


# California Dreamin': Enlightened Utopias and Politics in Eighteenth-Century New Spain



Latin American and Latino Studies | Post-Sabbatical Talk

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**NEW DATE**

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Wednesday, November 8 at 4:10pm—Roemmele Global Commons, Williams Hall

Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, Spain claimed sovereignty over California. Two hundred years later, however, and excluding sixteen Jesuit missionaries and a few supporting settlers, the Spanish presence in this vast territory of northwestern New Spain was practically non-existent. This changed in the 1760s, when two competing visions of California emerged. One portrayed it as the “Ophir of the Americas,” a mythical port in the Bible, famed for its riches. The other vision claimed California was hell on earth. José de Gálvez, an energetic and ambitious king's envoy, went to see it by himself. Historical records housed at the Huntington and Bancroft Libraries in California show that Gálvez's colonization efforts unleashed a heated political debate. This lecture examines the significance of this controversy against the wider context of enlightened reform in the Spanish empire.

María Bárbara Zepeda Cortés earned her doctorate and master's degree in History from the University of California, San Diego, and her bachelor's degree in International Relations from El Colegio de México. She joined Lehigh's Department of History in 2013. She is the author of “Cambios y adaptaciones del nacionalismo puertorriqueño: Del Grito de Lares al Estado Libre Asociado” (Morelia, Mexico: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo-Fundación Vueltabajo-Editorial Morevalladolid, 2015), which reconstructs the history of nationalist movements in Puerto Rico from 1868 to 1952. Zepeda Cortés has presented at conferences in the United States, Mexico, and Spain and she has received a number of research fellowships and awards. Her research and teaching interests focus primarily on politics in Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain, and the early modern Atlantic world; and particularly on political culture, corruption, state reform, political social networks, nationalism and identity formation, and U.S.-Caribbean relations. She is currently working on a second book manuscript based on her doctoral dissertation tentatively titled: “The Politics of Reform: José de Gálvez and the Transformation of the Spanish Empire”.