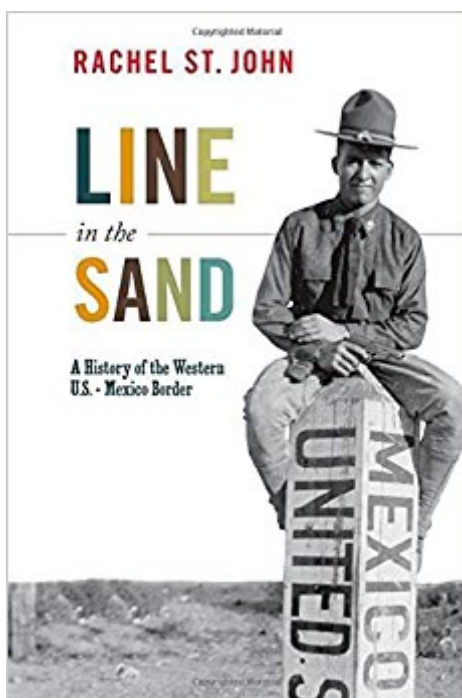


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# Line In The Sand: A History Of The Western U.S.-Mexico Border (America In The World)



## Synopsis

Line in the Sand details the dramatic transformation of the western U.S.-Mexico border from its creation at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 to the emergence of the modern boundary line in the first decades of the twentieth century. In this sweeping narrative, Rachel St. John explores how this boundary changed from a mere line on a map to a clearly marked and heavily regulated divide between the United States and Mexico. Focusing on the desert border to the west of the Rio Grande, this book explains the origins of the modern border and places the line at the center of a transnational history of expanding capitalism and state power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moving across local, regional, and national scales, St. John shows how government officials, Native American raiders, ranchers, railroad builders, miners, investors, immigrants, and smugglers contributed to the rise of state power on the border and developed strategies to navigate the increasingly regulated landscape. Over the border's history, the U.S. and Mexican states gradually developed an expanding array of official laws, ad hoc arrangements, government agents, and physical barriers that did not close the line, but made it a flexible barrier that restricted the movement of some people, goods, and animals without impeding others. By the 1930s, their efforts had created the foundations of the modern border control apparatus. Drawing on extensive research in U.S. and Mexican archives, Line in the Sand weaves together a transnational history of how an undistinguished strip of land became the significant and symbolic space of state power and national definition that we know today.

## Book Information

Series: America in the World

Paperback: 296 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press (November 25, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0691156131

ISBN-13: 978-0691156132

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #169,547 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #90 in [Books > History >](#)

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## Customer Reviews

Finalist for the 2012 Spur Award for Best Western Nonfiction, Contemporary (1900-Present), Western Writers of America "[R]emarkably well-told tale of the origins of the U.S.-Mexico border line and the social, economic, and political developments it has generated over more than a century and a half. . . . She clearly aims to tell the story of the border from both sides of the line and to emphasize the manner in which both the United States and Mexico have used it to foster transnational communities of interest as much as to divide them."--San Antonio

Express-News "[I]nteresting and easy to read."--Choice "St. John's book is valuable for providing the history behind the explosive topics of border control and immigration reform in contemporary U.S. politics. Beyond that, however, history buffs will be satisfied with the Western characters that inhabit this tale in the days when the line remained blurry."--Stephen Mauro, Wild West "[H]er work is a marvelous achievement. Just as no river runs through the western border, relatively little transnational scholarship has brought life to it compared to the Texas-Mexico region. This work will change that situation."--Richard Ribb, Southwestern Historical Quarterly "In all, St. John's book offers a general and nicely articulated history of this area, incorporating a bi-national perspective which is not tainted by narratives of U.S. exceptionalism. For these reasons this book offers a valuable contribution to the extant scholarship on the border."--Ignacio Martinez, 49th Parallel "St. John's book is replete with plenty of primary sources and archival material, too, unearthing many archival sources untouched by other historians. These primary materials add to the rich interweaving of ideas and conclusions that she draws, and pepper the prose with new anecdotes not seen in other related works. . . . [A] quality book--one that I will use in my borderlands classes and seminars for many years, and one that all borderlands scholars and students will need to have. They will enjoy it immensely!"--Sterling Evans, H-Net Reviews "This book is a welcome addition to the increasing body of U.S.-Mexico border scholarship that has appeared in the twenty-first century. Rachel St. John provides a well-written narrative based on exhaustive research from a variety of sources on both sides of the border."--F. Arturo Rosales, New Mexico Historical Review "Rachel St. John's *Line in the Sand* is the best book yet on the early development of the U.S.-Mexico border. It should be read widely by policy makers who continue to claim that border debates arose only during the very recent past, and by students of borderlands history at all levels. Particularly impressive is how St. John brings together the concerns and approaches of several subfields of U.S. and Mexican history, including histories of the U.S.-Mexico border, the American West, and Mexico's

northern frontier."--Geraldo L. Cadava, *American Studies Journal*"Rachel St. John has written an intelligent and highly readable transnational history of the western half of the United States-Mexico border. . . . St. John's research is thorough and impressive. . . . She has used English- and Spanish-language source materials and conducted research in both Mexican and American archival collections. Her sure grasp of the histories of both nations allows her to explore confidently the important economic, cultural, and political developments occurring on both sides of the border."--Patrick Ettinger, *The Americas*"The general trajectory of St. John's narrative has become somewhat familiar to borderlands scholars, but *Line in the Sand* deepens our understanding by focusing on the borderline itself and by extending the discussion of border enforcement into Mexico. The author shows that by the 1930s, a significant territorial boundary not only regulated border crossings but also enforced cultural and racial barriers to national belonging. With elegant prose and incisive analysis, she convincingly argues that anyone who hoped to cross had to reckon with its increasingly salient restrictions."--Eric V. Meeks, *Journal of American Ethnic History*"St. John's intervention in the public discourse over the border and immigration encourages us to take a wider view of the border to see it as a symptom of larger economic and political processes rather than the cause."--Raúl A. Ramos, *Diplomatic History*

"Rachel St. John untangles the myths surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border in this thoughtful and meticulously researched book. In so doing, she not only restores the border to its central place in borderlands studies but also renders the border essential for understanding the history of North America."--Karl Jacoby, *Brown University*"*Line in the Sand* is a fascinating, imaginative, and surprising history of the Mexican border, a border which is all too often reduced to clichés. In her exemplary work, Rachel St. John's border has depth, surprises, and great complexity. Her book is a wonderful corrective to our current moment, which seems ruled by a rush of conflicting, often hysterical, and sometimes downright false information. It forces us to pause and think about how we came to this and what else is possible."--Richard White, *Stanford University*"A pleasure to read, *Line in the Sand* is the first truly transnational history of the U.S.-Mexico land border. Grounded in extensive and meticulous research in both countries, this comprehensive book will be an important contribution to border and borderlands studies and U.S. history more broadly. It does a wonderful job of showing border dynamics in different realms and in all their complexity."--Mae Ngai, *Columbia University*"This elegant book draws on the archives and historiographies of the United States and Mexico to place the borderlands in a broad, transnational context. St. John focuses great attention on the social, political, and institutional foundations of the border itself, and the light she shines on

regional and national perspectives makes this outstanding book essential reading for historians of all stripes. It is one of the most satisfying borderlands histories available."--Sam Truett, University of New Mexico

While I have NOT received my ordered copy or the other order ('Migra'.....) I have nonetheless acquired "A line in the sand" from my research supervisor. It is one of the best books on the subject I have read as a an historian. Written by an historian it is well researched with an array of primary as well as secondary sources. It begins to define what borders are, what purpose they served and how these purposes changed over time. It refers quite eloquently to vested interests along the US-Mexican border and certainly introduced the reader to new conceptual frameworks for understanding the nuances of border control, border management and border security. The most interesting aspect of the book is that it develops a 'non-securitised' notion of the existence and meaning of borders. It does not dwell and was not intended to dwell on the post 9/11 issues with which border security, control or management is mostly concerned today. In that sense - it was extremely useful as an historian and retired analyst on border security issues to reflect on the 'line in the sand' - as a former academic. It is an extremely useful addition to my research bibliography as a student (at 60!). Randi Erentzen, Pretoria, South Africa

This is the context of the Mexico-US border... It is a little like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid... PhD factual and very readable! A must read for our current times!

Rachel St. John received her Ph.D. from Stanford university where she studied under Richard White. St. John then taught at Harvard for seven years and was a member of the history department at New York University. While this is her first manuscript, she has contributed a chapter to two essay compilations during her career, both of which were portions of her book. In this work St. John says it demonstrates not only that the border lay at the center of a borderlands region in which private individuals and government agents continued to contest the limits of state authority and national identity long after the establishment of fixed national boundaries. She also argues that by studying the border we gain an understanding of government priorities in Mexico and the United States. In an effort to support her thesis St. John divides her book into time periods, each one focusing on a theme. So chapter one focuses on the creation of the actual border line and covers the time period of 1851-56. Supporting her argument that private individuals continued to contest state authority, chapter two discusses the war(s) against land pirates and Apaches on the

border. In this chapter St. John shows how filibusters, while a threat to the Mexican state, actually helped to solidify a sense of Mexican national identity along the border. Chapter three discusses the growth of capitalism along and across the border, while chapter four deals with policing the boundary line. Chapter five discusses war on the border, chapter six covers the regulation of morality in the area and seven is about managing immigration along the boundary line. The author spent time researching her manuscript in archives located both in the United States and in Mexico. Her work also relies heavily on synthesizing secondary sources, to include works by such eminent historians as Richard White, James Brooks, and Pekka Hamalainen. Noticeable by their absence was work by Julianna Barr, Sam Brunk, and other historians who either live on the border or who studied along the boundary, all of whom could have helped to diversify her bibliography and give her added perspective as well as shield her work from criticism of being biased toward the west coast/east coast academic power center. St. John's method is to engage in lateral history, taking a cross section of different subfields, taking a time period and then analyzing the events in that period as they relate to the themes. St. John's book is, at the end of the day, a synthesis, one which addresses many of the common themes present in borderlands history: transnational analysis, border fluidity and middle grounds, to name a few. The author presents the borderline as central to state projects of territorial sovereignty, economic development, and the construction of the boundaries of the body politic. In crafting this argument, St. John is again addressing a traditional borderlands theme: center vs. periphery. Because of this the effect on the literature is minimal. While the book is a solid effort and does add to the conversation about the Mexican/US border, the main criticism I have of it is the fact that the author mainly focused her research on archives located in the United States, having visited only two archives located in Mexico. One wonders how complete a picture can be drawn of the border when very little of the Mexican archives were visited. Furthermore, while her acknowledgements section is impressive (it's a veritable who's who of Harvard and Stanford historians), her bibliography shows an obvious bias to manuscripts published in the United States. Just as she only uses a few Mexican archives, the author also uses few Spanish language sources, something which weakens her argument in the long run.

Good historical writing about on the ground indiscretions between American values and American greed.

It has some dry moments but the further I get the more interesting it is to learn about the border.

Well written. Good quality paperback. Covers topic well.

Rachel St. John is able to take a rather boring subject, and craft it in such a way as to make it interesting for any reader. I find that the work's ability to grab the reader is taken from St. John's inclusion of anecdotal episodes from the history of the towns on the border; which help to give some significance to the political and economic events which took place on both sides. History can be seen as very boring, but St. John takes strides to make this work an intriguing read for anyone.

We read this book for a book group. This excellent summary of the history of the western portion of our border with Our southern neighbor answers many questions. Any professor would love this book for its attention to detail and a wealth of primary sources. More casual readers will appreciate its clarity and interesting anecdotes.

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