



# **Medieval Culture and the Mexican American Borderlands (Rio Grande/Río Bravo: Borderlands Culture and Traditions)**

*Milo Kearney, Manuel Medrano*

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The land along the U.S.-Mexican border is often portrayed as the place where two separate cultures meet—or indeed collide. Yet this is not the first meeting of the two cultures, not their first collision, and not their first confluence. Their respective ancestral cultures in England and Spain, argue scholars Milo Kearney and Manuel Medrano, had common roots in medieval Europe, and both their conflicts and the shared understandings that may form the basis for their cooperation trace back to those days.

Kearney and Medrano explore three interlinking themes. First, they assert that Mexican American Borderlands culture cannot be fully understood without knowledge of its medieval underpinnings in both Castile (and pre-Castilian Spain) and England. Second, they argue that certain parallels in the medieval evolution of Hispanic and Anglo societies make the two cultures much more closely related than is often realized and in many ways set them apart from the cultures of other European societies. Finally, the authors show how, despite these similarities, the origins of Anglo-Hispanic tensions trace back to the Middle Ages, predating Bartolomé de las Casas and the “Black Legend.” Although they demonstrate the Borderlands expression of these cultural phenomena, the emphasis is on their pre-modern European sources.

The authors conclude that many of the foundations for the interaction of Hispanic and Anglo societies were laid by the year 1500. From science and learning through literature and music to art and architecture, medieval culture has defined many elements of Borderlands creativity.

While the hostilities and negative stereotypes generated by the Hispanic-Anglo warfare of the Middle Ages passed on prejudices and problems that are still not entirely overcome, a recognition of the interlinked past can draw Hispanic and Anglo subcultures in the Borderlands together.

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