

## *A View from the Spanish Borderlands*

ELIZABETH A. H. JOHN

IT IS INTRIGUING that today's panel brackets the Spanish Borderlands between considerations of frontier and of continuity. Both are so intrinsic to the Borderlands experience in the Greater Southwest as to be virtually taken for granted by scholars of this arena. Rather than fretting about *the* definition of 'frontier' and its applicability to our work, we deal quite comfortably with frontier in all three of its well-established meanings.

First, with respect to the advancing edge of a people's territory, the most obvious manifestation is the northernmost line of frontier provinces created by the Spanish advance from the heartland of New Spain. But we also find in this arena significant Indian frontiers, most advancing southward, but some westward and a few eastward. Second, in the encounter of these Hispanic and Indian populations, we find another key aspect of 'frontier': i.e., marchlands, the interactive boundary areas in which peoples or nations meet—in sum, the frontier as Borderland. That dimension is magnified as the Anglo-American frontier spills westward into the Spanish arena.

Third, the Spanish Borderlands present a tremendously challenging and rewarding frontier of research. The documentary legacy from nearly three centuries of Spanish governance is so voluminous—and so widely dispersed in North America and in Europe—that we are only beginning to realize its possibilities. Furthermore, within the arena are evocative remains from both Indian and Hispanic pasts—buildings, ruins, artifacts of every description, artistic and utilitarian—all prodding us to preserve and

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ELIZABETH A. H. JOHN is an independent scholar living in Austin, Texas.

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to interpret, to enhance our understanding of the human experience by meshing the physical with the documentary evidence. Most compelling of all are the persisting peoples—both Indian and Hispanic—whose deeply rooted presence demands inquiry into particular histories and lifeways too long obscured in the mists of time.

But their particular histories can be traced only in the context of the larger historical process in the arena: the formative interplay among various peoples and cultures—indigenous, European, and Euro-American—that shaped all their lives from first encounter onward.

The temporal limits of this historical process are vague. While the documentary record begins with the earliest Spanish observations, written in the first half of the sixteenth century, archaeology gives us some understanding of earlier conditions in Indian worlds, before Europeans ventured into the arena. Coming forward in time, there is no logical terminus. Hence the special pertinence of continuity. In the arena that we call Southwest, the research frontier of the Spanish Borderlands embraces a continuum that transcends successive national sovereignties: after all, most Indian peoples—and for that matter, many Hispanic families—endured in the region, as did the lands and the water and the concomitant litigation, the Anglo-American conquest of 1848 notwithstanding. How could there be a terminal date for a Borderlands scholar's engagement in the tri-cultural intricacies of this arena? Here we learn constantly from the complex interplay of past and present.

Those continuities differentiate the Southwest from such easterly Spanish Borderlands as the Floridas, which were Spanish most of the time from the mid-sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, and Louisiana, whose society remained essentially French through nearly four decades of Spanish rule. Other than a few architectural examples in both Florida and Louisiana and some elements of Louisiana law, little trace of the Spanish era survived the early-nineteenth-century acquisition of those territories by the United States. Although crucially important to scholars spe-

cifically concerned with those areas or with Spanish imperial process, the record of their Spanish past has relatively little bearing on the history of the American west.

That is the formal rationale for the particularly Southwestern orientation of this 'view from the Spanish Borderlands.' But more to the point, that is where the liveliest action is, the real zest. The Greater Southwest has long attracted scholars of various disciplines—historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists, geographers, and more—many with arcane sub-specialties. Most care passionately about their work, but their perspectives and skills differ so widely that they bring very different questions to the arena. Since the results of any inquiry depend in large measure on the questions asked, those differences can be wonderfully illuminating. Increasingly we recognize that the most important questions transcend the conventional limits of any one discipline. The more we capitalize on the complementary aspects of our several disciplines, and the less we boggle at the differences, the greater our progress toward some whole understanding of this fascinating arena of human experience, and the better the prospect of someday writing it into this nation's sense of itself.

The enterprise has as many possible starting points as there are practitioners, and for most of us the line of inquiry evolves through a learning process of trial and error. My own involvement in the Spanish Borderlands began quite serendipitously in 1949, as an undergraduate history student tracking Indians—specifically those who had left a puzzling cluster of archaeological sites on the Red River, in my home county in Oklahoma. No tyro could have wished better luck. My very first question led me to the twin villages of the kindred Taovayas and Wichita bands, where various Indian, Spanish, French, and Anglo-American forces met from about 1757 to 1813, an important story that had never been told. The ramifications were virtually unlimited. Moreover, the evidence lay principally in the rich store of Spanish documents that I have been exploring at every opportunity ever since.

At first, I was not particularly interested in Spaniards per se, but

of course it became necessary to understand the historical context of those documents. Gradually, that learning process led me to become as fascinated with Hispanic as with Indian cultures. But from the start, the effort to understand—as opposed to merely documenting—the Indian experience carried me into cultural anthropology and ethnology. In effect, the momentum of the inquiry that began with those Wichitan sites on the Red River took me directly into the rather controversial sub-discipline of ethnohistory, a hybrid which was just beginning to emerge during my graduate studies in the 1950s.

But the principal and more conventional avenue lay in the field of Spanish Borderlands history pioneered by Herbert Eugene Bolton, who outlived his contemporary Frederick Jackson Turner by two vigorously productive decades. Bolton spotted the possibilities of the Spanish documentary legacy when the fortunes of the academic marketplace took him to Texas early in this century. Subsequently, at the University of California at Berkeley, Professor Bolton led a veritable battalion of graduate students in a remarkably effective program of documentary research and publication that laid the foundation of the field. But even though Bolton lived until 1953, there were never enough students or enough time to pursue all of the problems that Bolton identified. To his further disappointment, he was unable to realize his dream of 'Parkmanizing' the Borderlands—that is, to win its rightful place in the national epic by writing sagas as attractive to general readers as the Parkman classics. On the contrary, in accord with the early twentieth-century vogue of social science, Bolton cast the Spanish colonial experience in a rather dull institutional framework—presidios, missions, mines (*reales*), and haciendas—obscuring the dynamic interplay of peoples and systems of belief.

One of Bolton's particular frustrations was the matter of Indians. He recognized the importance of the data on indigenous peoples that cropped up in many of the documents that he found, and he tried for many years—largely in vain—to steer students into Indian topics that he discerned. Always keenly interested in the work of anthropologists, Bolton contributed many tribal en-

tries to the Smithsonian's original *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Bolton attempted a monograph on the Indians of Texas, with which he dabbled for forty-odd years, finally narrowing the effort to a rather lame little manuscript on the Hasinai which his literary executor shepherded to publication thirty years after his death.<sup>2</sup> That little book illustrates the difficulties that deterred such pioneers as Bolton and his students from coping with Indians: they simply were not equipped to handle the necessary dimension of cultural dynamics that would become the fundamental concern of ethnohistorians.

But Bolton and some of his students (most importantly A. B. Thomas, Lawrence Kinnaird, and A. P. Nasatir) published great collections of documents which supplied an ethnographic baseline for many native peoples of the Spanish Borderlands. Such Bolton students as Max Moorhead and John Francis Bannon encouraged their own students to work on Indian topics. Moreover, as Moorhead developed his monographs in the military history of the Spanish Borderlands, he found so much information on Apaches that they were to be the subject of his final book, which was aborted by the premature failure of his health in the 1970s.

Happily for my purposes, the one Borderlands scholar available to me was the young Max Moorhead, officially the last of Bolton's doctoral students, to whose course in the history of the Spanish Borderlands my search for the Taovayas took me in 1950 as a beginning graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. Max was visibly startled when I turned up with that Taovayas research proposal already formulated, but he immediately supported my determination to minor in anthropology—a radical notion unprecedented in the annals of the history department, whose doubts he overcame on my behalf. Max also negotiated with the anthropologists waivers of the undergraduate prerequisites that I lacked.

But it was not until 1951, after the Taovayas problem was

1. Frederick Webb Hodge (ed.), *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907-1910).

2. Herbert Eugene Bolton, *The Hasinai: Southern Caddoans as Seen by the Earliest Europeans*, ed. by Russell M. Magnaghi (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

finished as a master's thesis under his direction, that Max asked whether I was aware that Bolton had long tried to persuade someone to tackle the Taovayas. Of course not: how could I have known? Max then broached a larger Indian topic on Bolton's unfinished agenda: Spanish relations with the so-called *indios bárbaros* on the northern frontier of New Spain. Would I be game for that as a doctoral dissertation? I rashly agreed, and by the time I finished it six years later, understood why Bolton had found no takers and why Max's senior colleagues had so sharply criticized him for steering his first doctoral candidate into such an outsized research problem.

Of course that dissertation was a useful learning process. But the result was unsatisfying because its focus was the Spanish dimension when I really wanted to tell the Indian story. So I turned down a publisher's offer to turn the dissertation into a book, in order to wait until I could develop the Indian dimension which seemed to me the essence of the matter.

I also recognized a fundamental flaw in my Taovayas work, which was published in the year of Bolton's death and is still used by some scholars.<sup>3</sup> I had used the standard technique that pioneers of ethnohistory called 'upstreaming': i.e., selecting a tribe as it is known in recent history and tracing it backward in time as far as pertinent documentary and archaeological evidence can be found. The fallacy is that upstreaming begins with questions shaped by modern perceptions of tribal entities, which may bear little relation to early historical realities. Moreover, the complex intertwining of tribal fortunes makes dubious the construction of any single group's history apart from its regional matrix. Those factors had led me to miss significant aspects of the Taovayas story.

In short, both the thesis and the dissertation had begun with wrong questions. How to correct that problem? My eventual re-

3. Elizabeth Ann Harper, 'The Taovayas Indians in Frontier Trade and Diplomacy, 1719-1768,' *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 31 (1953): 268-89; 'The Taovayas Indians in Frontier Trade and Diplomacy, 1769-1779,' *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 57 (1953): 181-201; 'The Taovayas Indians in Frontier Trade and Diplomacy, 1779-1835,' *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review*, 26 (1953): 41-72.

sponse was to define an arena in which to trace forward from the earliest documentation the key peoples within that arena, drawing upon anthropological insights to analyze, as even-handedly as possible, the complex interactions among the various Indian peoples and the Europeans whose successive intrusions reshaped all Indian lives. *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds*<sup>4</sup> embodies that investigation from 1540 to 1795; I am still struggling with the greater challenge of carrying the same line of inquiry to the mid-nineteenth century.

The arena is defined in terms of Indian worlds, from the Caddo peoples around the great bend of the Red River, westward to the Hopis, and from the Arkansas basin southward to the Rio Grande. But the interactions revolve principally around the Spanish hubs of Santa Fe and its dependencies in New Mexico and San Antonio and its dependencies in Texas, with an eastern bound at the Louisiana frontier posts of Natchitoches and St. Louis. The strand that interweaves the eastern and western sectors is the experience of the Comanches, who played formative roles in both New Mexico and Texas.

I meant to treat the many Apache groups only to the extent required by their specific involvement in the arena. Why? Because most of them seemed so amorphous and in some cases so engaged on vast frontiers south and west of my arena as to render it impracticable to construct their histories as I hoped with other peoples in the arena. But the Apaches aren't letting me get by with that. In the last decade, as I searched for material on an entirely separate topic, three significant Spanish documents on Apaches cropped up, first in London, then in Madrid, and finally in Paris, each demanding publication, the first as a book and the other two as articles.<sup>5</sup> They cast enough new light on the Apache situation in

4. Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540-1795* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1975; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

5. *Views from the Apache Frontier: Report on the Northern Provinces of New Spain by Don José Cortés, Lieutenant in the Royal Corps of Engineers, 1799*, ed. by Elizabeth A. H. John, trans. by John Wheat (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); 'A Cautionary Exercise in

the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to dictate some modification in my research design, and there is growing reason to think that the Apaches aren't through with me yet.

Why are Spanish documents so informative about the indigenes? That reflects the inclusive nature of the Spanish frontier—as contrasted to the exclusive nature of the Anglo-American frontier. The inclusive approach manifested the assumptions of Crown and Church that Indians were children of the same God as the Spaniards, with full potential for useful membership in Hispanic civilization in this world and salvation in the next. However, pursuing those objectives among the indigenes of the northern frontier proved far more difficult than expected.

Great legends of conquistadors notwithstanding, New Spain's northern frontier provinces survived only by coming to terms with Indian realities. Increasingly, that process entailed careful observation of the natives and exhaustive reportage, in order that Spanish policy and procedures reflect the most accurate, up-to-date understanding of the indigenes that could be obtained. The conditions of Indian-Spanish coexistence evolved painfully over many decades, with countless clashes and grievous suffering on all sides. But there were also triumphs of humane intent, of law and justice, and of intelligent, purposeful adaptation to sweeping change.

What of the Hispanic denizens of these Borderlands—the ordinary folk who bore much of the delicate, often dangerous responsibility of making coexistence work in their locales? Given the complexity of the challenges that they faced, the enormity of the odds, and the extent of their nearly forgotten successes, the ancestral experience of Hispanos deserves no less careful attention than that of Indians. It is frustrating that so little of the tenor of their lives can be discerned from the largely official records that survive from the Spanish and Mexican eras. Unhappily, private papers

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Apache Historiography,' *The Journal of Arizona History*, 25 (autumn, 1984): 301–15; 'Bernardo de Gálvez on Apaches: A Cautionary Note for Gringo Historians,' *The Journal of Arizona History*, 29 (winter, 1988): 427–30; 'Views from a Desk in Chihuahua: Manuel Merino's Report on Apaches and Neighboring Nations, c1804,' to appear in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, October, 1991.



generated on Hispanic frontiers rarely find their way into safe depositories accessible to scholars, so there is a crippling dearth of the personal correspondence and diaries which are vital sources for social and cultural history.

But there is encouraging progress. The prime example is James Officer's history of hitherto neglected Hispanic Arizona,<sup>6</sup> which until 1856 was merely the northern fringe of the province of Sonora. With an anthropologist's sensitivity to the key importance of family ties in a society integrated by kinship principles—as both Hispanic and Indian societies are—Officer managed to enlist the cooperation of old Sonoran families on both sides of the international boundary, not only gaining access to private documents but also drawing upon their knowledge of the ancestral experience.

Another recent breakthrough emphasizes the role of family in the Hispanic experience in New Mexico. Again, a key factor was the cooperation of families deeply rooted in the colonial past, who lent both their knowledge and treasured artifacts to a project for which the Museum of New Mexico also enlisted many scholars. The result is a brilliantly conceived and executed permanent exhibit in the new Hispanic Heritage wing of the Museum of International Folk Art at Santa Fe. Entitled 'Familia y Fé,' it displays the essence of the Hispanic experience in New Mexico—social, cultural, and economic—and much of the interpretation is applicable throughout the Borderlands.

Even more illuminating than its treatment of family is the clarity with which that New Mexican exhibit sets forth the role of the Faith. We cannot comprehend the Borderlands experience until we take into account the spiritual dynamics—not the institutional role of the church or missions which Bolton emphasized, but the deeply ingrained spiritual beliefs that shaped individual and community behavior on all sides. We must comprehend not only the fundamental assumptions of Hispanic Catholics and of the various Indian peoples, but also the syncretism that remains so striking in the Southwest, and the sharply differing beliefs of the conquering

6. James E. Officer, *Hispanic Arizona, 1536–1836* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987).

Anglos. We can only marvel that so many 'chosen' peoples confronted one another in this arena.

The early-nineteenth-century collision of Hispanic and Anglo frontiers forms the climax of Spanish Borderlands history. From it, new questions arise. What were the choices thrust upon the many Indian peoples caught in the collision? Did the costly lessons that Indians and Spaniards had learned through decades of dealing with each other now fall useless because the swarming Anglo-Americans were so amazingly different in law and custom and cast of mind?

Why were the differences between Hispanos and Anglos so profound? The answers to that lie centuries deep in the Old World, in the formative experiences of British and Iberian peoples, from the era of the Roman empire through the turmoils of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and the ordeals of consolidating nation states—too long ago, too far away to muster for our present purpose.

How can we write this rich, deeply rooted regional history into our nation's sense of itself? Surely the first requisite is to construct the narrative, bringing to life the persons whose story this is, telling what they did and why. Never mind that narrative fell into disrepute among historians about the time that Bolton envisioned 'Parkmanizing' the Borderlands. Common sense has always told us that narrative is the surest way to engage readers, and now scientists vouch for its importance. Not only does the distinguished psychologist Robert Coles affirm that story is the essential vehicle for understanding and moral insight:<sup>7</sup> a computer scientist finds that stories lie at the heart of human intelligence.<sup>8</sup>

But even the most compelling narrative of the Spanish Borderlands will meet two barriers: the first, structural; the second, psychological. The Turnerian construct of the westward movement of Anglo-Americans is so well established as *the* national tale

7. Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989).

8. Roger C. Shank, *Tell Me A Story: A New Look at Real and Artificial Memory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991).

that it is terribly difficult to mesh with it the Indian and Hispanic worlds that greeted the advancing Anglos.

The hardest psychological barrier is the old 'Black Legend' of Spanish cruelty, which is deeply imbedded in the mentality of the English-speaking world, and is at the root of the distortion and indifference that debase the Hispanic dimension of this nation's history. Fortunately for the purposes of Borderlands history, a balanced account of Spanish relations with native peoples assorts so oddly with the Black Legend as to form a useful corrective. Although ill-founded stereotypes also mar perceptions of indigenes, the wide, largely sympathetic interest in Indians affords the best chance to disseminate the Borderlands story.

More is at stake than the obvious concern of fairness to the fast-growing Hispanic and Indian minorities whose heritage is at issue. A more subtle consideration for the majority was voiced by C. G. Jung, as he reflected on his visit to the pueblo of Taos.

We always require an outside point to stand on, in order to apply the lever of criticism. This is especially so . . . where by the nature of the material we are much more subjectively involved. How, for example, can we become conscious of national peculiarities if we have never had the opportunity to regard our nation from outside? Regarding it from outside means regarding it from the standpoint of another nation. To do so, we must acquire sufficient knowledge of the foreign collective psyche, and in the course of this process of assimilation we encounter all those incompatibilities which constitute the national bias and the national peculiarity. Everything that irritates us about others can lead to an understanding of ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

Access to the historic—and continuing—encounter of disparate cultures in the Hispanic Borderlands affords the kind of 'outside point to stand on' that Jung required, that standpoint of other peoples from which thinking persons may see themselves and reconsider their own myths. No stronger argument could be advanced for incorporation of the Hispanic Borderlands into this nation's knowledge of itself.

9. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe and translated by Richard and Clara Winston. Reprinted in Tony Hillerman (ed.), *The Spell of New Mexico* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1976), p. 76.

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