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Review of *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* By David J. Weber

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The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico. By David J. Weber. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982. Maps, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliographical essay, index. xxiv + 416 pp. \$19.95, paper \$9.95.

This amply illustrated, fully documented and well-organized study is essentially a synthesis "built mainly on the work of other scholars" (p. xxii). However, David J. Weber also makes use of archival sources and primary materials in this overview of the Mexican borderlands. Part of the Histories of the American Frontier Series, this account sheds new light on "a dark age in the historiography of the Southwest" and differs from prior studies in two ways. First, it attempts to place this period "squarely within its Mexican context, without minimizing the significant activities of Anglo-Americans and other aliens." Second, "the region is examined as a whole, whereas most scholars have confined their studies to individual states" (p. xviii).

Weber's explanation of why Mexico eventually lost half of its territory to the United States recognizes that the Mexican northern provinces were isolated from one another but faced "a common set of problems." He finds that politically, religiously, militarily, economically, and culturally, Mexico's far northern frontier had weaker links to the central government in 1846 than it did in 1821.

Mexico's neglect and abuse of its border areas contrasts strongly with American success in extending its frontier in these years. It attempted to develop the northern provinces by allowing Anglo-American immigrants to settle and trade in Texas, New Mexico, and California. Economic, demographic, and cultural links to the United States exacerbated ambivalent loyalties and intensified regionalism. As frontier society and culture grew more distinctive, dissatisfaction increased among the *norteños*. Weber concludes that "cultural and societal changes of the Mexican era, coupled with disappointments that frontiersmen felt over political leadership, spiritual care, military aid, and

economic policies, became one of a series of wedges that would split the frontier from the nation's core in times of political crisis" (p. 241).

Although Weber's book is based on many scholarly monographs and has an excellent bibliographical essay, some readers will undoubtedly question some of his interpretations. For instance, Weber has a good deal to say about the collapse of the missions and the moral decline of the clergy, but he says very little about the folk religion and the religious sense of life that remained after the institutional church declined. Also, does Weber imply more than is warranted when he states that peyote was a "traditional" drug (p. 236)? It is generally known that various Indian groups have used peyote as healer and revealer, and Weber's source notes that Texas Rangers during the Civil War sometimes got high on mescal buttons soaked in water. But was peyote *traditionally* used by Hispanics in the Southwest? Finally, Weber portrays Don José Santos González, the leader of the 1837 revolt in New Mexico, as an Indian (p. 262) but fails to mention that he was a highly respected *vecino* of Rancho de Taos and a member of "a family living a Spanish way of life for three generations." He also neglects to mention that not only did Pueblo Indians support the insurrection, but American merchants in Santa Fe described it as an "unexpected and, for us, wonderful revolution."

Although some of Weber's interpretations may be questioned, this book is a welcome addition to the history of the American Southwest.

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