
RICHARD HOGAN
Purdue University
boganr@purdue.edu

John Walton excavates the history of Monterey, California, from the Spanish mission to Cannery Row, searching for stories of forgotten people and events and for an explanation of why and how persons, places, and events are preserved or ignored in popular historical narrative. Walton presents Monterey history as a contested terrain of events and of stories about those events. The persons whose stories he uncovers defended conflicting interests that shaped the events that characterize the historical narrative. Equally important, the narratives offered by contemporaries were similarly rooted in conflicting interests. Thus both the events and the stories of those events were contested by more or less organized interests that were more or less successful in achieving their goals, in fact and in narrative history.

Walton argues that narratives are constructions of the past that frame a plan for the future. They are successful to the extent that they represent actors with sufficient institutional power and organization to oppose competing claimants. Less successful interests, less developed plots, or stories of the past that lack a plan for the future are distinguished as “counter-memories.” The untold stories or missing voices are identified as “silenced groups.” In these terms Walton characterizes each period in the history of Monterey and titles a chapter for each: Spanish Colonial (1770–1821), Mexican Territory (1821–1846), American Settlement (1846–1900), Industrial Community (1900–1950), and Contemporary Society (1950–present). Within each chapter he provides a narrative history of the major actors, interests, and events, and then concludes by analyzing competing narratives of the period.

The competing interests of church and state, for example, characterize the Spanish colonial period (1770–1821). In fact, conflicting class, race, and gender interests, largely ignored in accounts from the period, characterize the colonial experience of both church and state and prove invaluable in explaining the demise of the Spanish empire in California. The Spanish mission but not the Spanish state survived into Mexican Territory period (1821–1846). At this point, however, the conflicts between Indian laborers and their mission masters and between the church and state were dwarfed by the demands of local commercial and landed interests who viewed both the church and the state as potential threats to local prosperity. Once these foes were vanquished, however, in the revolutionary struggles of 1836 and 1846, the Californio interest in local autonomy was threatened by the Yankee interest in free enterprise, as indicated in the struggles between squatters and property owners in the American settlement period (1846–1900).

By this time, the mission narrative had disappeared. In fact, the mission narrative had appeared in the Mexican Territory only as a counter-memory. The Yankee narrative had presented California as a land of considerable resources that the Californios (like the Spanish and the mission Indians) were morally or constitutionally incapable of exploiting. The Californio narrative, however, had defended the locals in their struggle against the abuses of Mexican or Spanish misrule. Thus as the Californio and Yankee interests displaced the missionary and Spanish interests, in the events of 1836 and 1846, they reconstructed the narratives of the Spanish state and the Catholic Missionary Church. In a similar vein, the Californio narrative became a counter-memory in the American settlement period (1846–1900), when the Yankee narrative was reconstructed as American progress.

Narratives are not simply discarded within three generations, however, as hegemonic meaning systems are first reconstructed and then forgotten. Usually, there are competing narratives rather than a single approved account. Also, long since forgotten actors and epochs are sometimes revived in new narratives or counter-memories. In the industrial community of 1900 to 1950, for example, a
version of the colonial state narrative was reconstructed as Spanish romance, in competition with the working class (Cannery Row) narrative. In contemporary society, a version of the mission story was rediscovered in the heritage narrative, and the Native American, who consistently had been a missing voice, was resurrected as a counter-memory in the service of an environmental narrative that romanticized the primitive life in harmony with nature.

This is a fascinating story of what happened to the capital of Spanish Alta California, told by a master story-teller. Embedded within this story, however, is a theory of history as contested terrain that effectively responds to the challenge of critical and postmodern theory by linking events and the stories told of those events to actors and interests who make their own history, but not of whole cloth. Walton’s story, like all narratives, represents a collective interest, of course, in presenting social history as the product of social movements. All those interested in social movements, social history, and social change should take note. Here is a new paradigm for community studies.


JON C. TEAFORD Purdue University

During the 1960s and early 1970s, many planners believed that suburban new towns were the hope of the future. These carefully conceived communities on the metropolitan fringe supposedly would provide an admirable alternative to the decayed, obsolete central cities and the sprawling ugliness and social fragmentation of suburbia. In Suburban Alchemy, Nicholas Dagen Bloom examines what happened to these dream communities. Largely ignoring the failed schemes subsidized by the federal government under Title VII of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1970, Bloom focuses on the more successful private efforts, specifically recording the fate of Reston, Virginia, Columbia, Maryland, and Irvine, California. After falling out of fashion in the late 1970s, these new towns attracted little national attention. By turning the attention of urban scholars back to these once vaunted communities, Bloom performs a valuable service. Given the plethora of panaceas littering the path of twentieth-century metropolitan history, it is useful to consider what happened to one of the most highly regarded proposals and why its supporters failed to transform American life.

Bloom begins by reviewing the planning and design of each of the three communities. Both Reston and Columbia were the creations of wealthy, idealistic developers who sought to build carefully planned communities that maintained architectural, environmental, and social standards alien to suburban subdivisions. New York real estate titan Robert Simon was the founding father of Reston, which he envisioned as a collection of seven villages on 6,800 acres of northern Virginia. A number of lakes, golf courses, and wooded areas offered ample open space, and walkways linked the villages. Moreover, the first village constructed included a high-rise apartment building and modernist town houses as well as an architecturally innovative shopping area around a semicircular plaza. It was a far cry from the rows of neocolonial single-family dwellings so characteristic of suburbia. Similarly, Columbia’s developer James Rouse emphasized the preservation of open space and the creation of individual villages intended to instill a sense of community that often seemed missing in the standard suburban subdivision. In addition, both Rouse and Simon intended to foster a degree of diversity unusual in suburban communities. Reston and Columbia were planned to accommodate industry as well as residences and attract blacks as well as whites and the poor as well as the affluent. Irvine was the creation of the Irvine Company, a corporation with less idealistic goals but that also sought to fashion a model community of businesses as well as homes.

In the course of his study, Bloom examines the civic activism, social heterogeneity, and cultural advantages of these communities. He claims that each new town did foster an unusual degree of civic life, with festivals, parades, and other communal events enriching the community life. He also demonstrates that Reston and Columbia achieved a level of