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Cartography of Power
The Politics of Cartography, Geography and Discovery in Hapsburg Spain
By Joshua Lourence

This paper will demonstrate that the Spanish State tried to monopolize information about the western hemisphere. Spain attempted to control information by first gathering empirical observations through surveys and expeditions. Skilled artisans and thinkers from Spain and abroad improved how these observations were processed in newly developed institutions like the House of Trade and the Council of the Indies on the behalf of Spain. The state also controlled access to cartographic knowledge through attempting to censor sources of information that mentioned the Americas. Rival European states attributed their self-perceptions of imperial inferiority to Spain's allegedly superior knowledge of Atlantic navigation and American geography. For its own part, Spain created maps that reckoned the world in accordance with their own interests, which in turn affected how other Europeans viewed the Americas. All of this activity relating to information reveals the central role that accurate information plays in the project of empire.