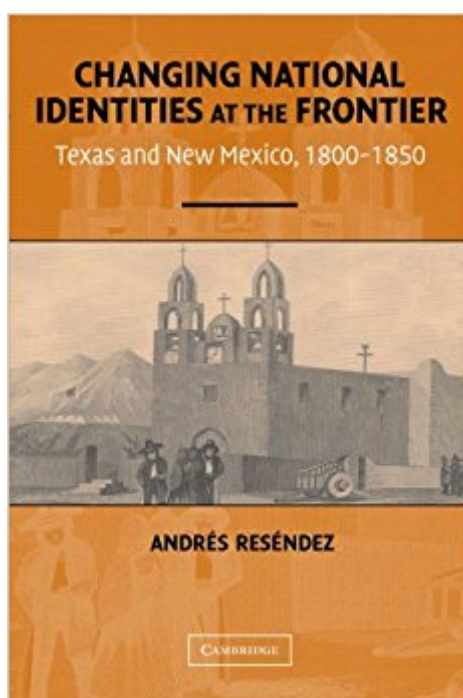


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Changing National Identities At The Frontier: Texas And New Mexico, 1800-1850



Synopsis

Hispanics, Native Americans, and Anglo Americans made agonizing and crucial identity decisions in this southwestern region during the first half of the nineteenth century. Whereas the Mexican government sought to bring its frontier inhabitants into the national fold by relying on administrative and patronage linkages, Mexico's northern frontier gravitated toward the expanding American economy. Andrés Reséndez explores how the diverse and fiercely independent peoples of Texas and New Mexico came to think of themselves as members of one particular national community or another, in the years leading up to the Mexican-American War.

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Customer Reviews

"Reséndez command of general political, economic, and cultural issues is remarkable. Highly recommended." CHOICE "...this book is a major contribution to borderlands and western studies and in many ways provides a valuable link between Spanish colonial history of the area and United States history." Journal of American History, Gilberto M. Hinojosa, University of the Incarnate Word "The major purpose of Andrés Reséndez's Changing National Identities at the Frontier is to examine the complex and overlapping ethnic identities of the peoples in Texas and New Mexico in the decades preceding occupation of the region by the United States. In doing so, Reséndez challenges the traditional historiography of the field that has dealt with the nationalities of Mexicans and Americans as if these were monolithic identities. He argues that individuals and communities in the region struggled with "enormous ambiguities and constant shifts" in identity because a nation

had not yet been constructed where they lived. Through his cogent argument Reséndez makes a splendid contribution to the historiography of the borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico." John R. Chávez, Southern Methodist University; Andrés Reséndez writes in truly synoptic ways about Mexico's far north becoming the American southwest in the early nineteenth century. Somehow he manages to keep in play Spain and Mexico, Mexico and the U.S., Texas and New Mexico, native-born and foreign-born, Mexican American, Anglo American, and Native American, traders and governors, men and women, and Mexican historiography and American historiography. The key to his success is a situational approach to identities-in-the-making shaped by powerful political and commercial forces that does not lose sight of particular circumstances and arresting episodes of frontier political life. This is one of those rare, well-researched books that treats national frontiers and histories from more than one side of the eventual border." William B. Taylor, University of California, Berkeley "Reséndez has produced a compulsively readable book distinguished for the depth of its research, making subtle use of evidence as diverse as contemporary memoirs, newspaper accounts, travelers' narratives, and both Mexican and American archival sources. He touches on such themes as the centralist/federalist conflict in Mexico itself, the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War, the social history of intermarriage between Anglos and Mexicans, and the pull of the U.S. market economy. A key to the book's originality is that it is written primarily from the Mexican perspective, although with balance. Reséndez skillfully blends economic, political, and cultural history in a way that throws new light on the separatist impulse in the Mexican north in the wake of Independence, on political and cultural identities in the Borderlands, and Mexican domestic politics." Dr. Eric Van Young, University of California, San Diego; "In the decades before the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1847, the American Southwest belonged to Mexico, but the United States economy washed over the region. In this fresh, imaginative, and timely narrative, Andrés Reséndez probes the hearts and minds of Mexicans, Anglos, and Indians torn between two nations contending for their loyalties." David J. Weber, Southern Methodist University "Historians routinely call for a new, transnational history; Andrés Reséndez has simply gone ahead and written one. Grounded in both the history of Mexico and the history of the United States, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier* recontextualizes familiar stories and events and, in doing so, alters their meaning. This is an important book whose influence should go far beyond both Mexican and American history." Richard White, Stanford University "...this book is well argued and is a must-read for both American and Mexican scholars interested in borderlands history or in the construction of identity." *New Mexico Historical Review* "...well written and thoroughly researched..." -Kevin M. Brady, *JOURNAL OF THE EARLY REPUBLIC*

This book explores how the diverse and fiercely independent peoples of Texas and New Mexico came to think of themselves as members of one particular national community or another in the years leading up to the Mexican-American War. Hispanics, Native Americans, and Anglo Americans made agonizing and crucial identity decisions against the backdrop of two structural transformations taking place in the region during the first half of the 19th century and often pulling in opposite directions.

This book was exactly what I had been looking for. Having read quite a bit about the Texas Revolution, I started to get the sense that "something was missing" in the full story. Hints of contemporaneous intrigue in Mexico City and passing references to other rebellions in Mexico made me believe I had been cheated by previous authors. Andrés Reséndez fills in some of the gaps, sets the record straight, and adds aspects to the story that have been flat-out ignored by others. "Changing National Identities at the Frontier" tells the story of Texas and New Mexico in this vital window of time by examining the motivations and prevailing sentiments of the normal people that made up the societies there. He also weaves the politics of Mexico City and in Mexico as a whole into the greater tale, putting the Revolution into a context in which it is seldom seen. The book follows equally the fates of Texas and New Mexico, whose only common link are their economic influences, and their fate as U.S. states. In many ways, I believe the book would have been stronger as two separate books, as their alternating tales seem to break up each others narratives. I do understand how the author wished to make a single historical point from those two examples, and was trying to organize chronologically and by subject, but I still found it disruptive -- a matter of taste I suppose. I would also have liked the book to be about 200 pages longer, as so much of the material is so interesting as to beg for elaboration. If you enjoy books on the history of the Southwest, I recommend this book highly. If you crave more knowledge of the Texas Revolution, this book is indispensable.

Changing National Identities at the Frontier, by Andrés Reséndez is one of two books I would recommend as essential reading before attempting to analyze the causes of the separation of the American Southwest from Mexico (the other, The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846, by David J. Weber). The dozens of books I'd read previously on the subject proved to be only valuable background reading in preparation for my discovery of these two.

Excellent contribution to the history of Texas and New Mexico. It would be of broad academic interest to people in many disciplines.

Came with minimal marks but since I did buy it used it really wasn't an issue. It actually helps because I'm writing heavily on it...lol

Excellent to a person interested in southwest history

The book was heavily underlined and marked over in yellow and blue marker and therefore difficult to read. However, what I could glean from the beginning few pages, it seemed that Mr. Resendez spent a lot of time trying to debunk the fact that the U.S. did, in fact, have the policy of Manifest Destiny in place. This plan was not only related to the Spanish, that by then had been intermarrying with the indigenous populations for at least 200 years and therefore that had become a nation of new Mexicans. That many individuals at the time were influenced by economics is understandable, but this does not cancel out Manifest Destiny plot. Interestingly enough, in one section he used a terrible example to color the thousands of actors at the time, that of dreadfully racist remarks about Mexican women by one or two men. I found that to be incredible, as I know as fact other examples that completely nullify the point he was trying to make. I could not finish reading the book as it was damaged, but this is as much as I could glean of the book. I don't think I would recommend it.

The author has an impressive academic record both before and after he earned his doctorate. He has produced a most thorough and useful interpretation of cultural relations on the Southwestern frontier. *There are many more than the shown categories and subjects listed below in this entry yet they only refer to the United States, they could be doubled again with Mexico as the central noun. And we can add further headings: Spanish Borderlands, Frontiers in general. And you can probably think of several more. This omission of Mexico simply indicates ethno-centric nature of the cataloging, ignoring the multi-national sweep of the subject and the wide-ranging relevance to many disciplines. Herein the author starts out with the voluminous works of the famous Alexander von Humboldt, who led an expedition to gather all the information and data he could on what is now known as the American Southwest. The only project of equal scope and importance covering this area is the multi-volume series sponsored by the US government in the 1850s is known to the geographer, geologists, and students of flora and fauna known as the "Pacific Railroad Reports" and that required the efforts of several huge multi-personnel expeditions over a much longer period. The

author states that he omits the lower Rio Grande del Norte Valley and the upper Valley in the present El Paso-Juarez urban complex. It is puzzling to me for control of those two areas was the core of political and economic concern. El Paso controlled the major route to the vast territory of New Mexico, all of which was ceded as a result of the Mexican War. However, this book is not a history of the borderlands, which has been a subject of scholarly concern since the 1920s, but rather concerns the larger questions of national identity. Two great civilizations clashed and the apparent little dog won. In 1800 the erstwhile mighty Spanish empire stretched from California to Patagonia, and around the world, though less dominant than it was before the rise of the British Royal Navy and the depletion consequent to the constant wars in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century. But the Spanish Empire in the New World was about to topple due to internal political forces, and Spain would retain for almost a century control over Cuba, along the way selling Florida to the US. In economic and population terms both the US and Spain, which soon broke off to become the subsequent Mexican nation were evenly matched. The Anglos approaching from the east who were familiar with living in closely wooded lands, opposed to the Mexicans, whose ancestral home was semi-arid, yet that made little difference for the Spanish had been in the borderlands for two centuries and knew how to live in an arid climate. On the other hand, the Anglos' migration into the mid West had stalled at the prairies of Illinois, whose lack of forests indicated to them that the area was infertile. The Mexican (Tejano) versus Anglo expansionists first met in the Arkansas, Louisiana area where there was no apparent difference in the vegetation and climate, yet the Tejanos formed a cluster in the San Antonio area and were not numerous enough to oppose the Anglos physically so a political solution was initiated with the land grants given to Stephen F. Austin, who, carefully screening his colonists, was also thought capable of social control of them. In the upper Rio Grande basin was located a corridor of Mexican settlement including the settled Pueblo Indians, while to the west and east roamed the powerful Navajo, Apache and Comanche nations, always nibbling on the fringes of New Mexico. Since Santa Fe and Taos were the most northern urban areas of New Mexico, they were thousand miles from Mexico City, if not physically certainly in consciousness. Thus the Santa Fe Trail stretching from Missouri across the plains was a much more efficient source of manufactured goods. When the US Army marched into New Mexico they were welcomed. While, Texas, of course, had been a sovereign nation for ten years. This work ends soon after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded upper California, Arizona, and New Mexico, moving the actual and de facto boundaries from the Rockies of Southern Colorado and the eastern edge of the Staked Plains, to the north bank of the Rio Grande, and westward along the Gila to the Colorado. This book will be very useful in following the development of the cultural history of the

borderlands. His thesis is that the Anglos won the contest with the Mexicans because of their vibrant and innovative culture contrasted with a poverty-stricken heritage of domination by an elite born in Spain and the resulting economic stagnation. Even those of pure Spanish blood born in Mexico had no political power, and the mestizos and Indians were even worse off.* Note my use of the term "American Southwest". This is just as much of an indication of the dominance of the US in the area as is the world-wide use of Eurocentric terms such as Middle and Far East, and the placing of the Prime Meridian for world mapping and navigation. Even the French, who for many years used the Paris meridian as the point of origin, by the end of the nineteenth century were publishing maps based on Greenwich, with that of Paris relegated to tick marks on the border of the map proper.

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