Spaces of Law in American Foreign Relations: Extradition and Extraterritoriality in the Borderlands and Beyond, 1877–1898. By Daniel S. Margolies. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011. xi + 427 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $69.95, cloth; $24.95, paper.)

This is a well-researched theoretical and empirical study of conflicts over sovereignty in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Focusing mainly on diplomatic disputes about the extradition of alleged criminals, this work also treats questions of water law, political asylum, and rebellion in Mexico. Daniel S. Margolies effectively mines U.S. consular dispatches and State Department correspondence from the National Archives, supplemented by Mexican records and periodicals. He argues that extradition and other legal devices were means by which "the United States strongly sought unilateral governance" of "transnational spaces" such as the borderlands and served as a blueprint for imperial power projection into other global regions (p. 28).

The book first discusses jurisdictional conflicts over the border's complex geography and then examines specific issues of criminality, citizenship, and political acts. The first part sets the stage with diplomatic negotiations in the 1870s and 1880s concerning the flight of the El Paso Salt War protesters to Mexico, that country's free trade zone, and its libel prosecution of editor A. K. Cutting. Later, issues between the two countries multiplied, including disputes regarding the ownership of Rio Grande bancos (sandbar islands), upstream water use, and transborder pursuit of criminals. Yet, in these matters, the two nations' representatives cooperated without resorting to military action.

The second part of the book delves more deeply into a series of criminal extradition cases, including "dynamite crimes" (terrorism) and limits on extradition due to "double criminality" (conduct illegal in both countries) and "specialty" (limiting charges to those cited in the original extradition request). Diplomats again avoided a broader international rift by managing (on a case-by-case basis) the infamous "Ord Order," justifying cross-border incursions by the U.S. military, and the "citizenship exception," whereby neither nation would deliver up its own citizens. An exception for political offenses further limited extradition and benefited rebels challenging the Porfirio Díaz regime in Mexico or Central American governments. Well into the next century, U.S. hegemony in other regions would feature these same exceptions.

This fine study displays few flaws, but two lacunae bear mention. One is the author's neglect of Mexican historiography on the subject, especially Daniel Cosío Villegas's classic work on Mexico's diplomacy with the United States in the late 1870s and 1880s, The United States Versus Porfirio Díaz (1963), which covers identical ground as the first part here and explains the basis for Foreign Minister Ignacio Vallarta's strategy. More recently, Roberta Lajous, in La política exterior del porfiriato (2010), put these border conflicts in the context of Mexico's contemporaneous relations with other countries. A second problem is that while the author argues that U.S. policy was aimed at amplifying sovereignty via unilateralism, his examples show that disputes were often resolved amicably, either because Mexico was adept at diplomacy or because neither side thought a few criminals worth a war. That the book's model of conflict is somewhat overdrawn, however, should not detract from its sharp analysis of international negotiations that helped shape the American imperial governance system.

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