

city than a last, futile attempt to force negotiations on unification. Soviet foreign policy subsequently hardened. Truman's refusal to open diplomatic channels with the People's Republic of China, despite early friendly signals from Mao, presaged the disaster that followed in Korea. There, military pressure could yield no real political advantage when an opponent was able to deploy significant military forces, a hard lesson learned in the wake of the Chinese intervention.

Offner's meticulously researched and sourced dissection of the intricate processes of superpower relations is couched in terse, urgent prose. A devastating indictment, and genealogy, of post-Second World War US foreign policy, it is a valuable new contribution to the field, a work certain to stimulate controversy in intellectual and academic circles. The sheer volume of data Offner presents makes this book perhaps an ambitious read for the non-specialist, but required material for any serious student of American history.

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Latin America and Caribbean/L'Amérique latine et Antilles

Natural and Moral History of the Indies by José de Acosta, translated by Frances López-Morillas, edited by Jane E. Mangan, with an introduction and commentary by Walter D. Mignolo. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002. xxii, 535 pp. \$74.95 US (cloth).

Duke University Press, under the stewardship of Valerie Millholland, has for many years been producing books on Latin America that have set standards of scholarly excellence few publishing houses have been able to match. To its credit, Duke remains one of only a handful of university presses prepared to take on not only innovative work in English but also to make available landmark contributions originally written in other languages. The series "Latin America in Translation" is an integral part of Duke's pedagogic mission, a subset of which is dedicated to "Chronicles of New World Encounter." Under that rubric we now have a new edition of José de Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, the first to appear in English in centuries, skilfully translated by Frances López-Morillas and adroitly edited by Jane E. Mangan. The book, in truth, is a marvel to behold.

Acosta (1540-1600) left Spain in 1571 for Peru, where from 1572 to 1586 he served the Jesuit Order and the Spanish Crown as a missionary whose calling saw him become acquainted first-hand with much of the Andean world. This experience presented Acosta, as Walter D. Mignolo points out in his Introduction, with an opportunity "to make sense of the novelty of lands, people,

religious practices, and methods of social organization that had been unknown to the Greek philosophers, Latin rhetoricians, and Christian theologians" (p. xx) who constituted the theoretical bases of Acosta's education. Entanglement in an Inquisition trial that resulted in two of his fellow Jesuits being sentenced to death led Acosta to request a transfer back to Spain. On the journey home he stopped over in Mexico for about a year, adding an all-important Mesoamerican dimension to his travels.

While no Sahagún or Durán, missionaries in Mexico more disposed to studying native culture in depth and with tempered empathy, Acosta was savvy enough to make sure he either read what others better versed than he had written on the subject or searched them out for consultation. In this regard he was strongly influenced, in Peru, by Juan Polo de Ongdegardo and, in Mexico, by Juan de Tovar. Acosta also likely had access to the natural history writings of Francisco Hernández. His genius, however, lay in his ability to synthesize and to contemplate the big picture. He was thus able to piece together a grand exposition that was uniquely his own. "It was the breadth of his observations," Mangan comments in one of her informative notes, "that propelled Acosta's imagination of the Indies to a comparative scope and pushed him to devise his structure of comparative ethnology of native peoples in the Americas, arguably the most novel contribution of the work" (p. 11, note 2). Scholars throughout Europe were impressed. After publication in Spanish in 1590, Acosta's *Natural and Moral History* was soon translated into Italian, French, English, Dutch, and Latin, the last language being the one in which Acosta wrote the first two of his seven substantial chapters.

Acosta prefaces his explanation of the New World and its inhabitants by stating "hitherto I have seen no author who deals with the causes and reasons for those new things and natural wonders, nor has any made a discourse and investigation of these matters" (p. 8). Rationalizing carefully within parameters that the Inquisition would find acceptable, Acosta managed to come up with ideas that not only challenged the thinking of his age but also pre-empted that of later times and discoveries. Consider, for example, his speculations about how the Americas came to be settled by humans in the first instance (pp. 63-64):

The argument that I have pursued leads me to a great conjecture, that the new world that we call the Indies is not completely divided and separated from the other world. And, to state my opinion, I came to the conclusion some time ago that one part of the earth and the other must join or continue, or at least that they come very close . . . [T]here is no certainty that things are otherwise, for toward the Arctic or North Pole the whole longitude of the earth has not been discovered and there are many who affirm that above Florida the land runs very far in a northerly direction . . . Others add that a ship has sailed there and state that the sailors had seen the coast of Newfoundland running almost to the ends of Europe . . . Therefore there is no reason or experience to contradict my conjecture or opinion

that the whole earth must join and connect somewhere or at least that the parts are very close. If this is true, as indeed it appears to me to be, there is an easy answer for the difficult problem that we propounded, how the first dwellers of the Indies crossed over to them, for then we would have say that they crossed not by sailing on the sea but by walking on land. And they followed this way quite unthinkingly, changing places and lands little by little, with some of them settling in the lands already discovered and others seeking new ones, so that in the course of time they arrived and swelled the lands of the Indies with many nations and peoples and languages.

Acosta in his own words (technically those of López-Morillas) is a delight to read, whether musing light years ahead of his time about passage across the Bering Strait, holding forth on the features of the Torrid Zone, volcanoes, earthquakes, gold, silver, emeralds, pearls, cacao, coca, chile, indigo, balsam, flowers, animals, and birds, or discussing the cultural history of Peru and Mexico. He is also willing to express a controversial view and to marshal evidence to defend it; Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, for example, Acosta regards as "a writer worthy of belief" (p. 443), even though many of Acosta's contemporaries, and several present-day commentators, would vehemently disagree.

If, indeed, as Professor Mignolo likes to imagine, some "curious and inquisitive undergraduates" (p. 451) are drawn to Acosta's great work, my hunch is that they will find Mignolo's Commentary (pp. 451-523) convoluted and heavy going. Others more attuned to postmodern reflection may not. Father Joseph's text, however, will endure any passing trend in literary criticism and be there, at the end of the day, to be read, appreciated, and referenced often.

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State Building and Political Movements in Argentina, 1860-1916, by David Rock. Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2002. x, 316 pp. \$65.00 US (cloth).

This book is an excellent historical synthesis of a period of tremendous political turmoil and change. David Rock is concerned with state building in Argentina — the transition from a period of disorder and civil war at mid-century to one of a strong centralized state at the turn of the century. The author highlights a crucial paradox that guided the liberal leaders who envisioned and built the nation state from the 1830s through the 1870s: "although they were willing to use force to achieve their objectives, they aspired to a state in order to minimize force in the future (p. 216)." The politics and ideals of Juan Alberdi and Domingo Sarmiento, among others, reflected French liberalism at the time of the French Revolution of July 1830. These men emphasized property rights and personal freedoms, both

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