

## **UC Merced**

### **TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World**

#### **Title**

Camps, Martín, ed. Dialogues of the Delta: Approaches to the City of Stockton. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. Print. 235 pp.

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/81j8b7mj>

#### **Journal**

TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World, 8(4)

#### **ISSN**

2154-1353

#### **Author**

Castañeda, Christopher J

#### **Publication Date**

2018

#### **DOI**

10.5070/T484042053

#### **Copyright Information**

Copyright 2018 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Camps, Martín, ed. *Dialogues of the Delta: Approaches to the City of Stockton*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. Print. 235 pp.

---

CHRISTOPHER J. CASTAÑEDA  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

Located in California's Central Valley, the city of Stockton provides an excellent case study of a mid-size highly diverse urban area in a state otherwise dominated by well-known coastal metropolises. The collection of essays in this book therefore reflects some of Stockton's unique and important economic, social, cultural and, historical attributes. The origin of this collection is straightforward: Dr. Martín Camps, Professor of Spanish and Director of the Latin American Studies program at the University of the Pacific, arrived in the city several years ago and desired to contribute, if not invigorate, the ongoing dialogue about the city, its development and ongoing challenges. He issued a call for papers and published eleven of them in this volume. As a group, the essays represent a well-rounded if not highly varied, interdisciplinary and insightful perspective on a variety of issues that continue to impact the city and its place in the region.

Stockton was established in 1849 immediately following the Mexican-American War and during the initial excitement of the California Gold Rush. The new town was established by Charles Maria Weber and named in honor of Commodore Robert Field Stockton (1795-1886) who had an impressive military and political career; he served in the U.S. Navy and in California during the Mexican-American War. After the war, he returned to New Jersey and engaged in other business and political activities; he also served as U.S. Senator representing New Jersey (1851-53). Interestingly, Stockton became California's first city with a non-Spanish origin name, but its history is rich in ethnic and cultural diversity. Editor Camps notes that while this collection is not, and could not be, fully comprehensive, it provides a framework and suggestions for further study.

This anthology is divided into four thematic sections comprised of chapters written on a variety of topics that relate to Stockton, its history and contemporary issues. In order, these sections are titled: "Political, Economic and Business Approaches," "Sociological Approaches," "Historical Approaches," and "Literary and Artistic Connections." The first section begins with a chapter by Robert Benedetti that in some respects establishes the overall tone for the book. Benedetti examines Stockton's economy during the last fifty years, leading to the recent municipal bankruptcy filing during 2012. Benedetti determines that Stockton's fall into bankruptcy was exacerbated by three unique

conditions. In short, the city had developed a co-dependent relationship with both San Francisco and San Jose, and during the economic downturn following 2008, Stockton was left without sufficient economic resources of its own when the larger coastal cities retrenched while facing their own financial difficulties. In addition, statewide policies – including but not only Proposition 13 – put increased financial pressure on the city’s resources. And, finally, Benedetti points to a general lack of adequate planning as well as political divisiveness that contributed to Stockton's efforts to emerge from economic and other urban difficulties.

Benedetti’s chapter is followed by an environmental perspective authored by Jeffrey Michael and Thomas Pogue. Michael and Pogue examine Stockton’s place in the historical development of the Sacramento - San Joaquin Delta region. Focusing on more recent history, they cover the development of the regional levee system in relation to the surrounding agricultural area and plans, including the proposed “WaterFix” system, to secure a stable and environmentally sensitive water supply for the entire region. The final chapter in part I by Sacha Joseph-Mathews focuses on the innovative PUENTES program that seeks to address the ongoing food security issues facing Stockton and the surrounding area. An impressive group of local and regional partners have pro-actively engaged in the complicated and essential dynamic of community food production and distribution. This essay describes their efforts to provide means to make accessible fresh food, particularly in low-income communities.

Part II, “Sociological Approaches,” is thematically more cohesive and begins with Susan E. Mannon’s chapter that carefully analyzes Stockton’s historical demographics. She notes that this city in 2010 had a racial-ethnic composition of 21% Asian, 12% Black, 40% Hispanic, and 23% White (with 4% “other”) that speaks to “such astounding racial-ethnic diversity that it might be seen as a microcosm of the larger story of racial formation, international migration, and racial-ethnic inequality in America.” (p. 83). Next, Marcia Hernandez’s chapter is a self-described autoethnography that describes her own experiences dealing with the academic job market, accepting a position at the University of Pacific in Stockton, weathering the economic downturn that followed the 2008 recession, and watching as Stockton appears to be making an economic comeback in recent years.

The final chapter in this section by Alison Hope Alkon and Dena Vang explore the ethnic diversity and food practices associated with Stockton’s Farmer’s Market. Continuing the theme of the importance of recognizing the value of different cultural practices within a community, the authors note that “...the Stockton Farmer’s market can help scholars to think through the intersections

between culture(s) and alternative food systems.” (p. 128). Alkon and Vang further remind the reader that ethnic diversity includes all ethnicities.

The book’s third section consists of three chapters that examine historical approaches for better understanding Stockton. The first essay by María de Jesús Duarte explores the powerful influence of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the Mexican community in Stockton. After reviewing the apparition’s historical background, Duarte focuses on the decisive role that the women of the Asociación Guadalupana of St. Mary’s Church have played in both revitalizing local devotion to the apparition while simultaneously contributing to the community building process, particularly among Mexican immigrants and their descendants.

The following chapter by Johanna Bakmas and Jennifer Helgren describes a fascinating episode during World War II when students at Stockton High School participated in the Schools at War program. During the entirety of the program Stockton High School students purchased an impressive number of jeeps: 275. Each of the jeeps had a plaque that identified the program responsible for its purchase. Bakmas and Helgren then examined the more than two hundred letters written by soldiers who had experiences related to these jeeps, thereby making connections between the High School students wartime fundraising and war time experiences.

The final chapter in this section by Mike Wurtz examines Stockton’s history through the collections of the Holt-Atherton Special Collections and University Archives at the University of the Pacific. His essay focuses on the ways in which the collections chronicle Stockton’s vast cultural diversity. Beginning with the Stockton State Hospital that was established during the Gold Rush he then describes parts of the collections relating to African Americans, Japanese American, Sikh community and Chinese residents. He also discusses the University itself which in 1869 became California’s first co-educational university.

The final section of *Dialogues on the Delta* is devoted to Stockton’s literary and artistic connections. Traci Roberts-Camps traces the biographical and literary history of Elena Poniatowska who was born in Paris and spent most of her life in Mexico. Connected to Stockton through her paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Sperry Crocker who had been born in Stockton and later married the son of Charles Crocker, one of the "Big Four" of the Transcontinental Railroad fame. Roberts-Camps’ essay then provides an overview of Poniatowska’s work, her adoption of a Mexican identity and her literary work that was heavily influenced with a social justice orientation.

The books’ final chapter by Martín Camps explores the life and artistic career of Martín Ramírez. Born in Mexico during 1895, Ramírez came to Stockton during the 1920s and was later

admitted to the Stockton State Hospital where he was treated for chronic depression and catatonic schizophrenia. He made wonderful drawings and collages that reflected both his surroundings and his heritage. Camps carefully examines Ramírez's art in relation to his cultural background, life experiences and ongoing and ultimately permanent hospitalization.

Although there is no concluding chapter to this eclectic collection of essays, the book's introduction includes a final paragraph that states "...this collection of essays provides insights into a vital city in the Central Valley of California...." (xii) This is certainly true, but Stockton's difficult financial predicament and often reported crime problem has tended to overshadow its fascinating and culturally diverse history. Along the same lines, I agree with Camps when he writes in the introduction that it is his hope that "this book may incite further studies" about Stockton and its region (vii).

This collection is the result of an effort to begin that process (although an index would be helpful to researchers interested in looking up particular topics in the chapters). In moving forward, future work can certainly build on the wonderful platform that these essays have established for developing a more complete and in-depth understanding of Stockton's history and place in California. Indeed, many of the chapters in this anthology could be expanded into monographs that interrogate a variety of topics such as Stockton's diverse ethnic communities, farm worker history, State Hospital, and cultural contributions. The authors have done an admirable job in bringing together in one book a fascinating and multidisciplinary study of one of California's least studied cities.