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Alfredo Jimenez, *El Gran Norte de Mexico: una frontera imperial en la Nueva Espana, 1540-1820*

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Book Reviews

El Gran Norte de México: una frontera imperial en la Nueva España, 1540-1820. Por Alfredo Jiménez. (Madrid: Editorial Tébar, 2006. 536 págs. Ilustraciones, mapas, notas, bibliografía, índice. 28.95€ en rústica.)

El Gran Norte de México is the latest entry in the field of Spanish borderlands surveys. The product of Spanish anthropologist Alfredo Jiménez, it is decidedly different from the last two books on the subject, David Weber's *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (1992) and John Kessel's *Spain in the Southwest: A Narrative History of Colonial New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California* (2002). Rather than the grand analytical narrative of Weber or the sweeping storytelling of Kessel, both of whom employ a clear chronological approach, Jiménez's book is thematically organized and descriptive in nature.

El Gran Norte is divided into two parts, the first of which provides a broad overview of Spain's history in the Americas, specifically New Spain, in three chapters. The first chapter alone is enough reason to make this book a worthwhile read. More than previous authors, Jiménez provides the Iberian background to the story of Spain on the North American frontier. He goes beyond the well-known association of the conquest to Spain's martial culture derived from the Reconquista, delving into how Spaniards attempted to understand the New World in terms of their Iberian experience. One example is how the office of *adelantado* changed from a royal district official in Spain to the leader of an expedition holding a royal charter to settle and organize new territory in America. He also reinforces how Spanish America was modeled on and mimicked the social and governmental organization of Castile. The second chapter provides geographic descriptions of the various regions included within the northern frontier. His approach is based on the works of earlier borderlands historians, particularly Oakah Jones's *Los Paisanos* (1979) and Peter Gerhard's *The North Frontier of New Spain* (1982). The third chapter is a thirty-five-page survey of the establishment of New Spain and its northward expansion. Unfortunately, a rather scatter-shot approach here leaves readers with a rather incomplete picture of the course of events, particularly in the eighteenth century.

The second part of the book is divided into six thematic chapters in which the author attempts to let historical actors speak for themselves. Topics include Spaniards' attitudes toward nature and environment, Crown and Church, the chronic state of Indian warfare, frontier economy and society, and frontier culture. Relying on a wealth of material from Spanish archives, Jiménez is perhaps overly descriptive in approach, and the inclusion of a number of brief quotes from royal communications expressing support for a given advisor's opinion adds nothing to the text. On the other hand, the amount and variety of new primary sources he utilizes helps make his case that Spain's North American frontier was as complex and diverse a place as any other part

of the empire. A final chapter attempts to frame the study of New Spain's northern frontier in a broader perspective, making some suggestive comparisons with the American western frontier.

Although not generally available or suitable for classroom use in the United States, *El Gran Norte de México* has much to offer American and Mexican borderlands scholars. This work is richly illustrated and documented with material from Spanish archives, conceived without respect to current political boundaries, and respectful of the varied visions of Spaniards, frontiersmen, and native peoples alike. It can be usefully mined for subjects meriting further scholarly attention, lectures for undergraduate classes, and topics for discussion in graduate courses on Mexican, Spanish, and even U.S. Western or borderlands history.

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Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600. By Alida C. Metcalf. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. xiv + 375 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth.)

This is a very important book on a neglected topic. Alida Metcalf examines sixteenth-century Brazil through the eyes of the "go-betweens," individuals who bridged cultures. She identifies three broad types: physical or biological who "carried disease, introduced European domestic animals, and transplanted American flora and fauna to Europe and Africa;" transactional, which included "translators, negotiators, and culture brokers;" and representational, "those who through writings, drawings, map-making and oral tradition shaped on a large scale how Europeans and Native peoples viewed each other" (pp. 9-10). As Metcalf points out, "go-betweens were central to the colonization of Brazil" (p. 15).

This work contains a number of truly excellent chapters. Though many of them could stand alone, they are very much inter-related. Chapter 4, entitled "Conversion," focuses almost entirely on the Jesuits and is a great synthesis and a fresh look at the role of the Society of Jesus based not only on their printed correspondence, but also supplemented with fresh documents from the Jesuit archives in Rome. Metcalf has an excellent eye for the apt quotation and finds much in the Jesuit documentation that is used throughout the book for the years after the Jesuits' arrival in Brazil in 1549.

The fifth chapter on "Biology" provides the reader details on the effects of epidemics on the lives of all those living in Brazil, especially during the second half of the sixteenth century. The author gives an up-to-date review of the latest research and reveals the importance disease played in shaping the human landscape of Portuguese America.