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Review of *Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute and Sectional Crisis* by Mark J. Stegmaier

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Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute and Sectional Crisis. By Mark J. Stegmaier. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2012. xii + 434 pp. Maps, appendices, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$34.95 paper.

In this revision of his 1996 publication, Mark Stegmaier has polished up an already comprehensive history of the Compromise of 1850 as it unfolded from the perspective of Texas and New Mexico. Whereas most histories have focused on the compromise from the standpoint of the national question about slavery, this work illuminates the significance of the part that fixed the boundary between Texas and New Mexico. Stegmaier argues that the boundary dispute acted as the linchpin for the entire block of compromises the 31st Congress passed in 1850. More so than any other issue—including statehood for California, the new fugitive slave laws, and the slave trade in the capital—the clash between Texas state authorities and those of the federal government over Texas's claim to all territory east of the Rio Grande could very well have led to armed conflict and potential civil war.

The land caught up in this territorial dispute mostly consisted of the section of the Southern Plains known as the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plain, an area most Americans believed devoid of the potential for the extension of slavery. Nevertheless, the adverse claims made by the state government of Texas and the federal government, with its military arm in Santa Fe, rose to the fore of the sectional crisis. Stegmaier adds considerably to our understanding of just how important the boundary dispute over the Staked Plains was in the settlement of the nation's issues in 1850, and how the local politics of Texas and New Mexico had an enormous impact on the escalation of tensions and the final negotiated outcome.

Stegmaier constructs his argument on a rich archival base and strong grounding in his sources. The results are clear and persuasive claims backed by copious notes. His use of Congressional Records, state records, personal

papers, correspondence, and local and national news coverage gives this account an even and authoritative tone. His close following of government records and his application of indices of cohesion and likeness to legislative bodies also help make this a sound political history of the 1850 compromise.

This focus on legislative history leads to a comprehensive story of the boundary dispute's role in the Compromise of 1850. Stegmaier examines in great detail the rhetoric and events as they developed in Congress as well as in the Texas legislature and the New Mexico military government established under the Kearny Code. The fantastic level of specificity can sometimes prove daunting, as the multiple names, along with their complex individual positions, become difficult to track throughout the debate over a range of particular compromises, bills, motions, and amendments. Still, the scholar of sectional crisis will find Stegmaier's political play-by-play of great value.

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