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*Borderland Films: American Cinema, Mexico, and Canada during the Progressive Era* by Dominique Brégent-Heald (review)

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*A Mexican Dream* evokes a rich multicultural heritage sustained by a confluence of cultures; it reads like a love letter to generations of remarkable men and women of vision with the courage of their convictions in political, health, and educational systems to advance progress on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. But it is also an elegy that moves beyond both memoir and historical account. The book reminds us that mutual respect for all, grace of vision, and love of family and learning must extend to love of neighborhood and community if we hope to actualize real and positive change for the future.

*A Mexican Dream* is a blueprint, a model of excellence that anyone can emulate. Source materials include family photographs, letters and family interviews, and newspaper articles; a short bibliography lists books, articles, and papers consulted.

An evocative, intimate read, *A Mexican Dream* will be useful to students and scholars of Mexican American and borderlands studies as well as laypersons interested in borderlands cultures and the American Southwest, notably South Texas.

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CORDELIA BARRERA

*Borderland Films: American Cinema, Mexico, and Canada during the Progressive Era.* By Dominique Brégent-Heald. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. Pp. 448. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index.)

In *Borderland Films: American Cinema, Mexico, and Canada during the Progressive Era*, Dominique Brégent-Heald maintains that the production and popularity of early borderland films must be understood within the context of a nascent film industry both searching for cultural legitimacy and negotiating the regulatory demands and anxieties of Progressive Era reformers. Borderlands, as “complex and paradoxical spaces,” she argues, satisfied the above demands (29). As ambiguous and contradictory sites, borderlands lent themselves to theatrical melodramatic and literary forms that pitted good against evil and preindustrial against modern—dichotomies the film industry hoped would “entice the middle class or at the very least pacify moral reformers” (29).

Brégent-Heald’s first two chapters introduce the analytical framework she uses to examine borderland films produced between 1908–19, a period that begins with the impressive rise of borderland motion pictures and terminates with World War I and the end of the Progressive Era. The burgeoning film industry joined other artists and writers such as Helen Hunt Jackson and boosters such as Charles Fletcher Lummis in portraying North America’s frontier as a liminal landscape, a site “characterized by notions of in-betweenness, ambiguity, and transition” (41). Keeping with literary form, filmmakers capitalized on the established dichotomy that

distinguished between Spanish and French colonial pasts and an overcivilized modern society.

The author argues that pastoral settings of the American Southwest and the sublime wilderness of the American Northwest satisfied film critics, audiences, and Progressive reformers' desire for a romantic premodern past and physical rejuvenation amongst the debilitating effects of industrialization and modernization. Place-based productions were a means to construct an aura of "historical reality" (52) aimed at "rais[ing] the cultural legitimacy of motion pictures" (62). The seemingly authentic landscapes, experiences, and characters in borderland films shaped and confirmed audiences' belief that the pastoral colonial past was destined to fade with the inevitable ascendancy of Anglo-American progress.

Subsequent chapters address the filmic representation of North America's borderlands as both utopic and dystopic landscapes. Borderlands, as cross-cultural and multiracial sites, provided filmmakers the canvas to highlight national anxieties and feature Progressive Era concerns about interracial unions, the treatment of Indians, emerging gender dynamics, criminality, and porous borders. For example, she finds that while mixed-raced characters often suffered tragic fates—suggesting that interracial romances were destructive—their imagined freedom to transgress normative gender roles, to possess power, and to express sexuality was equally celebrated (albeit highly racialized). Borderland films offered Anglo-American moviegoers a national narrative of past, present, and future that was desirable yet dangerous.

Although Southern California emerged as the mecca for film production, Brégent-Heald traces in the final chapters how the Texas–Mexico borderlands figured prominently as a thematic site for criminality and political instability. Analyzing several Texas Ranger- and Mexican Revolution-themed feature films, actualities, and military reenactments, she draws on cinema scholar Victor Burgin to describe this region as a heterotopic space comprising "sites of interface between disruptive (criminals) and disciplined (line riders) elements" (215). The layering of disruption and discipline and questions over national security and porous border zones, she notes, arose within the context of the Mexican Revolution and World War I. Here she documents the filmic transition from open spaces of interracial interaction to closed borders of military policing. Unsurprisingly, filmmakers depicted Texas Rangers as the heroic defenders of law and order against cattle rustlers, Mexican bandits, and whiskey, opium, and Chinese smugglers. Likewise, during the Mexican Revolution, filmmakers sought to capture and capitalize on "authentic" footage of military battles and army training camps along the Texas–Mexico border.

Seemingly treading familiar ground with the use of "imperialist nostalgia" to analyze early twentieth-century cultural products, Brégent-Heald's comparative borderlands approach suggests there is more to the narrative

of a destructive colonizer that yearns for the vanquished. Although the Southwest and Northwest borderlands diverged in landscape and iconography, she convincingly demonstrates that their “shared histories of sexual and territorial colonization” (131) established a genre that drew on those similarities to make meaning out of an imagined past until geopolitical conflicts like the Mexican Revolution influenced filmmakers to visualize a contrast between U.S.–Mexico and U.S.–Canada borderlands.

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*Houston on the Move: A Photographic History.* By Steven R. Strom. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016. Pp. 224. Photographs, bibliography, index.)

When a single photographer captures thousands of images of a single city, his work establishes an irreplaceable physical archive for understanding that place and its history. The works of Bob Bailey, a Houston-based photographer who took over 500,000 images of Houston and its region across five decades, represent such a shaping collection.

In *Houston on the Move*, Steven R. Strom presents a rich collection of Bailey’s photos, drawn from the Bailey Studios archives housed at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. Strom situates Bailey’s work as a key record of Houston’s undulating transformations over the course of the twentieth century.

One of the strengths of the book is that it looks beyond the photographs and into Bailey’s life. Strom argues that the photographer effectively straddled the line between being an artistic and a commercial photographer. While the bulk of Bailey’s work was done for commercial clients, there is no missing the artistic care with which he approached a store display or a promotional aerial photo.

The photos, of course, capture the story of Houston and its growth, but the work is served well by its focus on Bailey. Centering the photographer as an artist helps readers understand his view of the city. It also serves as a reminder that photographs, as historic objects, are shaped by their creator.

Strom curates Bailey’s photos to track Houston’s ascent from a small, bustling regional city into a sprawling suburban region between 1930 and 1990. While the narrative created by the photos tends toward the nostalgic “loss” of downtown, there is no doubt that Bailey documented an incredible transition. And, for Houston, a place with a develop-first reputation, where nothing seemed sacred, the photos of the city in the past are undoubtedly powerful.

Bailey’s photos are especially strong in their ability to document the growth of the region’s consumer culture—particularly its retail and