theories and methodologies

The Black Legend of Texas

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AMONG THE MANY SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF RAÚL CORONADO'S *A WORLD NOT TO COME: A HISTORY OF LATINO WRITING AND PRINT Culture* is its vivid account of a lost Latino public sphere, a little-known milieu of hispanophone intellectual culture dating back to the early nineteenth century and formed in the historical interstices of Spanish American colonies, emergent Latin American nations, and the early imperial interests of the United States. In this respect, the book builds on the foundational work of Kirsten Silva Gruesz's *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing*, which gave definitive shape to the field of early Latino studies by addressing what were then (and in some ways still are) the "methodological problems of proposing to locate the 'origins' of Latino writing in the nineteenth century." Gruesz unfolded a vast panorama of forgotten Spanish-language print culture throughout the United States, from Philadelphia and New York to New Orleans and California, in which letters, stories, essays, and above all poetry bequeathed what she showed convincingly were "important, even crucial, ways of understanding the world" that had been largely lost to history (x).[1] Coronado's book carries forward this project of recovery, exploring a particular scene of early Latino writing centered in Texas during its last revolutionary decades as one of the Interior Provinces of New Spain, its abrupt transition to an independent republic, and its eventual annexation by the United States. As a "history of textuality" rather than a study of literary culture per se (28), the book tells the story of the first printing presses in Texas but also evinces the importance of manuscript circulation as well as private and sometimes unfinished texts. *A World Not to Come* concerns both print culture and origins but refuses to fetishize either, attending to the past not to "the degree that it is a measure of the future," as Rosaura Sánchez once put it, but for the very opposite reason: because it portended a future that was never realized (qtd. in Gruesz, *Ambassadors* xi).

The particular past brought to life in vivid, archival detail in Coronado's study is a largely misunderstood and sometimes simply

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forgotten revolutionary scene in the war of Mexican independence from Spain. This scene takes place neither in Dolores, where Father Hidalgo issued the renowned *grito* or cry for liberation from colonial authority in 1810, nor in Mexico City, where Agustín de Iturbide's forces marched into power and ended Spanish rule permanently in 1821, but in the lesser known and little celebrated revolutionary milieu of Texas in 1813. That year, Texas became the first province of New Spain to declare its independence on the basis of a republican government and a written constitution. But its revolutionary history has been long ignored or misconstrued by historians of both the United States and Mexico because it ended, at least from the state-consolidating perspective of nationalism, in failure. Coronado urges that we consider other vantage points. The early revolution in the province of Texas "may have failed to establish a nation, but an alternative language of modernity began to sediment itself" in the history of early Latino writing and political thought. This sedimentation, which he excavates, is now a rich potential resource: "By returning to these moments of aspiration and failure, perhaps we, too, may be inspired to imagine our present and future in more capacious ways" (20).

In this essay, I highlight some of the most important contributions of Coronado's study while also answering his call to revisit the failed revolution at the center of his book in order to glimpse the present. I do so by way of a skewed but I hope illuminating perspective on the events in question, which are given voice in the oldest and most widely circulated magazine of the early-nineteenth-century United States. The point is not to better understand what happened (the research that stands behind Coronado's book is authoritative) but to return with eyes fresh from reading his study to a moment in which early Latino literary and political history were crucial to—and then definitively dismissed from—a national United States narrative about revolution in the hemisphere.

In the July 1836 issue of the *North American Review*, a long and unsigned essay appeared under the simple title "Mexico and Texas." Its self-stated purpose was to present the *Review*'s national readership with an extended analysis of "the past and existing state of things . . . in the portion of Mexico in our immediate neighborhood" (Bullard 227). That "portion," of course, was the nascent Republic of Texas, where four months earlier a revolution enacted largely by Anglo-American settlers and unsanctioned United States soldiers who had fled their assigned posts had culminated in independence from Mexico. By July, the question of how the United States should relate to the new self-styled republic—which had not yet received official recognition by any nation and was already seeking United States annexation—was at the forefront of national debate. As the *North American Review* observed, "The moment appears to us not inappropriate, to invite the attention of our readers" to the history of Texas (227). Filled with wry understatement and circumlocution, the article presented itself as urbane, dispassionate, and above all cautious on the subject of contemporary politics. The author warned against a rush to judgment about the United States position on the disputed territory, reminding readers that even an agreed-on purchase of Texas would be no more legal according to Mexican law than "the President and Senate of the United States ced[ing] to [Mexico] the state of Louisiana or Missouri." Even if the "large bodies of fine land" and "temperate climate" of Texas could be had, by sale or by other means, "many wise and reflecting statesmen are now fully persuaded that the territory of the United States is now sufficiently extended" (255).

Despite the essay's tone of evenhanded distance on the subject, its unnamed author had been an avid participant in the long

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history he went on to narrate here. Henry Adams Bullard was, at the time of the publication of the essay, a recently resigned United States Congressman representing Louisiana.[2] In 1813, however, he had been a twenty-four-year-old adventurer who traveled to Texas as a filibuster acting on a secret assignment to effect a coup in the leadership of the revolution unfolding there—an earlier and lesser-known revolution that is also one of the main topics of Coronado's research in *A World Not to Come*.[3] Occurring nearly twenty-five years before, this failed bid for Mexican independence was launched from what would later be the Texas-Mexico border, and it was the product, as Coronado convincingly argues, of the first Latino public sphere.

At the center of this history lie the writings of two Creole brothers from Revilla, a town on the banks of the Rio Grande in what was then New Spain: José Antonio Gutiérrez de Lara, a priest and a theorist of revolution who wrote a new if fleeting nation into being, and José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara, a diarist and ambassador, a purveyor of revolutionary pamphlets, and ultimately a military commander of the San Antonio–based uprising inspired by Mexican *independentistas*. Working in a rising hispanophone American print culture, the Gutiérrez de Lara brothers helped make Texas the earliest province in New Spain to achieve independence, form a republican government, and create a written constitution. In doing so, they also contributed to the origins of Latino literary and intellectual history.

Of the two brothers, only Bernardo appears in the version of this history recounted in the *North American Review*. He plays the story's archvillain, depicted with sinister flourishes that do not go with the article's studied neutrality about contemporary politics. This contrast in tone and style pinpoints how and why the Gutiérrez de Lara brothers and the revolutionary intellectual milieu they occupied were dismissed from later historical narratives. Indeed, while Bullard's essay gives some of the basic facts of Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara's role in the failed revolution, it also adds significant details that help consolidate a particular discourse of early-nineteenth-century United States politics that we might call a black legend of Texas. The early modern black legend of Spanish imperialism had long provided the English colonies and later the fledgling United States with a convenient foil for their narrative of Anglo-American colonial innocence. The black legend of Texas shows a rhetorical inheritance from its early modern predecessor but has a historiographical mode that developed quite specifically around the fluctuating political space of Texas.

The elaboration of this legend in Bullard's essay centers on Spanish vengeance both inflicted on and carried out by a fictionalized Gutiérrez de Lara, whose combined privilege and incompetence result in unthinkable corruption. "Don Bernardo Gutierrez" enters the story as a wealthy landowner with revolutionary sympathies who was once "among the followers of Hildalgo." For this reason, he is subject to the "vengeance" of Spanish colonial authorities and loses his "handsome estate" and indeed "all of his property" to confiscation. With this personal agenda, he "effect[s an] escape to the United States," where he sets out single-mindedly to drum up support for his proindependence and property-driven interests. Unfortunately for his cause, however, he is ill prepared to move in the refined world of Anglo-American politics: he is "rather uncouth in his manners" and "speak[s] no language but Spanish." Although he succeeds in "inducing" a great deal of United States support for his "expedition" despite the deficiency of his monolingualism, his failure is cast as all but inevitable (234–35).

As the essay continues, Bullard's version of Gutiérrez de Lara assumes a striking resemblance to the eponymous "Spaniard" captain that Melville would famously bring to life some two decades later in *Benito Cereno*. Like

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Benito Cereno, this invented Gutiérrez de Lara is, above all, a man "without the qualities necessary for a . . . commander," mired in "disorder and laxity of discipline" (Bullard 234, 237). The unchecked "relaxation of discipline" under him breeds a dangerous "spirit of insubordination . . . which prove[s] ultimately fatal to the cause" of independence in Texas, a cause that a formidable force of United States volunteers is trying to support. Like Melville's Captain Delano and crew, these "American volunteers"—including "American officers, some of whom were men of honor and character"—find themselves caught up in a Spanish American disaster of which they are "ignorant" and therefore innocent (236). Gutiérrez de Lara turns out to be "savage rather than brave," and his "revengeful disposition" leads to "so foul an outrage," committed in San Antonio, that many of the shocked Americans rebuke their Spanish American leader by fleeing to rejoin "an industrious and free people," that is, by "immediately returning to the United States" (234, 255, 236). The outrage committed by Gutiérrez de Lara is precisely what Melville's Delano fears from the "plotting pirate" he sees in Benito Cereno: a "most barbarously violated" pledge that threatens to culminate in "great slaughter" (Melville 98; Bullard 236). In Bullard's essay, Gutiérrez de Lara, having given a "solemn promise" to treat a group of captured royalists "with the urbanity usual among civilized nations," instead orders them "inhumanly butchered in cold blood," "their throats cut," "their bodies . . . rifled of their watches and trinkets" and "thrown into a deep ravine" (236). The butchery not only disgusts the American "volunteers" (i.e., filibusters waging an unauthorized war against a foreign state) but also evokes "a feeling of horror and disgust in the United States" writ large (237).

As these rhetorical similarities to *Benito Cereno* suggest, the *North American Review* drew deeply from the well of the black legend that Melville satirizes. Thus it is only a matter of time until Bullard invokes that legend's central nineteenth-century feature in the figure of "an old Spaniard . . . who had been buried in the dungeons of the Inquisition; whose ankles had been rendered callous by chains" (238). That a rendition of Spanish American history appearing in the pages of a prominent Anglo-American journal in 1836 would be shaped by this legend is hardly surprising, given the presence of American volunteers in the revolution who clearly needed foils. As several fine studies have shown, the "long shadow" of Spain was integral to delineating national United States self-conception from the colonial period onward (DeGuzmán; Greer et al.). The facts themselves—many of which are called into question or outright refuted by Coronado's research—are less important than the ideological separations instantiated by this version of the history: between civilization and savagery, innocence and atrocity, United States American and Latin American. We might add to this list of enduring binaries the bright, democratizing modernity of print culture and its dark, despotic absence. For this last reason especially, the example from the *North American Review* is helpful in highlighting the value of *A World Not to Come*, for Bullard's "Mexico and Texas," like Coronado's book, tells of the beginning of print culture in Texas.

So deeply entrenched is the black legend of Mexican literary barbarism in this essay's pages that Bullard cannot conceive of even the most important of Mexican legal writings as having any meaning beyond their mere existence: "With such a people, the written constitution is but little better than a dead letter" (252). No wonder that, when he recounts the arrival of what he believed to be the first printing press in Texas during the attempted revolution, he is invested in establishing the role of Anglo-American influence. As Coronado documents in detail, however, Gutiérrez de Lara had brought a printing press to Texas a full year before the Anglo filibusters arrived

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(189), and even the press to which Bullard refers came with a Cuban-born revolutionary who arrived in Texas from the United States and played a role, among many other early Latino writers and transmitters of political thought, in disseminating texts about the revolutionary future of Mexico. In the *North American Review*, however, the key element of Bullard's (inaccurate) story of a fetishized first arrival of the printing press in Mexico is its Anglo-American protagonist: "His name was Moore, a man of singular versatility of talent, possessing a vast amount of practical knowledge, and at the same time brave, enthusiastic, and enterprising" (238). The point of the lavish praise devoted to Moore (about whose identity historians remain uncertain) is to tell a story of Anglo-American skill and courage in bringing printed history to benighted Texas.[4] As the article announces with fanfare, "Here the printing-press was set up; and the first paper ever published in the Internal provinces of Mexico was issued in Spanish and English in May, 1813" (239). At least one other major detail of this account is wrong: the first Texan newspaper published, the *Gaceta de Texas*, was in Spanish alone. The dual Spanish-English printing touted in the *North American Review* is no paean to the bilingualism of this revolutionary scene, in other words, but an attempt to shore up English-language and Anglo-American hegemony over hemispheric revolutionary history, the history that Coronado recovers: the arrival of printing in Texas, the history of the Spanish-Catholic or Hispanic public sphere on both sides of the Atlantic of which it was a part, and the larger milieu of early Latino literary culture that it helped shape.

Bullard's enlistment of a Texas version of the black legend brings into focus other rhetorical features relevant to early Latino history that are less visible but no less defining. For example, in his story, Anglo-Americans are not the only foil for the Mexican-born "Don Bernardo." The only chance of saving "an enterprise stained with so foul a crime" by his butchery is the installment of a new Spanish American leader in the project of revolution: someone "destined to succeed Don Bernardo in the command" on the basis of quite different credentials. This superior leader, Don José Álvarez de Toledo, is "a native of the Island of Cuba." After an extensive résumé of his early accomplishments, the essay describes his political exile from Spain (for "advocat[ing]," in his capacity as a representative in the Cortes of Cádiz, "the independence of Spanish America"). Like Gutiérrez de Lara but under less dramatic circumstances (no seizure of property, no armed forces nearby), he flees to the United States (237). Yet where Bernardo merely "reach[es] the United States," "uncouth," monolingual, and conniving to get help, Toledo takes "refuge in the United States," bringing with him a written document of legitimacy: "an authority, signed by many of the members of the Cortes . . . to take command of any forces which might be in arms to sustain the independence of Spanish America" (234, 237). Álvarez de Toledo and not Don Bernardo, in other words, presents the preferred face of Spanish American independence and—as the repeated mention of his authorized status suggests—the preferred face of a Spanish American residing, however temporarily, in the United States (237). In fact, Álvarez de Toledo was hand-picked for his pliability by a United States special agent with expansionist designs on Mexico.[5] Bullard's preference for the Cuban-born revolutionary leader over the Mexican one has an imperial rationale, as does his pitting of one early Latino figure against another, though he disavows political reasons.

In "Texas and Mexico," anti-imperial, interimperial, and settler colonial histories intersect to create a strange rhetorical and ideological territory. Bullard's essay makes the familiar argument, for example, that the vast natural resources of Texas—its "great natural beauty and fertility" and its

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"extensive prairies," adaptable to "the culture of cotton and sugar" and "the raising of cattle to an unlimited extent"—have, under Spanish rule, been "wholly unknown, or never appreciated." But this anti-imperial testament to deficiency in the very "existence of the Spanish Government" soon leads to a thinly veiled imperial description of "the Mexican people," who, unlike the Anglo-Americans residing in Texas, "do not possess the enterprise and industry, necessary to profit by such decided natural advantages of soil and climate" (243). The *Review* here repeats an old staple of English colonial discourse for legitimizing the lack of indigenous rights to occupied land, thus marking the rhetorical site where Anglo-American settler colonialism coexists with and occasionally vexes the expression of United States imperial interests.

Perhaps this is why, alongside Bullard's almost lustful descriptions of Texan land, we find an odd lapse into a sublime register of poetic awe as the essay recalls the aftermath of the failed revolution in 1813, when "the settlements were almost entirely abandoned," leaving only "a scanty population":

> At the period we speak of, those extensive and woodless plains were the haunts of innumerable droves of horses "desert-born"; and nothing can be imagined more grand than their movements in squadrons of thousands, when frightened by the approach of the solitary traveller.
>
> A thousand horse—and none to ride!
> With flowing tail, and flying mane,
> Wide nostrils—never stretch'd by pain,
> Mouths bloodless to the bit or rein,
> And feet that iron never shod,
> And flanks unscarr'd by spur or rod,
> A thousand horse, the wild, the free,
> Like waves that follow o'er the sea,
> Came thickly thundering on. (243)

This vision of running horses may be "grand," but it is also, as the citation from Byron's *Mazeppa* makes clear, full of terror: Byron's eponymous hero anticipates death as the herd charges forward: a metonym for the "desert-born" Comanche known for cultivating the horses left behind by Spaniards since the sixteenth century. The failure of the Texas revolution marks not the demise of a short-lived political freedom or the abandonment of republican principles or the loss of liberty and well-being; it spells an existential threat: the decline of a settler population in Texas, the failure of Euro-American settlement, whether Anglo or Spanish. The specter of unsettlement looms in the figure of the wild horses haunting the woodless plains, their "bloodless" mouths and "nostrils—never stretch'd by pain" evoking the violence of domination that they have not yet felt but threaten to impose.

After this ambivalent citation of Byron, the essay tells readers that the "beautiful province" of Texas was, after the failed revolution, "for many years subject to the constant [depredations] of the Comanche Indians," who were deliberately incited "to massacre the defenseless inhabitants of the frontier" (243–44). These attacks on the now "scanty" settler population proved all the more effective because the Native fighters were equipped with arms and ammunition, furnished, Bullard contends, in a trade for horses, mules, "and, in some instances, captive Mexicans." But if the *North American Review* puts "captive Mexicans" among the victims of these Native attacks, it also expresses the opinion that the worst abettors of the violence of unsettlement were Mexicans in the United States. After fleeing the failed revolution and relocating to Louisiana, these Mexicans "prosecuted [the human trade] with more avidity" than anyone else, Bullard charges, before putting a particular face to his indictment: "Don Bernardo Gutierrez himself was engaged for several years in fabricating spear points for those Indians" (244). This is Bullard's trump card: an image meant to evoke a betrayal so deep that his nineteenth-century Anglo-American readers would need no further reason to dismiss

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the failed Texas revolution from further consideration, removing Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara from the great hemispheric narrative of revolutionary history once and for all.

The image of Gutiérrez de Lara using his own hands to fashion indigenous weapons, along with the broader assertions about "Mexicans . . . in Louisiana" (244), suggests a quite specific concern about the racial meaning of *Latinidad* within United States borders: not the commonplace fear that racial mixture will destroy the purity of the national body politic but a more profoundly existential anxiety about the fragility of loyalties in a settler colonial modernity built on competing imperial histories of Native elimination and African slavery. As Coronado shows, one of the major United States–backed accusations used to discredit Gutiérrez de Lara during the revolution was his alliance with a Haitian military force to oppose Spanish rule: a band of violent "mulattoes" led by "a Frenchman of color from San Domingo" (251). Two decades later, the *North American Review* essay enlisted the same racial logic to impugn Gutiérrez de Lara's whiteness but supplemented it with Bullard's allegations. The unspoken question raised about Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara's complicity with the Comanche Indians is just what Melville's Captain Delano wonders about Benito Cereno: "[W]ho ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguing in against it" with settler colonialism's racial enemies (75)?

The submerged themes of Bullard's essay are brought into the light by Coronado's study: Anglo-American print culture putting an end to Mexican literary barbarism, Cuban and Mexican antagonists in the story of *Latinidad* in the United States, Comanche Indians and Haitian mulattoes, "scanty [settler] populations" and species apostasy. With Coronado's work in mind, we see with more clarity that the black legend of Texas has a flexible racial logic capable of accommodating new settler colonial interests as they arise. By its closing pages, Bullard's essay on Texas in 1813 has effectively staged a race war—a mandate "to restrain *Indians*"—as the legal justification for a United States violation of the "Law of Nations" in supporting Texas against Mexico in 1836 (254). The specter of unsettlement, with its empty towns and "desert-born" horses, thus marks early Texas as a symbolic site of settler colonial anxiety in the mid–nineteenth century.

If that specter provides Bullard with the rhetorical means of naturalizing hostility toward an early Latino population born in Mexico but residing in the United States, the black legend of Texas also makes a particular contribution, with its unspoken and always changing racial logic, to our own cultural moment. *Reconquista*, the idea of a Latino reappropriation of former national Mexican territory in the United States Southwest, is a word often used by right-wing supporters of a militarized border. But the more historically (and now demographically) salient term that might be brought to bear on contemporary immigration debates is *indigeneity*, which invites us to locate these debates at the intersection of interimperial history and settler colonial history and which suggests how much Latino studies and Native studies have to offer each other in an era with increasing numbers of migrants whose roots are indigenous. For all these reasons, Coronado's *A World Not to Come*, with its beautiful evocation of a lost literary culture and an unrealized history that might have been, offers compelling resources for the future.

Notes

1. On the early Latino literary field, see especially two forthcoming works: a definitive bibliographic essay, "Nineteenth-Century Latino Literature," by Carmen Lamas, and a broad collection of recent literary scholarship,

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The Latino Nineteenth Century, edited by Jesse Alemán and Rodrigo Lazo. See also the vast body of scholarship produced through the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, starting with the first volume, which was edited and introduced by Ramón Gutiérrez and Genaro Padilla. Aranda's discussion of this project as a literary historical emergence ("Recovering") is also helpful, as is Gruesz's "What Was Latino Literature?," which notes that periodicity and canonicity have not always evolved together in Latino literature and describes the *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* as occupying "the unusual position of presenting an authoritative canon for a body of literature that doesn't yet have a literary history" (336).

2. Cushing's 1878 index lists Bullard as the author (122).

3. Later in life, Bullard apparently kept his experiences as a filibuster secret, which may explain his choice in 1836 to keep the article anonymous. After the first Narciso López filibustering expedition to Cuba in 1850, Bullard found his own filibustering past dredged up (see Chaffin 159).

4. Given Moore's uncertain identity, Coronado's very different account of the Anglo-American printer Samuel Bangs, captured after his arrival in Texas as a filibuster, is all the more fascinating (267–74).

5. In Coronado's account, Álvarez de Toledo, when he was living in Philadelphia, had already offered to betray Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara and the other revolutionaries to Spain. He may have been less pliable than his imperial United States sponsors thought, in other words (250–51).

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