

Letter to the Editor

A Response to “The Alamo’s Selected Past”

Dear Editor:

I recently read an article by Holly Beachley Brear in *CRM* (Vol. 22, No. 8), in which she portrayed the historical interpretation at the Alamo as one-sided. When I finished with the piece, I concluded that it is her interpretation and not the Alamo’s that is outdated. I am attaching a brief response to Brear’s “The Alamo’s Selected Past,” so that those who read her argument can see that her interpretation is not going unchallenged.

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Dr. Winders’ rebuttal follows:

In 1995, the University of Texas Press published Holly Beachley Brear’s book, *Inherit the Alamo*. The volume, subtitled *Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine*, examined the Alamo’s custodianship as viewed through the eyes of an anthropologist. Dr. Brear’s research, much of it gathered during an extremely tumultuous time in San Antonio, led her to conclude that the Alamo presented an outdated historical interpretation that excludes all but the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and other like-minded organizations or individuals. Her thesis, condensed into a short article, recently appeared in a special issue of *CRM*.

More than a year ago, Dr. Brear contacted the Alamo and requested an interview for an upcoming article she was preparing. She met with Brad Breuer, the Alamo’s Director, and me. We had an open and frank discussion with her regarding perceptions surrounding the Alamo and ways we were responding to meet the needs of our visitors and the local community. We toured the grounds with her before she left, telling her about changes that were then in development. We asked her to contact us should she have any questions, but never heard from her again.

I had hoped that meeting with us would help clarify certain notions Dr. Brear holds about the Alamo. One of these is an erroneous assumption that forms the basis for her criticism of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and the historic interpretation at the Alamo. According to Dr. Brear, “The Alamo, from the Daughter’s per-

spective, is a shrine to the men who worked to free Texas from Mexico’s control.” The point she has missed both in her book and article is that the Alamo is a memorial to the Texans who died here, declared by the State of Texas in legislation that granted the DRT custodianship of the site in 1905. Thus, the traditional focus on the 13-day battle is not just a decision of the DRT, it is a legislative mandate.

Another equally erroneous assumption is that little emphasis is placed on the history of the site prior to or after the battle. Explaining why the Alamo is located in an urban setting—a fact that shocks many visitors—is a critical step in enhancing appreciation of the site and its rich history. For us, the phrase “From Mission, To Fortress, To Shrine” is more than a cliché—it forms the backbone of our interpretation.

Another missed point concerns the donation boxes and Alamo Museum Gift Shop. As part of the 1905 legislation granting custodianship to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, the DRT agreed to maintain the site at no charge to the state. The Alamo receives no local, state, or federal tax revenue and funds all conservation and educational programs from the sale of souvenirs, donations, and more recently grants from private foundations. All monies raised at the site go into the preservation of the building and grounds and to cover operating expenses.

In summary, the Alamo is an extremely difficult historical site to interpret owing to its urban location, successive layers of history, and the cultural attitudes visitors sometimes bring with them. As a trained historian, I recognize the importance to be inclusive. Nevertheless, I question the value of a thesis that seems to seek inclusion for its own sake. It is possible to prioritize historical events that have occurred at the same location. In the case of the Alamo, the remnants of the original structures that exist for visitors to view were saved not because this was Mission San Antonio de Valero, but because it was the site of an important battle that helped shape the political, social, and cultural development of North America.