CHAPTER ONE

El Pueblo de Los Angeles

When Commodore Robert F. Stockton stood atop Fort Hill in 1846, looking down on the Mexican pueblo of Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula, what he saw was the result of the blending of three cultural traditions—Indian, Spanish, and Mestizo. It bore almost no resemblance to modern metropolitan Los Angeles.

Below him he could make out the plaza, a barren open space surrounded by a cluster of adobes almost indistinguishable from the brown grass that shimmered in the summer heat. To the east, between the pueblo and the stands of willows that marked the river channel—a distance of about half a mile—hundreds of cattle grazed slowly near dry irrigation ditches that led to a few irregularly shaped fields of beans, corn, squash, and peppers. In the heat of the day, the few vaqueros and farmers in the shallow valley stood motionless, as though time had stopped. But this seemingly changeless scene, reflecting as it did the earth out of which it had been made, had not always appeared so.

The Indian Tradition

The first families migrated into the area now known as Southern California at least 20,000 years ago. Anthropologists, who group California Indians linguistically, believe that these first settlers spoke Shoshonean, a language related to the Comanche, Aztec, and Pueblo Indian languages. Evidence indicates that these Shoshonean-speaking peoples probably migrated through

the Owens Valley from somewhere in the southwestern United States or northern Mexico.[1]

Culturally, all of the Indians of the Los Angeles basin shared the same life-style. By 1770 they numbered about 5,000 and were divided into many tribes. They spoke various dialects of Shoshone, but are all referred to as "Gabrielino" after the mission the Spanish established on their lands. They lived in an area bordered by the Santa Susana Mountains to the north, the Mojave Desert to the east, Aliso Creek to the south, and San Clemente Island to the west.[2]

Many elements of their culture facilitated the eventual assimilation of the Gabrielinos into the Spanish mission and hacienda systems. Intermarriage between the Gabrielinos and the Spanish, Mestizo, and Black settlers further aided assimilation. As was the case throughout the Southwest, the Hispano settlers in turn adopted certain elements of the native Indian culture. Thus, during the eighty-odd years of Hispanic contact, a subtle fusion of Spanish, Mexican-Indian, Black, and native Indian cultures took place on biological, ideological, and material levels.[3]

On the ideological level, for example, similarities be-

1. The major historical and anthropological studies of the Indians of Los Angeles are: Alfred L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California;* John W. Caughey (ed.), *The Indians of Southern California in 1852;* Alfred Robinson, *Life in California: A Historical Account of the Origin, Customs and Traditions of the Indians of Alta California;* William Wilcox Robinson, *The Indians of Los Angeles: The Story of the Liquidation of a People;* Hugo Reid, *The Indians of Los Angeles County* (a reprint of articles appearing in the *Los Angeles Star,* Feb. 21–Aug. 1, 1952; in Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History; Bernice E. Johnston, *California's Gabrielino Indians.*

2. Robert F. Heizer (ed.), *The Indians of Los Angeles County: Hugo Reid's Letters of 1852,* Introduction; Alfred L. Kroeber, "The Native Population of California," in Robert F. Heizer and Mary Ann Whipple (eds.), *The California Indians: A Source Book,* p. 71.

3. For another study of the cultural fusion of Hispanic and Indio peoples, see Frances Leon Swadish, *Los Primeros Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier,* ch. 2.

tween Indian and Spanish religious practices facilitated cultural mixing. Like the Franciscans, the Gabrielinos believed in a hierarchy of spiritual authority. They worshiped a creator god named "Chingichnich" or "Chungichnish," a virgin god named "Chukit," and a pantheon of lesser deities. The Gabrielinos had developed a complex ritual involving the use of jimsonweed mixed with salt water which, when taken as a food, represented a spiritual purification similar to the Eucharist. The Gabrielinos also had religious initiation rites and mystical chants and songs.[4]

There were other similarities. The social customs of the Gabrielinos closely paralleled those of the Spanish settlers: elaborate wedding ceremonies, a paternalistic authoritarian family, and strong kinship ties were common to both cultures. Politically, the Indian rancherías resembled the cacique system in Mexico. Local chiefs exercised despotic authority over small villages comprised of kinship groupings. How much the Californio culture in the Mexican era was influenced by Indian antecedents is a matter of conjecture. We know that the early settlers did adopt some local games, the use of woven baskets, and the use of symbolic money. The willow cooking shelters that adjoined the adobe houses of the rancho period were clearly adaptations of the Indian *jacals.*[5]

In matters of medicine, the Indian influence was probably more pervasive. The Indians taught the Spaniards to treat arrow wounds and to use such healing herbs as anise and wild hemp. The absence of doctors in the frontier pueblo accustomed the pobladores to rely on an occasional Indian shaman. It is not known exactly how much of this California Indian folk medicine found its way into the health practices of the early settlers, but the local *curanderos,* as in Mexico, probably borrowed elements of the native healing arts. In general, the Spanish and Mexican pobladores assimi-

4. Kroeber, *Handbook,* pp. 620–627.

5. Ana Begue Packman, *Leather Dollars: Short Stories of the Pueblo of Los Angeles,* pp. 36–37.

lated and modified elements of an Indian way of life that was well adapted to the unique environment of Southern California.[6]

Until the arrival of the first settlers, the Gabrielinos prospered in relative peace despite the density of their settlements. At least 40, perhaps as many as 70, Indian rancherías—each averaging about 130 families—had to share a limited food supply.[7] They had developed a delicate ecological balance among themselves and with the land. Because of this, together with the density and peacefulness of the Gabrielino population, the entry of the Spanish into Southern California was the beginning of a disaster.

The Settlement of Los Angeles

Spain delayed settling Alta California for over 200 years, largely because of difficulties encountered in establishing frontier outposts in Sonora (Mexico), New Mexico, and Baja California. New expeditions were costly, and for centuries the Spanish Crown had regarded their New World possessions as sources of revenue, not as areas for large-scale investment.

This neglect ended in 1769 when Visitador José Galvez organized a series of expeditions to explore Alta California. One of these first expeditions named the Los Angeles River. On August 2, 1769, Captain Gaspar de Portolá, along with Fray Junípero Serra and a contingent of soldiers and Indians, camped near the river, naming it El Río de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula. Here they encountered an In-

6. In 1838, Mariano G. Vallejo published *La botanica general de los remedios experimentados,* a compendium of local medicinal cures, many of them obviously borrowed from the Indians. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *California Pastoral, 1789–1848,* pp. 625–627; Richard Griswold del Castillo, "Health and the Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles, 1850–1887," *J. Mex.-Am. Hist.*

7. John W. Caughey, *California,* p. 20; "Nombre primeros de algunos de los lugares del Los Angeles County . . ." (ms., Coronel Collection, L.A. County Mus. Nat. Hist.); Kroeber, *Handbook,* map: "Native Sites in Part of Southern California."

dian ranchería of the Yang-na people, and noted that the location seemed suitable for a pueblo. Twelve years later the new governor, Felipe de Neve, sent out an expedition to establish pueblos, missions, and presidios, in order to secure Spain's claim to this remote frontier region. On about September 4, 1781 (historians are not sure of the exact date), a contingent of 44 settlers and 4 soldiers founded the community.[8]

There were 11 families in this first contingent, later described as persons "whose blood was a mixture of Indian and Negro with traces of a few Spanish. . . ."[9] A more exact description of the early ethnic composition of these pioneers counts 8 Mulattos, 9 Indians, 2 Negroes, 1 Mestizo, and 1 person listed as "Chino."[10] References to these people and later colonists as Spanish, therefore, are based on their political status as subjects, not on their ethnic identity.

As they had done in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, the Spanish in California chose sites for their pueblos, presidios, and missions near established Indian villages. Not only did the preexistence of an Indian settlement indicate that water, fertile land, and game were nearby, but it also promised a ready source of labor and—as was usually the case—women. These early pobladores chose a site near the Yang-na ranchería located on the west bank of the Río Porciúncula.

Under the terms of the Spanish laws governing colonization (de Neve's *Reglamento* of June 1, 1779), only adult males were eligible for land grants. Those who qualified received a town lot (solare) and 4 fields (suertes or bejesas) of 200 varas each (167 meters), along with loans of foodstuffs and farming imple-

8. Some controversy surrounds the original name of Los Angeles. Most authors have used the name Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles, but Father Francis Weber maintains that the original appellation omitted la Reina altogether. See Rev. Francis J. Weber, *El Pueblo de Los Angeles: An Enquiry in Early Appellations.*

9. Bancroft, *Pastoral,* p. 251.

10. Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States,* p. 36.

ments. But after five years, due to expulsions and defections, only 8 of the original 11 men remained to receive title to their lands in September 1786. Of those who remained, most were peasant farmers recruited from northern Mexico, men already accustomed to making a hard living in the desert.[11]

By 1791 the new pueblo had become one of the most prosperous settlements in California. Only nearby Mission San Gabriel surpassed it in crop and livestock production. But due to the remoteness of the colony, the forbidding desert barrier, and the lack of gold or silver, there was little incentive for additional settlers to make the long, dangerous journey north to Alta California. In 1800, after almost twenty years of colonization, Los Angeles had a population of only 139, including 28 families. There was now a town hall, a granary, a chapel, an army barracks, and 29 dwellings.[12]

The Spanish authorities' problems in recruiting settlers for the colony had brought about a change in policy. After 1791 the governors began sending numbers of convicts and orphans. This forced immigration, which lasted throughout the Spanish period and was continued by the Mexican government until 1846, antagonized the native Californios, who were more concerned with moral purity than with population growth. The government sent convict and orphan expeditions in 1825, 1829, and 1830, accounting for most of the Mexican immigration in those years.[13]

Mexico made some attempts to attract skilled artisans and farmers in addition to the convicts. One example was the colonization effort of 1833–34, organized by Gomez Fárias in Mexico and led by José María Padrés and José María Híjar. This scheme

11. Thomas Workman Temple II, "Soldiers and Settlers of the Expedition of 1781," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.*, p. 100; Bancroft, *Pastoral*, p. 249.

12. William Wilcox Robinson, *Los Angeles from the Days of the Pueblo*, p. 20; and Bancroft, *Pastoral*, p. 258.

13. Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846–1890*, p. 6.

attempted to entice artisans to California with promises of expropriated mission lands. The new settlers eventually established themselves in the Sonoma Valley, but the suspicions of local political authorities led to their disbandment. Remnants of the colony found their way to Los Angeles and some, like Don Ygnacio Coronel and Felipe Alanis, later became wealthy and influential men in the community.[14]

Early Population Data

A rough sketch of the sources of Los Angeles' growth before the Mexican war can be made from the censuses taken by the Spanish and Mexican governments (see Table 1). Population data for 1781 is based on the mission records and on Bancroft's copies of the Spanish archives; the originals of these documents have been destroyed.

The Mexican official censuses taken in 1830, 1836 and 1844 are much more detailed and complete.[15] From these two documents several trends emerge (see Table 2). First, the native-born population of Los Angeles nearly doubled in less than ten years, indicating a high birthrate and prosperous economic conditions. Second, immigration from other regions of California and the Southwest declined after 1836. Because of the generous land-grant policy of the Mexican government, many of those moving into the area settled on outlying ranchos rather than in the pueblo itself. Third, migration from northern Mexico was a major source of population; most Angelenos who had been born in Mexico came from Sonora or Baja California.

In reviewing the Mexican and Anglo-American cen-

14. C. Alan Hutchinson's *Frontier Settlement in Mexican California: The Padrés–Híjar Colony* has a detailed history of this expedition. See also Angustias de la Guerra Ord, *Occurrences in Hispanic California;* and Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The History of California,* 1825–1840, vol. 3, pp. 259–280.

15. J. Gregg Layne (comp.), "The First Census of the Los Angeles District," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.;* Marie E. Northrup (comp.), "The Los Angeles Padrón of 1844, *ibid.*

TABLE 1
Spanish and Mexican Populations of Los Angeles District, 1781–1844

	1781[a]	1830[b]	1836[c]	1844[d]
Men	11	258	553	627
Women	15	264	421	500
Children (under 18)	15	242	651	720
Domesticated Indians	nl	198	533	650
Foreigners	nl	nl	50	53
Total	41	962	2,208	2,550

nl = not listed in original census

Note: The Los Angeles District included many not living in the pueblo of Los Angeles.

a. Thomas Workman Temple II, "Soldiers and Settlers of the Expedition of 1781," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.* 15 (1931–1933): 99–104. Three others arrived after 1781, bringing the total to 44.

b. William N. Charles, "The Transcription and Translation of the Old Mexican Documents of the Los Angeles County Archives," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.* 20, no. 2 (June 1938): 84–88.

c. J. Gregg Layne (comp.), "The First Census of the Los Angeles District," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.* 18 (September–December 1936): 81–114.

d. Marie E. Northrup (comp.), "The Los Angeles Padrón of 1844," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.* 42 (1960): 360–422.

suses for the period 1830–1880, an unexpected finding is that the ratio of the sexes (number of males per 100 females) rose dramatically (see Table 1). The years 1836 and 1844 mark high points, after which the ratio declined. These high points coincided with political upheavals: the Alvarado rebellion of 1836 and the Micheltorena revolt of 1845 attracted hundreds of

TABLE 2
Los Angeles District's Growth, Based on the 1836 and 1844 Censuses

Place of birth	1836[a]		1844[b]	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Los Angeles City	1,038	47	2,018	79
California and the Southwest	939	43	325	13
Northern Mexico	140	6	110	4
Southern Mexico	41	2	44	2
Foreign	50	2	53	2
Totals	2,208	100	2,550	100

a. J. Gregg Layne (comp.), "The First Census of the Los Angeles District," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.* 18 (September–December 1936): 81–114.

b. Marie E. Northrup (comp.), "The Los Angeles Padrón of 1844," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.* 42 (1960): 360–422.

citizen-soldiers to the district. Thus these excesses of men to women were probably a result of military maneuvering during temporary political emergencies.[16]

16. David J. Weber, "Mexico's Far Northern Frontier, 1821–1854: Historiography Askew," *Western Hist. Q.* The sex ratio for the Mexican-American population, 1830–1880, was as follows: in 1830, there were *97* males to 100 females; 1836, *131;* 1844, *125;* 1850, *106*; 1860, *118*; 1870, *99*; 1880, *78*. This ratio is for adults only, defined as those over 20 years of age. An analysis of the age/sex distributions for the years 1844–1880 reveals that the bulk of the sex imbalance in 1844 and 1860 was in groups over 20 years of age, indicating that sex differences in birth and infant mortality probably were not a factor. The extremely low sex ratio for 1880 may point to a higher death rate for male infants in earlier years—but this is not an unequivocal finding, because of the high degree of geographic mobility in the population.

The California Culture

Frontier Los Angeles was far removed from the main currents of change in the Mexican Republic. This isolation reinforced the development of a unique way of life. Social and political contacts with central Mexico were infrequent, because a vast desert filled with hostile Indians separated the two regions. As a result, the cultural waters of central Mexico and of the frontier flowed in different channels. Ygnacio Sepúlveda noted as much: The Californios, having "settled in a remote part from the center of government, isolated from and almost unaided by the rest of the Mexican states and with very rare chances of communication with the rest of the world, they, in time, formed a society whose habits, customs, and manners differed in many essential particulars from the other people of Mexico. . . ."[17] Specifically, he believed that the Californios developed a less "restless spirit" and a "milder form of independence" than their cousins to the south. They were more egalitarian in social manners but, paradoxically, were more concerned with the purity of their Spanish blood.

It was true that the Californios were little influenced by the Inquisition and the military despotism, latifundian peonage, and centralized control that characterized the history of regions of central Mexico and portions of Texas and New Mexico. The Californios also lacked the experience of intense Indian warfare, with its constant threat of extermination, that hung over Hispanic Arizona and New Mexico. The custom of rewarding presidio soldiers with land grants made for a remarkable degree of upward mobility and created the fortunes of many leading families.[18]

The egalitarianism of Californio society decreased later when the province became wealthier and more populous. José María Amador, an old soldier who lived

17. Bancroft, *Pastoral,* p. 282.

18. Leon G. Campbell, "The First Californios: Presidial Society in Spanish California, 1769–1822," *J. of the West.*

through the change to a more stratified social order, remembered that "In my first years there were very few social distinctions—the officials and their families, the sergeants, corporals, soldiers, and their relatives exchanged horses during social gatherings and expected only that all were honorable men. Later, following the development of the country, which increased wealth and population, separate classes were formed. . . ."[19]

Of course, Amador was not considering the California Indians as part of the social system. They were the most notable exception to this view of an egalitarian society. The Spaniards and Mexicans alike considered the Indians to be their social inferiors. Outnumbering the Spanish-stock settlers, they lived as virtual slaves on the large ranchos after the secularization of the mission lands in 1834. Even a sympathetic observer such as Padre Durán remarked, "The Indian evinces no other ambition than to possess a little more savage license, even though it involves a thousand oppressions of servitude. . . ."[20] Amador's view of a classless society in the early years must certainly be tempered by an awareness of the social status of Indians.

The native-born Californio ranked the Mexican immigrants and soldiers with the Indians in the lowest orders. For the Californio upper class, the Mexican-born were "cholos," little more than thieves and public nuisances. This was particularly true of the *cholo* troops that Governor Micheltorena brought with him from Mexico in 1844. Described as "thieves and pickpockets scoured from the jails," the soldiers only heightened the class prejudices of the Californio against the

19. José María Amador, "Memorias sobre la historia de California" (ms., Bancroft Library), p. 266. The original Spanish reads: "En mis primeros años había muy poca distinción social—los oficiales y sus familias, los sargentos, cabos y soldaderos y los surgos alternaban pintos en reuniones solo se exigía que fuese gente honrada. Leugo generalmente según fueron desarrollandose los recoursos aumentando la riqueza y creciendo la población con gentes de fuera se fueron separando las clases. . . . "

20. C. Alan Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement,* p. 233.

Indian-stock Mestizo.[21] The "gente de razón" regarded themselves as pure-blooded sons and daughters of the conquistadores, racially and culturally superior to the lowly Indian and Mexican.

The Franciscan mission system also helped to shape Californio culture. The California missions were different from the institutions that developed in other areas of the Southwest; they were on a larger scale and much more prosperous than those of Arizona, New Mexico, or Texas. The New Mexico missions were small churches located near Pueblo Indian villages. Unlike those in Alta California, they owned no lands and pursued no program of concentrating diverse tribes into a central location.[22]

Indian labor formed the backbone of the California mission system, although only about one-twentieth of the native peoples were missionized by 1836. The Franciscans introduced hundreds of new plants and animals such as wheat, barley, and alfalfa, and cattle, horses, pigs, and sheep; and they trained the Indians to cultivate them. The Indians became *vaqueros,* farmers, and craftsmen. This pool of trained labor made possible the growth of the rancho and, later, the agricultural economy of California.[23]

The Indians in turn taught the missionaries, soldiers, and settlers their foods, medicines, games, and languages. But the natives were the losers in this historical exchange. Besides transmitting Western "civilization," the newcomers also contributed measles, typhoid, influenza, smallpox, and cholera.

As these diseases reduced the native Indian popula-

21. Ord, *Occurrences,* p. 52. Bancroft has listed those Californio writers who expressed their opinions of the *cholos* in *History of California,* 1841–1845, vol. 4, p. 365.

22. For a comparison of the New Mexico and California missions, see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The History of Arizona and New Mexico, 1530–1888,* pp. 160–162 and 279, and his *History of California,* 1801–1824, vol. 2, pp. 107, 112, 160, and 552.

23. Gabriel Marcella, "Spanish-Mexican Contributions to the Southwest," *J. Mex.-Am. Hist.*

tion, contacts with the pobladores and soldiers resulted in genetic assimilation. Throughout the Spanish and Mexican periods, intermarriage and illicit unions between the Gabrielinos and the settlers were common, producing many *hijos de país* of Indian lineage.[24] Mexican families customarily adopted orphaned or abandoned Indian children and considered them as their own; in some families these Indian children were employed as live-in servants and laborers.[25] By 1850, through the processes of missionization, secularization, intermarriage, adoption, and employment, remnants of the local Indian way of life had become a living part of the Hispanic culture of Los Angeles.

The Age of the Ranchos

During the Mexican period and well into the American, ranchos were an important part of pueblo society. In 1844 there were no industries in Los Angeles except those dependent upon the rancho economy. A listing of pueblo occupations from the census of that year reveals this interdependence: saddlers, farm workers, blacksmiths, tavernkeepers, ranchers, laborers, and servants made up the bulk of the occupations of those employed in the city. The rancho formed the social as well as the economic heart of the pueblo well into the 'sixties.

Authors have eulogized the lives of the hacendados, giving Anglo-Americans visions of an idyllic and romantic society. Writing in the 1880's, Hubert Howe Bancroft conjectured that before the Americans came, ". . . supremest happiness was theirs; the happiness that

24. The earliest record of a legal union between a settler and a Gabrielino occurred in 1784, when José Carlos Rosas and his brother married Indian women at the San Gabriel Mission. W. W. Robinson, *Indians of Los Angeles,* p. 13; Caughey, *California,* p. 23.

25. "Madrinas . . . have a great taste for keeping Indian children til they become of age or marry; there are many orphans whom their parents have left to the possession and care of particular friends, and others for whom the probate courts have appointed guardians. . . ." B. D. Wilson quoted in Caughey, *Indians of So. Calif.,* p. 51.

knows no want, that harbors no unobtainable longing, no desires that might not be gratified, the happiness of ignorance, of absence of pain. . . ."[26] Summarizing the quality of life on the southern ranchos, this statement and others like it applied only to the wealthy class. The vast majority of Mexican Indians, Mestizos, and other mixtures achieved what happiness they could through hard work. They were underlings, subservient to the patrón and to a life-style organized for the benefit of an elite.

As the rancheros became more dominant in the social and economic life of Mexican California, the egalitarianism of the early years gave way to a more hierarchical society. Every aspect of rancho life was controlled by a rigid, highly organized work routine. Besides the Indian vaqueros and servants, there were different levels of overseers: *mayordomos de los chaponeras* were in charge of the servants, and there were other overseers of varying degrees of authority.[27]

The role of women in rancho society was rigidly defined by tradition and work routine. For most, life was marked by unremitting drudgery, a notable exception to the pastoral myth. José Carmen del Lugo, who lived on a rancho during the Mexican regime, recalled something of the women's role: "At three o'clock in the morning the entire family was summoned to their prayers. After this, the women betook themselves to the kitchen and other domestic chores such as sweeping, cleaning, and dusting, and so on. . . . Woman's labor lasted till seven or eight in the morning. After this they were busy cooking, sewing, or washing."[28]

26. Bancroft, *Pastoral,* p. 264. This pastoral idealization was reflected by later Anglo historians who emphasized the Spanish over the Mestizo culture in California. Carey McWilliams has called this a "fantasy heritage." For a detailed discussion of the historiography of this pastoral myth, see Pitt, *Decline,* ch. 16, and McWilliams, *North from Mexico,* ch. 2.

27. Horace Bell, *Reminiscences of a Ranger, or Early Times in Southern California,* p. 227; Jo Mora, *Californios.*

28. José Carmen del Lugo, "Vida de un Ranchero," *Q. Hist. Soc. So. Calif.,* p. 21.