

### **Book Review: On the border: society and culture between the United States and Mexico. Edited by Andrew Grant Wood. Lanham, MD: SR Books, Rowman & Littlefield 2004. ISBN 0842051732**

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normative space and time. *Real cities* is a major addition to theorizing emotional and imaginary urban geographies, always lucid and accessible.

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**On the border: society and culture between the United States and Mexico.**

Edited by Andrew Grant Wood. Lanham, MD: SR Books, Rowman & Littlefield. 2004. 320 pp. \$24.95, paper. ISBN 0842051732.

The border between Mexico and the United States is fast becoming one of the most dynamic cultural regions in North America. As this region expands and evolves, popular perceptions are continuously challenged by new insights into the historical and social development of what has become known as *the* border to most Americans. Without question, it is popular perceptions of border culture that are investigated and challenged by the contributors of *On the border*. Whereas many compilations in border studies seek to produce a more generalized vision of this region, Andrew Wood and his 13 fellow contributors attempt a self-proclaimed 'eclectic'—and at times eccentric—view of the *Frontiera* social mosaic.

Unfortunately, the book's eclectic nature might be seen by some as a weakness of this compilation. Because of the diversity of chapters, a confusing stylistic contrast emerges between pieces that range from traditional scholarly essays to works comprising casual field observations. A variance in methodologies and a surplus of insider terminology will distract some readers who might fail to interpret the connections between, say, Maria Arbelaez's musings on low-budget, *Fronterizo*-aimed films and Dan Arreola's Nogales postcard collection. That being said, the above contributions are perhaps two of the most innovative and insightful, and will, if carefully presented, most likely spur dialogue among graduate students wherever assigned.

The above statement, of course, introduces a necessary caveat. Whoever requires this book for an undergraduate course in regional studies will no doubt incur a wave of scholastic disengagement. *On the border* is a book best suited for graduate seminars—an environment that will facilitate instructors seeking to tie diverse vignettes to a larger framework. It is in this context that students will be positively engaged, and forced to question their own individual constructions of the region. For example, the tenuous history of Mexican Catholicism has long been deconstructed, but Paul Vanderwood's field notes on Juan Soldado encourage a new perspective on the cultural significance of this type of religious veneration. Likewise, Victor Macias-Gonzalez' examination of homosexuality in Porfirian Mexico is an engaging essay with new applications for queer theory to the region—an often misinterpreted social factor in studies of the machismo north.

Despite the inclusion of one or two distracting pieces, *On the border* is an insightful contribution to border studies. In drawing from an interdisciplinary mosaic of academic perspectives and alternative methodologies, Andrew Wood has compiled a volume that

begs a fresh look at the development of the social and political relationship between the US and Mexico. Ultimately, the book succeeds in that it encourages even those with a strong background in border studies to reconsider their own perceptions of the region.

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**Indigenous modernities: negotiating architecture, urbanism, and colonialism.**

By Jyoti Hosagrahar. New York: Routledge. 2005. 224 pp. £75 cloth, £24.99 paper. ISBN 0415323754 cloth; 0415323762 paper.

Jyoti Hosagrahar frames this examination of nineteenth- to twentieth-century Delhi with the concept of colonial modernity. Her interest is in the intersection between modernization, the reordering of space, and modernism, the experience of that space. However, she openly admits that the focus of this work is architecture and the built environment, with the emphasis of the six excellent chapters laid on the creation of space, rather than on its negotiation. Hosagrahar does, however, at times pick out those occasions on which the occupation of space has thwarted self-conscious attempts at modernisation, never better than in her detailing of the negotiation and circumvention of the Delhi Municipal Committees by-laws and the persistence of community-based urban ordering. Each chapter moves chronologically, from the Delhi of the 'Mutiny' (1857) to infrastructural work before independence (1947), whilst also charting an analytical movement from the spaces of *havelis* (mansions), to the streets, geographies of health, city expansion and urban improvement.

Following such a trajectory, Hosagrahar also provides a stunning refutation of the colonial urban historiography that depicts European enclaves as the repositories of modernity and the native quarters as calcified museums of tradition. One of the outstanding features of this work is the way that approaches to space form the driving force of the narrative. After attempts to create a post-Mutiny placatory civic space (libraries, clock towers, railways), the bargaining and defiance of political society in public space soon came to the fore, just as public hygiene projects came to rely on traditional sweepers and cleaners. In terms of economic space, the state struggled with the paradoxical demands of *laissez-faire* trade and controlled urbanism, laying out a new commercial district without the powers to control the forces unleashed. As the comparison between the health of New Delhi and the disease of Old Delhi increased in the twentieth century, the colonial government instituted spaces of improvement. Hosagrahar dwells briefly on the architectural modernism of the Delhi Improvement Trust, although she also stresses its failure to tackle the slum crisis or regulate housing prices.

In conclusion, Hosagrahar returns to the idea of colonial translations of modernity and local resistance. While these trends are made empirically obvious throughout the book, some theoretical considerations would have made the chapters cohere more clearly in line with the book's title. However, the clarity of archival analysis articulates