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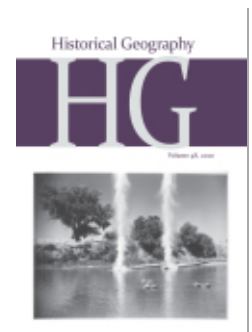
Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake by Paul Musselwhite (review)

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der is actually created and made physical. It also illustrates the assumed power of the “visual,” both in terms of the monuments themselves and the official use of photographic records to check and support border location claims. But Morrissey takes the analysis further and compares images taken by the Mexican section photographers with those by the American photographers, giving a thoughtful account of the differences of perspective—a fascinatingly humanistic interpretation of this often (inter-)nationalized, abstracted political space.

Collection chapters such as these demonstrate the geographical relevance of the visual approach to examining a borderland. And the power of geography and the “visual” in tandem for spurring meaningful interdisciplinary work is laid out here clearly to see. The book offers a valuable taste of the kinds of work that can be done with this topic and this approach—and the only critique would be that there is surely room for even more interpretive essays on similar topics in this collection. This book takes a political construction, a border, and vividly reminds us, through the visual and artistic frames, of its physical creation and form, and its symbolic power. This integration is so apt for something that is both a political weapon and an everyday human structure, as a border so manifestly can be. And while this interdisciplinary and multilevel approach shares the visual as a topic, the very structure of the book—with its “conversational” essays and open-minded spirit—echoes that same sense of meaningful and necessary cross-disciplinary engagement. This book is of clear interest to anyone wishing to learn more about US-Mexico border and borderland history, to the way it has been represented and created, and to those seeking a transformative way of doing and presenting history.

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Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake. Paul Musselwhite. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. xii+341 maps, illustrations, notes. \$50.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-0-226-58528-4.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the wider Chesapeake Bay region was full of plantation landscapes. Few cities, however, dotted

this overwhelmingly rural world. The conventional historiography of the Chesapeake suggests that the dual factors of plantation agriculture and physical geography limited urban growth, as nearby rivers allowed for planters to export their product without the need for city-based economic services. A plantation-dominated Chesapeake was viewed as destined to remain rural, and even Thomas Jefferson argued that nature itself dictated the lack of towns in the region. However, this view erases the historical fact that Chesapeake residents both understood their own region's rurality and anticipated eventual city growth. In *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake*, Paul Musselwhite contests the dominant theme of the rural historic Chesapeake Bay region, what Musselwhite calls the "artificial belief in the incompatibility between plantations and cities" (3). Instead, he notes that while ultimately unsuccessful, Chesapeake urbanization incorporated wide-ranging experimentation in city building and deep debates over the very necessity of cities themselves.

The book's seven major chapters are arranged chronologically, with each section centering on a particular time period that experienced the possibility of urban growth, such as the early decades of the Virginia Company or the Restoration era. Each chapter addresses the contemporary debates surrounding urbanization, as well as the resulting failures of urban development in that era. An epilogue describes contested urban development in the years immediately after the American Revolution. Throughout *Urban Dreams*, the author delivers an efficient discussion of the rural Chesapeake—a region whose lack of towns differentiated it from other English colonial domains in North America.

Multiple parts of this book deserve additional recommendation. Of particular note is Musselwhite's superior quality of research. Part historical narrative, part historical geography, and part historical analysis, *Urban Dreams* centers on a well-researched argument, drawing from a seemingly endless number of archival sources housed on both sides of the Atlantic. Personal papers, government documents, and business records result in a full sixty pages of footnotes covering nearly two centuries of Chesapeake history. Several maps representing plantation sites are also effective.

This well-sourced history gives more credence to Musselwhite's narratives of different key players' motivations in plans for the urban

Chesapeake, including the “intense contemporary concern” of Chesapeake residents over expected urban development (8). To use one chapter as an example, “Towns, Improvements, and the Contest for Authority in the 1680s” weaves a successful treatment of plans for regional reform in the years after Bacon’s Rebellion. The different points of view in this chapter include the positions of the English Crown and the Stuart court, the Virginia House of Burgesses, local county government officials, and Chesapeake Bay planters. Was a city primarily a civic institution or an economic engine? At times, different regional stakeholders had conflicting answers to that question.

Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth is one volume in “American Beginnings, 1500–1900,” a series of seventeen books on American history published by the University of Chicago Press. However, this text is important not only to historians but also to urban and economic scholars alike. *Urban Dreams* appears at the end of a recent period with renewed focus on the historical Chesapeake, in texts such as Jean Russo and J. Elliot Russo’s *Planting an Empire: The Early Chesapeake in British North America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). The rurality of the pre-European Chesapeake was explored in James Rice’s 2009 work, *Nature and History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson* (John Hopkins University Press). *Virginia 1619: Slavery and Freedom in the Making of English America* is a 2019 volume edited by Paul Musselwhite, Peter Mancall, and James Horn exploring society building of the colonial Chesapeake (University of North Carolina Press). Older studies such as the 1991 volume *Robert Cole’s World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* (University of North Carolina Press) by Lois Carr, Russell Menard, and Lorena Walsh, as well as Alan Kulikoff’s 1986 book, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (University of North Carolina Press) also hold value.

In the introduction the author noted the existence of several dynamic urban landscapes among plantation regions in the British Western Hemisphere, such as Kingston, Jamaica, and Charleston, South Carolina. These near-plantation cities existed in stark divergence from a Chesapeake Bay region nearly defined by its “absence of towns” (1). Perhaps a more detailed exploration of why these other city locations did endure as metropolises would be useful as a comparison to the sluggish urban settings of the Chesapeake. However, these are minor

critiques and likely beyond the geographic scope of this book. As the author noted, “this story of plantations and cities is a Chesapeake story” (4).

In the introduction the author argues that the intense rurality of the historic Chesapeake Bay region was not some preordained system, inevitable as a product of slave-based plantation agriculture or Tidewater river geography. While Thomas Jefferson had proclaimed that nature was the guiding hand for the rural Chesapeake, Paul Musselwhite has definitively answered with a broader view of history in *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth*. In the end it was the historic Chesapeake Bay region’s “persistent self-conscious debates about cities” that made the region stand apart (8). This book is an inspired addition to the field of historical geography.

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The Limits of Liberty: Mobility and the Making of the Eastern U.S.-Mexico Border. James David Nichols. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. Pp. xv+287, photographs, maps, notes, index. \$60.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-1-4962-0579-7.

Opposition to licit and illicit flows of people and commodities from Mexico has been a long-standing feature of American political discourse. The most recent addition to this discourse is the idea of building a wall across the entire US-Mexico border to visibly distinguish “them” from “us.” Despite its literal and figurative divisiveness, the idea of a wall displays considerable continuity with two centuries of US-Mexico relations. These have been characterized by near-constant coercive attempts to make a border, and subversive attempts to cross it. James David Nichols, historian at the City University of New York at Queensborough, skillfully outlines the early part of this process in *The Limits of Liberty: Mobility and the Making of the Eastern U.S.-Mexico Border*.

Long before a wall was even a discursive possibility, the area bounded by the Gulf of Mexico, the Nueces River, the Rio Grande’s Big Bend, and the Mexican cities of Monclova, Monterrey, and Ciudad Victoria was a