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The Man from the Rio Grande: A Biography of Harry Love,
Leader of the California Rangers Who Tracked Down Joaquin
Murrieta (review)

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The Man from the Rio Grande: A Biography of Harry Love, Leader of the California Rangers Who Tracked Down Joaquin Murrieta. By William B. Secrest. (Spokane, Wash.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2005. Pp. 304. Acknowledgments, illustrations, maps, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0870623281. \$34.50, cloth.)

The Man from the Rio Grande by William Secrest chronicles the life of Mexican War veteran and California Ranger Harry Love. Love is most known for his pursuit of the infamous bandit Joaquin Murrieta in California. The author contends that while scholars have learned more about Murrieta and have offered newer interpretations regarding him, they have often mistreated Love's role in Murrieta's fall or have ignored him altogether. He further argues that Love is an important figure whose legend extends beyond his involvement in the hunting down of Murrieta.

Although he receives greater prominence in California, the story of Harry Love, according to Secrest, really begins along the Texas-Mexico border during the Mexican War. During the war the army commissioned Love as a courier and express rider. According to Secrest, Love garnered admiration from his superiors. The army trusted Love with an important expedition along the Rio Grande in 1850, but gold soon lured Love to California.

During this time, as the book asserts, Murrieta was establishing himself as one of the most notorious bandits that California and the West would ever see. Stealing and killing at a feverish pace, Murrieta and his gang claimed whites and Chinese as their victims. Secrest states it did not take Love long to realize that there was a crime problem in California and he soon shifted his attention from gold prospecting to bringing the state's most dangerous killers to justice. Secrest argues that it is because of Murrieta that Love argues for the formation of the California Rangers—which of course led to the capture and death of Murrieta and his henchmen. The book dismisses all notions that Love and his rangers did not kill Murrieta as an attempt at legend building in the Mexican American community.

Perhaps the largest source of controversy stems from Love detaching Murrieta's head from his body. Although some during the time and in the many years to come saw this decapitation as an act of brutality, Secrest counters that it was common to use a head as means of identification. The Murrieta affair, according to the author, was the last mark of greatness for Love. Soon thereafter Love married an older woman who Secrest deemed as cold, calculating, and manipulative. His attempt at running a sawmill failed as a flood soaked the region. Love's marriage ended in a bitter divorce, and when he tried to make amends he received a severe gun wound and died from medical complications.

No book is without shortcomings and *The Man from the Rio Grande* is riddled with problems—the most critical of them being the lack of sources. The author relies primarily on newspaper articles—most of which are secondhand accounts of events. He seemed unable to acquire many sources from Love himself. An essential ingredient of almost any modern biography is material from the central person of the story. Moreover, he offers a mere two pages on Love's childhood and his life before the Mexican War. Limited sources on Love apparently forced

Secrest to concentrate more on Murrieta than he perhaps had planned. Curiously enough, Secrest decides to close the book—a biography on Harry Love—by devoting several pages to a woman who purported herself to be Murrieta's widow.

What the book lacks in written sources pertaining to Love, it does to some extent make up for in other ways. Secrest provides the reader with many maps and illustrations—mostly of California, with a few relating to Texas. Also, Secrest appears to be quite knowledgeable of the regions that he discusses. Thus, while *The Man from the Rio Grande* fails to emerge Harry Love from the looming shadow of Joaquin Murrieta, it is successful in conveying an American West that is beautiful, violent, and unrefined.

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Old Las Vegas: Hispanic Memories from the New Mexico Meadowlands. By Nasario García. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005. Pp. 318. ISBN 0896725391. \$34.95, cloth.)

Nasario García is the preeminent editor and translator of oral histories of rural New Mexicans. He has made it his life's work to preserve the experiences of the *viejitos* (old ones) and often references his own childhood in Ojo del Padre, New Mexico. He wistfully states, "Each time a *viejito* or *viejita* dies, a portion of our cultural and linguistic soul is interred with them." García has compiled their stories in several volumes since 1992, including voices of grandparents, his father, Hispanic men and women, and a compilation of their *chistes* (jokes). Joining this body of work are these voices of the *viejitos* of Las Vegas, New Mexico, in San Miguel County.

Las vegas means the meadows, and the city by the same name is sixty miles due east of Santa Fe. It is a 123-year-old town that has 918 buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. It was a stopover for explorer Coronado; the traders on the Santa Fe Trail; the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad; and a magnet for famous ne'er-do-wells like Billy the Kid and Jesse James.

Twenty voices remember the lifestyle of the last generation of sheepherders, ranchers, homesteaders, and villagers. They speak with nostalgia and humor about relatives, education, witchcraft, religion, and politics. They have names of another era: Filemón, Cesaría, Isabel (a man), and more. The elders' accounts have the flavor of a grandparent musing about one thing or another on the porch on a hot summer night. They talk of poverty, pranks, and evil spirits. They had little or no education and rarely traveled farther than Colorado or Texas. Yet they were made of tougher stuff than those of us who have lived softer lives with more possessions and less injustice. And funnier.

The book is bilingual with a glossary comparing English, Spanish, and colloquialisms. The last chapter is "Folk Sayings and Riddles," and I end this review with an *adivinanza* by teacher Elba C. de Baca:

A tiny little box

As white as can be