

*Sunshine/Noir: Writing from San Diego and Tijuana*. Edited by Jim Miller. San Diego: San Diego City Works Press, 2005. Photographs and illustrations. 220pp. \$12.95 paper.

Reviewed by Lupe García, Doctoral Candidate, Department of History, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Jim Miller has compiled a selection of short fiction, essays, and poems that reveal both the pitfalls and possibilities present in the city of San Diego. The collection also contains photographs and artwork that like the writing itself highlight the diversity of experience among the contributors. Different viewpoints (some of which are inspiring and others of which are thought-provoking and/or powerfully disturbing) reflect the transformations that have taken place in the city and communities of the San Diego region. The title of the book, *Sunshine/Noir*, alludes precisely to the range of diversity and contradictions found in a city whose identity has all too-often been oversimplified into that of the theme-park metropolis of perpetual sunshine. It must be mentioned, however, that the subtitle is misleading, as many of the selections in the book tend to be from North American authors with North American perspectives. The selection of material from the Tijuana side of the U.S.-Mexico border is minimal, and selections by Latinos are few.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section, “Border Crossings,” speaks to the variety of transgressions—social, political, and geographic—that occur daily in San Diego. The short story written by Jimmy Santiago Baca demonstrates that love and desire (including the desire for the other and the desire for whiteness) can often be a reflection of unequal power dynamics, in this case those created by the political border that separates San Diego from Tijuana. In a different take on the same theme of “border crossings,” the essay by Mark Dery illustrates the different ways in which one may cross borders in San Diego. In

"Loving the Alien: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Became Californian," Dery describes his and his family's adjustment to San Diego after leaving New England, drawing a parallel between his experiences and those of other, more well-known Southern California transplants such as Ray Bradbury and Walt Disney. Dery's essay points out the physical imprint that transplants to San Diego left on the city during San Diego's initial real estate boom.

The next section, entitled "Memory and Ash," reveals a similar nostalgia as that experienced by the transplants in Dery's essay. The essay by Matthew Bokovoy, for example, evokes a yearning for a long-lost San Diego that is also echoed in the short story by Ed James (in the final section of the book, entitled "Where We Live Now"). Unlike in Dery's essay, however, the San Diego which Bokovoy and James imagine is one that functioned as the natural environment for groups of residents that have become outcasts in a city continually undergoing a process of transformation. By and large, contributions in this section illustrate the extent to which memory—that all too often unreliable agent of our imagination—redefines the places we inhabit and, when juxtaposed with different versions of our own stories, helps reveal the many layers of our environment. It is in this section as well that Mike Davis presents a short essay that discusses another (albeit modern) signifier of the Southern California city: fire. Davis uses the brushfire outbreaks that sometimes devastate Southern California as a means to discuss the politics behind urbanization in San Diego. Why is it, his essay seems to ask, that in a region with the "luxury" of space, people feel the need to contend with nature in a losing battle for virgin space? With this question, one is brought back to Dery's recollection of the eastern San Diego border that is now disappearing under the pressures of the real-estate market.

The final two sections of the volume are entitled "Homeland" and "Where We Live Now." The latter is the longest section of the book and the one in which the full realm of San Diego grit and possibility is most visible. The subject of urban growth, gentrification, and the displacement (or lack of place) of individuals who are large in numbers but without cultural or political capital are some of the subjects addressed by contributors Leilani Clark, Marilyn Chin, and Mario Chacon.

The collection foregrounds the literary culture of San Diego. Although the works vary in their levels of success, *Sunshine/Noir* makes a noteworthy contribution to furthering an understanding of San Diego and its diverse communities. This volume is useful to individuals interested in San Diego history and popular culture as well as urban history in general.