

War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880

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Review

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González-Quiroga, Miguel Ángel. *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880.* University of Oklahoma Press, 2020. HARDCOVER. \$55.00 ISBN 9780806164984 pp. 508

Two chapters on the U.S. Civil War and the French Intervention in Mexico anchor *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880* and capture how cooperation ran parallel with the violence that chronicled the nineteenth-century U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Whereas intersecting studies such as Andrew Masich's *Civil War in the Southwest Borderlands, 1861-1867* (2017) focus on a shared culture of violence and martial masculinity, Miguel Ángel González-Quiroga's *War and Peace* emphasizes the common ground of cooperative, personal, and binational relationships. By examining "the day-to-day business of life and work" and not just the "headlines" of history (359), the author effectively supports this premise. A true transnational scholar, González-Quiroga has lived and taught in Texas and Mexico and co-written multiple books on this border region. With a Weberian foundation and Tolstoyian intent, this book provides a remarkable history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands that reshapes the current emphasis on violence in the historiography.

From Mexican trade in stolen goods with Comanches and Apaches to U.S. physicians, or those pretending to be, providing medical care across the border region, the book initially establishes the theme of cooperation in a range of ways. Most central, though, is the corridor of commercial exchange for building collaborative relationships—U.S. and European merchants, for example, "fanned out from Matamoros to Nuevo León and Coahuila" (24) and partnered with local Mexican merchants during the 1820s and 1830s. Smuggling, both then and later, emerges as one of the most important linkages between Anglo-Americans, Europeans, and Mexicans (for example, Monterey merchant Jesús González Treviño and his trade with Texas) that establishes the argument about cooperation in times usually understood through the prism of violence. Hence, economic motivations played a significant role in forging mutually beneficial relations.

Chapter 2 delves further into the commerce of the Texas Republic period that punctured the border to reveal that “beneath the surface of hostility, members of both races—Anglo-Texans and Mexicans—desired to get along” and establish reciprocal exchanges (55). Here too we see smuggling efforts leading the way, especially through the Villas del Norte, while frontier merchants such as Henry L. Kinney forged relationships with Mexicans and Native Americans. Even the Mexican Federalist War (1838-1840) is captured as an interval of cooperation through such leaders as Antonio Zapata and his deployment of a combined Anglo-Texan and Mexican force. One intriguing angle that aims to redirect the literature on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is the idea of cooperative violence, including earlier partnerships between Mexican federalists and Texans and their mutual quest for local autonomy. Violence and trade could thus produce cooperative political understandings too.

The main argument gains even more traction in Chapter 3 by examining the theme of how adjusting to new historical situations after the U.S.-Mexican War could produce cooperative relationships. From the rise of Eagle Pass as a trade gateway to the failed Carvajal Revolt—originating as protests against government policies then growing into a separate republic movement—we gain an understanding of the involvement of formative Anglo merchants, such as Charles Stillman, and the upswing of Santiago Vidaurri as regional caudillo by the mid-1850s. This chapter also delves into German colonization efforts in Texas and the dynamic of escaping slaves from there along with the sometimes-joint Mexican-Anglo efforts to stop them. Further, we discover the U.S.-Mexican collaboration in combating Indian raids. The reader may find the topics somewhat jumbled together at this point. Yet, we do recognize a clear line of argument: despite the new border and very real racism, cross-border interactions and cooperation emerged, as further reflected with labor migration, such as teamsters and many more *servientes*. Chapter 4, the second chapter on the 1849 to 1860 period, also stretches into the role of both Protestant and Catholic missionaries, prominent European-background merchants, and even Juan Cortina’s raid (to a degree) to reflect angles of integration and cooperation between Northern Mexicans and Texans.

In the pivotal chapters on the U.S. Civil War and the War of the French Intervention, the Matamoros to Brownsville cotton trade (and then to Bagdad with the Union occupation in 1863) stands out as a vital link between Mexico and the Confederacy. Intersecting with the recent volume *The Civil War on the Rio Grande, 1846-1876* (2019), edited by Roseann Bacha-Garza,

Christopher L. Miller, and Russell K. Skowronek, Chapter 5 likewise reflects long-standing cross-border merchants, such as José San Román and Mifflin Kennedy, alongside the partnership between Vidaurri and Confederate agent José Quintero. This chapter also exposes the centrality and revival of the Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras trade route to the Confederacy and the longer-term implications of economically integrating the region (as the above book does). Yet it also extends into Confederate migration to Mexico after the Civil War to reflect angles of accepting Mexico as place of economic opportunity, while usually not accepting most Mexicans themselves.

The companion chapter stresses the overlapping ten-month period when both national conflicts impacted the Rio Grande area and helped build cross-border relationships because of the shared atmosphere of war. Confederate general Hamilton Bee appears in both chapters as a transborder officer and, later, resident of Coahuila who “was most assiduous in cultivating friendly relations with Mexicans.” (214) Caudillo Vidaurri also re-emerges as formative to forging relationships with Texas. González-Quiroga also examines Mexican contributions to Confederate and Union forces—for example, spotlighting Octaviano Zapata’s role with the latter. Union arms figure significantly into supporting Mexican Republican efforts to oust the Imperialists, including aiding Mariano Escobedo’s crucial victory at the Battle of San Gertrudis, and establish the ongoing trend of U.S. investments in railroads and mining.

Chapter 7 engages with what has been considered perhaps the most violent decade—the 1870s—due to livestock theft and raids, racial animosity, revival of the Texas Rangers, and cross-border destruction. González-Quiroga does not overturn this framework, but amplifies the nuances of Anglo-Mexican collaboration, and especially how Kickapoo and Lipan raids pushed Texans and Mexicans to seek greater security for themselves. Reaching a curious conclusion about the usually maligned U.S. Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, the author argues on p. 271 that instead of only viewing Mackenzie’s 1873 punitive expedition as “American aggression,” we should recognize how it contributed to “eliminating one troublesome problem in U.S.-Mexican relations.” Perhaps, but this may fit this figure and event too neatly into the argument about cooperation while limiting the role that native peoples may have played in this framework. It would be quite interesting to learn more about potential collaboration with Native Americans, alongside the arc of violence directed at them. Nevertheless, the following chapter effectively focuses on Anglo-Mexican relations by recognizing laborers coming into Texas to work on

railroad lines and women such as Petra Vela and Salomé Ballí who married prominent Anglo businessmen, but managed to sustain and foster Mexican culture.

The concluding chapter recaptures the history of consolidated investment, commercial exchanges, and railroad development across the Texas-Mexico border during the 1870s to early 1880s, but emphasizes the long-standing, local connections between people, reconfigured around the might of outside investors (e.g. Collis Huntington). It also stresses how Mexico and the U.S. managed to bring a “resolution to border problems,” such as the 1882 reciprocal crossing agreement, and develop more “harmonious relations” (353). Hence, national and personal relations between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans register as primary areas of this work.

González-Quiroga grapples with an extensive range of primary sources, from Mexican state archives in Coahuila and Nuevo León to university and state records in Texas, as well as online resources. Likewise, *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier* integrates central studies, such as Andrés Reséndez’s *Changing National Identities at the Frontier* (2005), Jerry Thompson’s *Cortina* (2007) and *Vaqueros in Blue and Gray* (1976), and Nancy McGown Minor’s *Turning Adversity to Advantage* (2009). The volume could at times have relied on the latest versions of scholarship, such as the James David Nichols book *The Limits of Liberty* (2018), or my own *The Southern Exodus to Mexico* (2015), instead of the earlier dissertations. Yet, with such a vast range of research to support an innovative project, this is certainly a minor lapse.

Benefiting from time at the Clements Center along with other financial support that ultimately makes research and books like this one possible, *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880* divulges an extensive scope of time, topics, and scholarship to deliver an exceptional transnational borderlands study. The book provides a narrative element that unveils the people who lived largely by way of cooperation and not just under the headline of violence.

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