

Battle of the Brazos: A Texas Football Rivalry, a Riot, and a Murder. By T. G. Webb. Swaim-Paup Sports Series. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018. Pp. xiv, 170. \$27.00, ISBN 978-1-62349-661-6.)

Late fall is when aficionados of ancient foes sit in stadiums and before giant television screens to watch as their teams do battle on gridirons across the nation, highlighting the often venomous loathing that certain institutions of higher learning have for one another. The story presented in this fine book documents how and why the rivalry between Baylor and Texas A&M Universities erupted into a riot and was taken to a murderous extreme in 1926.

T. G. Webb does an excellent job of contextualizing the rivalry and how it fit into both the development of the Southwest Conference and the goal of economic expansion in the city of Waco, Texas. The action on the field in the years before 1926 is well covered, as are the shenanigans of students from both institutions after victories (which nearly led to riots in 1922 and 1924). There were (and are) few things that raise the hackles of college students more than seeing supporters of their foe celebrate triumphantly after a contest.

The principal contribution of this book is Webb's detailed analysis of the events surrounding the murder of Charles Milo Sessums and the subsequent botched investigation. There were recriminations on both sides, and the perpetrator(s) of the act never confronted justice in a courtroom. The author utilizes sources from both institutions, as well as a later report by investigators from Pinkerton's National Detective Agency, to get as close as possible to uncovering the truth of the Cotton Palace Riot.

Webb's work ties in nicely with the magnum opus of the late Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982). In the Cotton Palace Riot, a murder was committed primarily due to the questioning of the honor of white southern men within the context of a football game. Whether it was the parading of a donkey (by A&M students), the Aggies' reactions to the celebrations of Baylor Bear fans, or Baylor "women" (or were they men dressed in drag?) being treated disrespectfully by A&M cadets, the uprightness of the Baylor green and gold was called into question, and that, as it did in the nineteenth century, called for fisticuffs to uphold honor. The principal question posed by this work is whether, even after the arrival of the railroad and other trappings of modernity, Waco and the students involved remained mired in antebellum notions. If football was a way to demonstrate how far the community had come by the 1920s, this event showed that it still had a way to go.

This excellent short book should be part of any course on southern history, the history of Texas, or the history of sport. Given some of the unpleasant events that take place during rivalry week each autumn, it is also a warning about letting our sporting passions get the better of us.

Texas Tech University

JORGE IBER