

## Introduction

Every California schoolchild's first interaction with history begins with the missions and Indians. It is the pastoralist image, of course, and it is a lasting one. Children in elementary school hear how Father Serra and the priests brought civilization to the groveling, lizard- and acorn-eating Indians of such communities as Yang-na, now Los Angeles. So edified by history, many of those children drag their parents to as many missions as they can.

Then there is the other side of the missions, one that a mural decorating a savings and loan office in the San Fernando Valley first showed to me as a child. On it a kindly priest holds a large cross over a kneeling Indian. For some reason, though, the padre apparently aims not to bless the Indian but rather to bludgeon him with the emblem of Christianity. This portrait, too, clings to the memory, capturing the critical view of the missionization of California's indigenous inhabitants. I carried the two childhood images with me both when I went to libraries as I researched the missions and when I revisited several missions thirty years after those family trips. In this work I proceed neither to debunk nor to reconcile these contrary notions of the missions and Indians but to present a new and, I hope, deeper understanding of the complex interaction of the two antithetical cultures.

Until recently the missions were the only piece of Spanish or Mexican California history children heard about in the public

schools, in spite of the centrality of subsequent events concerning Mexicans to the history of the state. Only Carey McWilliams wrote and kept alive what later came to be known as Chicano history. Most people of Mexican descent knew, at least vaguely, that their families were part of a history. But this history received no validation or acknowledgment because it received no attention either in schools or in the dominant culture. Then came that resultful era, the sixties, when the struggle of the United Farm Workers, under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, and the youthful explosion of *chicanismo*, including the Brown Power movement, catalyzed Mexican American consciousness of both the present and the past.

In the seventies Mexican Americans began to affirm the existence of a Chicano history in writings that reflected the different self-conceptions, self-definitions, and strategies of Chicanismo. Were these newly defined Chicanos an internal colony, or a superexploited sector of the working class, or erstwhile Mexicans isolated from the home country, or only the latest immigrant group waiting for acceptance into American society? The new Chicano historians wrote history refracted through the prism of these political and cultural exigencies. They seemed to agree that Mexicans in the United States were an oppressed group (though the nature of that condition was imprecisely defined and hotly debated) who resisted their disparaged condition to various degrees.

These political and cultural considerations are still of importance, of course. My answer, however, to the question of definition is simply that Mexican Americans/Chicanos/Hispanic Californians are a product of history, a history as yet written incompletely. Many books, scholarly and popular articles, and even some fiction about old California tell of the missions, or the Indians, or the ranchos, or the Mexican War, or the Gold Rush, or the Anglo settlement of nineteenth-century California. I set out to understand the history of the Mexican people—"how they were born, how they came to this certain place"—and to add this neglected aspect to the history of southern California. The point here, as regards Chicano history, is that the situation of Mexicans in California

derives from the outcome of the interaction of Indians in California with those Europeans and Americans who, along with their productive institutions and notions of other, sought to hold sway over them. On the journey to this understanding I found that history proved more complex and more interesting. One cannot understand discretely either the history of any one people or any one of their many categories of existence. This book is still a history of Spanish and Mexican California, but only because these peoples dominated the landscape during the years under study. It is as much a history of the Indians because, first, they are worthy of historical analysis and, second, the history of Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo California cannot be understood apart from the relationships these people entered into with the native inhabitants. My sometimes-difficult, sometimes-tedious, but usually inspiring expedition through the documents of early California history has shown me that understanding can only come from a sympathetic hearing and critical analysis of the stories of all these people. The Spanish and the Anglos have had their stories told for a long time, and in the last two decades so too have the Indians and the Mexicans. Now it is time for the whole history, and that is what I have tried to write in this book.

An array of these sorts of relationships of Spanish and Mexican California are here dissected and analyzed. I hope that my readers will bear with all of these differing accounts in the various sections of the book. The same things did not happen to everyone in Spanish and Mexican southern California, and when they did, different people had profoundly different perceptions of the events. Not everyone, therefore, had the same story. To approach the truth, we must know as many of these stories as can reasonably fit into this narrative. Epistemological questions arise from this methodology. The existence of differing accounts of the same event means that someone is not telling the truth. How do we know who is accurate? Does the fact that one person's telling includes obvious fabrications delegitimize his or her entire reckoning? Can we conclude anything definitively or are our views of society and culture at best a series of subjectivities to which different

people adhere? It is the historian's job to analyze critically these multifarious chronicles—to deconstruct them, if you will—and discern where there is truth. I have done so using the insights of political economy, psychology, anthropology, social theory, feminism, and, of course, historical analysis. Through this process I have constructed with integrity and empathy—an impossible task, had I adhered to only one category of historical investigation—my own view of this history, which I think is a more complete one than has been written heretofore. Such a frankly interpretive effort is a risky undertaking, and I hope that differences with my point of view will be creative ones that produce yet fuller understandings of these historical characters, cultures, and epochs.

The consistent theme of this book—the experience of people being thrown among strangers, usually because of the demands of labor, in southern California—seeks to illuminate how cultural and historical change happens. I take the view that such change happens when there is interaction, which may be conflictual, adaptive, and even lethal, with “others” and when the weight of historical development encounters the perceived exigencies of a later historical moment. From the aboriginal inhabitants to the Californio dons to the Mexican immigrants of the late nineteenth century, cultural change occurred when the actions of various people and the events of history broke down or delegitimated the old ways. When people then adapted, rebelled, retrenched, or suffered physical and cultural decay, they made history, be it tragic, foolish, heroic, comic, pathetic, boring, or confounding. The evidence accumulated and digested in this book suggests that work on this frontier, as regards first Spain and Mexico and then the United States, has been central to understanding how and why different cultures interacted with one another. Thus, the narrative revolves around the nature of work, ideas about who should do it and under what conditions, and peoples' cultural handling of changes in life and labor.

In part 1 I examine the interaction of the native and Iberian cultures through the institution of the mission in California as a whole. For the Indians, time had been essentially circular. At this historical moment, the late eighteenth century, “el Camino Real” reached them and the Indians were

thrust onto the highway of European history, an event of monumental consequences for them. The padres' civilizing efforts, the Indian responses based on their own cultural presuppositions, and the role of the civil authorities, especially the soldiers, provide the substance of this initial era of Mexican and Spanish California history. In part 2 I proceed to analyze, by examining rancho southern California, what the mission period bequeathed to the history of Mexicans before and after the Mexican War of 1846–48. The relationship between the rancheros and the Indians who labored on their lands is central to this era. Part 2 pursues an analysis of how that legacy continued through the Anglo period in southern California, where most Mexicans lived after the 1850s. The demise of the Indians, a process traced from their first interactions with the Iberian soldiers to their end in the City of the Angels, and their replacement with Mexicans from south of the border, completes this historical venture.

The activities and relationships of common people, as well as of elites, come into this analysis. These active associations, which people assume with varying degrees of choice, are a cause of historical change in the arenas of popular culture, ideology, and relations of political and economic power. When those who work enter into production, they do not simply engage the land, tools, and machines; they commence an interconnection with those who control such means as well. Elites, whether in Madrid, Mexico City, Washington, or Los Angeles, influenced such matters as the body discipline of mission Indians in the eighteenth century and the alienation of Mexican lands in the nineteenth century. Structural changes in the regional economy contributed to the final destruction of the Indians in the mid-nineteenth century and the new trappings of work for Mexican immigrants in the late nineteenth century. The most salient features of racial conflict were rooted in each culture's antithetical lifeways in the 130 years covered here. Furthermore, political, economic, racial, and sexual domination is of crucial importance in the forging of social and cultural history.

Many Spanish words are used to tell this story—not only such permanent immigrants into the English language as *patio*, *taco*, *cañon*, *rodeo*, and even the word *California* itself

but also *gente, americano, raza, chicano, mexicano, bandido, rancho*, and others that enrich and make more precise this historical venture. Indeed, I have sometimes opted to use the very words by which the people in this book described certain others. Thus, since Spaniards or Californios referred to the native inhabitants of California as *indios*, I often use that word to convey their viewpoint. Similarly, when Mexicans or Californios encountered Anglo-Americans, they called them *americanos*, and that is the word I use when I am describing the Spanish-speaking peoples' perceptions of the newcomers from the east.

It has been a good journey for me. From the stories I heard on it, I learned much about not only Indians, Iberians, Mexicans, and Anglos but also the riddle of existence. I want to share this knowledge with my readers in the most accessible way. The tone, and often the form, adopted here is more literary than is customary in the social sciences. It should become clear that the style borrows from the tradition of the greatest of California, Western, and Southwestern historians, Hubert Howe Bancroft, and from notions of Indian storytelling. As Leslie Marmon Silko says in her novel, *Ceremony*, "You don't have anything / if you don't have the stories." In a good story there is much to be learned and much insight to be gained: "I will tell you something about stories, / They aren't just entertainment. / Don't be fooled."

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