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## Law and Community on the Mexican California Frontier: Anglo-American Expatriates and the Clash of Legal Traditions, 1821-1846 by David J. Langum

G. Emlen Hall  
*University of New Mexico - School of Law*

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with them from the east. The organization of the book traces these three themes.

This study stands on firmest ground when it addresses Anglo perceptions of and adjustments to the Mexican system. Langum is particularly moving when he describes and analyzes the profoundly different goals of Mexican and Anglo civil litigation. According to Langum, Mexican litigation tried to end disputes while Anglo litigation tried to vindicate rights. In a world so sharply divided, it is no wonder each regarded the other with such profound suspicion. The book details and explains this mistrust particularly well.

The book succeeds almost as well in its treatment of the Mexican system of law on its own terms. Langum's extensive research in the Monterey archives and the Berkeley and Huntington libraries, as well as a wide range of secondary sources, yields an interesting portrait of litigation in California from the bottom up. The author's approach shows the difference between the law as mandated from Mexico City and as applied in frontier California. However, the few defects in this marvelous book stem from the virtues of its specificity.

The book restricts itself in at least two ways that make its conclusions difficult to extend to the Borderlands in general. First, the book hardly deals with disputes regarding land and water and the method of their resolution either in California or in those other areas in which Mexican law applied between 1821 and 1846. For example, the New Mexico record demonstrates that pitched battles over access to natural resources provided the greatest need for dispute resolution and tested the Mexican system to its limits.

Second, Langum's suggestion that the compulsory arbitration mandated by Mexican law effectively reduced full-blown litigation may be true for California but is not so obvious in a Mexican New Mexico that was six times as large as California and probably much further developed and entrenched in its institutions. In particular, Mexican period historians of New Mexico have noted that New Mexicans were no less litigious after 1821 than they had been before. While books of *conciliaciones* do begin to appear in the Mexican archives of New Mexico after 1832, they by no means replaced the extensive, full-blown lawsuits that New Mexicans entered into between 1821 and 1846.

This difference may only mean, as today, that Californios were more mellow than Nuevo Mexicanos. But it suggests that the bold outlines of Langum's California analysis did not emerge as clearly elsewhere in the Borderlands. In those days, California was the wilderness and New Mexico the heartland of civilization.

These questions about scope and applicability represent minor cavils with a magnificent work that is bound to remove some of the bad reputation that legal history suffers in the Borderlands. Langum writes beautifully. His sentences sparkle with rich legal detail that is explained for lay readers. The University of Oklahoma Press has produced a handsome text that is easy to read and easy to follow, especially because the extensive footnotes appear on the bottom of each page.

Em Hall  
University of New Mexico