

The Spanish Borderlands As a Field of Historical Study

The View from the Spanish Colonial Research Center

The Spanish Borderlands as a field of study has many dimensions. Aside from chronological and geographical considerations, there are historiographical issues and ethnic and cultural considerations. Chronologically, the period 1513 to 1821 dictates the core periodization of a geographic area that covers the north Mexican States and Southwestern United States as well as areas beyond the Mississippi River running from St. Louis, Missouri to New Orleans and eastward of there, particularly along the Gulf Coast to Florida. More recently, the chronology has been stretched to include the Mexican and early Anglo-American periods between 1821 and 1850. Similarly, ethnicity and culture transcend time and one can take the present society within the referenced geographic areas and work backward to the colonial period to examine change and continuity of a given people and their relations with others. One binding historical element within the societal structures of the Borderlands is their common history within the context of colonialism and the vestigial colonialism that pervades modern attitudes. Lore, language, religion, music, food are outward signs pointing to historical relationships within the geographic area typed as the Borderlands. As a field of study, the Borderlands encompasses all of the above elements and more.

Changing Nature of the Historical Literature

In some ways, father of Borderlands history Herbert Eugene Bolton himself would be surprised about the development and continuity of the Borderlands as a field of study. Bolton's works are sources for factual information regarding the interpretation of the Borderland's history, but also archival guides, for his footnotes are invaluable for locating documents in Spain and Mexico. Some of his conclusions, particularly in regard to the locations of places such as rivers and routes can be challenged, but his work paved the historiographical pathway for scholarly debate on such issues. One major change in the literature, particularly in the last 20 years, is the proliferation of studies accomplished by Hispanic historians, some of whom do not subscribe to the style or sentiments

expressed by Bolton, but who nevertheless write about Borderlands history and society. These writers are not so much interested in the broader story that Bolton painted, they are interested in topics that relate to society, race, gender, and ethnicity. They write about town founding, and legal, political and social processes within the context of a Spanish colonial world. They move in and out of the Borderlands approach by sometimes taking an imperial approach, that is, they set their topics within a Colonial Latin American perspective. These writers tend to see the Borderlands society against the larger Spanish colonial culture that evolved throughout Spanish America. The literature has changed largely along the lines of more detailed concerned with social processes compared to topics related to exploration, missionization, and the establishment of broad claims to territory. One such work is Gerald E. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, *Tejano Origins in Eighteenth-Century San Antonio* is a work that explores the relationship between soldiers, settlers, missionaries, and Indians in Texas.

It is also interesting to note the inclusion, more and more, of Mexican Period topics in Borderlands historiography. One book that covers both Spanish and Mexican periods in terms of continuity is the author's *Explorers, Traders and Slavers: Forging the Old Spanish Trail, 1678-1850*. The book covers the Spanish Period efforts to establish routes between Santa Fe and Los Angeles by way of Utah, the Great Basin, and Northern Arizona. The continuity of the effort cuts across both Spanish and Mexican periods culminating in an immigrant route with later variations that had been pioneered by Antonio Armijo in 1829. Jim Officer, *Hispanic Arizona*, is another study that blends both Spanish and Mexican periods. As a regional study, Officer's work is destined

The Spanish Colonial Research Center, located on the campus of the University of New Mexico, is a National Park Service office dedicated to the study and identification of sites important in Hispanic history.

to be the standard work for Arizona. Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo*, is one that cannot be ignored in the context of Borderlands history as it is a study that begins the long epilogue to the history of the Spanish and Mexican periods.

New Directions for Study

Relatively recent studies would include publications by William Foster, *Spanish Explorations in Texas*, which aims to identify with some precision the routes taken by explorers, missionaries, and settlers along the colonial roads of Texas leading to and beyond San Antonio. Frank de la Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar*; Gilberto R. Cruz, *Let there be Towns*, and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo, 1755–1870*, represent a new direction in Borderlands historiography, for they focus on the significant settlement of the Southwest, particularly Texas. Donald Cutter and Iris Engstrand, eds. *Quest for Empire: Spanish Settlement in the Southwest*, Okah L. Jones, Jr. *Los Paisanos: Spanish Settlers on the Northern Frontier of New Spain*, and Elizabeth John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds*, set the pattern for telling a broad story with excellent analysis. One other book worthy of mention is David Weber's, *The Spanish Empire in North America*, which serves as a synthesis of the old Boltonian thesis dealing with the epic of greater North America. That theme was also expounded upon by one of Bolton's disciples, John Francis Bannon in *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513–1821*.

The Best Research in Historical Literature

The Borderlanders of the Bolton School have performed their best work on themes related to exploration, missionization, and Spanish-Indian relations. They have predominantly looked at the Spanish presence in North America. The neo-Borderlanders have gone beyond the Bolton School to examine ethnic, social, and cultural relations in Spanish North America.

Factors That Have Influenced Research

In the early years of the Spanish Colonial Research Center (SPCO), some of the Center's researchers were influenced by Bolton's writings. Narrative history, moreover, had been emphasized in their graduate training. Similarly, archival research had been the basis of their attraction to the work they had dedicated themselves to doing. Ironically, it was archival research in Spain, Mexico, and England that opened an intellectual path to seek more knowledge about the values of the period studied in the SPCO. With that, the SPCO staff sought to define the Spanish Colonial culture and society in all of its manifestations to better understand those values. They learned that in order to understand the 18th century, one had to first understand the 17th and 16th centuries

that came before it. Change and continuity had to be bridged chronologically to understand the depth of an evolving frontier culture that was being defined internally within its socio-geographic context and externally by the imperial mandates that governed local and regional concerns. It was through continuous research in the archives that one could at least begin to grasp a multi-faceted understanding of the colonial frontier culture that came to be defined historiographically as the Borderlands. In order to encourage this view, the SPCO founded and edits the *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* (CLAHR) with the idea that the definition of the Spanish Borderlands frontier culture could be explored at least operatively within the context of the greater Colonial Latin American experience.

Perhaps it would be limiting to suggest a topic or theme in greatest need of examination. The open-ended approach is, in many ways, best. Everything is in need of examination and re-examination. The historiography always needs to be looked at since it is there that we learn what has been done and what needs to be done. It is there that we identify the gaps. It is not suggested that we should slice baloney thinner, but oftentimes research done 30 years ago should be re-examined in light of new research that has or may yield new information.

Archival research is another area that sometimes reveals new insights, topics, or themes on given subjects. Sometimes the subject is right there in front of us. In that way, we should look at subjects that tell us the "how" of history. How did things work for our colonial forefathers? For example, travel on colonial roads. How did they get from point A to point B, and how long did it take them to do it? What problems did they face in their travels that are different or similar to ours? We often identify points A and B, but we never really study the route taken so that we can with precision mark it on a map. We refer generally to *caminos reales*, but do we really know where they were. Borderlanders tend to narrate the lives of important people, but what about the not-so-important people. How did they live? What did they do for a living? How did they interact with other village folks? What kinds of imperial policies guided or controlled their lives? As settlers who founded towns, ranches, and farms, what legal processes did they need to follow to succeed? How did they interact with the important people, if at all? Land grant, inquisition, and military service records, legal correspondence, reports, diaries, decrees, etc., often supply some of the answers to these kinds of questions.

Additionally, Borderlanders tend to forget about colonialism and colonial values as well as

the colonial cultural context that shaped behavioral responses to particular problems. Colonial-native relationships are often viewed through the lens of bureaucratic responses, but how much of given relationships were owing to ethnic, racial, or colonial mentalities? Models and methodologies for answering such questions have been worked by Colonial Latin Americanists, and they may point to new approaches by historians of the Borderlands.

Sources Useful to Borderlands Historians

The great Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla, Spain, is a major depository of manuscript sources for Spanish America. The Archivo General de Simancas near Valladolid is another important archive for those seeking new information about Spanish North America. The Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City is equally important. Provincial archives such as those found throughout Mexico similarly are significant fonts for documentary sources. Depositories like the Huntington Library, the Berkeley Library, the collections at the Newberry Library are also significant. There are other important smaller archives that contain a depth of documentation, but they are too many to list in this review. Suffice it to say, that while the major archives referenced above are the best known, it is likely that new discoveries can be made in smaller, lesser-known collections.

Obviously, the new technology, that is, computers, offer new capabilities regarding the storage of information and the assemblage of it for interpretive purposes. They will be part of the methodologies used for future works.

SPCO Contributions to the Field of History

The work of the Spanish Colonial Research Center complements that of other research collections and, thus, is part of an historiographical continuity that has evolved in such a way that the new growth or offshoots assures the viability of the Borderlands as an area of study and research.

It is hoped that the SPCO has made a contribution to that effort. Aside from books produced in the SPCO which are listed below, other of the SPCO's literary contributions including the *Colonial Latin American Historical Review (CLAHR)* should complement the efforts of others to fill out the Spanish Colonial story in North America in such a way that we might learn more about the rich heritage left by our Spanish/Mexican predecessors.

Publications

Monographs

Colonial Latin American Historical Review (CLAHR), a quarterly publication of the Spanish Colonial Research Center, Volume I:1992; Volume II:1993,

Volume III:1994, Volume IV:1995, Volume V, 1996, Volume VI, 1997.

Books

- Don Fernando's Legacy: A History of the Atrisco Land Grant, 1692-1968*, Department of the Interior, 145 pp. (Forthcoming 1997).
- Explorers, Traders and Slavers: Forging the Old Spanish Trail, 1678-1850*, University of Utah Press, 1997, 289 pages.
- The Aztec Chronicles—The True History of Christopher Columbus as narrated by Quilatzli of Texcoco: A Novella*, Berkeley: Tonatiuh-Quinto Sol International—TQS Publications, 1995, 140 pages.
- Gaspar Pérez de Villagrás's Historia de la Nueva México, 1610: A Critical and Annotated Spanish-English Edition* with Alfredo Rodríguez, Miguel Encinias, co-editors, University of New Mexico Press, December 1992, 367 pages.
- Spanish Bluecoats in Northwestern New Spain, 1767-1815: A History of the Catalan Volunteers*, Joseph P. Sánchez, University of New Mexico Press, May 1990, 196 pages.
- Pecos: Gateway to Pueblos and Plains*, Joseph P. Sánchez and John Bezy, coeditors, Southwest Parks and Monuments, Tucson, Arizona, 1988, 142 pages.
- The Río Abajo Frontier, 1540-1692: A History of Early Colonial New Mexico*, Albuquerque Museum Monograph Series, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1987, 159 pages. Second edition, 1996.

Book Length Bibliographies and Archival Indices

- Guide to the Spanish Colonial Research Center's Map Collection of North America*, SPCO staff compilers, Government Printing Office, Denver, 1994, 7 volumes, 2,000 pages.
- Spanish Colonial Research Center Computerized Index of Spanish Colonial Documents*, SPCO staff compilers, Government Printing Office, Denver, 1991, 3 Volumes, 1,007 pages.
- A Selected Bibliography of the Florida-Louisiana Frontier with References to the Caribbean, 1492-1819*, SPCO staff compilers, U.S. Government Printing Office, Denver, 1991, 159 pages.
- Bibliografía Colombina, 1492-1990: Books, Articles and other Publications on the Life and Times of Christopher Columbus*, United States Government Printing Office, Denver. SPCO staff compilers, 1990, 199 pages.

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