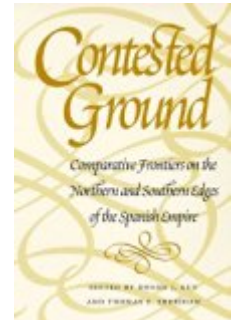


Donna J. Guy, Thomas E. Sheridan, eds.. *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998. xiii + 275 pp. \$52.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8165-1859-3.



Reviewed by Ralph Lee Woodward

Published on H-LatAm (April, 1999)

This splendid reader brings together, including the editors, nine historians, three anthropologists, and a sociologist to compare and contrast the influence of the frontier at the northern and southern extremes of the Spanish American Empire. The volume originated in a conference on the topic sponsored by Southwest Center at the University of Arizona in 1992 and a second conference sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the Arizona Humanities Conference the following year. These conferences brought together two groups of scholars who rarely appeared together on conference programs, one specializing on the northern frontier of Mexico and the other focusing on the Rio de la Plata region. The "northerners" were coordinated by Thomas Sheridan, Curator of Ethnohistory at the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, and the "southerners" by Donna Guy, well known for her work on Argentine economic and gender history.

Implicit in the volume, even occasionally explicit, is the presumption that these extreme zones were unique in their frontier status. A strong case can be made that there were similar

frontier zones throughout the empire--in Central America, New Granada, Peru and Chile, and even in the Caribbean. Although this is fundamental flaw in the volume, the comparative focus on these two areas still makes this a highly successful and useful approach to Latin American historical development.

An introductory essay by the editors overviews "frontiers" and the volume. They note similarities in the historical evolution of the two regions, their geography, their Europeanization, international rivalry, and their respective mythologies. It also points to ecological and historical differences between the Rio de la Plata and the Greater Southwest United States. In discussing the frontier, Guy and Sheridan note that in both areas the frontier was not static, but often moving and changing. They also note that several of the contributors to the volume argue that "women and families played much more important roles on those frontiers than previously acknowledged" (p. 5). Drawing on the work of historians of the frontier such as Frederick Jackson Turner to David Weber, the editors do an excellent job of

synthesizing the characteristics of the frontier, noting Patrick Limerick's declaration that despite much historical criticism of Turner's frontier thesis in the mid-twentieth century, it "entered its second century in remarkably good shape" (p. 8). Nevertheless, rejecting Turner's or Sarmiento's concept of frontiers as boundaries between civilization and wilderness or between civilization and barbarism, Guy and Sheridan redefine the term to mean "zones of historical interaction where ... different polities contended for natural resources and ideological control, including the right to define categories of people and to determine their access to those resources. Those polities often exhibited immense differences of organization, population, and technology, yet frontiers marked the social and geographical limits of power among the polities themselves. Frontiers were," they add, "in a most basic sense, contested ground" (p. 10). Thus this work focuses on indigenous resistance and incorporation into imperial society and race, class, and gender on the frontiers of the Spanish Empire.

Eleven original essays follow. First, Daniel Reff challenges the historiographic assumption that the Indian in Paraguay and northern New Spain accepted missionization because of the inherent superiority of European crops, tools, and organizational strategies. In "The Jesuit Mission Frontier in Comparative Perspective: The Reductions of the Rio de laPlata and the Missions of Northwestern Mexico, 1588-1700," Reff argues that Indians accepted Jesuit missions because their own native systems were collapsing as a result of epidemic diseases brought by the Europeans. Moreover, he argues, Jesuit missionaries assumed the rights and responsibilities of indigenous elites. He details the ways that the Jesuits did this, including their learning of indigenous languages that facilitated the process of redirecting the Indians activities to conform to the imperial society, but at the same time recognized "the logic and utility of many native behaviors and beliefs,

particularly those that were consistent with Church teachings" (p. 31).

Susan Deeds, in "Indigenous Rebellions on the Northern Mexican Mission Frontier from First-Generation to Later Colonial Responses" compares and contrasts the Acaxee Rebellion of 1601 with the Yaqui Rebellion of 1740, showing us how indigenous resistance changed in response to changing frontier conditions. The Acaxee and other first-generation revolts, she argues, represented attempts to restore pre-Columbian social and religious elements that had been destroyed by the Spanish conquest, whereas later revolts such as that of the Yaqui, sought to restore the village autonomy and territorial integrity which Habsburg colonial policy had allowed. In a separate essay, "The Colonial Pact and Changing Ethnic Frontiers in Highland Sonora, 1740-1840," Cynthia Radding gives us another example of how this understanding broke down under Bourbon rule and on into early independent Mexican rule, as private property took precedence over communal ownership. In the process, capitalist penetration of northern Mexico redefined ethnic identities as they created class antagonisms and engendered new peasant resistance in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, Deeds is more critical than Reff of the Jesuit missionaries, whose work, she says, hastened the exploitation of the Indian workers and alienation of their lands.

Turning to the Rio de la Plata, Susan Socolow examines the myth of the gaucho and the almost totally neglected question of the role of women in Argentine rural society. She suggests in "Women of the Buenos Aires Frontier, 1740-1810 (or the Gaucho Turned Upside Down)," that the presence of women and children might offer a better explanation of how gaucho boys were socialized than the traditional male-oriented mythology of the gaucho. Her essay is one of the best in the volume and is groundbreaking in her discussion of women and the rural economy and the treatment (or mistreatment) of women in gaucho society, chal-

lenging other scholars to pursue these themes in greater depth.

Richard Slatta, well known for his work on the gaucho, contributes an essay on "Spanish Colonial Military Strategy and Ideology," in which he picks up the comparative focus of the volume and compares Spanish military policy in northern New Spain, primarily Nueva Vizcaya and New Mexico, with that in the pampas of Buenos Aires. In both cases he says that Spanish military strategy against hostile indigenous peoples was ineffective. He provides evidence of substantial similarity in the policies and resources applied by imperial Spain in the two region, but in both cases he concludes, "fiscal constraints, corruption, the ignorance of newly arrived officials, and a desire for easy wealth hindered effective military policy." Moreover, he adds, "Eurocentric ideology demanded total victory of Spanish 'civilization' over Indian 'barbarism.'" And finally, "Without question, Spaniards living in frontier regions came to understand that social relations required significant negotiation and accommodation with Indians. Unfortunately European ideology, not New World frontier realities, most often shaped overall Spanish strategy. Ideological rigidity stymied any hope for the level of intercultural arbitration that might have resulted in more inclusive, pacific frontier relations" (p. 96).

In another comparative essay, "Comparative Raiding Economies, North and South," Kristine Jones explains how in both regions the indigenous groups incorporated horses and cattle into their trading patterns, noting considerable similarities between grassland areas in the two regions. She also relates this development to the military policy of Spain in response to raiding activities of such groups. Despite the hostility of such frontier environments, Jones argues that such raiding activities actually contributed to the formation of nineteenth-century capitalist development "and ultimately pulled all the players into that market through trade." Moreover, "Much as the contem-

porary discourse of the time may have argued, military conquest of the Indians was not the a priori or inevitable solution, but rather the result of failure of prior frontier strategies that had excluded and subordinated Indian traders." Jones concludes, further, that by "challenging the conceptual marginalization of the 'raiders' as an outside force obstructing the consolidation of the modern nation-states, we discover that frontier raiding and trading economies involving Indians and Creoles alike not only facilitated the formation of the modern ranching industry but also played a central role in the process of state building" (p. 114).

Three of the remaining essays in this volume focus on a specific problem in one area. Mary Karasch, for example, looks at "Interethnic Conflict and Resistance on the Brazilian Frontier of Goias, 1750-1890," where Portuguese miners, Indians, and runaway slaves all migrated in search of gold and agricultural opportunities, often creating conflicts with the indigenous population already there. Jerry Cooney, in "North to the Yerbales: The Exploitation of the Paraguayan Frontier, 1776-1810," describes the expansion of the cattle and yerba mate industries at the close of the colonial period and the important political ramifications of the revenues gained through that expansion, especially in the way it allowed the old elite to become more entrenched as a powerful force in Paraguay until the 1930s. Daniel Nugent, meanwhile, in "Two, Three, Many Barbarisms? The Chihuahuan Frontier in Transition from Society to Politics," adds weight to Radding's argument, as he explains how the colonial compact that had evolved between the state and settlers of varying ethnic origin around Namiquipa in the late colonial and early national period in an effort to combat the Apache broke down in the late nineteenth-century as Porfirio Diaz' policies attacked those communities, seeking to replace these peasant communities with enterprises more productive within the capitalist model then being espoused by the government and the dominant class.

The other two essays offer fascinating comparative observations. Lyman Johnson's "The Frontier as an Arena of Social and Economic Change: Wealth Distribution in Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires Province," seeks a revision of views of the Rosas period in Argentine history, noting that it was actually a time of significant economic growth and that despite the growth of great estates, wealth inequality was less notable there than in ranching areas of Texas or Wisconsin.

In another comparative chapter, Thomas Hall applies world-system theory to the frontiers of both north and south, arguing that the evolution of these regions can only be understood in the context of the interaction between global and local forces. He notes important differences in the economic development of the two regions, but emphasizes the common characteristics resulting from incorporation into the world system as global geopolitical and geoeconomic forces and processes became a heavy influence. Even after the respective regions were incorporated into three rather different states, the United States, Mexico, and the Argentine, global processes still "transcended these differences by influencing the moment when Indian wars would end and nomadic groups would become sedentary" (p. 165).

Taken together, these twelve essays are a stimulating and valuable addition to frontier literature. Only about half of them focus primarily on a comparative view of frontier regions at the extremes of the empire, but all reflect high standards of research and writing and deepen our understanding of frontier regions. While many of the characteristics described in these essays might also be present in other frontier regions of Latin America, the book is a positive addition to the historical literature on frontiers. The book would make excellent collateral reading for sophisticated courses on Latin American history, and also for courses on the Spanish Borderlands or western United States history, as well as for courses on

Mexico or the Argentine. A series of fine maps on the frontier regions under discussion enhance the volume materially.

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Citation: Ralph Lee Woodward. Review of Guy, Donna J.; Sheridan, Thomas E., eds. *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. April, 1999.

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