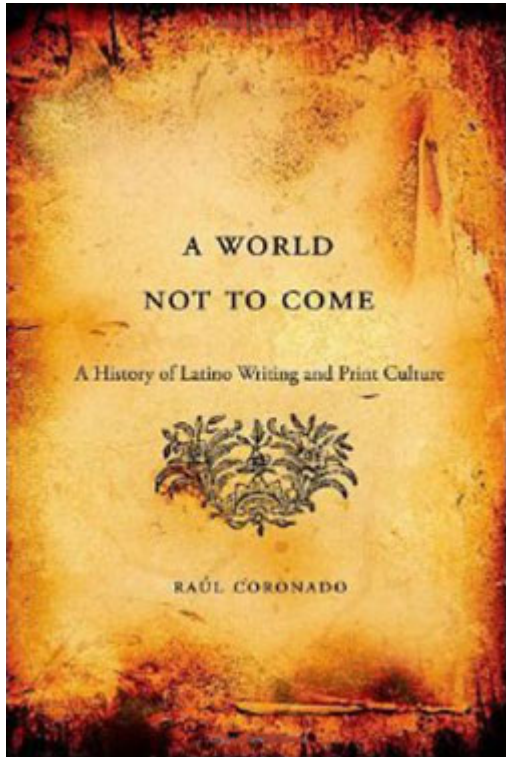


# The Lost Histories of Past Futures: Revolution, Belonging, and the Times of Transnational Print Cultures



When I was a teenager in Catholic school developing a sense of political consciousness, I fixated on the Apostle Jude, patron saint of the hopeless and despairing, because his patronage seemed to extend broadly to what the Psalms call “the wretched of the earth,” the down-and-out and overlooked in modern societies and their written histories. I was also inclined toward Jude because I was forgetful, and so I was told I could pray to him when I lost something valuable, like a new jacket—a rather odd conflation of the transcendent and the banal. St. Jude is also sometimes described (along with St. Rita) as the patron saint of “the Impossible,” making his saintly office even more metaphysically puzzling, since he oversees a conditional, temporal category, impossibility, rather than a geographically bounded place (the Philippines, São Paulo), a profession (confectioners, bankers), or an ailment (bubonic plague, cattle diseases), like most saints in the pantheon. Jude belongs to the counterfactual conditional, that which would or could have happened, had not something else out of your control interceded—an illness, an act of violence, or one of the many other natural and structural injustices that shape the present and limit the futures of the despairing souls that petition Jude for hope and relief.

Jude’s realms, which combine the most quotidian and magnificent aspects of human frailty and aspiration and transcend the bounded present and the

conditional future, are in some sense the domain as well of Raúl Coronado's brilliant, provocative, and often moving book, *A World Not to Come: A History of Latino Writing and Print Culture*. Coronado's book is ambitious, both theoretically and historiographically, rigorously researched, and eloquently written. His objective is twofold: first, to document the emergence of a Catholic Hispanic modernity in the Latin American age of revolution, one whose models of knowledge and systems of understanding did not match up with the liberal individualism of the Anglo-American world, which has been generally taken to be the standard of political modernity that others in the hemisphere aspired to emulate. Secondly, he explores the emergence, and failures, of revolutionary, anti-imperialist republican thought in early to mid-19th century Texas, using this specific, largely peripheral geography to argue for the centrality of such short-circuits—"worlds not to come," lost futures birthed by revolutions yet to be completed—that nevertheless shape the national cultures that emerge out of the crucibles of empire, slavery, war, and revolution. In so doing, Coronado offers a compellingly rigorous corrective to the often presentist orientation of "transnational" cultural studies by excavating the contingent, unstable forms of social belonging and political meaning in Spanish America that helped create, but also elude, the national categories we have inherited from the revolutionary 19th century.



Coronado offers a compellingly rigorous corrective to the often presentist orientation of "transnational" cultural studies by excavating the contingent, unstable forms of social belonging and political meaning in Spanish America that helped create, but also elude, the national categories we have inherited from the revolutionary 19th century.

The post-Reformation world of Catholic Scholasticism, in which the Spanish Empire took shape and in which it crumbled, is important to Coronado's history of print culture and national consciousness in Texas because it determined the kinds of social and geographic belonging available to those living on New Spain's periphery at the time. In Coronado's summary, Scholastic philosophy responds to the Protestant heresy of a priesthood of believers with direct, unmediated access to the divine Word by presenting the world as a single text, mandated by God, in which all things are intertwined, in a meaning that could only begin to be deciphered by an ordained clergy. (This entanglement of the visible and spiritual world helps explain St. Jude's alternately banal and profound offices.) As Coronado puts it, Scholasticism is an intellectual and social system that values not "innovation but interpretation," the skill of reading the world and uncovering "God's signature" within it (52). The Catholic world was an "enchanted" one, in which events were shaped not only by individual agency, but also by unseen forces and unknowable spirits. "Proximity to the divine," Coronado writes, "involves having a 'porous' self, where meaning emerges not within autonomous individuals but relationally with the visible and invisible world around us; where spiritual transcendence could at times be experienced by a community coming together during trying times" (51). In this "enchanted world," agency resides not just in individual bodies and

intellects but also in impersonal forces that are both beyond these and yet also of them. This position is difficult to articulate in other than teleological terms because, according to Charles Taylor, a critic of Scholasticism that Coronado leans on for his own account, this enchanted world seems so strange, and thus so “traditional,” to us.

This seeming anachronism points to the most exciting part of Coronado’s argument, which is his historiographical emphasis on the past futures “not to come” in 19th-century Texas, a historical project that takes seriously radical political desires, and the failure that inevitably accompanies them. The “future-in-past” grammatical formulation of *A World Not to Come* considers the history of Texas in terms of the spaces that radicals, pamphleteers, diarists, and generals imagined that they “would become,” rather than the inevitability of the nation-states that they “became.” As Coronado suggests, teleological narratives that presume the independence and later U.S. annexation of Texas as an inevitable product of Mexican instability, slave-state expansionism, the heroism of the Alamo, etc., tend to write those who would become “Tejanos,” and still later, “Latinos,” out of their region’s history, reducing them to footnotes or obstacles along some other historical path. More broadly, Coronado’s genealogical approach is essential, I think, for any serious approach to empire and anti-imperialist movements in the 19th-century U.S. and Caribbean, where national imaginaries, to say nothing of the territories themselves, were so dynamic that the very meaning of the things later called “Texas,” “Cuba,” or “Florida” changed profoundly across generations. *A World Not to Come* uncovers traces of national futures that look different from the territories we might recognize as inevitable—the post-1848 U.S.-Mexican border, or the revived Aztlán of Chicano nationalism—as well as a Hispanic Catholic epistemology that determined alternative worlds not to come, but not without leaving traces behind.

Given his emphasis on interpretation as a theological and social value in the time and place under consideration here, Coronado organizes much of his argument around close readings of key terms that ground his argument in his print and manuscript archive, while helping to organize this often sprawling book for readers. Besides “enchantment,” he considers “Latino,” a word he considers as “less...a subject position than...a literary and intellectual culture that emerges in the interstices between the United States and Latin America” (30). *Publicar*, the Spanish word meaning “publish” as well as “publicize,” becomes an important combination in 19th-century Texas, where the rarity of printing presses meant that important documents were disseminated in manuscript and through oral performance. Coronado’s use of unpublished manuscripts, listed for readers on a [bibliography](#) posted online, is instructive for this reason. He shows how print was an instrument of religious and political authority in late imperial Spanish Texas, “the embodiment of the voice of sovereignty,” as well as a rare technology in the northern periphery of Spain’s American empire (271).

Yet challenges to temporal and religious authority often eluded these

authoritative and authoritarian print forms; here, Coronado's interest in literary form and archival authority coincide with his project of historical recovery. The intellectual and political history of a short-lived 1813 revolution in Bexar, the New Spain city now known as San Antonio, Texas, is a particularly fascinating example. Coronado describes its preparation, aftermath, and legacy through various manuscript sources. The travel diary of José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara, a polemicist and leader of the rebellion, frames its political and theoretical background in Coronado's reading. The "Memoria de las cosas más notables que acaecieron en Bexar el año de 13 mandando el Tirano Arredondo" (Report of the Most Notable Things That Occurred in Bexar in the Year 13, under the Command of the Tyrant Arredondo), a handwritten eyewitness account of Spanish counter-revolutionary atrocities, offers harrowing testimony of the sudden, violent interruption of that revolutionary moment and the future it anticipated. Coronado concludes with a reading of the diary of Florencia Leal, a young Tejana woman living in San Antonio four decades later, as it comes under Anglo control. Coronado uses these manuscripts as records of historical moments pregnant with possibility and uncertainty—the protracted, bloody end of the Spanish Empire in Texas, in the former cases, and the dawn of an Anglo-American one, in the latter—and as peripheral, informal, or forgotten *forms* of writing that do not fit clearly into the genres that we have come to regard as conventional and modern.

The key terms *patria* and *pueblo* bring out some of the political implications of the Spanish-American Catholic modernity that Coronado argues for here, whose vibrations can be felt today. *Patria*, a word without a suitable English translation, refers to both a national homeland and the broader cultural, linguistic, and religious loyalties that radiate from it. *Pueblo* is similarly specific and expansive; it can be translated as "town" or as "people," giving it a paradoxical combination of bounded and vast meanings. Unlike either of its English equivalents, *pueblo* can also refer to an indivisible group, a collective entity. This is different from the sense of "people" enshrined in the beginning of the United States Declaration of Independence, a collection of discrete, individual subjects residing in a particular territory. The difference is critical and points to competing notions of sovereignty developing in the Americas at the time, which Greg Grandin has summarized in terms of an Anglo-American conception of republicanism predicated on individual rights and state sovereignty, and a Latin American valorization of collective rights and territorial sovereignty. The concept of social rights, Grandin argues in his recent article in the *American Historical Review*, bequeathed a tradition of political militancy that has been framed, in the U.S. context, as "disorder," a symptom of the cultural and racial deficiencies of Latin Americans. In his study of an 1856 print debate in the Spanish-language San Antonio newspaper *Ranchero*, for example, Coronado shows how these catholic (with a small and, he suggests, large "c") senses of national belonging struggled to survive amidst the growing tide of Anglo racism and Know-Nothing nativism. The *Ranchero*, edited by a Cuban émigré, José Quintero, gave voice to a "colonial history of Hispanic belonging based on concentric imagined communities," a capacious sense of belonging that could not restrain the

discourse of racial nationalism in Anglo-American Texas (374).

Threaded through several of the chapters is the career of Bernardo, a leader of the short-lived Bexar rebellion. Its defeat, Coronado argues, short-circuited the intellectual legacy of Bernardo's revolutionary movement and doomed its history to oblivion. In his diary of a trip to New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Washington, Bernardo admires the visual world and apparent forms of republican rule (such as new state legislative halls and the layout of the new capital city of Washington) but does so in a vocabulary that betrays his familiarity only with the politics of monarchy—describing Washington's government buildings as the “Corte de este Reyno,” (the Court of this Kingdom) for example. Coronado explains how to read this slippage between seemingly republican and feudal modes of political knowledge:

Bernardo's voyage should not be understood as some teleological metaphor for the shift in his political thinking, with his departure from New Spain representing some break with a premodern, semi-feudal way of thinking and his arrival in the United States signifying the development of modern political thought. Such a metaphor would merely replicate our clichéd notion of the United States as the normative agent, positing it as the teleological end of the modern political world; at the other end of the spectrum, of course, would be Spanish America, hurriedly attempting to follow the United States' path to modernity. This is the conundrum of comparative work, the inescapability of positing norms and standards to which some fail to live up. The task requires us to decenter the normative history that has set up the Protestant Atlantic's path to modernity as the ideal (82).

The contradiction between Bernardo's fascination with the visual style of republican rule, and his intellectual dependence on feudal and Catholic modes of ordering the world, allows readers to see him wrestling with new forms of loyalty and political agency not yet articulated as a coherent ideological program, the kind of contingency, possibility, and uncertainty that Coronado is after in his readings of “peripheral” genres like this travel diary. Other notions of collective agency and sovereignty, which can be read in the Catholic modernity of the not-yet borderlands, reverberate elsewhere in Latin American political thought, from Simón Bolívar to José Martí, as Coronado suggests. The combination of social rights and collective agency encoded in the meaning of *pueblo*, for example, continues to reverberate in Latin American militant politics today, down to Hugo Chávez and contemporary Latin American social movements, as well as Anglo-American dismissals of these as irrational or “populist” deviations from democratic norms. Coronado's attention to what he calls the “indices of the irrelevant” is an impressive work of comparative scholarship, reflective of a determinedly skeptical approach to what the archive holds and what it hides.