

## Where Texas Meets the Sea: Corpus Christi and Its History (Clifton and Shirley Caldwell Texas Heritage)

By Alan Lessoff

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A favorite destination of visitors to the Texas coast, Corpus Christi is a midsize city that manages to be both cosmopolitan and provincial, networked and local. It is an indispensable provider of urban services to South Texas, as well as a port of international significance. Its industries and military bases and, increasingly, its coastal research institutes give it a range of connections throughout North America. Despite these advantages, however, Corpus Christi has never made it into the first rank of Texas cities, and a keen self-consciousness about the city's subordinate position has driven debates over Corpus's identity and prospects for decades.

In this masterful urban history—a study that will reshape the way that Texans look at all their cities—Alan Lessoff analyzes Corpus Christi's place within Texas, the American Southwest, the western Gulf of Mexico, and the U.S.-Mexican borderlands from the city's founding in 1839 to the present. He portrays Corpus as a place where westward Anglo expansion overwhelmed the Hispanic settlement process from the south, leaving a legacy of conflicting historical narratives that colors the city's character even now. Lessoff also explores how competing visions of the city's identity and possibilities have played out in arenas ranging from artwork in public places to schemes to embellish, redevelop, or preserve the downtown waterfront and North Padre Island. With a deep understanding of the geographic, historical, economic, and political factors that have formed the city, Lessoff demonstrates that Corpus Christi exemplifies the tensions between regional and cosmopolitan influences that have shaped cities across the Southwest.

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Review

"Lessoff's call to recognize the rise of urban Texas is valuable and rewarding for both historians and local residents." (*Western Historical Quarterly* 2015-11-01)

"This book is a model for other historians to test in other places—in Texas, the Southwest, and in other regions. It is a great urban history and an excellent source for readers both familiar and new to the city's history." (*Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 2016-04-01)

"An important contribution to the growing body of work on Sunbelt cities. . . . [It] proves that the history of successes, anxieties, and new starts in 'peripheral' cities might be just as important, if not more so, than the urban monoliths of history and historiography such as New York and Chicago." (*Pacific Historical Review* 2016-11-01)

"A well-researched and interesting addition to urban history in an understudied region. The author incorporates environmental history nicely and demonstrates why Corpus Christi has not been able to achieve long-term success like many of its neighboring cities." (*Journal of Southern History* 2016-05-01)

""

"This is the most sophisticated and compelling urban history set in Texas, and an excellent contribution to the growing body of literature that traces the sometimes-bloody meeting of Anglo and Mexican cultures along the borderlands. . . . A meticulously researched, gracefully written work of considerable originality and importance." (Benjamin Johson, Loyola University Chicago, and author of *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* and *Bordertown: The Odyssey of an American Place*)

"Corpus Christi is very lucky that Alan Lessoff called that community home for so many years and took it seriously and on its own terms—the book reflects his deep knowledge of its history and present state, his considerable love for its conversations and arguments, tempo and tempests across time. I cannot imagine a more definitive study of the "Sparkling City by the Sea." The book [also] makes a very strong contribution to the literature on urban history in the United States; its close reading of a peripheral place speaks directly to dilemmas and challenges facing the nation's mega cities. That's a major achievement, and one more reason why I am delighted to recommend the book with such enthusiasm." (Char Miller, W. M. Keck Professor of Environmental Studies, Pomona College, and author of *Deep in the Heart of San Antonio: Land and Life in South Texas* and *On the Edge: Water, Immigration, and Politics in the Southwest*)

"Where Texas Meets the Sea is the definitive history of Corpus Christi. In this expansive and nuanced portrait of place, Alan Lessoff charts the captivating life of a dynamic and often misunderstood city. He tracks the storms—meteorological, political, cultural, and economic—that have shaped Corpus, and he renders the area and its people with rare insight. The city has long been overlooked by historians, and it's rarely been put in its deserved larger context, but in *Where Texas Meets the Sea*, Lessoff ends the silence. It was worth the wait." (Bret Anthony Johnston, author of *Corpus Christi: Stories and Remember Me Like This*)

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## About the Author

Alan Lessoff is Professor of History at Illinois State University. A specialist in U.S. and comparative urban history, he has written, cowritten, or edited five previous books, most recently, *Fractured Modernity: America Confronts Modern Times, 1890s to 1940s*, edited with Thomas Welskopp.

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