



PEARL

The Unsettlement of America: Translation, Interpretation, and the Story of Don Luis de Velasco, 1560–1945

Maudlin, Daniel

Published in:

Journal of American History

DOI:

[10.1093/jahist/jav409](https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav409)

Publication date:

2015

Document version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link:

[Link to publication in PEARL](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Maudlin, D. (2015). The Unsettlement of America: Translation, Interpretation, and the Story of Don Luis de Velasco, 1560–1945. *Journal of American History*, 102(2), 512-513.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav409>

All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Wherever possible please cite the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.

styles found all over the region: Why does the dominant culture in southern California work so hard to evoke a Spanish heritage at the same time that it marginalizes and oppresses people of Mexican origin—and its own Mexican origins? Or, as the author puts it, “What are the ways in which the history of the United States can be made to come to terms with its Latin American past?” (p. 159).

In *Aztlán and Arcadia* Roberto Ramón Lint Sagarena explores the region’s “fantasy Spanish heritage” through the lenses of religion and indigenism. In doing so, he adds an important new layer to the scholarship, arguing that the long-standing practices associated with imagining California’s Spanish past reveal a variety of tensions related to history and identity, such as the question of whether Anglo settlers could layer a Protestant identity over a territory that had been previously conquered by Catholicism. The author frames the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848 as the origin of this conflict (which coalesces nicely with a renewed interest in that war among scholars in Chicana/o studies) but brings us up to contemporary iterations of faith and place making, such as those expressed in urban muralism. Throughout, the author maintains focus on the provocative central question of the book, but he relies on an array of case studies, including historical pageants, literary representations, architecture, and poetry.

Importantly, *Aztlán and Arcadia* shifts the focus on southern California’s self-making from dominant Anglo cultural practices to those performed by people with roots in Mexico. By turning to Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicana/o appropriations of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Aztlán, the author makes it clear that the region is also a site of contestation as well as domination. Its Spanish fantastical past is powerful but so are the modes of resistance developed by those who attempt to rewrite the spiritual histories of the place.

Lint Sagarena covers some well-trodden terrain by examining works that have already been subjects of much scholarly attention, such as the writings of the early twentieth-century eccentric Charles F. Lummis and Helen Hunt Jackson’s ubiquitous novel *Ramona* (1884). I found it frustrating that he makes only passing

references to Arcadia, the pastoral idyll referenced in the title of the book, when it could have served as a deeper metaphor for the competing visions of southern California. However, these criticisms are minor, considering all that *Aztlán and Arcadia* accomplishes. In clear prose and supported by abundant evidence, it interrogates one of the most important concepts in Chicana/o history—Aztlán—from a fresh perspective. The book will be welcomed by anyone interested in southern California, its history, and its relationship to Aztlán.

Jason Ruiz
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana

doi: 10.1093/jahist/jav443

The Unsettling of America: Translation, Interpretation, and the Story of Don Luis de Velasco, 1560–1945. By Anna Brickhouse. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. xviii, 366 pp. \$65.00.)

The Unsettling of America is a literary assemblage of approaches and interpretations surrounding an account of the titular Don Luis de Velasco: a sixteenth-century Native American from Ajacán, the Chesapeake, who traveled to Spain, Cuba, the Floridas, and Mexico (in the 1570–1571 period) before leading a native rebellion or “unsettling” against Jesuit settlers in his own country. Anna Brickhouse argues that the concept of “unsettling” offers a counterview to narratives of European conquest and/or settlement (whichever term you prefer) and the subjugation of indigenous peoples. This accomplished book continually questions sources and modes of interpretation, and provides substantial grist for the historian’s intellectual mill but is of limited use as a secondary source on sixteenth-century Atlantic history.

For the historian, Brickhouse’s critical approach to primary sources, notably letters, located in Part 1, “The Methods and the Story,” bears the most fruit as she seeks out Don Luis’s voice as a native translator in Spanish accounts. She shows that Don Luis’s story foregrounds “the geopolitics of knowledge in the sixteenth-century Americas,” as the authorial rights of these documents are challenged and

their contents interpreted against the grain to suggest Don Luis was not simply “a heroic figure of native agency” but also a producer and transmitter of knowledge (pp. 9, 8).

Brickhouse contextualizes the story of Don Luis within literary studies to argue that his physical and conceptual travels between Europe and America give a cosmopolitan edge to native history in the early colonial period that offers a “useful provocation to the literary-historiographical and pedagogical renovations announced by both the transatlantic and the hemispheric approaches current in the field” (p. 6). However, amid these “speculative possibilities,” a question might be asked: Did the term *unsettling* need to be used at all? A principal stated aim of the book is to introduce *unsettling* into transatlantic literary studies as a counterterm to *settlement*; yet, while *unsettling* is an established term in postcolonial studies—see, for example, Katherine Ellinghaus, David Goodman, and Glenn Moore, eds., *Unsettling America: Crisis and Belonging in United States History* (2004)—the use of the term *unsettlement* here to span both physical acts and mental states of anticolonialism appears forced and does not by itself add to our understanding of Don Luis as a native presence with Spanish colonial culture or as a rebel against it. Despite the great efforts made to promote “unsettlement,” the book would be much the same and as strong without it.

Parts 2 and 3 turn to the afterlife of Don Luis’s story through to the twentieth century. For example, his appearance in William Cullen Bryant and Sydney Howard Gay’s, *A Popular History of the United States* (4 vols., 1876–1881) is cited as an example of Anglo-American nationalist fantasy pitted against a Spanish United States that might have been. This fascinating literary afterlife moves the book beyond its usefulness, if not interest, to most historians. This is an excellent literary study of a historic figure and the world he witnessed. For historians it is a thought-provoking read that reminds us to question our sources.

Daniel Maudlin
University of Plymouth
Plymouth, England

doi: 10.1093/jahist/jav409

Urban Origins of American Judaism. By Deborah Dash Moore. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014. xx, 185 pp. \$32.95.)

Deborah Dash Moore’s *Urban Origins of American Judaism* examines “the formative power of city living on American Jews” (p. 1). She efficiently recasts over three centuries of American Jewish history using the lenses of religious life, public venues and behavior, and iconic photographs to argue for urbanism as a defining facet of, and influence on, American Judaism. With its distinctive contemporary movements and institutions, American Judaism stands apart from, but historically connected to, Jewish practices and identities elsewhere in the world. Moore offers an alternative approach to understanding how those distinctions emerged, moving away from such well-known themes as “migration and freedom” and “reinvention and renewal” (*ibid.*). By her account, urban is not simply characteristic of where American Jews historically have concentrated but also of the conditions that have shaped that compound identity. Cities are the places of origin for a Judaism that is “fundamentally diverse, open, eclectic, and vibrant” (p. 7).

The chapter “Synagogues” provides the most convincing support for her argument, with a clear account of how these religiously unnecessary structures became important signifiers of Jewish commitment, community, and comfort in the United States. Drawing examples from the colonial era to the late twentieth century and from across the country, Moore traces the urban influences that changed immigrant Judaism into American Judaism. The examination of synagogue location, architecture, purpose, and programming highlights the roles of American Jews and Judaism in the social and physical transformation of U.S. cities. Equally articulated is the influence of urban social conditions and crises that provoked changes in synagogues from prayer centers to community centers to education centers. Most telling is the example of a synagogue that has become an international brand—Chabad’s world headquarters housed in a Brooklyn brownstone. The outreach arm of the Lubavitch Hasidism, a pietistic sect transplanted to the United States from