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Coronado and Our Spanish Legacy: A Review Essay

JOSEPH P. SÁNCHEZ

Once in a great while a book like *To the Inland Empire: Coronado and Our Spanish Legacy* comes along to add much-needed perspective to historical interpretations of our colonial past. Stewart Udall, former Secretary of the Interior, has written an impressionable yet perceptive narration of a complex subject, the historiographical underpinnings of Spanish colonial history in the Southwest.¹

Writing with deceptive simplicity, Udall focuses his examination on the Coronado Expedition, 1540–1542, “because missing pieces of evidence continue to tantalize us.” The missing pieces include not only

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1. For works on Coronado, see Herbert E. Bolton, *Coronado, Knight of Pueblos and Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1949). Fray Angélico Chávez, *Coronado's Friars* (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscans, 1968). George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition, 1540–1542* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940). George P. Winship, *The Journey of Coronado, 1540–1542. From the City of Mexico to the Grand Canyon of the Colorado and the Buffalo Plains of Texas, Kansas and Nebraska* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1904).

documents still to be discovered in Spanish and Mexican archives concerning Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's mission and unknown segments of the trail followed by the sixteenth-century explorers, but also the veil of misunderstanding that shrouds our perceptions regarding the Spanish colonial experience in our national history. Udall reminds historians to strike for balance in relating the history of our Hispanic forefathers who explored the heartland of Mid-America and settled on its periphery long before Jamestown existed.

In his first chapter, titled "Growing Up Along Coronado's Trail," Udall recounts how his life-long study of Coronado's route has influenced his appreciation and understanding of history, culture, and institutions. Of the first time he heard of Coronado, Udall recalls, "I was six when I went with my father . . . to witness the 'grand opening' of . . . the 'Coronado Trail.'" The revelation that the 1540 expedition passed by his hometown of St. Johns, Arizona, on its quest to find the Seven Cities of Gold sparked a curiosity in the young Udall that kindled his later scholarly dedication to Spanish colonial history and the period of discovery. While his devotion to finding the true story of Coronado became the anvil upon which he would test the metal of his convictions, the insights he gained from living at St. Johns as a member of an unpopular sect of Mormons served as the hammer. Between hammer and anvil, Udall shaped a well-balanced and sober view of Southwest history and culture from which he developed his thesis.

Udall's thesis is that Spanish colonial history and culture, which comprise a significant element of our national story, have been distorted and almost obliterated. The formulation of Udall's thesis represents a fascinating coming together of ideas. He writes, "The Mormons were outcasts because of their religious tenets, and the Spaniards were doubly despised by newcomers because of their blood and their religion." To Udall, St. Johns became an intriguing window on the past because the Mormons and Hispanics of St. Johns "had stories to tell that refuted legends and 'histories' popularized in the East by the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who were running the country."

Udall tested some of his ideas regarding the Coronado Trail in his first study titled "In Coronado's Footsteps," which appeared in the April 1984 issue of *Arizona Highways*. That issue is devoted entirely to a series of interpretive essays on the Coronado Trail where it passes through eastern Arizona from Mexico to New Mexico. Later, in January 1988, *Arizona Highways* published Udall's "Thoughts on our Spanish Legacy," which is adapted from *To the Inland Empire*. In it Udall focuses on the historical development of anti-Hispanic biases embodied in the

Spanish Black Legend. *To the Inland Empire* goes beyond the two publications in perspective and historiography.

In his careful examination of trends in the historical literature of the United States, the author builds upon schools of history that express the theme of the "winning of the West." The ethnocentricity of the theme has clouded our national perceptions about who we are as a nation. Given our common Western European and colonial backgrounds, which have intermingled with the Native American heritage, to be an American in New England is not unlike being an American in the Southwest. The author, however, contends that "the winning of the West thesis" has become a "WASP article of faith," which has accentuated differences rather than similarities. The theme, furthermore, has permeated our history and has distorted our national self image.

The poignancy of the St. Johns story is that the inhabitants "acted from a script of intolerance written by others," and missed opportunities to become true neighbors. Conceding the failure to understand and appreciate each other's rich strands of history, Udall writes: "In St. Johns, neighborliness had to wait." The national trends that afflicted St. Johns bore down upon the Hispanic inhabitants, the small Mormon enclave and, finally on the Udall family itself. After St. Johns underwent troublous times, which resulted in political trials, Bishop David K. Udall, founder of Mormon St. Johns, was railroaded to a federal prison in Detroit. Meanwhile, semisegregated St. Johns with separate schools and little social interaction became the victim of a certain ethnocentric wave that coursed through America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

From this background, Udall reaches out to remind us that the Christopher Columbus Quincentennial in 1992 offers an opportunity to reflect on the common heritage of the Americas. Not only will Western Europe and the Americas focus on the five-hundredth year since Columbus' landfall, the Southwest will celebrate a Hispanic heritage that began when Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and his three comrades trekked across Texas and southern New Mexico in the middle 1530s. Hardly forty-eight years had passed since Columbus' landing when members of Coronado's expedition under Hernando de Alvarado first stood on the banks of the Rio Grande within the city limits of present-day Albuquerque. The Quincentennial is not without its tribute to Native Americans either, for they are the first Americans. It is a truism that nearly all "discoveries" in the Americas by the Europeans were made with Indian guides and on Indian foot trails. In the spirit of the

encuentro entre dos mundos (encounter between two worlds), the Quincentennial should also serve to extol the virtues of America's true pioneers who, before the coming of Europeans, made their homes, raised their children, and died in pre-Columbian America. It is that sort of fair play that inspires the kind of objectivity Udall encourages.

Central to Udall's thesis is the question, "Why have we been so grudging in acknowledging contributions made in the dawn years of our history by people with Spanish surnames?" In 1971, Philip Wayne Powell published the first major English response to a similar question. In *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices Affecting United States Relations with the Hispanic World*, Powell explains that the anti-Hispanic propaganda of the past by English, Dutch, French, and German rivals of Spain resulted in negative stereotypes still used in the twentieth century to discredit Hispanics and their contributions to the march of Western Civilization.² In 1604, Francisco Gómez de Quevedo y Villegas wrote *España Defendida* in which he pointed out that anti-Spanish propaganda and misconceptions were deeply rooted in the lore of Protestant Europe.³ More than three hundred years later, in 1912, Julián Juderías, a Spanish intellectual and journalist, observed that anti-Spanish misconceptions had continued to develop unabated long after their usefulness as propaganda had been served. Juderías argued that anti-Spanish, indeed, anti-Hispanic distortions in both Europe and the Americas, constituted a *leyenda negra*—a black legend.⁴ By the late 1960s, decades after Juderías had coined the term "Black Legend," Chicano academicians in the United States sought to understand historical anti-Hispanic attitudes which continued to affect public policies at home and foreign relations with Spain and Latin America. They concluded the Black Legend had resulted in beliefs that Hispanics were inherently evil. The centuries-old anti-Spanish propaganda had developed a folkloristic nature of its own with far-reaching effects, and it had created a false stereotype of Hispanics.⁵

Udall goes a step further in his analysis of the Black Legend by demonstrating the role of Richard Hakluyt as propagandist for a greater England during the 1590s. Hakluyt's "histories" glorified English

2. Philip Wayne Powell, *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices affecting United States Relations with the Hispanic World* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

3. Julián Juderías y Loyot, *Don Francisco Gómez de Quevedo y Villegas: La Epoca, el Hombre, las Doctrinas* (Madrid: N.p., 1922).

4. Julián Juderías y Loyot, *La Leyenda Negra: Estudios acerca del Concepto de España en el Extranjero* (Madrid: N.p., 1912).

5. Joseph P. Sánchez, *The Spanish Black Legend: Origins of Anti-Hispanic Stereotypes* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1986), 1.

accomplishments and ignored Spanish deeds. Hakluyt, Udall writes, "altered the outlines of sixteenth century history by muddling events, dates, and the deeds of individual nations. This flip-of-the-wrist technique so jumbled the two halves of the sixteenth century that Spain's age of discovery was only dimly discernible."

From Hakluyt to George Bancroft, Richard Hildreth, John Lothrop Motley, Francis Parkman, John Gorham Palfrey, Jared Sparks, Walter Prescott Webb, and others, the anti-Hispanic school has reverberated in our historical literature and has permeated our educational system. In a 1987 article, "Europeans, Indians, and the Age of Discovery in American History Textbooks," James Axtell critiqued textbook writers and publishers of American history and exposed their disregard for the role of the Hispanic experience in our nation's development.⁶ William H. McNeil offered an admonition to historians who persist in myth making in a 1986 article. He wrote: "Historians, by helping to define 'us' and 'them,' play a considerable part in focusing love and hate, the two principal cements of collective behavior known to humanity. But myth making for rival groups has become a dangerous game in the atomic age, and we may well ask whether there is any alternative open to us."⁷ While the anti-Spanish propagandists of the sixteenth century indulged their immediate nationalistic needs, they also clouded the intellectual and popular thought of the English speaking world far beyond their generations and culture. *To the Inland Empire* offers a universal message to the truth-seeking mythographer, as McNeil refers to the wise historian: seek balance.

Yet Clío's judgment of human affairs is undeniable. Despite the fabricated past contrived by the anti-Hispanicist writers, the role of Hispanic frontiersmen, whose deeds complement those of Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, John Colter and others, are yet to be discovered for our national story to be complete. Spanish frontiersmen, among them Francisco Rendon, Facundo Melgares, and Francisco Almangual await biographers and induction into the pantheon of North America's heroic past. Albeit great historians, among them Herbert E. Bolton, Carlos E. Castañeda, France V. Scholes, Philip Wayne Powell, Benjamin Keene, Lino Gómez Canedo, and Lewis Hanke, have paved a wide scholarly path, the Spanish colonial story awaits its Parkman.

6. James Axtell, "Europeans, Indians, and the Age of Discovery in American History Textbooks," *American Historical Review*, 92 (June 1987), 621-32.

7. William H. McNeil, "Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History and Historians," *American Historical Review*, 91 (February 1986), 7.

Any review of *To the Inland Empire* would be remiss if the professional photography of Jerry Jacka were not discussed. The beautiful panoramic vistas of Coronado's route captured by Jacka's camera are an outstanding contribution for future generations to enjoy. Jacka, one of America's foremost landscape photographers, has created an unrivaled collection of Coronadoscapes. On the eve of future development of the Southwest, Jacka's photographic essay views the Coronado trail in its pristine glory. We hope that known portions of the trail will one day be marked and preserved. Udall and Jacka have combined to produce a verbal and pictorial choric statement about the meaning of our Spanish colonial past in the Southwest.