving cotton prices, demographic information on slave owners, and a more extensive explanation of the Texas Slavery Project offer promising starting points. *Seeds of Empire* is a valuable work that invites scholars to envision a narrative of the US-Mexico borderlands that both centers the experiences of local actors and places the development of the region within a global context.

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