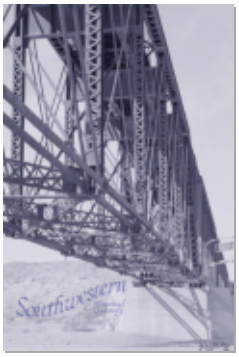
The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire , 1713-1763 (review)



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tives. For example, he mentions that the Waco Indians "farmed the alluvial terraces above the [Brazos] river and maintained a village first reported by the Spanish explorers in 1541" (96). This statement is either poorly worded or inaccurate. In his travels across what would become Texas, Coronado did cross the main stem or tributaries of the Brazos River, and sources suggest that Coronado might have encountered a group associated with the Waco Indians. However, the Waco were not living anywhere in Texas in 1541.

Despite occasional problems with the historical text, Jim Kimmel's *Exploring the Brazos River: From Beginning to End* affords a very good introduction to a system that is both complex and understudied. The book is well-written and well-researched. Moreover, it succeeds in making the riverscape a place that can be experienced on a personal level. Kimmel ends every chapter with a section that tells readers how and where to engage this riparian history. Consequently, this text should be mandatory reading for anybody interested in the waterways of Texas.

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The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–1763. By Paul W. Mapp. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. Pp. 480. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. ISBN 9780807833957, $49.95 cloth.)

At the end of the French and Indian War (or Seven Years' War), Britain stood as the only imperial power east of the Mississippi River while Spain remained the only imperial power west of the great river—the notional empire of the Comanches notwithstanding. In this sprawling retelling of how Spain and Britain wound up as the only Europeans standing and how France fell victim to its colonial ambitions, Paul Mapp takes us not only to the contested regions of western North America but to the Falklands in the South Atlantic and the Juan Fernández Islands in the South Pacific and to Siberia and China as well. His argument is that as long as historians remain focused on the geographic space of North America they cannot fully understand the role of the largely unexplored part of the continent on imperial decision making in London, Paris, and Madrid. In the end, he concludes, the French became disenchanted with the potential of western North America to provide access to Spanish sources of wealth in the years leading up to the war while the British reached the same state in its aftermath. Spain, of course, had no choice in the matter; its acceptance of trans-Mississippi Louisiana at the end of 1762 was a purely defensive move in the face of Britain's sweeping victories to the north and east.

Much of what *The Elusive West* tells us, as the author readily admits at times, is already part of the standard historiography. The book's innovation consists in broadening the context to make French, British, and Spanish diplomacy with regard to western North America more understandable, if not always more reasonable. A substantial portion of the book is consequently devoted to explaining how the judgments of European policy makers were informed by an imperfect understanding of the geographical relationship of western North America to more valuable places such as Mexican and Peruvian silver-mining regions and potential Pacific trade routes. Developments and contrasts in the collection and processing of geographic information among the imperial powers in North Amer-

ica, and even in Asia, receive considerable attention. A particularly insightful section delves into how the influence of Locke and Newton (replacing Descartes) on French thinking in the mid-eighteenth century led to Paris policy makers wanting empirical evidence for the fanciful claims of earlier geographers regarding access from the interior of North America to the Pacific Coast and to Spanish territories. To the degree that the facts did not support them, "The old marvels were dropping out of written evidence of foreign office deliberations" (382).

Readers of this journal will be most familiar with the latter part of the book, where matters come to a boil in the decade of the 1750s, although they are bound to be disappointed with the minor role that Mapp assigns to Texas. Mapp does a very good job of explaining the strategic thinking of British, French, and Spanish statesmen based on short- and long-term objectives. However, although some of the major Spanish-French encounters in Texas are briefly discussed—the French trader Blancpain's capture on the lower Trinity River, the Norteño attack on Mission San Sabá—his arguments are mostly built around French encounters with New Mexico. Curiously, the founding of Texas in response to French activities in trans-Mississippi Louisiana is missing from Mapp's narrative.

The Elusive West is an impressively well-researched and thoughtful work, even when its narrative rambles so far afield from the plains and mountains of western North America that it becomes difficult for the reader to see all the connections. The book will amply reward those patient enough to stick with it to the end.

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Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border. By Rachel St. John. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011. Pp. 304. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780691141541, $29.95 cloth.)

Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border immediately assumes a valued place in the historiography of transnational border scholarship. To the study of our southwestern border St. John returns the national boundary itself in a manner that transcends the common, simplistic efforts that cast the border either as a totalizing demarcation line between oppositional cultures and politics or as an imaginary construct largely irrelevant to a specialized transnational culture. Rather, she argues that "questions about the control of space, the negotiation of state sovereignty, and the significance of national identities have been entangled with the boundary line since its creation and continue to define the border today" (5). Her work is especially valuable because it addresses the border where it is most illusory: the vast reach from El Paso-Juarez to San Diego-Tijuana that has received relatively little transnational scholarship.

St. John's opening chapter recounts the arduous and often futile attempts to locate and establish the international boundary itself. Her second chapter features extensive use of archival sources that illuminate Mexico's efforts to combat filibustering, especially in Sonora, and the cooperation by both countries to quash Apache resistance. Her account of cooperation for mutual advantage, in this case by furthering military sovereignties, is a recursive theme, one that undermines widespread beliefs about rigidly antagonistic interests.

With "Landscapes of Profits: Cultivating Capitalism across the Border," St.