

The Missions, Culture Shock, and European Invasion

“Before baptism was administered,” writes Edith Buckland Webb, “the Indians were warned that when they had become Christians they would no longer be allowed to roam through the forests, over the hills, or down to the seashore whenever they felt so inclined; they must thenceforth live at the mission. . .”¹

But how could the Indians have understood that, by accepting baptism, they and their children became *perpetual vassals* of the catholic church? And how could the franciscan friars, even if they were fully honest about it, have communicated this stunning information to their first converts? After all, the friars were ignorant of the Indians’ languages; even the christian Indians they had brought with them from Baja California could not, at first, understand them.

If baptized Indians (neophytes) fled the mission and tried to return to their former lives, the Spanish military authorities were obligated, under Spanish law, to track them down and bring them back to the mission. Beneath the outward trappings of voluntary conversion and fatherly love, the Spanish mission was a coercive system. And the California Indians had never before been coerced into changing their way of life.

A New Way of Life...

By baptizing children, the friars enticed their parents to come to the mission and accept baptism. By baptizing a village or tribelet chief, they encouraged the chief's people to become Christians too. Each mission was typically surrounded by scattered Indian villages grouped into various tribelets. So once the friars found success in converting Indians in the fairly wide vicinity of their mission, the mission Indians faced a new living situation: Indians of different tribelets, some of them speaking different languages, now lived together on the mission premises. At mission Carmel near Monterey, Junípero Serra and his successors gathered Indian neophytes from seven Ohlone and Esselen tribelets, who fell into two language groups. At first these two groups set up separate villages attached to the mission, and were reluctant to mix with each other, either in farm work or religious services. By 1814, friar Juan Amorós could report to the Spanish government that the friars "have succeeded in making them associate together."² The missions concentrated the Indian population: Whereas a native village typically included between 30 and 100 people, the mission premises contained an average of 500 to 600 Indians. Mission populations of over 1,000 were common.³

Mission Indians and friars woke shortly after dawn every morning, at the chiming of the mission bells. They assembled at the mission church for prayers and mass, lasting an hour. Meanwhile, Indian women were boiling the breakfast meal in big iron cauldrons in the central square. Breakfast consisted of a porridge of corn, barley or wheat called *atole*, along with hot chocolate.⁴ The friars or their helpers carefully ladled out the hot food to all comers.

Then the major day's work began. The men herded cattle, horses, sheep and goats, and worked with oxen in the grain fields, plowing, sowing and harvesting; during the slack seasons for agriculture, they might concentrate on making adobe bricks from soil mixed with water and straw, molding tiles from clay and firing them in the kiln, sawing logs into beams and rafters, and constructing new mission buildings with the aid of mud plaster.

The women spun and dyed yarn from wool, wove the yarn into fabric on big looms, sewed the fabrics into garments, baked bread, and cooked. They spent a lot more time indoors than the men: While the spinning wheels were light enough to be moved outdoors, the heavy looms confined their women tenders indoors in large workshops, where they had to use many candles to augment the dim natural light

seeping in through small and high windows. Older women had to do a lot of heavy work outdoors: They fetched sand and straw for the male tile-makers, and gathered and carried wood to fuel the fires for the tile kiln, tallow and soap vats, baking oven, and porridge cauldrons.⁵

The morning work shift lasted perhaps four or five hours. At noon the bells rang for lunch, and the Indians assembled for a hot meal from the same cauldrons used at breakfast. The porridge was thicker now, containing not only grain, but also peas, beans, squash, chili, pigs' feet and perhaps beef (this stew was called *pozole*). Then came *siesta*, and work resumed at 2 o'clock. The afternoon shift lasted until 4 or 5 o'clock, and then came the evening prayers, which lasted perhaps an hour. Supper consisted of *atole* as at breakfast, perhaps containing meat. A French explorer visiting mission Carmel in 1786 estimated that the Indians had to do seven hours of work, and two hours of prayer daily. Saturday was sometimes a work day, while Sundays and holidays (of which there were many, given the catholic penchant for patron saints) were days of rest and amusement—following four or five hours of worship.⁶

The Indians were not terribly fond of the food dished out to them in the mission square, and it must have been monotonous eating similar porridge and stew three times every day. But many reports indicate that the friars were usually flexible enough to allow their neophytes to continue drawing on their traditional food sources, and even cultivate some new ones around their family huts. The French explorer La Pérouse reported that Indian women at mission Carmel kept a few chickens around their huts, giving the eggs to their children.⁷ Louis Choris, an artist visiting San Francisco in 1816 as part of a Russian scientific exploration team, reported that two or three mission Indian families lived in a house, around which they kept their own gardens; they grew onions, garlic, pumpkins, cantaloupes, watermelons, and fruit trees, whose products were theirs to eat or trade.⁸ Friar José Señán of mission San Buenaventura (in Chumash territory, near present day Santa Barbara) reported in the early 1800's that, in addition to their weekly beef and grain rations, his neophytes "have in their homes supplies of acorns, chia, seeds, fruits, herbs, and other various wild eatables, all of which they do not overlook, being very fond of them. They also eat fish, mussels, ducks, geese, cranes, quail, hares, squirrels, rats, and other animals which are to be had in abundance. Owing to this hodgepodge of eatables which they have in their homes, and to their being like children who eat at all hours, it is hard to determine how much they eat every day."⁹

In 1815, friar Mariano Payeras of mission La Purísima (also in Chumash territory) noted that his neophytes were out on their annual acorn gathering excursion. In 1819, friar Narciso Durán of mission San José (in Ohlone territory) informed the Spanish governor that all his neophytes were doing likewise. Durán and other friars admitted that the neophytes still preferred their native foods to the mission diet.¹⁰ Especially during times of bad harvests or food supply problems, the friars (no doubt with a heavy heart) let their neophytes roam beyond the mission farm and pasture lands to fish and hunt. The returning neophytes often gave part of their catch to the friars, for them to share out among the mission population or present to guests.

Mission Indian girls, at the age of around eight, had to leave their mothers' home and live in the female dormitory, called the *monjerío* ("nunnery"). They were locked into their secluded sleeping quarters every night, along with widows and even married women whose husbands were on leave from the mission. During the morning, too, they were confined to the dormitory complex with its adjoining workshops and patio. The girls and women worked under the strict supervision of Indian *maestras* (instructresses), who in turn were responsible to the friars. Once the girls had finished their allotted tasks for the day, they were allowed to visit their home village on the mission premises.¹¹ Louis Choris reported in 1816 that the female dormitory at the San Francisco mission housed about 250 girls and women.¹² The girls had to keep living in the dormitory until they got married within the church—which they typically did at an early age, as young as 15.

The Indian boys and unmarried young men had their own dormitory, but it was much less confining: They were not locked in at night, nor were they required to stay inside during the day. The friars supervised the boys, training some of them to become bell ringers, acolytes, choir boys, violin players, pages, or servants. The boys often helped the men in their outdoor work, watching over the crops and yards of drying adobe bricks to scare birds and other animals away. Some boys came under the instruction of christian Indians from Baja California or Hispanic artisans living and working at the mission, and learned to become carpenters, masons, millers, blacksmiths, butchers, leather tanners, saddle makers, cowboys, and/or farmers.¹³

Religious instruction was generally conducted in Spanish. The Spanish monarchy decreed in 1795 that native languages in the empire should be suppressed, and all instruction given in Spanish—overturning the provision of the New Laws of the Indies (issued in 1542) that had directed missionaries to instruct neophytes in their native languages.

Yet the Spanish catholic church leaders still upheld the third provincial council of Lima in 1583, which had directed priests to give all their sermons and religious instruction in the native language, and to receive confession in the people's own languages.¹⁴

The franciscan friars in California, usually inclined to follow church policy in any conflict with state policy, had great difficulty mastering the many languages of their neophytes. In 1817 the catholic *comisario-prefecto*, friar Vicente de Sarría, paid a canonical visit to all the California missions and issued a critical circular to the friars. Reminding them of the language policy decreed by the third council of Lima, Sarría wrote that "it is not enough . . . to give instructions in Spanish and say nothing in the language which the Indians understand. . ."¹⁵ Frederick Beechey, a British explorer visiting the San Francisco mission in 1826, noted that "It is greatly to be regretted that . . . the priests do not interest themselves a little more in the education of their converts, the first step to which would be in making themselves acquainted with the Indian language. Many of the Indians surpass their pastors in this respect, and can speak . . . Spanish . . . , while scarcely one of the padres can make themselves understood by the Indians."¹⁶

To bridge over their language problem, the friars chose talented Indian boys from each language group at their mission, taught them Spanish, instructed them in the ABC's of catholic doctrine and practice, and then used them as interpreters and catechists to lead the neophytes of their group in reciting the doctrine.¹⁷ The friars often taught these exceptional boys to read and write in Spanish and Latin. But for the vast majority of the mission Indians, there was no literacy training in any language.*

*An 1813 questionnaire circulated to all the California missions by the Council of the Indies in Spain asked, among other questions: "Is there any inclination towards reading and writing in their [the Indians'] own languages?" The friars at mission Santa Clara replied: "We observe in the Indians no inclination towards reading or writing. Certainly some of the Indian boys learn how to read with undoubted facility. However, since we missionary fathers are interested only in teaching and explaining the christian doctrine and in having singers and musicians for church functions, we are satisfied with these efforts, taking into account on the other hand the lack of interest on the part of the Indians and the arduous labors in which we are engaged."¹⁸ Note that the friars evaded the issue of literacy training *in the Indians' own languages*, failing to acknowledge that the limited literacy teaching they did was all in Spanish or Latin.

... and New Ways of Death

The missions became breeding grounds for the spread of European diseases among the Indians. Against a backdrop of high death rates and low birth rates at the missions, several epidemics broke out over the 60-year mission period. In 1777, a fatal respiratory disease hit the Ohlone Indians in and around mission Santa Clara, shortly after its founding. In 1802, another respiratory epidemic, probably involving pneumonia, diphtheria and/or pleurisy, ravaged the mission Indians from Carmel to San Luis Obispo. In January 1806, measles erupted at mission San Diego and spread north, reaching mission San Francisco, which was suffering crop failures, by March. At least 1,600 Indians died, including nearly all the children under age ten in some missions.¹⁹ At mission San Francisco alone, more than 300 Indians died in 1806, and at mission Santa Clara, 226 people died of measles: 88 women, 64 men, 36 girls, and 38 boys.²⁰ The average child mortality rate at the California missions in 1806 was 33.5%. Other years of high child mortality were 1799 (26.5%) and 1828 (22%).²¹ Overall through the sixty years of the California mission system, more than half the Indian children born at the mission died before reaching their fifth birthday.²² In 1827-28, measles broke out at mission San Gabriel, spreading south to San Diego and north all the way to mission San Francisco Solano north of the San Francisco bay.

In the face of all the disease and death among the neophytes whom they closely supervised every day, it is remarkable how few of the friars succumbed to those same diseases, and how many of them lived into their 60's and 70's.

The franciscan missionaries were physically tough men. Most of them were born and raised in rural Spain, where infant mortality was high and deadly epidemics rather frequent. They had survived the harsh voyage to Mexico, often enduring hunger and thirst along the way. In Mexico they were exposed to malaria and other tropical diseases. By the time they arrived in California, their immune systems must have been highly developed, protecting them against a wide range of both European and American pathogens.

The California Indian men and women typically had splendid physiques, owing to their active outdoor life of work and play, and their nutritious and varied diet. But they had not been through the kind of harsh selection process that had prepared the friars so well for the conditions of life they were to establish in California. The Indians' geographical isolation had left them unexposed to many contagious diseases brought from Europe.

In the over 60 years of the California mission system—during which nearly 84,000 Indians were baptized—there was very seldom more than one Spanish or Mexican doctor in all of California. In 1773, mission president Junípero Serra wrote to the Spanish viceroy Bucareli in Mexico City, that a new doctor was badly needed in California: A supply ship had delivered a large cargo of medicines, for use both by the Spaniards and mission Indians; but Dr. Prat, who was supposed to instruct the friars on how to use the medicines, had gone insane, so the friars had nothing to go by, except a few do-it-yourself medical manuals written for missionaries.²³ The single doctor was stationed at the Monterey *presidio*, and was thus more available to the Spanish officers than to the mission Indians. Between 1824 and 1829, there was no doctor serving the California missions.

Medical Conditions at the Missions

To be sure, even the finest European doctors in those days were helpless in the face of most infectious diseases. In the absence of doctors to serve the mission Indians, the friars did their best to provide medical care. The college of San Fernando in Mexico City had taught them some rudiments of the healing arts.²⁴ They assembled the medicines they received into pharmacies, and concocted home remedies in an effort to cure their neophytes of a variety of ailments and injuries. They set up infirmaries (misleadingly called “hospitals”), staffed by male nurses they had trained, where ailing neophytes could rest and recuperate. The friars spent a good deal of time personally attending to the patients, providing them extra beef and chicken, and administering the last sacraments if they seemed to be dying.

Carrying out king Carlos 3's campaign to wipe out smallpox throughout the Spanish empire, the friars inoculated their neophytes with smallpox vaccine whenever it was available. Smallpox ravaged the Indians of Baja California through 1781. To prevent it from spreading to Alta California, the military officials and friars quarantined apparent smallpox victims. The friars and their paramedical assistants vaccinated the neophytes with smallpox pus (variolation), and later used the less dangerous cowpox pus, which was brought into medical practice in 1799.²⁵ Through these efforts, they may have succeeded in keeping the smallpox epidemic from reaching Alta California.*

*Rosemary Keupper Valle, in her doctoral dissertation on medicine and health in the California mission system, claims that the Indians of Alta California were saved from smallpox. Many historians and anthropologists have written that smallpox broke out among the California mission Indians; but Valle holds that the primary sources for their writings reported symptoms that correspond far better to *measles* than to smallpox.

Besides measles, syphilis was the most devastating disease suffered by the mission Indians. In 1804, the Spanish doctor based in Monterey, José María Benites, conducted a medical survey of seven missions, and reported that syphilis was the most common and serious disease there.²⁶ In 1815, friar Vicente de Sarría declared in a letter to governor Pablo de Solá that syphilis was destroying the poor neophytes, especially the women.²⁷ Infected women transmitted syphilis to their infants, an alarming number of whom were born dead, or died in their first or second year.²⁸ In 1817, friar Ramón Abella wrote to governor Solá that the Indians at mission San Francisco were so weak from syphilis that they were unable to work.²⁹ Syphilis not only killed its victims directly, but also weakened their resistance to a host of other diseases—whether chronic or epidemic—which became killers as well.*

From the devastating impact that syphilis had on the mission Indians, it is likely that most, if not all of the Indian groups brought into the missions were unexposed to syphilis at the time the Spaniards arrived. The key mode of transmission to the Indian population was the rape of Indian women by Spanish and Mexican soldiers. Then the disease spread swiftly among the mission Indian populations. The concentration of previously isolated Indian groups in the living quarters of the mission premises no doubt widened their network of sexual contacts, despite the friars' attempts to stamp out all but marital sex.

Pregnant women at the missions had practically no medical care beyond that provided by their traditional midwives—assuming the friars were tolerant enough to let the Indian midwives/shamans continue working as before. From their religious standpoint, the friars were more interested in the fetuses than in the women who carried them. In fact, they were under instructions to do everything possible to extricate a fetus from the body of a woman who died during pregnancy. In 1749, king Carlos 3 ordered that a cesarian section be performed on every woman in his empire who died in the later stages

*None of the early European explorers to California mentioned syphilis or symptoms suggesting it among the Indians. On the other hand, a study of human remains excavated at a burial ground near Bodega bay (northwest from San Francisco bay) revealed that several adult skeletons dating roughly 2000-3000 years ago showed lesions suggesting periosteal disease, which in turn might indicate syphilitic infection.³⁰ However, while 7 out of the 17 men's skeletons, and 2 out of the 10 women's skeletons showed such lesions, *none* of the 111 children's skeletons found at the site showed any signs of pathology. And if syphilis had been widespread among adults, it would likely have been passed congenitally to their children. So the syphilis hypothesis from this study seems doubtful.

of pregnancy, in an effort to get the fetus out alive. In his usual thoroughgoing way, king Carlos declared: "... We order that anyone who violates this pragmatic sanction [law]... whether he be a husband, a relative of the pregnant woman or any other person, who... for any reason interferes with the cesarian operation or endangers the fetus, or who maliciously promotes an abortion, be reported as a homicide and be treated as a criminal..."³¹ Viceroy Bucareli introduced this policy into New Spain (Mexico) in 1772. Carlos' policy was cesarian in more ways than one, as he aimed to maximize the number of laborers, soldiers and colonial settlers for his empire. Placing the life of the fetus above the life of the pregnant woman, it meshed with the theology of the franciscans, who were zealous to procure a live birth, baptize the baby, and thus save his or her soul for eternity.

Provided with a manual written by Spanish medical authorities, the friars were instructed to perform the cesarian operation themselves, upon the death of a pregnant woman at their mission. The first such operation was performed by friars José Viader and Josef Viñals at mission Santa Clara in 1799.³² Viader, who served at the mission from 1796 until 1833 and took a keen interest in medicines and the healing arts, proudly recorded in the mission register that the fetus had been extracted from the dead mother's womb, and survived. Only 13 more such cesarian operations were recorded during the remaining 34 years of the California mission system.³³ No doubt the horror of many friars over having to perform the operation, combined with cultural resistance from Indian groups at the missions, kept the policy from being widely carried out.

In 1820, friar Mariano Payeras, writing from mission La Purísima in Chumash territory to his religious superior in Mexico, made a stark assessment of the mission system's impact on the Indians' health: The pagan Indians, "in spite of their hunger (?), their nakedness, and their living completely outdoors almost like beasts," were admittedly healthy and robust. But the mission Indians, "as soon as they confine themselves to a sociable and christian life, become extremely feeble in their health, lose weight, sicken, and die." Payeras went on to blame the Indians themselves, for "not valuing their health as they should."³⁴

Bells of Joy, Bells of Sorrow

The mission population woke daily to the chime of the main bell at sunrise, summoning the neophytes to church and the morning prayers. About an hour later, the bell chimed again for breakfast. After breakfast, the bell called the neophytes to work. The bell chimed again

to announce lunch, the afternoon work shift, the evening prayers at about 5 o'clock, supper at 6 o'clock, and bedtime at 8 o'clock.³⁵

In addition, many mission churches were flanked by pairs of *esquilas*, called "joyous bells" because of their lively resonance when rotated by hand, up, down and around the horizontal bars on which they were mounted. Indian boys loved to clamber up the mission church edifice and ring these special bells, and they were instructed to do so on joyous and festive occasions: the arrival of a supply ship or party of colonists, the visit of a friar from another mission, and the baptism of a baby. The joyous bells were also rung when a baby *died*: The bereaved parents were congratulated, for they now "had an angel in heaven."³⁶

The mission bell was no doubt a great stimulus that helped draw the Indians towards the mission to begin with—out of wonder and curiosity over the strange new society taking shape before their eyes, and the pleasure of receiving glass beads and colorful cloth from the missionaries. But what became of that stimulus when the Indians were drawn fully into the mission, and nearly their entire daily lives were regimented by its relentless clangor? What psychological impact did it have upon them when the mission food, labor, and church services—which they may at first have found stimulating, new and exciting—calcified into monotonous and often meaningless repetition, five or six days a week, week after week, all punctuated by the monotonous chime of the bell? How did parents respond when the same joyous bells that had announced the birth and baptism of their baby also announced the child's death a few months or years later?

This brings to mind the experimental work of the Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov. In his most famous experiment, Pavlov trained (conditioned) a dog to salivate by presenting food, while simultaneously ringing a bell; when the bell was rung with no accompanying food reward, the dog salivated as before. Through further experiments, Pavlov found that multiple repetition of the old stimulus without the reward once coupled with it, caused the stimulus not only to lose its positive effect, but to become an "inhibitory agent."³⁷

Pavlov distinguished between two basic types of animal and human response: *excitation* and *inhibition*. In modern psychological terms, excitation carried to an extreme is mania, while inhibition carried to an extreme is depression. Pavlov defined the healthy personality as one expressing an equilibrium between excitation and inhibition. In another experiment, he presented his dogs with two stimuli that were at once similar and different: One stimulus (agitating the skin of a dog)

was coupled with a food reward, while the other stimulus (also agitating the dog's skin, but only half as fast) had no reward coupled with it. By alternating these two stimuli one after the other, Pavlov found that several of his dogs quickly became ill, suffering what might be called nervous breakdowns. The dogs of an excitable temperament became manic, and those of an inhibited temperament became depressed. Only those dogs with a personality solidly balanced between excitation and inhibition remained healthy through the capricious and conflictive treatment.³⁸

While the franciscan friars were compassionate men who saw their mission as one of advancing the spiritual and material welfare of their Indian neophytes, the actual system of social conditioning they imposed upon the neophytes was, in many ways, crueler than any experiment that Pavlov and his disciples subjected their dogs to. For the friars, the dawn bell waking the mission population and summoning the neophytes to church was a positive stimulus: It brought, if not immediate pleasure and reward, at least the challenge of converting the Indians to the catholic faith; and the friars had been conditioned, through their long years of missionary training, to seek long term, indeed eternal rewards. For most of the mission Indians, the same bell meant confinement inside a building, listening to and repeating monotonous phrases in a foreign language, pledging obedience to a strange and terrible god. Then the same bell rang again, calling them to breakfast.

The psychological impact of this conflictive conditioning must have been profound. Those neophytes who grew irritable, manic or rebellious soon fell under the physical discipline of the soldiers and friars. So the main response among the neophytes became one of depression. This explains the frequent reports of explorers visiting the missions that the Indians were sullen, listless, and dull: They had lost the vitality, joy and initiative they had once expressed in their own societies.

Chronic depression must have impacted the overall physical health of the mission Indians. As we have seen on page 117, once the missions got established as food production units, the food available to the neophytes was normally abundant and varied—so that malnutrition is hardly a likely cause of the high mortality rates.* But depression

*Sherburne Cook, on the basis of a thorough survey of Spanish records of food provisions to the California missions, calculated that the average neophyte ate only about 2300 calories' worth of food daily—which he judged as probably
(continued at bottom of next page)

probably played a big role in reducing the Indians' resistance to disease. Many friars lamented that, despite their efforts to care for and heal their sick neophytes, the neophytes seemed to lack the will to live. To be sure, it sometimes happened among California Indians in their native state that a person, convinced that he or she had fallen under a deadly sorcerer's spell, pined away and died, even though no symptoms of illness had appeared before. But under the mission system, a self-defeating attitude towards life often became widespread.

Moreover, the rigid labor system imposed at the mission was a culture shock for the Indians. The work routine of perhaps seven hours a day, five or six days a week, was not very burdensome by the capitalist standards of the day (or even of today, for that matter). But the Indian men were not used to working every day, and none of the Indians were used to working by the clock, under the strict supervision of others. While native women had shouldered the daily burden of food gathering and preparation, the entire native community had worked hard only on specific tasks that occurred seasonally—such as the annual acorn gathering and salmon fishing. Indian men were used to getting quick results and gratification from their work. They built their huts and boats out of wild reeds and grasses, and could dispose of them easily. When an Ohlone reed hut became rotten or thoroughly infested with insects, for example, the owners would burn it down and quickly build a new one.

The Christian Indian men now had to do systematic work for long-term construction projects, in whose design they had no say. They had to dig up soil, mix it with water and binding materials (shards of straw or glass), tread on the mixture with their bare feet to get an even consistency, pour it into molds, and wait several days for the resulting forms to dry into adobe bricks, which weighed about 60 pounds each.³⁹ It took years, sometimes decades, to complete construction on a mission church. And the church was more a place of confinement, confusion and boredom for many neophytes than a source of pleasure.

inadequate to sustain good health. (*The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization*, pp. 39-48). Facile critics of the mission system have accepted Cook's estimates as the last word in scientific analysis of the mission food regimen. However, Cook clearly underestimated the mission Indians' ongoing access to their traditional food sources—allowing only 200 calories per person per day from these sources (p. 47). The friars' responses to the 1813 questionnaire, after some 40 years of mission-building, indicated that their neophytes kept ample supplies of acorns, grass seeds, and small and big game meat in their huts on the mission premises. And the friars would have had no motive to exaggerate this "primitivist" tendency among their neophytes; indeed they would have had an interest in downplaying it, since it was a source of dismay and embarrassment to them.

Mission Indian women had to spend long hours manufacturing woolen clothing, which did not protect them as well against the winter cold as did their traditional rabbit- and otter-skin garments.

The French explorer La Pérouse made a striking, if superficial observation upon touring mission Carmel in 1786: "The color of these Indians, which is that of blacks; the house of the monks; their storehouses, which are built of brick and plastered; the threshing floor on which they tread out the corn; the cattle; the horses, in short, everything we observed, presented the appearance of a plantation in Santo Domingo [Haiti, then a French colony employing African slave labor], or any other colony. The men and women are also assembled by the sound of a bell, and a monk leads them to work, to church, and to all their employments. We declare with pain, that the resemblance is so exact, that we saw both men and women loaded with irons, while others had a log of wood on their legs..."⁴⁰

The Whip and the Cross

As Junípero Serra and his comrades had done in the Sierra Gorda mission in Mexico (see page 44), the franciscans in California relied on bold visual dramatizations of catholic doctrine to spur the neophytes to assimilate the faith. The ritual of Jesus' death march was performed not only every year at Easter time: It was performed every week, and the neophytes were expected to participate. At every one of the stations of the cross, the friar leading the procession would stop and deliver a prayer to his flock, urging them to engage in holy meditation. Inside the mission church, the walls flanking the congregation often depicted contrasting scenes: One wall showed the joys and bliss of heaven, while the other showed the terrors and torments of hell. No doubt the friars used these murals as graphic points of reference in their daily sermons.

The ancient Mayas celebrated life, elevated its most diverse aspects to divine categories. Today the Holy Week processions produce sad exhibitions of collective masochism: They drag heavy crosses, participate in the flagellation of Jesus step by step on the interminable ascent to Golgotha; with dolorous wails they convert his death and burial into a cult of their own death and burial. (The Indians' Holy Week ends without a resurrection). When victory is talked about in the language of the conquistador's culture, the Indians celebrate their own defeat. To know this, it is enough to see their dances or listen to that rancorous silence which replaces the songs they no longer sing.

— Eduardo Galeano, *Guatemala: Occupied Country*
(New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967)

Even so, it is doubtful whether the friars ever won more than a minority of their neophytes to embrace christianity with a passion. Louis Choris reported on the Sunday and holiday service at mission San Francisco in 1816 as follows:

All the Indians of both sexes, without regard to age, are obliged to go to church and worship. Children brought up by the superior [friar], 50 of whom are stationed around him, assist him during the service which they also accompany with the sound of musical instruments. These are chiefly drums, trumpets, tabors, [etc.]. It is by means of their noise that they endeavor to stir the imagination of the Indians. . . It is, indeed, the only means of producing an effect upon them. When the drums begin to beat they fall to the ground as if they were half dead. None dares to move, all remain stretched upon the ground without making the slightest movement until the end of the service and, even then, it is necessary to tell them several times that the mass is finished. Armed soldiers are stationed at each corner of the church. After the mass, the superior delivers a sermon in Latin to his flock.⁴¹

Ten years later, Frederick Beechey reported on a service in the same mission church:

The congregation was arranged on both sides of the building, separated by a wide aisle passing along the center, in which were stationed several bailiffs with whips, canes, and goads, to preserve silence and maintain order, and, what seemed more difficult than either, to keep the congregation in their kneeling posture. The goads were better adapted to this purpose than the whips, as they would reach a long way, and inflict a sharp puncture without making any noise. The end of the church was occupied by a guard of soldiers under arms, with fixed bayonets. . .⁴²

Neophytes judged “delinquent” in their worship, labor, or personal behavior were punished by whipping them on the bare back with a rope, lariat, or a flexible reed or cane. Bruising or drawing blood in the course of the whipping was to be avoided, according to Fermín de Lasuén, Junípero Serra’s successor as California mission president. The maximum number of strokes delivered usually ranged between 21 and 25, and in unusual cases reached 50.⁴³ For an offense judged especially heinous, such as physically assaulting his friar, a neophyte might get 25 lashes daily for nine days, plus a whipping every Sunday for nine Sundays. The man who delivered the flogging was typically an Hispanic soldier or an Indian bailiff, elected by the neophytes from a list of candidates approved by the friars, and subservient to the friars. It was

common for an Indian awaiting punishment to ask forgiveness — in which case the force, but not the number of whip strokes was decreased.⁴⁴

Indian men were thus whipped in the public mission square. “Delinquent” Indian women, on the other hand, were whipped “in a secret place, and at a distance, in order, perhaps, to prevent their cries exciting too lively a compassion, and thereby stimulating the men to revolt—whereas the men are exposed before all their fellow citizens, that their punishment may serve as an example. . .”⁴⁵ The “secret place” where women were flogged was the female dormitory, and the whip there was wielded by a woman supervisor (*maestra*).⁴⁶

The humiliation of being whipped in front of one’s peers must have been appalling—especially when one recalls that the Indians in their own societies did not physically punish one another, and seldom punished or even publicly scolded their own children.* And what was it like for an Indian woman neophyte to be whipped by another Indian woman? How could they reconcile this cruelty with the image of the all-loving, all-forgiving virgin Mary brought by the friars?

Francis Florian Guest, a contemporary franciscan historian, points out that public floggings of convicted delinquents and criminals were common in Spain and elsewhere in western Europe in those days, as was the flogging of rebellious school children (which was not banned in Spain until 1834). A man convicted of theft or escape from prison typically received 200 lashes in Spain.⁴⁸ Physical punishment within the Spanish military was mild compared with the dreaded cat-o’-nine-tails used by the British navy, which helped provoke the famous mutiny on the British cargo ship *Bounty* in 1789. And physical punishment

*Jacob Baegert, a German jesuit missionary who served in Baja California from about 1750 till 1767, reported: “Nothing causes the [native] Californians less trouble and care than the raising of their children, which is merely confined to a short period, and ceases as soon as the latter are capable of making a living for themselves—i.e., to catch mice and to kill snakes. . . Nothing is done . . . in the way of admonition or instruction, nor do they set an example worthy to be imitated by their offspring. The children do what they please, without fearing reprimand or punishment, however disorderly and wicked their conduct may be. It would be well if the parents did not grow angry when their children are now and then slightly chastised for gross misdemeanor by order of the missionary; but, instead of bearing with patience such wholesome correction of their little sons and daughters, they take great offense and become enraged, especially the mothers, who scream like furies, tear out their hair, beat their naked breasts with a stone, and lacerate their heads with a piece of wood or bone till the blood flows, as I have frequently witnessed on such occasions.”⁴⁷

imposed by the franciscans in California was not much harsher than that used within the Spanish military.

But for the California Indians, the comparison between their treatment and the norms of punishment prevailing in various European institutions was meaningless. What counted for them was that their punitive treatment at the missions ruptured the freedom and dignity they had once enjoyed. Guest also points out that many friars were accustomed to whipping *themselves* much harder and more often than their neophytes had to endure the whip.⁴⁹ But self flagellation, however absurd and unnatural, is a voluntary act—whereas instituting a system that inflicts physical pain on others is a basic violation of human trust.

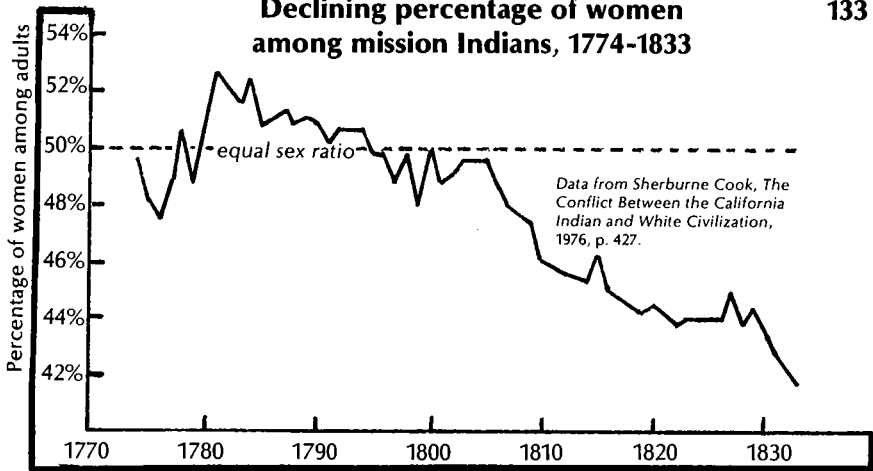
A Setback for Women

Vital statistics derived from the friars' thorough recording of baptisms and burials at their missions show that deaths exceeded births, usually by a wide margin, throughout the mission period. And the birth rate among the mission Indians declined, from an average of 45 births per thousand neophytes in 1780, to 40 births (per thousand people) in 1800, to 35 births in 1820, to 32 births in 1830.⁵⁰ Sherburne Cook estimates that the average birth rate among nonmission Indians, by contrast, was about 45 to 50 births per thousand people per year.⁵¹

The declining birth rate among the mission Indian *total population* may not have been due to a declining birth rate among the mission Indian *women*. Cook, who did the most comprehensive statistical studies of the California mission system, rather infers that the decline in the *crude* birth rate among the mission Indians was due more to the sharply *decreasing ratio of females to males* among the mission Indians: While the mission Indian population was about 50% female in 1770-80, by the end of the mission period in 1834 it was only 42.6% female. Since the sex ratio for mission Indian children under age ten remained steady at about 50/50, a *higher death rate among female adolescents and women* than among males of comparable ages probably played the key role in tipping the numerical scales against women, and therefore against children, and therefore against the Indian people as a whole.⁵²

The friars defined *adults* as those ten years of age and older—and by that age, girls were confined in the female dormitory. Among the Ohlone mission Indians, the *adult* female/male sex ratio fell, over the course of the mission period, to 41.2% female.⁵³ At mission Santa Clara, the adult population shifted from 44.4% female in 1782, to only 37.9% female in 1832.⁵⁴ Among the Salinan mission Indians, the adult

Declining percentage of women among mission Indians, 1774-1833



population was 44.4% female by 1830. This trend of a relative decrease in the number of mission Indian females aged ten and older took off around 1800, notably at the missions of central and northern California; at the southern California missions, however, the sex ratios remained nearly equal between males and females.⁵⁵

Aside from child mortality, the high rate of female mortality was concentrated among adolescents and young women. At mission Santa Clara, 64% of the female deaths occurred before age 25, and 27% occurred between the ages of 10 and 25. Among males, 58% of the deaths occurred before age 25.⁵⁶ The strikingly high female mortality among younger women and adolescents brings us back to the female dormitory.

The Spaniards had designed the female dormitory to protect the girls and young women from rape, and to preserve their virginity prior to marriage. But in many ways the female dormitory and workshops came to concentrate the medical, cultural, and psychological stresses of the mission system upon the girls and women confined in them.

The enclosure of dozens, in some cases hundreds of girls and women in common sleeping quarters must have promoted infectious diseases, including the dreaded measles. Sanitary facilities were crude, and the water piped into the dormitory could easily be contaminated—so gastro-intestinal diseases were probably common. Spinning wool into yarn (indoors, at least during the cold winters) and weaving the yarn into cloth, inside poorly ventilated workshops, saturated the air with dust; dust borne pathogens must have spread respiratory infections. Skin diseases, and especially itching, were also common among women and children. The friars, after initial resistance, often

allowed neophyte men to build sweat lodges at the missions, and the regular sweating ritual combined with bathing kept the men fairly free from skin ailments; but the women lacked access to the sweat lodges, and the girls and women confined at the dormitory lacked ready access to river bathing.⁵⁷

Given the cramped living quarters, the unhealthy conditions, and the strict regimentation, many girls must have desired to escape. But where could they escape to? They were no longer permitted to sleep in their mothers' huts. If they tried to escape from the mission and were caught, they were liable to be whipped; repeat offenses might get them confined in irons or in "the log," a hinged contraption binding their legs and preventing them from standing up.

The only other escape from life in the dormitory was marriage. According to Spanish catholic law, girls could marry at 12, and boys at 14—and the mission records show that it was common for females to take marriage vows at around age 15. But marriage often brought with it the dreaded syphilis; since the friars did not repress the sex lives of teenage boys nearly as tightly as those of teenage girls, a young groom was more likely to be carrying syphilis than his young bride. In 1815, friar Sarría wrote that, owing to the syphilis epidemic, in some missions "to marry is to die."⁵⁸

Moreover, life in the female dormitory and at the mission generally disrupted Indian women's control of their reproductive power, and the social status that had once flowed from it. In native societies, a girl's first menstruation marked her rite of passage into womanhood. She went into seclusion—often in a separate hut built just for the occasion—fasted, bathed, and received visits from mature women of the village, who instructed her in the secrets of female power. Given the lack of privacy and the strict supervision in the female dormitory, it must have been very hard, if not impossible, to sustain this crucial rite. So a young woman now lacked the self confidence and sense of connection with her female elders that her mother and grandmothers had enjoyed.

When she married, she was no longer free to choose when and whether she would bear a child. To be sure, many mission Indian women defied the catholic ban on abortion and infanticide. In 1795, mission president Lasuén declared: "The failure of the mission Indians to show a greater increase [in population] may be attributed to their great incontinence [i.e., promiscuity] and the inhumanity of the mothers who, in order not to become old and unattractive to their husbands, manage to abort or strangle their newly born children. Little by little these grave evils are being corrected."⁵⁹ Five years later, Lasuén

denounced "... the inhuman cruelty to which the Indian women are too much addicted. . . to abort and strangle their children. To remedy this all means are being employed. . ."60—including, presumably, whipping the guilty women and placing them under confinement.

Lasuén's explanation that the Indian women were concerned "not to become old and unattractive to their husbands" seems rather contrived and male centered. If they now feared growing old, it was more likely due to the sharp loss of status suffered by older women—as the friars now usurped the powers of shamans, and even of midwives.

There is no way to determine whether abortion and infanticide were practiced more frequently at the missions than among the native Indian societies. Lasuén failed to consider the possibility that the Indian women might abort or kill their newborn children because they simply could not raise more than one child at once, especially now that widows were confined in the female dormitory—or that they could not tolerate bearing children into a forced labor system.

According to Victoria, an Indian girl raised at mission San Gabriel, an Indian woman who had a miscarriage there was accused of infanticide. She was punished by having her head shaved, being whipped daily for 15 days, having her feet bound in irons for three months, and "having to appear every Sunday in church, on the steps leading up to the altar, with a hideous painted wooden child in her arms." The mission was ruled at the time by friar José María Zalvidea, an unusually harsh disciplinarian. He often whipped himself and wore punishing undergarments, in the fashion of Junípero Serra. Zalvidea later suffered a nervous breakdown.⁶¹

The growing excess of men over women (in the central and northern coastal missions) must have intensified sexual rivalries among the mission Indian men; and the friars' banning of homosexuality, polygamy and divorce,* and their disruption of the bridal gifts system that had regulated relations between kinship groups, made it harder to resolve such conflicts peacefully. Two cases help illustrate the point:

*The Spanish catholic system, while banning divorce, did not deprive a married woman of all her rights: The married woman retained her own family name, and her own legal identity. She had the right to manage her own property and enter into contracts. She also was to share equally in all profits earned by the married couple, and her husband could not sell their land without her consent. A woman married under the Spanish system thus had more legal and property rights than a woman married according to English common law.⁶² However, since mission Indian couples did not live on independent homesteads, these rights probably meant little to mission Indian women—except those who married Spanish or Mexican soldiers.

1) Aurelio, a married neophyte at mission San Juan Capistrano (near present-day Anaheim), was himself promiscuous. But, angrily accusing his wife of adultery, he beat her to death in 1797. Confessing his sins and crime, he insisted that he had not intended to kill his wife—but only to beat her. The San Diego presidio commander who ruled on the case judged Aurelio's crime "accidental," and recommended release without punishment. But the viceroy intervened and sentenced Aurelio to four years' hard labor on public works.⁶³ (And the Spanish authorities' frequent use of hard labor as a punishment for convicted criminals no doubt strengthened the Indian men's aversion to the mission labor system).

2) Primo, a neophyte at mission San Antonio (in Salinan territory), had a secret love affair with Eulalia, a married woman. With the help of a friend named Ventura, and apparently with Eulalia's connivance, Primo murdered Eulalia's husband. The two Indian men were sentenced to death by hanging; since there was no hangman in California, they were shot, in 1802.⁶⁴ This was a rare instance of the death penalty being carried out under the Spanish mission system.

The male agricultural system imposed by the missions dislodged women as the main food producers. Their gathering of acorns, roots and grass seeds now became supplementary, instead of central to the mission Indians' diet. The male head of each mission household received the weekly rations of grains and meat from the friars, delivering them to his hut or house. So the more the missions prospered, the more status Indian women lost.

Even after a woman married, her freedom of movement was more severely restricted than that of her husband. She could no longer simply step out into her natural surroundings and start gathering her food and basketry materials: The mission was surrounded by farm and pasture lands, male dominated territory. If she wanted to gather grass seeds, she had to compete with the longhorn cattle, horses and sheep. She had far less opportunity to leave the mission than her husband, who might go on occasional hunting and fishing excursions, go off to work for a time at the presidio or nearby colonial settlement, or join expeditions to capture runaway neophytes. And when he left the mission without her, she was confined, along with the adolescent girls, young women and widows, to the female dormitory. According to Louis Choris' observation of mission San Francisco in 1816, the Indian men requested the friars, out of jealousy, to lock their wives up in the dormitory whenever they went on leave from the mission.⁶⁵ Such confinement was inconceivable in the Indians' native societies, where both men and women enjoyed basic personal freedoms.

Indian Resistance and Rebellion

Flight from the missions was the most common form of resistance. The Indians' longing to return to their native villages and their unfettered ways of life was their key motive for escape. The friars, unable to suppress this longing either by persuasion or coercion, had to flex and accommodate it: They let the neophytes visit relatives and friends in their home villages, for a total of perhaps ten or twelve weeks each year. While this policy provided new opportunities for escape, the friars saw it as a necessary safety valve. Mission president Fermín Lasuén, Junípero Serra's successor at Carmel, observed that if the neophytes were strictly banned from visiting their pagan relatives in the mountains, the missions would face the danger of a riot.⁶⁶

In 1780, the franciscans founded two missions among the Yuma Indians on the California (west) side of the Colorado river. Contrary to Serra and his colleagues' careful policy of separating the presidio by some distance from the mission and discouraging colonial settlement near the mission lands, here the mission, presidio, and colonial pueblo were combined into a single establishment, to cut costs. Friars Juan Díaz and Francisco Garcés, who was keenly attuned to Indian cultures and famous for trekking thousands of miles across desert and mountains to contact Indian groups, assured the Spanish commander general that this novel approach would succeed. But Francisco Palóu, learning of the experiment, scornfully dubbed it a "new mode of conquest."⁶⁷

The settlers' livestock intruded on the Yumas' gardens, and land disputes between Indians and Spaniards soon erupted. Captain Fernando de Rivera, heading south for Sonora (today a state of northwest Mexico) with a party of soldiers and their families, aggravated the situation by setting up camp on the east bank of the Colorado river in July 1781. The visitors let their horses graze on Yuma fields near the missions, and their cattle destroyed part of the Yumas' mesquite bean crop. Rivera and his soldiers seemed oblivious to the social conflict brewing at the missions, to the Yumas' combat prowess, and to their tribal solidarity.

On 17 July, Yuma warriors led by chief Salvador Palma destroyed both missions, killing two of their four friars. The next morning, they crossed the Colorado river and attacked the unwelcome visitors. The soldiers, surprised and overwhelmed, fought to the last man, inflicting heavy casualties on the Yuma archers. In the end, all the Hispanic soldiers, including Rivera, lay dead. The Yuma warriors then captured

the survivors, most of them women and children. On 19 July, they caught up with friars Francisco Garcés and Juan Barrenche, who had fled from the assault on pueblo Concepción two days earlier. Both friars were killed, despite efforts by some of their neophytes to save them.

In September, lieutenant Pedro Fages led a punitive expedition against the Yuma villages, and freed 61 Hispanic captives by paying a ransom of flannel, beads and tobacco. The Yuma people suffered heavy casualties, but the Spaniards failed to subdue their warriors.⁶⁸ The Yuma revolt severed the Spaniards' route across the Colorado river, breaking a key link between New Spain/Mexico and the California mission chain.

Toypurina the Sorceress and the San Gabriel Uprising

On the night of 25 October 1785, a group of painted Indian warriors from nearby villages, led by the neophyte Nicolás José, silently scaled the parapet surrounding mission San Gabriel's inner quadrangle. The men, armed with bows and arrows, slipped into the friars' sleeping quarters, eager to confirm a prophecy: The young Indian sorceress Toypurina had convinced them to attack the mission by promising to kill both friars with her magic spell, clearing the way for them to kill the soldiers guarding the mission.⁶⁹ And, sure enough, as the warriors entered the friars' quarters, they found both friars laid out in coffins.

But suddenly, the two "dead friars" leapt out of their coffins. As the warriors shrieked in terror, armed Spanish soldiers appeared from hiding, raising their war cry, "*Santiago!*" In the ensuing melee, ten Indian warriors, including their leaders, were captured—without a bullet or arrow being fired. The remaining Indian warriors fled. Toypurina was soon arrested as well.

It turned out that the Indians' plot had been overheard by a soldier of the mission guard who understood their language. He had informed his superior, corporal José María Verdugo. With the approval of the friars, Verdugo had planned a bold counterplot, asking two of his soldiers to dress in friars' garb and play dead.

The key figures arrested were the neophyte Nicolás José, two chiefs from nonchristian villages, and Toypurina. The remaining warriors arrested—most of them neophytes—were given a public whipping of 20 lashes, and released from jail. Their punishment was designed to show the Indians "that the sorceries and incantations of the woman Toypurina are powerless in the face of the True Faith," in the words of California's military governor, Pedro Fages.⁷⁰ Then began the military trial of the four accused leaders of the revolt, presided over by Fages.

Nicolás José, under interrogation, admitted that, six years earlier, he had plotted to kill a fellow neophyte—indeed, his baptismal sponsor (*padrino*)—for laying covetous eyes on his bride to be. He had also plotted earlier to kill the priests and soldiers; the plot had been discovered, and he had then been let off leniently. Now he declared he led the recent revolt because the friars had refused to allow him and his fellow neophytes to stage their native dances at the mission.

Nicolás José further testified he had approached Toypurina, respected and feared as the most powerful sorceress among the Indians of the region. He had paid her glass beads and colorful ribbons, to incite her fellow nonchristian Indians to revolt; he was to organize the plot among the mission Indians. Under Toypurina's influence, five villages from the mountain, three from the valley, and others still more distant had joined forces to form the attacking war party.

The 24-year-old Toypurina now took the stand, facing down the Spanish military officers and speaking defiantly in her native language. She admitted having ordered chief Tomasajaquichi (one of her fellow defendants) to go to the mission Indian village and persuade the neophytes not to believe another word of the friars, but to trust only in her. "I commanded him to do so," declared Toypurina, "for I hate the *padres* and all of you, for trespassing upon the land of my forefathers..."⁷¹ This was her real reason for rallying the warriors to attack—not the trinkets Nicolás José had paid her.

In January 1786, governor Fages ordered Nicolás José and the two chiefs sent in irons to the presidio. Nicolás José was later sentenced to six years' imprisonment at half rations in the most distant, northern presidio, to be followed by transfer to a similarly distant mission and a ban on ever rejoining his family. The two chiefs, after two years in prison, were released and allowed to return home, but were kept under surveillance.

Toypurina, while in detention after her trial, informed one of the friars that she wanted to become a christian. This was really the only option open to her: If she were released back to her home village, she would surely be murdered by the defeated warriors, who were furious over her false prophesy and the humiliation they had suffered at the Spaniards' hands. On 8 March 1787, Toypurina was baptized at the mission San Gabriel she had plotted to destroy. She proceeded to cast off her husband, who refused to become a christian. Exiled north to mission Carmel, she married a soldier from the Monterey presidio on 26 July 1789. She bore four children in less than ten years. On 22 May 1799, after having received all the final sacraments of the church, Toypurina died, at the age of about 39.

If this account is true, it shows the extraordinary importance which the Spanish friars and military officials gave to psychological warfare in their struggle to convert the Indians. The sorceress Toypurina was engaged in mortal combat with the San Gabriel friars for moral and spiritual power over the Indians, whether christian or nonchristian. It is significant that she did not order the warriors to attack the mission soldiers straight away—but insisted on first killing the friars (through her spell): Once the friars were gone, their spiritual power to protect the soldiers and the whole mission establishment would also disappear. The Spaniards, for their part, would not have taken the trouble and risks of hatching their dramatic counterplot, had it not been for the psychological value of shocking and terrorizing the Indian warriors, debunking Toypurina's prophesy, and presenting the friars as invulnerable and the soldiers as invincible in the eyes of the Indians.

Soldiers/Colonists vs. Indians

In 1794, California's military governor began allowing retired soldiers to establish ranches near the various presidios. In the Salinas valley east of Monterey/Carmel, several retired soldiers quickly set up their estates. The friars protested this policy as an infringement on Indian land rights. In 1795, Indians burned the fledgling ranches. The Spanish military took reprisals against the Indian "bandits," and the colonists soon got their ranches started again, with official support from the Spanish royal hierarchy.⁷²

Here we see the roots of the social conflict that was to spell the end of the California mission system some 40 years later. Once the Spanish and Mexican soldiers and colonists took hold of their landed estates, they needed Indian labor to run them profitably. The only source of training and discipline of the Indians in European style labor were the missions. So the ranch owners had to draw on the mission Indians for their labor supply. But the friars tried to protect their neophytes from private exploitation, and were dedicated to "eventually" turning over all the mission lands to the christian Indians, who would then work the land as independent family farmers. The Hispanic ranching system and Indian land rights could not coexist for long. The big question was whether the mission Indians could make an alliance with their "wild" Indian cousins to destroy the ranching system, before the ranch owners and soldiers destroyed what was left of Indian freedom.

Persistence of Indian Customs and Beliefs

“The majority of our neophytes have not yet acquired much love for our way of life,” lamented mission president Fermín de Lasuén in 1797. “And they see and meet their pagan relatives in the forest, fat and robust and enjoying complete liberty.”⁷³ Lasuén concluded that, were it not for the restraining force of the military guard at the mission, most of the neophytes would return permanently to their home villages. This was after more than 25 years of mission building and evangelizing in California.

As it was, perhaps one in every ten mission Indians tried to escape, and perhaps one in twenty-four managed to elude the soldiers and make his or her escape permanent.⁷⁴ In September 1796, some 200 neophytes fled mission San Francisco and paddled across the bay. Their grievances were overwork, harsh punishment, inadequate food rations (they had not been getting three hot meals per day, as was standard at other missions), and a recent epidemic that had claimed many children’s lives. Many of those who fled later returned to the mission, either through capture by the soldiers or their own choice.⁷⁵ Those who returned voluntarily were probably influenced more by a desire to live with their captured relatives and friends, than by any preference for the mission over their native villages. The captured fugitives were punished, whereas those returning voluntarily were spared punishment.

At mission Santa Barbara in 1801, in the midst of an epidemic of pneumonia and pleurisy, a Chumash christian woman, under treatment by a native shaman, had a vision stimulated by the hallucinogen datura: She met Chupu, the Chumash earth goddess, who told her that all baptized Indians would die; only those mission Indians would be spared who annulled their baptism by bathing in the “tears of the sun.” News of her vision spread to the outlying villages, and Chumash people from the offshore islands and inland areas came to see this woman and worship Chupu. The ferment lasted three days before the friars got wind of it and squelched it, probably by forcing the woman to renounce her vision. Still, the cult of Chupu persisted clandestinely at the missions in Chumash territory; the friars’ policy of transferring neophytes to nearby missions according to labor requirements actually helped spread the cult.⁷⁶

The franciscans’ policy towards Indian shamans seems to have varied from mission to mission. Many neophytes continued to honor their traditional shamans and seek treatment from them. Shamans—men and women—were the friars’ main rivals for moral and spiritual power

over the neophytes. At those missions where the friars felt insecure in their power, they exerted themselves to squelch all shamanic activity among their neophytes, physically punishing those who practiced “witchcraft” and “devil worship.” Other friars, sensing the inadequacy of their own efforts to provide medical care, allowed shamans to continue their healing practices at the missions. But the shamans, like the Spanish doctor and friars, were overwhelmed by the epidemics that swept the neophyte population. This must have shattered the moral authority of many shamans in the eyes of the neophytes, undermining a key aspect of the native belief structures.⁷⁷ But rather than strengthening their catholic faith, it only added to their melancholy and despair.

Despite a 1782 order banning all dancing among christian Indians, many friars found it necessary to give ground and allow their neophytes to keep engaging in one of their major pleasures. Lasuén lamented the influence of pagan Indians on his Carmel neophytes in the dancing arena: “. . . They [the nonchristian Indians living near the mission] put on a heathen and abominable dance or *fiesta*; if the christian who is present refuses to participate in that vile diversion, they mock him and laugh at him and persecute him until he gives in.”⁷⁸ Louis Choris observed at mission San Francisco in 1816:

On Sunday, when the [church] service is ended, the Indians gather in the cemetery, which is in front of the mission house, and dance. Half of the men adorn themselves with feathers and with girdles ornamented with feathers . . . or they paint their bodies with regular lines of black, red, and white. . . The men commonly dance six or eight together, all making the same movements and all armed with spears. Their music consists of clapping the hands, singing, and the sound made by striking split sticks together. . . This is finally followed by a horrible yell . . . along with a whistling noise. The women dance among themselves, but without making violent movements.⁷⁹

Since the neophytes had trouble assimilating the franciscans' contempt for sensual pleasure and contempt for their own flesh, they likewise had trouble accepting the friars' restrained dress code. In 1814, friar Juan Amorós of mission Carmel, responding to a questionnaire from Spain, wrote that, thanks to the use of woolen and cotton garments, the neophytes “. . . all are clothed somewhat decently. . . If all valued wearing apparel much more would be given them, and in a short time we would have them going about as civilized beings. But they (i.e., the men) are not concerned whether they go about with or without clothing, inasmuch as they gamble away their wearing apparel;

(continued on page 147)

nothing is worn from that which is given them; it is sold, exchanged, gambled or given away, then another garment older or newer is sought. They do, however, enter the church and *padres'* dwelling decently apparelled, because otherwise they would be reprimanded..."⁸⁰

The same questionnaire asked, "Do they [the Indians] retain any superstitions? What means can be used to destroy these superstitions?" To this, the friars of mission Santa Clara replied:

The Indians are very superstitious. They worship the devils, offering them seeds, and they fast and dance in their honor, in order to placate them... By using certain herbs, roots, feathers and other items, they believe they can free themselves from their enemies and from illness. They practice witchcraft by means of herbs, thorns, and other enchantments by means of which they attempt to injure others and obtain revenge. Finally, they believe in all they dream about. To destroy such an accumulation of evil, we know of no methods more opportune than frequent preaching and instruction, time, and patience.⁸¹

Turn of the Century, Turn for the Worse

As the 1800's began, many of the missions were prospering as farming, ranching and food production centers. Indian labor was the backbone of the missions' productive success. But far from spurring the cultural development of the mission Indians, this prosperity thrust them into bitter, at times violent conflict with nonchristian Indian groups, and with Hispanic land and ranch owners.

As the missions multiplied (five new ones were founded in 1797-8, bringing the total in California to 18) and their farm and pasture lands expanded, their large herds of cattle and horses became choice targets for nearby Indian groups. The Hispanic soldiers were hard pressed to prevent the mission cattle and horses from being driven off by nonchristian Indians, who used the horses sometimes for meat, sometimes for their own transport. Punitive expeditions against "wild" Indians accused of stealing mission animals, attacking the missions, or sheltering runaway neophytes became more bitter and systematic. The official Spanish rationale for these aggressive campaigns was *escarmentar a los gentiles*, to teach the pagans a painful lesson.

Whereas, in the late 1770's, the soldiers under governor Neve had refused to cooperate with the friars in capturing runaway neophytes (see page 72), now they hounded and captured the runaways with zeal.

In their drive to punish nonchristian Indians for sheltering runaways and for other alleged crimes against the missions, the Spanish military forces sometimes arrested an entire Indian village, confining the men at the presidio and the women and children at the mission.*

Indian labor, which the friars had proved productive, was at a premium, and the soldiers badly needed to control it. Not only were the mission Indians producing meat, milk, grains and fruits for the presidios, but the presidios were directly exploiting Indian labor—often under slavlike conditions and over the friars' objections—to maintain their own premises and serve the officers' families. Since the soldiers hoped for comfortable retirements as ranch owners commanding Indian laborers, they had a strong self interest in keeping both christian and nonchristian Indians under the taskmaster's whip.

*This is where the dispute over the Spaniards' *forced conversion* of California Indians to catholicism arises. Sherburne Cook wrote that "By 1810 extensive expeditions in search of fugitives were established policy . . . As time went on, the friction between wild Indians and whites increased, until toward the end of the mission period all pretense of voluntary conversion was discarded and expeditions to the interior were frankly for the purpose of military subjugation and forced conversion."⁸² Cook's claim that forced conversion became Spanish policy in California has been uncritically accepted by many writers on the mission system during the 1800's.

Francis Florian Guest, a franciscan historian and biographer of Lasuén, disputes Cook's thesis of forced conversion. Guest shows how Cook, in the course of reading forced conversion into the Spanish punitive campaigns, mistranslated some key Spanish terms and misestimated the force of Spanish imperial law upon the soldiers. Guest, to be sure, documents several cases of wholesale military arrests of Indian villages, and admits that the soldiers did incalculable harm to the Indians in discharging their role as frontier police for the Spanish empire. But he explains: "...The reasons why the Spanish captured and imprisoned whole [villages], or the remains thereof, were judicial and military. . . The Indians were brought to the Spanish settlements . . . for the purposes of punishment, not necessarily for conversion. Now then, it is evident from Spanish documentation that many Indians who had been captured and imprisoned or were for other reasons fearful of Spanish military power had a tendency to ask for baptism, often, it would seem, as a means of appeasing their conquerors. . . [But] the fact that Indian men were forced into a presidio, and Indian women and children into a mission, does not prove that either were compelled to accept conversion. . ."⁸³ Guest stresses that Spanish imperial law, while requiring converted Indians to live at the mission, also required that all conversions be voluntary.

As in the case of the defeated rebel sorceress Toypurina (see page 139)—when Indian men, women and children found themselves detained at the presidio or mission after a traumatic clash, the line between voluntary and forced conversion became blurred. And, while Guest's criticisms of Cook's thesis are well taken in many respects, I think that Guest's own analysis is too legalistic, underestimating the Spaniards' drive to exploit Indian labor.

The outbreak of the Mexican revolution and independence struggle in 1810 broke most of the remaining links between the California mission system and the Spanish imperial regime in Mexico. The modest annual salary of 400 pesos issued by the Spanish viceroy to each missionary was terminated, and the soldiers as well stopped getting paid. Now the missions emerged as more crucial than ever to the material wellbeing of Spanish California. The government, still commanded by military interests, imposed taxes on and requisitioned supplies from the missions, to keep the presidios going.

Forced to support themselves and the entire military establishment, the missions became more commercial. Defying Spain's protectionist laws, they sold cattle hides and tallow (beef fat, used to make soap and candles) to English and Yankee sea merchants. The Anglo merchants made easy fortunes from this trade, taking advantage of the friars' ignorance of real world prices of the goods produced by their neophytes. The mission work routine was molded more and more in the service of the hide and tallow trade. To keep up with the surges in demand, the mission Indians had to slaughter far more cattle than they could possibly eat at one time, and a great deal of meat went to waste.

The Hispanic farmers and ranchers traded with the missions and foreign merchants for the foodstuffs and manufactured goods they lacked. As early as 1790, they widely conscripted nonchristian Indians to work their estates. Among themselves, the colonists of pueblos San José and Los Angeles were roughly equal in status during the early years of settlement; but later, they stratified into rich and poor. The poor farmer worked a small plot, and owned a few head of cattle. The rich colonist—often a retired military officer or his heir—received a big land grant from the government, and commanded a large labor force of Indians to till his crops and tend his herds.⁸⁴ The total non-Indian population of California grew from about 1,000 in 1800 (mainly concentrated in three pueblos) to about 3,000 by 1821—more through natural increase than through fresh colonization.⁸⁵

The missions, still suffering higher death rates than birth rates, continued to depend on recruitment and conversion of "wild" Indians for their numerical growth. At several missions, after 20 years of evangelizing, virtually the entire Indian population in the area had been brought into the mission and baptized; those Indians who rejected the lure of christianity had fled into the interior, beyond the soldiers' reach. The friars had to found new missions in pagan territory, and begin the process anew. But now the pagan Indians were far wiser about what baptism and mission life meant, and could not be so easily

lured by trinkets and sweet songs into accepting baptism. On the other hand, the friars had cultivated a group of loyal Indian Catholics, whom they used both to evangelize the pagans and to search out and help the soldiers capture runaway neophytes.

The delay in founding a mission on the eastern shores of San Francisco Bay led the friars and their helpers to range more widely in their search for fresh converts. In the 1790's, converts from East Bay Ohlone tribelets were brought across the bay into Mission San Francisco. Their dismay over being confined so far from their native homes was no doubt a big factor in the September 1796 mass escape from the mission. In 1797, the friars sent a party of neophytes headed by a man named Raimundo across to the east bay in search of runaways and new converts. The party was massacred by East Bay Indians.⁸⁶

In other cases, neophytes collaborated with Hispanic soldiers in launching bloody reprisals against pagan villages dubbed rebellious or accused of harboring runaways. Under the pressure of evangelizing campaigns, armed searches for runaways, and ruthless attacks against villages defying the Spanish authorities, the non-Christian Indians faced a stark choice: either full cooperation with the mission system (leading eventually to their own conversion), or armed rebellion, or flight into the interior.

Frederick Beechey observed of San Francisco in 1826:

It does not often happen that a voluntary convert succeeds in his attempt to escape, as the wild Indians have a great contempt and dislike for those who have entered the missions, and they will frequently not only refuse to re-admit them to their tribe, but will sometimes even [betray] their retreat to their pursuers... The [mission] Indians, besides, from political motives, are, I fear, frequently encouraged in a contemptuous feeling towards their unconverted countrymen by hearing them constantly held up to them in the degrading light of *bestias* [beasts]...⁸⁷

By recruiting Indians from (and sometimes all the members of) several tribelets into a given mission, and convincing them to live and work together, the friars succeeded in suppressing traditional warfare between those tribelets. But at the same time, they created a new cultural cleavage among the California Indians, between neophytes and pagans. The reciprocal distrust and misunderstanding that festered between neophyte and pagan Indians erupted, at times, into violence—as neophytes identified pagans as thieves of their (mission) animals, and pagans identified neophytes with Hispanic encroachment against their land, resources, and labor.

The mission Indians, who remained “neophytes” through virtually the entire 60 years of the mission system, scarcely had a chance to develop the political and intellectual skills needed to overcome this fateful cleavage. The 1813 questionnaire from Spain to the missionaries asked, among other things: “What virtues are the most eminent among them [the Indians]?...” The Santa Clara friars replied: “Without doubt, their dominant virtues are their love for their relatives and members of their household, docility, respect, and obedience towards the Spaniards or *gente de razón* [artisans, overseers and colonists from Mexico], and particularly towards the missionary fathers.”⁸⁸ This was 36 years after the founding of mission Santa Clara, and 26 years after Indian self government was formally required by Spanish law. It is not clear to what extent the friars’ response reflected the actual behavior of their neophytes, or rather the friars’ ideal of how the neophytes *should* behave. But in either case, it shows the paternalistic mentality that continued to pervade the missions.

The Mission Indians under Mexican Rule

In 1821, Mexico cast off the Spanish colonial yoke, becoming an independent monarchy and then, three years later, an independent republic. California now became a province of Mexico. The new Mexican government in 1821 granted citizenship to Indians, declaring protection of their person and property, and the republican constitution of 1824 granted Indians the right to vote and hold office. But in California, the relationship between Indians, friars, military officers and colonial landowners continued much as before. Indeed the expropriation of Indian lands was spurred on by Mexican policy favoring colonial settlement in California. Individuals could now get land grants of up to 50,000 acres (about 20,250 hectares).

The sons and grandsons of Spanish military officers who had carved out the first private estates now rose to economic prominence. Culturally insecure, they developed a racial caste consciousness and tried to separate their family lines from the peoples of colors they exploited. They married “white” and presented themselves as Spanish, renouncing Mexico and its *mestizo* culture.⁸⁹ These new aristocrats relocated entire Indian villages onto their estates to employ the Indians as full time laborers; where they needed only part time labor, they let the Indians continue living in their home villages, conscripting them for the harvests and other seasonal tasks. The Indian laborers received food, clothing, and some utensils from their masters. They were subject to physical punishment for even petty violations of the work rules.

A growing number of California Indians thus fell victim to feudal exploitation. In many respects, they were worse off than the mission Indians. The friars failed to teach more than a few of their neophytes to read; the big landowners, often illiterate themselves, were even more negligent about educating their laborers. Nor did the owners concern themselves with the medical conditions of their Indians, who were subject to the same diseases that ravaged the mission Indians.

The Chumash Uprising of 1824

In 1818, the California coast was threatened with invasion by the seafaring band of Hippolyte de Bouchard, a privateer from Buenos Aires. Friars at the missions in Chumash territory responded by training their neophytes for combat. At mission Santa Barbara, friar Antonio Ripoll placed 180 Indian men under arms: 100 archers made up the infantry, 50 more men carried machetes, and 30 mounted lancers made up the cavalry. The Indians got to choose their own corporals and sergeants, though their entire unit was led by the presidio commander. At mission La Purísima, friar Mariano Payeras organized a similar Indian fighting force, and wrote to governor Pablo Solá: "It would cause me joy if you could see the preparation and enthusiasm of these Indians."⁹⁰

As it turned out, Bouchard's band invaded Monterey, failed to destroy the provincial government, and had no impact on Chumash territory. But the arming and large unit drilling of the Chumash neophytes took on a momentum of its own, more powerful than the threat it was designed to check. The friars did not foresee that European martial arts, in the hands of the Indians, could be turned against the mission system.

Continuing to worship their goddess Chupu, Chumash neophytes secretly built little shrines of sticks and brush adorned with pieces of cloth and feathers. The friars harshly punished any neophyte caught practicing such "idolatry."⁹¹ Persistent and resourceful, the Chumash used every social organization available to them, including even the military drill units, to communicate with one another and preserve as much as they could of their traditional customs and beliefs.

After 1820, the friars launched a systematic campaign to root out the old Chumash ways. Friar José Señán designed a line of questioning (*confesionario*), largely in the Indians' own language, to be used at the annual Lenten confession of each neophyte. The neophytes were asked a series of specific questions about their kinship relations, marital status, sexual practices (including homosexuality and bestiality), use of the ritual hallucinogen datura and tobacco, and resort to shamans for

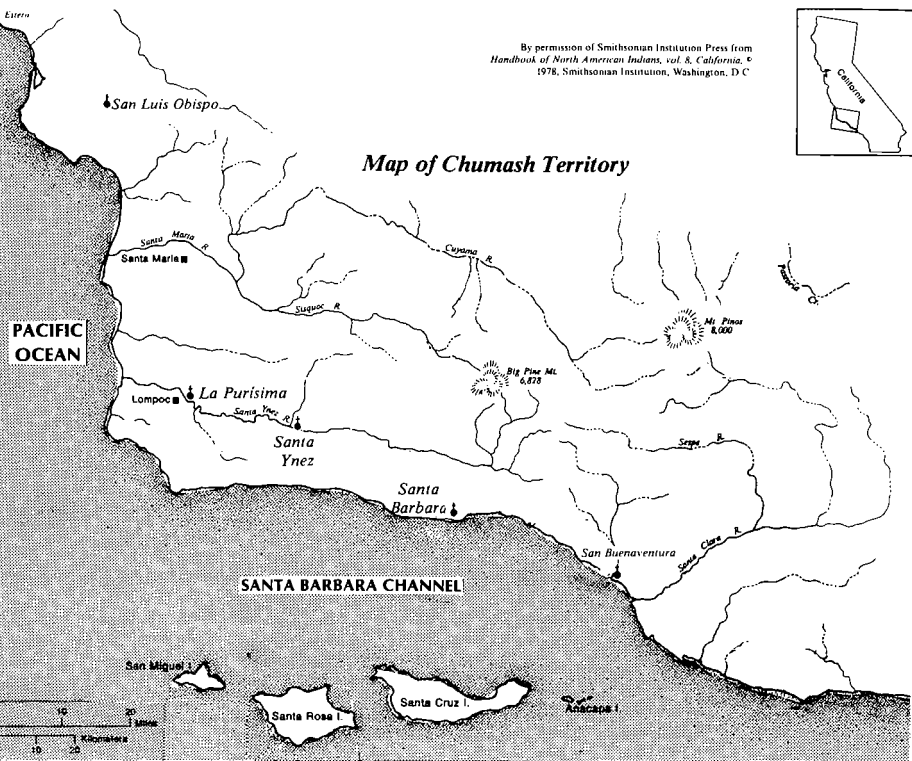
healing. Señán and his colleagues might have done some fine anthropological research with their *confesionario*, if they weren't so intent on undermining the customs they asked their neophytes about. As it was, coming at the time of greatest stress and guilt imposed upon a practicing catholic, the *confesionario* provoked the Chumash into cultural, and soon physical resistance.⁹²

Added to the cultural and psychological pressure from the friars was rough treatment from the soldiers who, not receiving their salaries, requisitioned foodstuffs, clothing, and other goods produced by the mission Indians. As Lent and the annual interrogation approached in February 1824, the atmosphere at the Chumash missions grew tense. The death of friar Señán the summer before, and the appearance of a large comet in the southern California sky beginning December 1823, probably convinced the shamans and their followers that the time was ripe for a sudden change, a bold return to the old ways. When a Mexican corporal ordered the flogging of a Purísima neophyte who had come to visit a relative imprisoned at mission Santa Ynez, he triggered the revolt.

On Saturday afternoon, 21 February, Indians from both missions showered arrows upon the soldiers at Santa Ynez, burned a building, and besieged the soldiers and a friar. When Mexican reinforcements arrived, the Indian warriors—having lost two men in combat—retreated to mission La Purísima, where their comrades had driven out the soldiers and taken over. Fortifying the mission quadrangle by erecting palisades, they cut ammunition slits through the church walls, awaiting a Mexican counterattack.

The rebels sent messengers to the Indian mayors at missions Santa Barbara and San Buenaventura, demanding that they join the insurrection. At San Buenaventura the mayor turned the rebel messenger over to the soldiers for imprisonment. But at Santa Barbara, Chumash mayor Andrés armed his fellow neophytes and nearby pagan Indians to confront the soldiers. After a skirmish costing three Indian lives, the rebels briefly took over the mission, but then fled to the hills. The returning soldiers took revenge by killing five more neophytes at Santa Barbara. Friar Antonio Ripoll, caught in the middle of this conflict, tried to maintain contact with the rebels and arrange their peaceful return to the mission. But the distrustful rebels fled further inland, to the tule marshlands in the southern San Joaquín valley.⁹³

On 16 March, the Mexican counterattack against the La Purísima rebels finally rolled into motion. The 109 Mexican soldiers were well equipped with cavalry and artillery. The Indian rebels had massed a



defending force of over 400—including nonmission Indians, some of them Yokuts. They met the attackers with arrows, musket fire, and volleys from the mission's small ceremonial cannons. But the Mexicans' heavy artillery carried the day. Unable to break the siege, the Indians asked friar Antonio Rodríguez—who had remained with them since they took over La Purísima—to negotiate their surrender. Sixteen Indians, and one Mexican soldier lay dead. In July, the Mexican authorities tried 19 rebel leaders for murder: Seven Indians were condemned to death; four were sentenced to permanent exile and ten years of presidio labor; and eight were sentenced to eight years each of presidio labor.

The Chumash rebels from Santa Barbara wanted to create a new life for themselves in the valley marshlands. Released from the inhibitions of catholic worship and social mores, they spent a lot of time gambling, and engaged in free wheeling sexual activity, without respect for marriage bonds. Yet they planned to use the technical skills they had learned at the mission to build the community they desired. "We shall maintain ourselves with what god provides us in the open country,"

they replied to friar Ripoll's request for them to return. "Moreover, we are soldiers, stone masons, carpenters, etc., and we will provide for ourselves by our work."⁹⁴

But the Mexican authorities could not let the missions unravel to the benefit of Indian freedom. In June, they mounted an expedition of some 130 troops equipped with heavy artillery, to capture the runaways. Mission president Vicente de Sarría and friar Ripoll accompanied the expedition, bearing a pardon from the governor to convince the rebels to return to mission Santa Barbara. The friars thus negotiated the surrender of many of the rebels. But many more fled deeper inland, some of them entering Yokuts territory. Nearly half the Indian population of Santa Barbara at the time of the revolt, numbering several hundred, escaped the military campaign and retained their freedom. They cultivated corn, pumpkins, melons and other crops they had learned to grow at the mission, and integrated the golden images and other ritual objects they had taken from the Santa Barbara church into their traditional modes of worship.

The 1824 Chumash uprising was directed mainly against the soldiers as enforcers of mission discipline. The kind treatment which the neophytes gave the friars even at the height of their revolt showed that, while they hated the mission system, they still respected the friars—viewing them as friendly, or at least neutral, in their conflict with the soldiers. In the wake of the revolt, the Mexican authorities ordered the friars at each mission to surrender all machetes, lances and firearms to the nearest presidio. The rebel neophytes who returned were not only disarmed, but also broken spiritually. The shamans among them faded from prominence, their old kinship bonds broke down, and the annual Lenten confession came to mean submitting humbly to the priest's authority.⁹⁵

Farther north in the San Joaquín valley, groups of "wild" Indians launched protracted armed resistance against the private ranches that kept intruding upon their ancestral lands and food sources. Becoming skilled horsemen, the Indians rustled cattle and horses from the ranches with speed and flair. They made their societies more mobile, and developed guerrilla tactics to fend off the private and official armed parties sent to punish them. A Miwok Indian named Estanislao (after the Polish saint Stanislaus) became one of several brilliant guerrilla leaders among the valley Indians. After routing several Mexican attacking parties, Estanislao and his warriors had, in 1829, to face an invasion force of a hundred soldiers supported by heavy artillery

and led by lieutenant Mariano Vallejo. The Mexican attackers with their Indian auxiliaries killed many Miwoks, but failed to defeat Estanislao's forces.

Secularization and Dispersal

The mission Indians continued to suffer low morale and high mortality. "I am weary of all this sickness and dying," lamented friar Narciso Durán in a note in the death register he kept at mission San José. "These Indians are more fragile than glass."⁹⁶ Friar José Viader, a 34-year veteran of mission Santa Clara who had made strenuous efforts to provide medical care for his neophytes, wrote in 1830: "There are many deaths and few births. Sickness is always with us, and I fear it is the end of the Indian race. What can we do?"⁹⁷ Over the next three years, a malaria epidemic devastated the Indians of California's central valley, including the free Chumash people who had fled from mission Santa Barbara in 1824.

Friar Durán, in a letter to the president of Mexico in 1830, denounced the "invincible repugnance they [the Indians] have for becoming civilized and for relinquishing their heathen preferences and prejudices." Durán shifted the blame for the failings of the mission system onto the Indians' shoulders: "They are children of a vicious upbringing, of an immemorial and eternal tradition, of absolute liberty exempt from all bonds of excellence and law. It is from this, in spite of the elaborate efforts of the missionaries, that there follows the tendency or inclination, also insuperable, toward the savage life in which they were brought up and which, because of their communication with neighboring nonchristian Indians, they always keep in mind. . ."⁹⁸

In 1833, the Mexican government passed a law secularizing California's 21 missions. The governor of California, José Figueroa, did not implement the law until the following year, when he issued his own secularization decree: The friars had to stop running the affairs of the missions, and were to perform only religious duties until being replaced by parish priests. The missions were to become pueblos, with their lands parcelled out among the neophytes. Each head of a family or adult male over 20 years of age was to get 33 acres (about 13 hectares) of land. Half the missions' livestock, tools, and seeds were also to be distributed to the neophyte men. All the remaining lands, livestock and other property were to come under the missions' new administrators, appointed by the governor. And the government reserved the right to force neophytes to work on these state owned fields and orchards. The Indians could not sell or mortgage their new property; if a head of

family died without a legal heir, his landholding would revert to the state.⁹⁹

Most of the neophytes, spurning the offer of land ownership, declared their freedom and fled the missions—sometimes leaving their elders behind. For those who stayed, the legal right to own land was no great blessing: Under the friars' regime, neophyte families had been able to keep their own gardens and a few fruit trees, disposing of the products as they wished. Now they had few cattle to plow and graze on the lands they owned; the friars, fearing for their own sustenance as secularization approached, had directed the mass slaughter of cattle, placing the revenues from sale of their hides into the Pious Fund.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, Figueroa's handpicked administrators soon took advantage of the forced labor clause to enrich themselves and their families at the Indians' expense. The "emancipated" Indians now had to labor in the fields and private homes to support the administrator, the soldiers, and the governor. Many of the administrators were so greedy and corrupt that, within a few years, they drove the mission Indians into poverty.

Meanwhile, many poor Hispanic settlers were allowed to borrow cattle from the mission herds to get a start at extending their own farms and ranches. Few of these cattle were returned to the missions, and many of the Hispanics, calling themselves *Californios*, prospered and grew rich. The fertile mission lands, instead of becoming a source of Indian industry and happiness as the early missionaries had dreamed, became a source of Indian peonage. The newly rich landowners contented themselves with exporting rawhide and beef tallow, buying all the finished products they needed from merchant ships. The mission soap, candle, shoe, saddle, blanket, pottery, and wine industries disappeared, and the Indians skilled in them had no place to continue their work.

Many of the Indians fleeing the missions in the wake of secularization wandered into the pueblos such as Los Angeles and San José, living through casual labor and begging. Deprived of their traditional food sources, they faced starvation, and often resorted to theft and scavenging for food discarded by the Californio townspeople. Demoralized, the men spent a lot of time drinking and gambling.

Other former neophytes fled inland into free Indian territory. In southern California, Cahuilla and Kumeyaay Indians fought the Hispanics and raided their ranches and settlements along the coast, maintaining their own freedom among the inland mountains. At Pleasanton east of San Francisco bay, plains Miwoks, coastal Miwoks,

northern valley Yokuts, Chochenyo and Patwin Indians who had been brought together at the missions founded a new, multi-ethnic community. Other such communities, crossing old tribelet and language barriers, were created in the regions around the northern missions.¹⁰¹

But most of the mission Indians wound up working as farm hands, ranch hands, and domestic servants for the big Californio land owners. The carving up of the rich mission lands left the growing class of big landlords in the saddle. During the period of Spanish rule from 1769 to 1821, only 20 private land grants had been made in California; under Mexican rule from 1821 to 1846, about 500 landed estates were authorized.¹⁰² A few mission Indian men received land grants of their own. But the vast majority of mission Indians were dispossessed, despite their legal land rights. For years they tried to hang on to the legal papers they had received, entitling them to their shares of land. But most of those papers were eventually stolen, or burned along with the Indians' houses when the dwellers were absent.¹⁰³

The Indian laborers, while free in theory, were really bound to their estate owner for as long as he wanted their services. The owners and their foremen trapped the Indians in a net of debt obligations, pulling the net ever tighter. They used physical punishment to keep their Indians in line. The Indians were banned from moving from one place to another, without a discharge signed by their last employer proving they were not in debt to him.¹⁰⁴ Bitter, smallscale fighting raged back and forth between the landlords' forces and "wild" Indians of the central valley, who resisted the expanding estates by raiding their horses and cattle. The Californios now had a dual aim in their bloody raids against free Indian groups: punishing stock thieves and capturing laborers for their estates.

Starting in October 1845, the California missions, already gutted by their administrators and the newly rich landowners, were placed on the auction block by governor Pío Pico. An order from Mexico prohibiting their sale was ignored. In 1846, a group of Yankee mercenaries overran the feeble Mexican government forces and declared California an independent republic. In February 1848, the U.S. military victory over Mexico made California a U.S. possession.

The Gold Rush and Yankee Invasion

The Yankees' discovery of vast gold deposits later that year was to prove even more devastating to the California Indians than the Spaniards' discovery of Aztec, Mayan and Incan gold had been to the

Indians of Middle and South America. Through the sixty years of the Spanish mission system, the California Indians—especially those living near the Pacific coast, where the missions were established—had suffered terrible losses in population, due mostly to diseases and demoralization. Their total population may have been reduced by half, from roughly 300,000 in 1769 to roughly 150,000 by 1845. Yet most of their cultures and languages survived, and they still formed a large majority of the California population. They seemed to have a fighting chance to reassert their cultures and regain their numbers.

But the gold rush was, for the Indians, an overwhelming invasion of white, fortune-seeking scoundrels. These invaders, far from wanting to save Indian souls, were intent on uprooting all Indian obstacles to their lust for quick wealth. Within a few years, the California Indians were a besieged minority in a land that was once their own.

At first, many Indians labored for white Californians to dig and pan for gold. Other Indians became independent prospectors, and their basketry skills came in handy for sifting gold from the mountain stream silt; they traded their gold to white merchants, who typically took advantage of their commercial naiveté to pay them way below the market value of their finds. As competition for prospecting claims sharpened, whites violently drove Indians out of the goldfields. Murder of Indians, and rape of Indian women became commonplace.

California's constitutional convention of September 1849, dominated by white male Yankees, extended the right to vote only to white male citizens. A California state law of 1850 barred Indians and Blacks from testifying in court, either "in favor of, or against a white man." In 1854, California's chief justice declared that Chinese men—who, as wage-working goldminers employed by big companies, were being lynched by frustrated white losers—were legally Indians. Another 1850 law, deceptively titled the "act for the government and protection of Indians," subjected able bodied Indians to arrest "on the complaint of any resident" if they could not support themselves, or were found loitering or "leading an immoral or profligate course of life." An Indian judged vagrant could be hired out within 24 hours to the highest bidder, for a labor term up to four months. This law opened the way for the conversion of California's Indians to chattel slaves. It also provided that an Indian convicted of any offense punished by a fine could be bailed out by any white person willing to pay the fine; the Indian then had to work for the white man until he had discharged the amount of the fine.

The gold rush dealt a body blow to many Indian groups in eastern California who had escaped recruitment into the missions and landed estates. After rich gold deposits were found in the mountain streams and valleys of the Sierra Nevada and Cascades of eastern California and central Oregon, aggressive whites flooded in. The pile-up of dirt and silt from their mining activities blocked salmon from swimming up the rivers to spawn. In the central California valley as well as the coast, gold and mass immigration spurred a feverish expansion of private farming and logging. The conversion of grasslands and river bottoms to plowed fields and orchards deprived the Indians of vast seed and fish food sources. The draining of swamps and marshlands drove away the wild birds and the reeds which the Indians used for basketry and building. The farmers' cattle and hogs gobbled grass seeds, clover, and acorns.¹⁰⁵ By 1850, the total Indian population of California had been reduced to about 100,000. By 1855, it was down to about 50,000.¹⁰⁶

In the 1850's, the Californios' (Hispanics') feudal estates came under the ax of the Yankee legal system. Land hungry Yankees contested the Californios' land titles, and dragged them through long court battles. Even when a Californio won the case, he often had to sell his estate to pay his attorney's fees. The big feudal landholdings were carved up into a multitude of small subsistence farms, and the land came under much more intense cultivation. The wage labor market was now glutted with white ex-miners and Chinese workers, so Indians were no longer much needed to work on the farms, except as domestic servants. Released from the feudal yoke, they were now fully vulnerable to murder of their men, rape, and enslavement of their women and children.

Indian Slavery in the Free Republic

The 1850 California law "for the government and protection of Indians" also set up a system of Indian "apprenticeship": Any white person wanting to employ an Indian child could come before a judge with the child's "parents or friends"; if the judge decided that the child had been obtained without coercion, he would issue the white person a certificate giving him "the care, custody, control, and earnings of such minor, until he or she obtains the age of majority," which was 18 for Indian boys, and 15 for Indian girls. The white master was legally required to feed and clothe his Indian wards, and treat them humanely. But if he failed to meet these requirements, his maximum penalty was a \$10 fine and reassignment of the abused youth to another master. An 1860 amendment extended the terms of "apprenticeship" by several years: An Indian boy could be held until he was 25, a girl until 21; an

Indian first “apprenticed” while a teenager could be held until 30 if male, and until 25 if female.

According to Robert Heizer, up to 10,000 Indians became indentured servants under the laws of 1850 and 1860. Judges made few or no efforts to enforce even the minimal protections for Indians specified in the laws. Outright kidnapping and enslavement of Indian children became common; often the kidnappers murdered the children’s parents, after raping their mother. They then held the children under threat of death, shooting them if they tried to escape. Young Indian women “apprentices” often became concubines of their masters. Yet California was supposedly a free state, its constitution having banned slavery and involuntary servitude.¹⁰⁷

The Indian acts of 1850 and 1860 were repealed by the California legislature in 1863. But the kidnapping and selling of Indian children, and the private enslavement of Indian adults, continued until at least 1867. Between 1852 and 1867, perhaps 3,000 to 4,000 Indian children were kidnapped and enslaved, with northern California natives suffering the heaviest assaults.¹⁰⁸ In the summer of 1865, the *California Police Gazette* demanded an investigation of the treatment of Indians in the state: “Slavery exists in California in precisely the same condition that it did until lately in the southern states. . . Here *in almost every county* Indians are unlawfully held as chattels. . . Many of them have fallen into cruel hands and the barbarities inflicted upon them by inhuman masters would put to blush the most unfeeling wretch that ever lorded it over a gang on a Southern plantation.”¹⁰⁹

Yankee Genocide

Killing off “wild” Indians to clear the way for mining, lumbering and farming became a matter both of private passion and state policy. In the 1850’s, the California government issued over a million dollars in state bonds to pay local volunteers for their armed campaigns against Indians. Governor Peter Burnet declared to the legislature that a “war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct.”¹¹⁰ The federal government in Washington, at first reluctant, reimbursed the state for most of the blood money it paid to its white citizens. In 1855, Shasta City in northern California offered \$5 for each Indian head delivered to the city center. In 1863, the citizens of Honey Lake paid 25¢ for each Indian scalp turned in.¹¹¹

The Yahi (Yana) Indians of north central California, living on hilly land covered with oak trees, tried to avoid all contact with white society. But white gold seekers, and later white farmers and ranchers, hunted them



Ishi, one of the last Yahi Indians. Found scavenging for food in a slaughterhouse in 1911, Ishi was romanticized as “the last Yahi” and became a living anthropology museum display. This photo of him was taken by Alfred Kroeber in 1914, two years before Ishi’s death. According to Native American writers Rupert and Jeannette Henry Costo, Ishi had actually been ostracized by his own people, for stealing. Although Ishi’s sister survived him, the Yahi people have now died out.

(Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley)

down like wild animals. In 1871 a rancher found one of his steers wounded, and blamed the local Yahi Indians. Trailing a group of Yahis with dogs, he drove them into a cave, and shot about 30 of them to death there; he shot the adults with his hunting rifle, the children with his revolver.¹¹² And by that time, the Yahis were nearly extinct.

By the 1870’s, the total number of California Indians was less than 30,000—a reduction by about 80% since 1845. Nearly all the surviving Indian groups of northern and central California had been herded onto government reservations. About 60% of the Indian deaths were caused by disease, 30% by malnutrition and starvation, and 10% by private and official murder by armed whites. By 1900, the California Indian population was less than 16,000.¹¹³

As we have seen, the California Indians suffered genocide, the near total destruction of their populations and cultures, between the years 1845 and 1870. The main culprits were the invading Yankee gold seekers, farmers, ranchers and loggers, along with the U.S. federal army. Once Indian labor was no longer very useful to the white man, extermination of the native peoples became a goal openly embraced by the aggressive vanguard of the new white majority, with official state backing. The Indians “must fade away before the Saxon race as the cloud in the west before the light and heat of a greater power,” declared the *San Francisco Alta California* newspaper in 1851.¹¹⁴

Was Serra a Racist?

The racism of the Yankee invaders was flagrant. But what about Junípero Serra and the Spanish franciscan friars? Were they likewise racist towards the California Indians?

The Spanish mission system did not aim to destroy the Indian race, but rather to convert the California Indians into catholic citizens of the Spanish empire. The franciscan friars, through their long training in catholic dogma and missionary techniques, were imbued with contempt for the culture of native peoples who worshipped a bewildering variety of goddesses, gods, animals, and spirits. They underestimated the power of the belief systems of those peoples who ignored the True Religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, and studied their beliefs only superficially, and then only to undermine them.

Yet the Spanish friars did not consider the Indians inherently inferior beings. The Indians had souls worth saving, just like all other human beings (with the exception of infidels and those who knowingly consorted with the devil). Junípero Serra, in particular, seems to have held more respect for the California Indians’ intellectual capacities, than did most of his franciscan colleagues. Towards the end of his life, Serra objected, with mild sarcasm, to the official distinction between *gente de razón* (“people of reason”) and Indians; he suggested that the Indians too were people of reason (see page 73). By contrast, his successor, Fermín de Lasuén, described the Indians as “a nation that is barbarous, ferocious and ignorant...”¹¹⁵

Serra also encouraged intermarriage between Spanish soldiers (including white Catalonians) and christian Indian women, and several such marriages took place under his regime. The Spanish empire was extremely race conscious, employing a detailed list of ethnic categories—including “*color quebrado*” (“softened color”) for people of a multiracial mix—in gathering census data on its subjects. Yet the

Spaniards and Mexicans, with a long history of racial mixing behind them, were generally far more relaxed and matter-of-fact about interracial marriage than were the Yankee boneheads who later invaded California. In 1860, the *Humboldt Times* of northern California, reflecting popular white sentiments, declared: "It is as impossible for the white man and the wild Indian to live together as it is to unite oil and water."¹¹⁶ The Yankee invaders viewed the Indians as a contemptible and inferior race, even while they held Indian women as concubines and fathered children by them.

Serra, to be sure, was no less paternalistic towards the Indians than were the rest of the franciscan missionaries. "... They are our children (*hijos*)," he wrote of the Indians, "for no one else has begotten them in Christ. For this reason, it is our duty to regard them highly, which indeed we do in a paternal way."¹¹⁷

If the franciscan friars were not overtly racist towards the Indians, they were culturally chauvinistic. Their attitude was: 'We will love and respect you, *if you give up your primitive ways, stop speaking your strange languages, and become like us.*' In this sense, the franciscans' approach to the indigenous peoples was—ironically enough—similar to the stance of enlightenment liberals and vulgar marxists.

An Apprenticeship for Feudalism

The franciscans' paternalism proved disastrous for the Indians of California. By teaching them farming and ranching without allowing them to govern their own lives and labor, the friars made the Indians exploitable by private landowners. By teaching them mechanical trades without the scientific and engineering principles behind those trades, they guaranteed that the Indians' new skills would be lost once the missions were dismantled. By teaching them catholic dogma in Spanish and Latin, de-emphasizing literacy and failing to give the Indian languages written forms, the friars hastened the disappearance of the Indian languages and left the Indians without resources to claim the formal rights they had under Mexican law. By confining women and downgrading their social status, the friars broke their independent spirits, making them exploitable as domestic servants and concubines.

The objective, historical impact of the Spanish mission system was to train the California Indians for feudal exploitation by Hispanic landlords, to be followed by capitalist enslavement, assault and genocide at the hands of the Yankee invaders. The Spanish mission system was not, in itself, genocidal. But it softened the Indians up for genocide.

Chapter 3: Missions, Culture Shock, & Invasion

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