

Mexican California: A Study in Contrasts



In seeking to understand what Douglas Monroy has called "the making of Mexican culture in frontier California" (see this chapter's second essay), it is important to focus on the complicated interplay among Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo cultures during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is important, as well, to remember that throughout the Wars of Independence in Latin America (from 1808 to the birth of the Mexican Republic in 1821), California was a marginal bystander, isolated from Mexico and its rebellion. Such separation encouraged the growth of California sectionalism rather than identification with Mexico and its liberatory aspirations. Nonetheless, when Pablo Vicente de Solá, the last Spanish governor of Alta California, learned of the Mexican revolutionaries' success, he was persuaded by his advisors to declare California a part of the new Mexican empire. In September 1822 the Mexican flag thus replaced the Spanish one at Monterey, then the capital of Alta California.

*During the early years of the Mexican Republic, mestizo (or mixed-blood) migrants from the interior of Mexico joined with retired frontier Spanish soldiers to settle in towns near the California missions. The 1820s and 1830s were a period of social and political turbulence during which the mission system ended. This historic transition involved a process called "secularization," or conversion of the missions into ordinary parish churches. As historian Lisbeth Haas recently has reminded us in *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936* (1995), it also involved a related process of "emancipation," or the release of Indian neophytes from close supervision by friars. Together, secularization and emancipation made possible the rise of a vast network of private ranchos (ranches used mostly to raise cattle), which eventually covered much of southern California.*

As Monroy points out, the rise of these ranchos "profoundly influenced the course of California history." The Californios (or Mexican-Californians) prospered greatly from secularization by taking over enormous amounts of former mission lands and mission assets; thereafter constructing a hierarchical, seigneurial system in which they functioned as virtual lords. For the

Indians, many of whom became menial laborers on the new ranchos, it was, in contrast, an extremely painful and disruptive experience. In other words, whatever positive effects emancipation may have had for the Indians were severely compromised.

One knowledgeable student of that era, Lawrence Jelinek of Loyola Marymount University, has observed in *Harvest Empire: A History of California Agriculture* (1982) that "secularization represented not a democratization of land holding for Indian or settler, but the shift of land monopoly from a religious elite to a secular elite." The new *ranchero* elite was itself to be displaced during the 1840s and 1850s through a process of "Americanization," culminating in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, when California became part of the United States.

There is little doubt that the secularization of the missions and emancipation of the Indians led to a different kind of society, one in which the Mexican administrative and *ranchero* elite played the dominant role. But it is difficult to summarize the impact of Mexican rule on the social, economic, and legal structure of California. What was daily life like? How did the Indians fare under secularization? Look for evidence of many different points of view in the documents. Did contemporaries experience California as a happy-go-lucky "lotos-land" during this period, or did they perceive problems? To what extent is the message shaped by each speaker's background? The two essays that follow the documents also offer widely differing perspectives; it is tempting to speculate on why each historian wrote as he did.



DOCUMENTS

It was not until some years after Mexico gained its independence that the Mexican government addressed the issue of the secularization of missions in Baja and Alta California. In May 1833 a commission of the Mexican chamber of deputies issued a report on the subject, recommending a law that was formally adopted several months later. Portions of that report are included here as the first document. It is followed by a narrative account dictated by Angustias de la Guerra Ord, an upper-class California woman. She was the daughter of Comandante de la Guerra and the wife of Manuel Jimeno Casarin, a leading military and, later, civil official during the 1830s and 1840s. Ord describes the process of secularization from the point of view of a well-placed *Californio*.

The third document is drawn from Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), considered by many to be California's first literary classic. Formerly a Harvard undergraduate, Dana signed on the brig *Pilgrim* in 1834 as a common sailor and made the arduous voyage around Cape Horn to California, later recording his observations about the region. The nostalgic, romantic reminiscence of daily life during the so-called pastoral period by Guadalupe Vallejo, whose uncle, General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, was for a long time military leader of California, is this chapter's fourth document.

The fifth document is selected from a group of letters published in April 1847, one year after the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, as a special supplement to the *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette*. These letters, signed by "W.G." (who was actually William Robert Garner, a resident of Monterey from 1824 to 1846), contain the most complete description of the

customs and life of Californians to reach the broader American public prior to the discovery of gold in 1848.

Several key articles from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which established most of the current boundary between the United States and Mexico, are reproduced as the final document. The treaty's eighth and ninth articles, in particular, were intended by their framers to protect fully the civil and property rights of Mexicans and Indians who remained in the conquered region and who were now residents of the United States. Yet later on these provisions were often interpreted in ways that violated the original intent. After the Mexican-American War, Yankees asserted their own style of domination, arguing that the treaty made California a "white man's country."

A Mexican Commission Urges the Secularization of the California Missions, 1833

The commission of the district and territories in order to recommend to this respectable chamber the project of law on secularization of the missions of both Californias . . . decreed in the year 1813 [*sic*; 1833] the secularization of the missions, ordered the administration and management of the property to be wrenched from the hands of the religious people and deposited with the civil authorities in order that by a just and proper distribution those to whom it belonged by so many titles should enter into the enjoyment of it. What then should be expected of a government truly parental and philanthropic in which we enjoy so satisfactorily the social pleasures?

This government with respect even to the Californias, in order to take the extended view which is exacted by a policy for all those governed, hears from the commission of wise men which is formed for that purpose the projects for the organization of that country, and from them arises the initiative which is about to be discussed. The missionaries, whether Jesuits, Fernandinos, or Dominicans, at the beginning labor with the evangelical spirit. Their toils and apostolic labors are recompensed with seasoned fruits of conversion; they overrun the deserts, they penetrate the forests, they domesticate those savage beings, they mitigate their ferocious customs, and raise them to a certain grade in civil life. Without fear it might be augured that they would be those who without doubt would dissipate ignorance, combat errors and prejudices to the point where they planted there the holy law of Nature which is the foundation of the others. But how soon did they come to submerge those unfortunate beings in a chaos a thousand times more horrible than the other from which they had emerged! Administration of the property turns them aside from their vocation and far from persuading the weak, opposing the rebels and conducting all towards happiness, they continue the conquest like their predecessors, and the natives see renewed in themselves the days of horror and mourning in the punishment and severity which they suffer from those who profess the adorable religion which inspires sweetness and preaches humanity and meekness. This despotic monklike government, once independence was gained, increases the misfortune of the Californias, since the missionaries, being in the greater part Spaniards and refusing to take the oath of independence, make

them feel all the evils which afflict subordinates when the mandarins, mad and infuriated, have to turn loose their prey which for so long a time has increased their boundless ambition.

Such misfortunes are in part alleviated by the undertakings of the government, in the greater part the law of colonization which has just been discussed will remedy them. . . .

[T]he commission offers for the deliberation of the chamber the following articles:

- Art. 1. The government will proceed to secularize the missions of Upper and Lower California.
2. In each one of these missions a parish will be established served by a parish priest of the secular clergy with a salary of 2000 up to 2500 *pesos* annually according to the judgment of the government.
3. These parish priests shall not collect nor receive any fee for marriages, baptisms, burials, or under any other name whatever. In respect to fees for pomp they can receive those which are expressly set out in the schedule which will be formed with this object in view by the bishop of that diocese as soon as possible and which shall be approved by the supreme government.
4. The churches which have served in each mission with their sacred vessels, ornaments and other equipment which each one has today, are destined for the parishes, and in addition the rooms next to the church itself, which in the judgment of the government may be thought necessary for the most decorous use of the parish itself.
5. For each parish the government will order a cemetery to be constructed outside the town.
6. Five hundred *pesos* annually are assigned to sustain the worship and the servants of each parish.
7. The most appropriate of the buildings belonging to each mission shall be assigned for the habitation of the parish priest, adding to it ground not to exceed 200 *varas* square, and the others shall be assigned especially for the town house, the school of first letters, public establishments and workshops.
8. In order to provide at once and effectively for the spiritual needs of both Californias there is to be established in the capital of Upper California a vicar who shall extend his jurisdiction over both territories, and the bishop will confer on him the corresponding powers with all the amplitude possible.
9. For the endowment of this vicar 3000 *pesos* shall be assigned, all business to be performed by him without exacting under any pretext whatever, not even for paper, any fee.
10. If for any reason the parish priest of the capital or of any other parish of those districts should act in this capacity as vicar 1500 *pesos* annually will be assigned to him beyond his salary as curate.
11. No custom whatever, which obliges the inhabitants of the Californias to make gifts for no matter how pious the object, shall be introduced even if it is said to be necessary, and neither time nor the

willingness of the citizens themselves can give such any force or virtue whatever.

12. The government will effectively take care that the bishop contributes on his part to fulfill the objects of this law.
13. When the new parish priests have been appointed the supreme government will furnish them gratuitously their transport by sea together with their families and besides for their journey by land, it shall allow each one from 400 to 800 *pesos* according to the distance and the number of family which he takes.
14. The government will pay the expenses of transporting the missionaries who return, and that they may perform their journey by land in a comfortable manner to their college or convent it shall give each one 200 to 300 *pesos*, and in its judgment whatever may be necessary to leave the republic for those who reject the oath of independence.
15. The supreme government will pay the expenses contemplated under this law out of the products of real property, the capital and the rents which are now set aside as the Pious Fund of the missions of California.

The committee room of the chamber of deputies,
Mexico, May 9, 1833
Berriel—Losano—Anaya

Angustias de la Guerra Ord Defends the Virtue of Mission Priests, 1878

Genl. Figueroa continued to govern the land with great ability and acquired wide respect. He always maintained, as I said before, good relations with the Diputacion and the other civil officers. His health worsened each day and he anxiously awaited his relief, but it did not come. He finally succumbed to a cerebral attack in August of 1835, and was widely mourned. Though at that time I resided in Monterey, I had come to Santa Barbara to see my parents, and was here when Figueroa died.

His body was embalmed, and honors were rendered to his remains in Monterey according to his rank. Before his death he had directed that his body be interred at Santa Barbara Mission. This was done, the body being brought from Monterey in a ship to Santa Barbara. Captain Muñoz represented the Army and my husband, Jimeno, represented the Ayuntamiento. I do not remember whether any representatives of the Diputacion came. Here he was deposited in a niche in the vault of the Mission by Padres Narciso Durán and Antonio Jimeno, who were the pastors of the Mission, which I believe was then secularized, but was preserved with all its privileges. This was not true of San Miguel which in 1833 was very rich. Padre Juan Cabot showed me all of its warehouses. They were full of goods, grain, etc., and also had a goodly sum of money belonging to the Mission. When I returned there in 1835 I found not even a glass in which to drink water and had to

drink from a cup I had brought myself. All of the assets of the Mission, herds, etc., had disappeared.

It has been said by some that before the secularization of the Missions when the padres saw that it was coming upon them, they decided to turn as much of the herds into cash as possible. That to this end extraordinary slaughterings were had, under orders of the missionaries, under contracts with individuals on a half-share basis. That they killed many thousands of cattle, of which they retained only the hides. So great was the slaughter that the authorities became alarmed lest the country be left without neat [*sic*] cattle if limits were not put on it, and that the Jefe Político took steps to stop this destruction of animals.

My father had been Síndico for the missionaries for many years past, under appointment from the College of San Fernando and had in his hands the *sínodos* of the padres. Later when the Missions in the north were turned over to the Guadalupans, he remained as Síndico of the Fernandinos and continued as such until his death. All the padres came to him for their *sínodos* and never took money even to give alms (and the major part of what each owned was involved in this) without his views and advice. They all looked on him as their best friend and loved him like a brother.

On my part, I had two brothers-in-law who were missionaries who loved me as my own brothers.

If there had been dishonest killing of herds to get money before the Missions were secularized, I would have known of it. My father would have had knowledge of all of it. I had no hesitancy in saying that this charge is false, like many others which have been made to the prejudice of the good name of our priests, who were living examples of virtue and who lived for the good of their neophytes.

Surely, the Missions at certain times of the year had slaughterings on a grand scale for hides and tallow with which they purchased from the ships materials in which to dress their neophytes. They also used the meat. They made jerky of it to feed the same Indians during the winter.

I am informed that the Mission of San Gabriel (which they say had about 100,000 neat [*sic*] cattle) had made contracts with some residents of Los Angeles and also of San Diego (in fact it was said that the herds of the Mission reached to San Diego) to kill on shares a great quantity of cattle because they could not confine the cattle within the lands of the Mission. The killers were to take a half of the hides of the cattle they slaughtered and to deliver the other half to the Mission. I do not know whether these contracts were made prior to the death of Padre José Sánchez. I do not remember if the killing began before his death, but the massacre was after his death. I heard it said that more than 30,000 cattle were killed there and there were fears that there might be cholera or some other epidemic because of so much meat rotting in the fields.

The same was done at San Luis Rey, which was also a Mission very rich in herds. I do not believe that any other Missions held killings on a grand scale (there was the usual one each year) and if there had been I would have known of it.

Much has been said of the Missions having large amounts of coins. Special mention has been made of San Gabriel having huge deposits of money. I don't know where such great quantities of money could come from, because their transactions with traders were always goods for goods. There was but little money in the country. Even the ships had scarcely enough to pay their taxes. Many of them took money loaned here for this. No doubt the Missions had some money but it must have been in moderate sums. It may be that some of the Missions in the north which trafficked with the Russians had more opportunities to get cash, but I doubt if even there they received much, because when the Russians bought wheat they paid partly in cash and partly in goods.

The missionary padres whom I knew in my time almost all died here. The only ones who in my time left the country were Ripoll and Altimira, who according to what they wrote themselves, carried money sufficient to pay their passage. Padre Luis Martínez was put out and the money he carried came from my father's house; it had been put there as his *sínodos*. Padre José Viader took his *sínodos* from my father's house when he went.

Padre Antonio Peyri, founder of the Mission of San Luis Rey, on the day of his departure took with him \$3,000 as his *sínodos* for his administration. He wrote the Commanding General, who transcribed a paragraph to my father. He also took with him 2 or 3 little Indians to Rome and established them there to be educated for the priesthood. Only one of them survived and he became a priest of great capacity and virtue in Rome. Naturally he paid the travel expenses of his companions from the \$3,000.

Those who died in California in my time were Padre José Señán at San Buenaventura. I was very little.

Padre Antonio Jayme at Santa Barbara.

Padre Uría—in my father's house. He was a very generous man; in fact, at his death he had nothing left of his *sínodos*.

Padre Buenaventura Fortuny—in the house of Don José Antonio Aguirre at Santa Barbara. He left no *sínodo* at his death because when he received even one peso of it, he sought permission of the *Síndico* to give it to the poor.

Padre Vicente Francisco de Sarría—was found in 1835 almost dead at the Mission of San Antonio.

I heard it said that he had died of hunger, because he had nothing with which to buy food, because the administrator did not supply him, whether for ignorance or other reason. He was buried at the Mission.

Padre Luis Gil de Taboada—died at San Luis Obispo before the Mission was secularized.

Padre Ramón Abella—died at Mission Santa Inés in 1842. As he was very old my father sent him from here from his *sínodos* what he needed. I believe he had nothing left at his death.

Padre Marcos Antonio de Vitoria—was truly an angel—he was child-like. He died at Santa Inés. I wasn't here but I believe he left nothing at his death.

Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Criticizes the Mexicans in California, 1834

Vessels began to come into the ports to trade with the missions and receive hides in return; and thus began the great trade of California. Nearly all the cattle in the country belonged to the missions, and they employed their Indians—who became, in fact, their serfs—in tending their vast herds. In the year 1793, when Vancouver visited San Diego, the missions had obtained great wealth and power. . . . On the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish dominions, the missions passed into the hands of the Franciscans, though without any essential change in their management. Ever since the independence of Mexico, the missions had been going down; until, at last, a law was passed, stripping them of their possessions, and confining the priests to their spiritual duties, at the same time declaring all the Indians free and independent *rancheros*. The change in the condition of the Indians was . . . only nominal; they are virtually serfs, as much as they ever were. But in the missions the change was complete. The priests now have no power, except in their religious character, and the great possessions of the missions are given over to be preyed upon by the harpies of the civil power, who are sent there in the capacity of *administradores*, to settle up the concerns; and who usually end, in a few years, by making themselves fortunes, and leaving their stewardships worse than they found them. The dynasty of the priests was much more acceptable to the people of the country, and, indeed, to everyone concerned with the country, by trade or otherwise, than that of the *administradores*. The priests were connected permanently to one mission, and felt the necessity of keeping up its credit. Accordingly, the debts of the missions were regularly paid, and the people were, in the main, well treated, and attached to those who had spent their whole lives among them. But the *administradores* are strangers sent from Mexico, having no interest in the country, not identified in any way with their charge, and, for the most part, men of desperate fortunes—broken-down politicians and soldiers—whose only object is to retrieve their condition in as short a time as possible. The change had been made but a few short years before our arrival upon the coast, yet, in that short time, the trade was much diminished, credit impaired, and the venerable missions were going rapidly to decay. . . .

The government of the country is an arbitrary democracy, having no common law, and nothing that we should call a judiciary. Their only laws are made and unmade at the caprice of the legislature, and are as variable as the legislature itself. They pass through the form of sending representatives to the congress at Mexico, but as it takes several months to go and return, and there is very little communication between the capital and this distant province, a member usually stays there as permanent member. . . .

As for justice, they know little law but will and fear. A Yankee, who had been naturalized and become a Catholic, and had married in the country, was sitting in his house at the Pueblo de los Angeles, with his wife and children, when a Mexican with whom he had had a difficulty entered the house

and stabbed him to the heart before them all. The murderer was seized by some Yankees who had settled there, and kept in confinement until a statement of the whole affair could be sent to the governor general. The governor general refused to do anything about it, and the countrymen of the murdered man, seeing no prospect of justice being administered, . . . proceeded to try the man according to the forms in their own country. A judge and jury were appointed, and he was tried, convicted, sentenced to be shot, and carried out before the town blind-folded. The names of all the men were then put into a hat, and each one pledging himself to perform his duty, twelve names were drawn out, and the men took their stations with their rifles, and, firing at the word, laid him dead. He was decently buried, and the place was restored quietly to the proper authorities. . . .

When a crime has been committed by Indians, justice, or rather vengeance, is not so tardy. One Sunday afternoon while I was at San Diego, an Indian was sitting on his horse when another, with whom he had had some difficulty, came up to him, drew a long knife, and plunged it directly into the horse's heart. The Indian sprang from his falling horse, drew out the knife, and plunged it into the other Indian's breast, over his shoulder, and laid him dead. The fellow was seized at once, clapped into the *calabozo*, and kept there until an answer could be received from Monterey. A few weeks afterward I saw the poor wretch, sitting on the bare ground, in front of the *calabozo*, with his feet chained to a stake, and handcuffs about his wrists. I knew there was very little hope for him. Although the deed was done in hot blood, the horse on which he was sitting being his own, and a favorite with him, yet he was an Indian, and that was enough. In about a week after I saw him, I heard that he had been shot. These few instances will serve to give one a notion of the distribution of justice in California.

In their domestic relations, these people are not better than in their public. The men are thriftless, proud, extravagant, and very much given to gaming; and the women have but little education, and a good deal of beauty, and their morality, of course, is none of the best; yet the instances of infidelity are much less frequent than one would at first suppose. . . . [T]he jealousy of their husbands is extreme, and their revenge deadly and almost certain. A few inches of cold steel has been the punishment of many an unwary man, who has been guilty, perhaps, of nothing more than indiscretion. . . . With the unmarried women, too, great watchfulness is used. The main object of the parents is to marry their daughters well, and to this a fair name is necessary. . . .

Of the poor Indians very little care is taken. The priests, indeed, at the missions are said to keep them very strictly, and some rules are usually made by the *alcaldes* to punish their misconduct; yet it all amounts to but little. . . . Intemperance, too, is a common vice among the Indians. The Mexicans, on the contrary, are abstemious, and I do not remember ever having seen a Mexican intoxicated.

Such are the people who inhabit a country embracing four or five hundred miles of seacoast, with several good harbors; with fine forests in the north; the waters filled with fish, and the plains covered with thousands of

herds of cattle; blessed with a climate than which there can be no better in the world; free from all manner of diseases, whether epidemic or endemic; and with a soil in which corn yields from seventy to eighty fold. In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be.

Guadalupe Vallejo Reminisces About the Ranchero Period

Our social life still tends to keep alive a spirit of love for the simple, homely, outdoor life of our Spanish ancestors on this coast, and we try, as best we may, to honor the founders of our ancient families, and the saints and heroes of our history, since the days when Father Junipero planted the cross at Monterey.

The leading features of old Spanish life at the Missions, and on the large ranches of the last century, have been described in many books of travel, and with many contradictions. I shall confine myself to those details and illustrations of the past that no modern writer can possibly obtain except vaguely, from hearsay, since they exist in no manuscript, but only in the memories of a generation that is fast passing away. My mother has told me much, and I am still more indebted to my illustrious uncle, General Vallejo, of Sonoma, many of whose recollections are incorporated in this article.

When I was a child there were fewer than fifty Spanish families in the region about the bay of San Francisco, and these were closely connected by ties of blood or intermarriage. My father and his brother, the late General Vallejo, saw, and were part of, the most important events in the history of Spanish California, the revolution and the conquest. My grandfather, Don Ygnacio Vallejo, was equally prominent in his day, in the exploration and settlement of the province. The traditions and records of the family thus cover the entire period of the annals of early California, from San Diego to Sonoma. . . .

The Jesuit Missions established in Lower California, at Loreto and other places, were followed by Franciscan Missions in Alta California, with presidios for the soldiers, adjacent pueblos, or towns, and the granting of large tracts of land to settlers. By 1782 there were nine flourishing Missions in Alta California—San Francisco, Santa Clara, San Carlos, San Antonio, San Luis Obispo, San Buenaventura, San Gabriel, San Juan, and San Diego. Governor Fajés added Santa Barbara and Purissima, and by 1790 there were more than 7000 Indian converts in the various Missions. By 1800 about forty Franciscan fathers were at work in Alta California, six of whom had been among the pioneers of twenty and twenty-five years before, and they had established seven new Missions—San José, San Miguel, Soledad, San Fernando, Santa Cruz, San Juan Bautista, and San Luis Rey. . . . In 1773 Father Palou had reported that all the Missions, taken together, owned two hundred and four head of cattle and a few sheep, goats, and mules. In 1776 the regular five years' supplies sent from Mexico to the Missions were as follows: 107 blankets, 480 yards striped sackcloth, 389 yards blue baize, 10 pounds blue maguey cloth, 4 reams paper, 5 bales red

pepper, 10 arrobas of tasajo (dried beef), beads, chocolate, lard, lentils, rice, flour, and four barrels of Castilian wine. By 1800 all this was changed: the flocks and herds of cattle of California contained 187,000 animals, of which 153,000 were in the Mission pastures, and large areas of land had been brought under cultivation, so that the Missions supplied the presidios and foreign ships.

No one need suppose that the Spanish pioneers of California suffered many hardships or privations, although it was a new country. They came slowly, and were prepared to become settlers. All that was necessary for the maintenance and enjoyment of life according to the simple and healthful standards of those days was brought with them. They had seeds, trees, vines, cattle, household goods, and servants, and in a few years their orchards yielded abundantly and their gardens were full of vegetables. Poultry was raised by the Indians, and sold very cheaply; a fat capon cost only twelve and a half cents. Beef and mutton were to be had for the killing, and wild game was very abundant. At many of the Missions there were large flocks of tame pigeons. At the Mission San José the fathers' doves consumed a cental of wheat daily, besides what they gathered in the village. The doves were of many colors, and they made a beautiful appearance on the red tiles of the church and the tops of the dark garden walls. . . .

Family life among the old Spanish pioneers was an affair of dignity and ceremony, but it did not lack in affection. Children were brought up with great respect for their elders. It was the privilege of any elderly person to correct young people by words, or even by whipping them, and it was never told that any one thus chastised made a complaint. Each one of the old families taught their children the history of the family, and reverence towards religion. A few books, some in manuscript, were treasured in the household, but children were not allowed to read novels until they were grown. They saw little of other children, except their near relatives, but they had many enjoyments unknown to children now, and they grew up with remarkable strength and healthfulness.

In these days of trade, bustle, and confusion, when many thousands of people live in the California valleys, which formerly were occupied by only a few Spanish families, the quiet and happy domestic life of the past seems like a dream. We, who loved it, often speak of those days, and especially of the duties of the large Spanish households, where so many dependents were to be cared for, and everything was done in a simple and primitive way. . . .

It is necessary, for the truth of the account, to mention the evil behavior of many Americans before, as well as after the conquest. At the Mission San José there is a small creek, and two very large sycamores once grew at the Spanish ford, so that it was called *la aliso*. A squatter named Fallon, who lived near the crossing, cut down these for firewood, though there were many trees in the cañon. The Spanish people begged him to leave them, for the shade and beauty, but he did not care for that. This was a little thing, but much that happened was after such pattern, or far worse.

In those times one of the leading American squatters came to my father, Don J. J. Vallejo, and said: "There is a large piece of your land where the

cattle run loose, and your vaqueros have gone to the gold mines. I will fence the field for you at my expense if you will give me half." He liked the idea, and assented, but when the tract was inclosed the American had it entered as government land in his own name, and kept all of it. In many similar cases American settlers in their dealings with the rancheros took advantage of laws which they understood, but which were new to the Spaniards, and so robbed the latter of their lands. Notes and bonds were considered unnecessary by a Spanish gentleman in a business transaction, as his word was always sufficient security.

William Robert Garner Promotes the American Annexation of California, 1847

February 24, 1847—In the name of wonder, what is the meaning of all this fuss and bustle about us here in California; or in what is it going to result? Will this country be annexed to the United States of America, or will it not? Some doubts appear to remain, and the question is undecided. Seven-eighths of the inhabitants of California this day believe with me, that it is as easy for the American flag to come down in the city of Washington, as it is that it should ever come down in California; but then we only believe so because we, like most other people, are apt to believe what we wish to be the case; the more especially, as we have good reason to dread the consequences, should the Mexicans ever regain their sovereignty here, which almost all in California are ready to say, *and do say*, God forbid.

There is another strong reason why the U. [sic] States is in the present case bound to perform what she has undertaken. She has said, I must have California. The words were hardly spoken before we the inhabitants of California heard them, and on hearing them could not refrain from demonstrating our joy, in the hope of being by her freed from the rapacity and caprices of a few individuals who held us in bondage. Should she now abandon us, that joy would be turned into bitter lamentation; because it will not for one moment be supposed by any who are acquainted with the vindictive spirit of our former masters, that they would hesitate or make any scruple about assassinating all those individuals who had expressed the slightest wish to shake off the fetters with which they have been bound for the last twelve years.

Nothing can prevent this disaster but the retention of California by the United States, and the prompt establishment of settled government under her sanction, and a strict execution of law. Such is the daily and hourly wish of all those persons who hold property. Those who have nothing are the only persons from whom any future dissensions may be expected. But as California has afforded to every man who wished to acquire it, a means of supporting himself and family in an independent manner, those who do not do so may be considered, with a very few exceptions, as a set of worthless men, whose only desire is to support themselves by plundering and cheating the industrious.

As plunder and fraud will not be permitted under the government of the United States with impunity, the result will be one of two things. By a strict

execution of justice these delinquents will fall under the iron hand of the law, or they will have to become what they never have been, *honest and industrious citizens*.

The Californians are naturally very docile. Generally speaking, they are very apt to act on the impulse of the moment, without any heed to the future; but the reason is, they have never been taught to look forward for their own benefit. They have been brought up under the government and tuition of vicious and corrupt men, and nothing but example will make them see their folly. Precept will not do it; but as soon as one, two, or three of the worst malefactors have undergone capital punishment, the whole country will be at peace.

Selected Articles from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848

Of Peace, Friendship, Limits, and Settlement, between the United States of America, and the Mexican Republic, concluded at Guadalupe Hidalgo, on the Second Day of February, with Amendments by the American Senate, March 10th, 1848, and by the Mexican Senate, May 25th, 1848.

The Treaty

In the name of Almighty God:

The United States of America and the United Mexican States, animated by a sincere desire to put an end to the calamities of the war which unhappily exists between the two republics, and to establish on a solid basis relations of peace and friendship, which shall confer reciprocal benefits on the citizens of both, and assure the concord, harmony, and mutual confidence wherein the two people should live as good neighbours, have, for that purpose, appointed their respective plenipotentiaries . . . who, after a reciprocal communication of their respective powers, have, under the protection of Almighty God, the author of peace, arranged, agreed upon, and signed the following treaty of peace, friendship, limits, and settlement, between the United States of America and the Mexican republic.

Art. I.—There shall be a firm and universal peace between the United States of America and the Mexican republic, and between their respective countries, territories, cities, towns, and people, without exception of places or persons.

Art. II.—Immediately on the signature of this treaty, a convention shall be entered into between a commissioner or commissioners appointed by the general-in-chief of the forces of the United States, and such as may be appointed by the Mexican government, to the end that a provisional suspension of hostilities shall take place; and that in the places occupied by the said forces, constitutional order may be re-established, as regards the political, administrative, and judicial branches, so far as this shall be permitted by the circumstances of military occupation. . . .

Art. VIII.—Mexicans now established in territories previously belonging to Mexico, and which remain, for the future, within the limits of the United States, as defined by the present treaty, shall be free to continue where they now reside, or to remove, at any time, to the Mexican republic, retaining the property which they possess in the said territories, or disposing thereof, and removing the proceeds wherever they please, without their being subjected, on this account, to any contribution, or tax, or charge, whatever.

Those who shall prefer to remain in said territories, may either retain the title and rights of Mexican citizens, or acquire those of citizens of the United States. But they shall be under the obligation to make their selection within one year from the date of exchange of ratifications of this treaty; and those who shall remain in the said territories, after the expiration of that year, without having declared their intention to retain the character of Mexicans, shall be considered to have elected to become citizens of the United States.

In the said territories, property of every kind, now belonging to Mexicans not established there, shall be inviolably respected. The present owners, the heirs of these, and all Mexicans who may hereafter acquire said property by contract, shall enjoy, with respect to it, guaranties equally ample as if the same belonged to citizens of the United States.

Art. IX.—The Mexicans who, in the territories aforesaid, shall not preserve the character of citizens of the Mexican republic, conformably with what is stipulated in the preceding article, shall be incorporated into the union of the United States, and admitted as soon as possible, according to the principles of the federal constitution, to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States. In the mean time, they shall be maintained and protected in the enjoyment of their liberty, their property, and the civil rights now vested in them according to the Mexican laws. With respect to political rights, their condition shall be on an equality with that of the inhabitants of the other territories of the United States, and at least equally good as that of the inhabitants of Louisiana and the Floridas, when these provinces, by transfer from the French republic and the crown of Spain, became territories of the United States.

The same most ample guaranty shall be enjoyed by all ecclesiastics and religious corporations or communities, as well in the discharge of the offices of their ministry as in the enjoyment of their property of every kind, whether individual or corporate. This guaranty shall embrace all temples, houses, and edifices dedicated to the Roman Catholic worship, as well as all property destined to its support, or to that of schools, hospitals, and other foundations for charitable or beneficent purposes. No property of this nature shall be considered as having become the property of the American government, or as subject to be by it disposed of, or diverted to other uses.

Finally, the relations and communication between the Catholics living in the territories aforesaid, and their respective ecclesiastical authorities, shall be open, free, and exempt from all hindrance whatever, even although such authorities should reside within the limits of the Mexican republic, as

defined by this treaty; and this freedom shall continue, so long as a new demarkation of ecclesiastical districts shall not have been made, conformably with the laws of the Roman Catholic church.



ESSAYS

In the nineteenth century, the writing of California history was done largely by talented amateurs, the most important of whom was Hubert Howe Bancroft. Bancroft, a wealthy San Francisco bookseller, began in the 1850s avidly to collect pamphlets, documents, manuscripts, and books relating to California and the Pacific Coast. By the early 1870s his collection had grown to more than 10,000 items. Deciding to write a multivolume history based on his massive collection, he hired a group of research assistants and began work in 1871. Bancroft's series ultimately reached thirty-nine volumes, including *California Pastoral, 1769–1848* (1888), from which the first essay is drawn. From this account, and others like it, the popular conception of life in Mexican California has been derived, romanticized as the “pastoral era,” or, in Bancroft's term, “lotos-land society.”

In a new and bold reinterpretation of the rancho era and the settlement of southern California by Mexicans and then by Anglos, Douglas Monroy, who teaches at The Colorado College, in the second essay stresses the dramatic encounters of conflicting, even antithetical, cultures and worldviews. Drawn from his prize-winning book, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (1990), Monroy argues, contrary to Bancroft, that the situation of Mexicans in California must be understood in terms of their continuing relationship with the native inhabitants. In doing so, Monroy examines what the mission system bequeathed to the history of Mexicans before and after the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848.

Mexican California as “Lotos-Land”

HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT

The theory of the mission system was to make the savages work out their own salvation, and that of the priests also. In fact, whatever work was to be done it was foreordained that the natives should do it. Work was a necessity of civilization. Souls to save was a necessity of the church. Servants to raise cattle and till the land was ever an indispensable factor in missionary economy, [*sic*] Here were all the elements for a new church militant, a new heaven and a new earth. . . .

Pity the poor Spanish man who does not like to work! The motto of the Zacatecas padres, as indeed of many more modern churchmen, was “Diver-

tirse hoy que ya mañana es otro día." This California country, about as well any could, suited the Mexican settler, with his inherent indolence, relieved only by slow, spasmodic energy. With the richest of soil around him, which to the scratching of the wooden plough would yield sixty and a hundred to one, he disdained tillage, partly because this labor had been turned over to Indian serfs, partly because there was no market for cereals. The plodding tasks and narrow confines of the farm were not for him. More suited to the chivalric instincts of the Mexican, coming to him honestly in his Spanish blood, was general domination over animals, with lordly command of men and horses to aid him in controlling vast herds and flocks. It pleased him to have at his bidding a suite of dusky retainers, drawn from wandering tribes; for the settlers served one another only as friends and brethren, connected as they often were by consanguinity in greater or smaller decree.

With few inhabitants, and a vast extent of country, land was of little value, and could be occupied as fancy dictated, the stock-raiser extending his range beyond original limits whenever the communal tract round the pueblo became too narrow for a rising ambition. Cattle, indeed, roamed in a half-wild state upon the plains, and wiry-limbed, swift horses, of larger size and longer neck than the Mexican prototype, were subordinated at times by nomadic rancheros. Cattle formed a ready recourse with which to obtain from flitting trading vessels such comforts and luxuries as growing taste suggested. The annual rodeo constituted the stock-taking period, when additions to the herds were counted and branded, old marks inspected, and stragglers from adjoining ranges restored to claimants. The occasion became a rural festival, from the necessary congregation of neighbors for mutual aid and supervision of interests. Wives and sisters lent their charms to the meeting, and animation to the scene, by inspiring the horsemen to more dashing feats, either in rounding up the herds, or during the sports that formed the appropriate finale to the event.

These were the equestrian days of California. The saddle was the second and life-long cradle of the race. The men in walking grew awkward, as indicated by the uneven gait, attended by the jingling of the immense spurs at the heels. Riding began in early childhood. The boy, mounted by a friendly hand, sped away in exhilarating race, whirling the lariat at whatsoever attracted his fancy, and speedily acquiring skill for veritable game. The saddle became an object of dearest pride, elaborate with stamped leather and glittering adornments, which extended from the high pommel to the clumsy wooden stirrup, partly hidden by the leather cover that shielded the foot. The bridle was of braided rawhide, with a large and cruel bit. Little was thought of long horseback journeys and camping under the open sky, with the saddle for a pillow and blankets for a cover. The horse might be exchanged from among the bands roaming in all directions. Even the women preferred riding to driving in the clumsy, springless carretas, with frames of rawhide, and sections of logs for wheels. Wagon roads did not exist. When women rode, they would generally be seated in front of their cavalier, shaded by his huge sombrero.

The Californian ever aspired to gallantry; with a graceful figure, when mounted, he was well favored. Latin peoples are more demonstrative in their manners than Anglo-Saxons, more picturesque in their politeness. The common people are more cordial, and the better bred young men more gallant. To French politeness Spaniards add chivalrous courtesy. With only a lasso for a weapon, he ranked not as a soldier, but was not the less venturesome and dashing in facing wild herds, in bearding the grizzly, in mounting and taming the wild horse. Frank and good-natured, polite and ever punctilious, he proved a good friend and admirable host, until checked somewhat in certain directions by the rebuff and deception on the part of blunt and grasping foreigners. Spoiled partly by bountiful nature, he yielded his best efforts to profitless pursuits, heedless of the morrow. Moved by impulses which soon evaporated, his energy was both unsustained and misdirected, and he fell a ready prey to unscrupulous schemers. He lived for the enjoyment of the hour, in reverie or sport, rejoicing in bullfighting and bear-baiting, eager for the chase as for the fandango, and sustaining the flagging excitement with gambling, winning or losing with an imperturbability little in accord with his otherwise movable nature; yet he gambled for excitement, while the foreigner, who freely gave vent to his feelings in round oaths or ejaculations, was impelled mainly by avarice.

Sunday morning was spent, where possible, in devotion, with senses quickened to loftier feelings by the solemnity of the place, the illuminated splendor of the altar, the beauty of the chant, the awe-imposing ritual. This duty was quite irksome, however, involving as it did so great a restraint. After service, amends were made, the remainder of the day being passed in active games or social entertainments. The load of sins removed by penance or confession, the soul was ready to take on a fresh load of iniquity, to be as easily removed another day. And when in winter time the sun hurried the day along, and night slackened its pace, then lovers met. The old-fashioned rule in Spain was that a kiss was equivalent to betrothal; but there were here many kisses for every betrothal, and many betrothals for every marriage, and sometimes a marriage without a priest. The guitar and violin were in constant use, the players being always ready for dance and song, the simple music being usually marked by a plaintive strain. The singing was frequently improvised, especially in honor of guests, or in sarcastic play upon men and events.

Lazy some of them might be, and were; day after day, at morning and at night, lazily they told their rosary, lazily attended mass, and lazily ate and slept. They were as sleepy, and indolent, and amorous, as if they fed exclusively on mandrakes. But the languor of ennui was not common with them. They could do nothing easily and not tire of it. Theirs was that abnormality wherein rest was the natural condition.

Supremest happiness was theirs; the happiness that knows no want, that harbors no unattainable longing, no desires that might not be gratified, the happiness of ignorance, of absence of pain. Nor might it truthfully be said of them that theirs was only a negative happiness. Was it not happiness to breathe the intoxicating air, to revel in health and plenty, to bask in the

sunshine and fatten on luscious fruits, to enjoy all of God's best gifts uncursed, in their Eden to possess their souls in peace? And of the doings of the outer world, of past ages, of progress—these are not happiness; does not knowledge bring with it vastly more pain than pleasure? Yet sadness they were not wholly free from; a shade of melancholy is characteristic of their features. But what of that? Does not the serenest joy often spring from quiet hearts, and sad thoughts find expression in sweetest song?

There were not lacking verse-makers among them, though in poetry no attempt was made to achieve the upper regions of Parnassus, their half-fledged muse being apparently content to flutter round the mountains bare.

Like their language, the Spanish are poetic, rhythmic people; yet stern, majestic, and with a melancholy tone. In their softer moods they are touchingly sweet and tender, but when roused their tongue is terrible.

The empirical law of human nature, which asserts that youth is impetuous and old age cautious, finds in the Hispano-Californians an exception; the young men were impetuous, and the old men scarcely less so. A life-long experience failed to generate circumspection.

Though bursting with conditions favorable to wealth, there was comparatively little wealth in the land. Gold lay scattered in the streams and imbedded in the crevices of the Sierra foothills, and the valleys were fat with grain-producing soil. Yet there lacked the applied labor that should turn these resources into tangible riches. Some, nevertheless, acquired what might be called wealth in those days, though not by voluntarily saving part of their earnings, but because they could not spend their accumulations. They did not love money. Any time they would pour out a gallon of it for a pint of pleasure; but the trouble was too often that there was nothing to buy. . . .

The products of these engendering conditions were of the most material and practical kind, such as were wealth and wealth producing. As they were not largely exchanged for money, silk, foreign wine, and tobacco, not sunk or squandered in these things, they were left to increase, which they did rapidly. All were productive consumers as well as productive laborers. Little was lost or squandered in luxuries or pleasures. Luxury and pleasure there were an abundance of, but they were of such a character as not to be dependent upon money or wealth. . . .

In conclusion, we may sum up our Lotos-land society in this wise: ignorant, lazy, religious, the religion being more for women, children, and Indians than for European men—though Coronel speaks of pausing in the midst of a fandango or rodeo to pray; and all went to church, though they gambled freely afterwards. It was common for heads of families and all circumspect persons to wear sanctimonious faces in the presence of the young, refraining from the mention of wickedness lest they should be contaminated. ~~Morals at first were quite pure; later they became very bad,~~ syphilis being quite common among all classes and both sexes.

They were a frank, amiable, social, hospitable people, and honest enough where it did not require too great an exertion to pay their debts. No obligations of any kind weighed very heavily upon them. They were an

emotional race; their qualities of mind and heart floated on the surface; they not only possessed feeling but they showed it.

They were not a strong community in any sense, either morally, physically, or politically; hence it was that as the savages faded before the superior Mexicans, so faded the Mexicans before the superior Americans. Great was their opportunity, exceedingly great at first if they had chosen to build up a large and prosperous commonwealth; and later no less marvelous, had they possessed the ability to make avail of the progress and performance of others. Many were defrauded of their stock and lands; many quickly squandered the money realized from a sudden increase in values. They were foolish, improvident, incapable; at the same time they were grossly sinned against by the people of the United States. There was a class of lawyers, the vilest of human kind, whose lives were devoted to a study of the cunning and duplicity necessary to defraud these simple-minded patriarchs. Nevertheless, as I have said, it would be difficult to find in any age or place, a community that got more out of life, and with less trouble, with less wear and wickedness, than the people of Pastoral California.

The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California

DOUGLAS MONROY

Certain attributes a culture takes on as it journeys through history can be explained, as Horkheimer says, simply as the "habitual forms of the individual's adjustment to the social situation." Although the gente de razón confronted circumstances partly of their own making, it is important to remember that their estimation of the Indians derived not only from their daily contact with the natives but also from their position as the socially ascendant people of the region. . . .

In the same manner that missionization entailed more than bringing heathens to Christianity, more prevailed in these relations between rancheros and Indian laborers than work. For the gente de razón, a class in search of social standing and elite self-definition, the conception of the Indian as their opposite played a central role in the formation of their social personalities. On a frontier where brutal appetites seemed to reign, Californios lacked the benefit of the formal and at least mildly scholarly education that enabled the priests to reassure themselves of their rational nature. They had no positive role models for eminence. Whereas the priests concerned themselves with the heathenism of the Indians and not their physical features, now race came to be an operative force in demarcating the peoples of California. To be de razón meant not to be like Indians, who drank to excess, had sex, worked at a pace bound to nature, had a demonic religion, and were generally "wild." But in fact the gente de razón were

mestizos who also drank, had sex (with Indians, no less), were not known for dedication to hard work, and, between the Holy Trinity, the saints, and the revered Virgin of Guadalupe, had something of a pantheistic religion. This bind, of which the gente de razón were vaguely aware, kept them searching endlessly for meaningful distinctions between "us" and "them." "They" served not only as a work force but also as a contrast to "us." Violence against Indians allowed the gente de razón not only to obliterate threatening similarities but also to realize the forbidden fantasy of wild and unrestrained brutality against an other. Racial ideology was replacing reason and the alleged lack thereof as the divider of the peoples of nineteenth-century California.

The Indians, whose service as the degraded other was expanding, did not wear many clothes. "In those times," affirmed Juana Machada, "female Indians did not clothe themselves except for a cover of rabbit skins that covered their shameful parts." Indeed the Indians were *sin vergüenza*—without shame—in matters of the body. The rancheros, by contrast, dressed thoroughly and lavishly. The *chaleco*, a men's silk or calico jacket, and the short-sleeved gowns of the women continue to symbolize Californio elegance. The rancheros produced neither for the sake of producing nor to accumulate wealth: they traded hides and tallow with the Yankees and British, particularly after the liberalization of trade policy in 1828, for luxury goods. Their expensive clothing indicated their seigneurial status most apparently. Rich waistcoats, gilt-laced velveteen pantaloons, brightly colored sashes, and necklaces and earrings for the hatless and long-haired women sought to establish the prestige and social leadership of the wealthy gente de razón. After 1840 they even had available to them European fashions. Social status was the goal of their productive efforts, and they were not indolent in pursuing it; they diligently endeavored to elevate themselves to grandeur and aristocracy.

The mirror facilitated this way of appearing. The mirrors unloaded from the trade vessels not only allowed the Californios to assure themselves of their sartorial distinctiveness but enabled and encouraged a new awareness of self born of preoccupation with one's image. Dressing in front of a mirror, family members could decorate themselves in a way they imagined would inspire authority and awe.

The horse expressed the gentility of the Californio elites. "Californians are excellent horseback riders," noted the Russian Khlebnikov: "From childhood they begin to ride horses and grow up to be skillful horsemen. They deftly throw the lasso over the horns of bulls and heads of horses. . . . Children also go around with lassos and become trained in this practice from youth, throwing the loop over pigs, chickens and, from sheer mischief, often on horses." Yet another European impressed with the apparent lack of Californio productive ambition sneered in 1861 about the remnants of ranchero society: "The only thing they appear to excel in is riding." Sir George Simpson agreed with the negative estimation of California equestrian culture: "With such painted and gilded horsemen, anything like industry is, of course, out of the question; and accordingly they spend their

time from morning until night in billiard-playing and horse-racing, aggravating the evil of idleness by ruinously heavy bets." Simpson's statement reveals something about what his own culture perceived as appropriate activity as well as what the *rancheros* valued. Racing indeed produced trouble for the Californios . . . in the Yankee period. "The Spanish Californians are passionately fond of horse-racing, and the extravagant bets which they make upon them contribute not a little to their ruin," concurred the French traveler Dufлот de Mofras. An elite *ranchero* did not simply idle about but rode a *caballo*, showing the common folk and the Indians his *gachupín*.

In their own estimation they were honorable men, not idlers. Elites referred to one another as *mi valedor*, "my defender"; the idea of the self-interested individual had not yet come to California. They sought personal riches, to be sure, but maintained a sense of reciprocity and obligation, at least with respect to other *gente de razón*. These were *vecinos*—neighbors, not citizens. . . . *Vecinos* lived in relation to other *vecinos*. They were not independent citizens who lived in relation to a state. All people in such cultures feel an interconnectedness and a restraint that is absent in liberal society. . . . The amount of *honor* one had made a reputation, not the amount of money. (Of course, material wealth gave one the wherewithall to act graciously, honorably, and generously.) An acquisitive person who acted without regard for other *gente de razón* was aberrant. Indians (allegedly) and Yankees acted that way toward their own people.

Faith to the true church was a central aspect of being *de razón*. The reciting of prayers helped strengthen ties among family members. Family patriarchs asserted their appropriate leadership role by enforcing proper attention to church ritual. They led their wives and children in the morning devotions and evening rosary. Church attendance was obligatory on Sundays and holy days. Education meant learning church doctrine; *de razón* elites made confession and received the sacraments regularly. Much of their extensive social lives revolved around mass and church fiestas. Religion was a serious matter for the elites. It underpinned their status, provided the rationale for the control of women and children, and kept the elites confident that, even on this frontier, they remained *de razón*.

These family fathers locked up their unmarried daughters at night. José del Carmen Lugo remembered how "the boys [slept] in the outside porches, exposed to the weather, and the girls in a locked room, of which the parents kept the key, if there was any key, which was not a common thing." Locks primarily functioned to regulate sexuality, maintain sexual propriety, and control and protect girls. Liberal social relations did not take hold in the elite families with respect to marriage. "These [marriage] arrangements," Carlos Híjar recalled of the 1830s, "took place only between the fathers of the children, and they tried to keep them from learning of their plans." Parents may well have considered the wishes of their children and probably headed off disastrous liaisons with marriage bargains when they noticed dangerous flirtations at the Californios' frequent fiestas. Lust and love could not be permitted to inspire *de razón* social relationships. After all, passion could not be allowed to run its subversive course with so much

property at stake. Instinct enslaved the lower classes and Indians; and love, a rather fleeting emotion anyway, could not provide a stable basis for a marriage. To the gente de razón it seemed better that paternal reason should prevail. . . .

While their rule went largely unchallenged, the patresfamilias did not arbitrarily lord it over de razón women, at least in the ideal culture. Women had legal protections against abuse. Men could be punished for maltreating their wives and pressured to marry or fined for "ruining" a woman; in 1821 the authorities "condemned [a soldier] to two years' work in shackles for rape of a child." The many instances of such punishments indicate that such violations happened regularly, that the culture considered them deviant, and that the perpetrators were castigated, however inconsistently. The civil law enforced sexual morality. Living together without benefit of marriage got the man and woman sentenced to hard labor, banished, and subject to public humiliations. . . .

The ascendant frontier culture, through the civil law, made sure that . . . couple[s] lived like reasonable humans rather than *bestias*, animal or aboriginal humans. . . .

Regard for others expressed itself most famously in the Californios' legendary hospitality. According to José del Carmen Lugo, "The traveler could go from one end of California to the other without it costing him anything in money, excepting the gifts he might wish to make to the Indian servants at the missions or on the ranchos." Being respectable—and having Indians about to labor generously—enabled one to partake in the abundance of the region. Said Salvador Vallejo, "Formerly our cattle roamed by thousands, yet not one was stolen, for the unwritten law of the land granted to the weary traveler the privilege of killing cattle whenever he wanted beef, so long as he placed the hide where the owner could easily find it." . . . [F]oreign travelers corroborate these tales. "The virtue of hospitality knows no bounds," declaimed George Simpson. "They literally vie with each other in devoting their time, their homes, and their means to the entertainment of a stranger." . . . "Every rancher's house was open to everybody, free," marveled an Anglo traveler in 1841. . . . In this historical and cultural context a man increased in social standing if he gave away, rather than hoarded, his wealth.

These gente de razón acted from neither foolishness nor pure generosity. They acquitted themselves admirably within the context of their aspiring seigneurial culture. A spirit, in this instance one of social ascendance and caste solidarity, animated this material graciousness. A human being, in this case a don, "does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods," Carl Polanyi points out. "He acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social interests." The gente de razón earnestly endeavored to be successful; they were not simple idlers. But success derived not from producing and accumulating; rather, the rancheros valued material goods only insofar as they allowed genteel openhandedness—a sure mark of seigneurial status. The bestowal of some of their surplus through ritualized generosity safeguarded the social

standing of the elite *gente de razón*. This gracious form of disaccumulation became part of their individual and collective characters. . . .

In order for them to exercise this seigneurialism, the elites could not sequester themselves. Their epic and illustrious fiestas allowed them to display their affluence and demonstrate their generosity by redistributing some of their bounty to those of lower status. As distinct as they sought to make themselves from others, the *gente de razón* did not recoil from social mixing, at least in the years of their emergence as a class. This is not to say that the *gente de razón* danced and chatted with the rest of the people. Richard Henry Dana noted that "there is always a private entertainment within the house for particular friends." Surely, when everyone assembled in the yard of a *ranchero*, or in the plaza, the boundaries between *gente de razón* and servants and laborers remained. But the few elites could not make a whole fiesta, and they could reassert their superior position on the social ladder through community celebrations. . . . It is likely that caste distinctions were sufficiently evident, even at aguardiente-laced fiestas, that the *gente de razón* did not need to sharpen them further by means of complete segregation.

The apparent democratic sociability of . . . weddings hid their class nature and function. Socioeconomic factors determined marriages. Intermarriage was rare in the Mexican era. Gloria Miranda notes that "in the Spanish era Santa Barbara officers and enlisted men stationed at Los Angeles frequently married daughters of soldiers or *inválidos* rather than wed women from the pueblo's lower strata." The wedding celebrations included everyone; the ceremony, however, "produced an elite social-political group who perpetuated their newly acquired privileged standing in the community by way of continued intermarriage among themselves." By 1840 careful intragroup marriage prevailed among the increasingly seigneurial *gente de razón*: recall that "poor, handsome, and brave" Manuel Garfias had to be elevated to landed status by his old commander Micheltorena before he could marry Luisa Ábila. There came to be much at stake in Californio weddings. Love could too easily interfere with the weighty matters of status and land. . . .

[I]n nineteenth-century California, . . . there was more food than there were people there. . . . If Indians or lower-caste persons were hungry, it was easier to give them a cow from the profuse grazing lands than to intensify the sorts of conflict that raged between the haves and the have-nots in places of scarcity. Anyway, a cow's worth was in its hide and tallow, since no value could be realized on the meat in those days before packinghouses and refrigeration. When, for whatever reasons, the *rancheros* slaughtered cows, they customarily distributed the meat. (The packs of dogs present on every rancho and in every pueblo consumed the offal.) The *ranchero* laborers received from their *patrón* a ration of beef, butter, corn, beans, garbanzos, squash, and chile; they also grew some of these victuals on small plots of their own. Beef, which was extremely tough, tortillas, and beans were the most common donations, which the laborers ate from *cajetas de barro*, or clay dishes. The poor had a regimen of meat and more meat, but at least they ate

And they drank—the employed ones to excess, and the unemployed ones to destruction. “Intemperance, too,” Dana noted, uncharacteristically understating the matter, “is a common vice among the Indians.” Misery and degradation existed alongside the plenty and festiveness. Indian social organization continued to unravel, and Indian drunkenness and vice did not abate. Many of these Indians were permanently unemployed, a ready pool of itinerant labor, although inefficient and lethargic. Convicted Indians inevitably wound up in a chain gang, pressed into service for petty misdemeanors and drunkenness. As early as 1836 the ayuntamiento of Los Angeles authorized the use of arrested drunken Indians to clean the irrigation ditch. Thus, the law turned the decaying Indians into the city public-works force through the penal system. That the Indians, ever more apparently *sin razón*, should do all the work was public policy, too.

Those attached to the ranchos labored like peones, not free workers. They lived on their patrón’s land in houses made of tules or sticks stuck vertically in mud and then thatched. Some inhabited the *indiada*, or quarters, near the main casa, and others lived in the thatched huts of the rancherías by the water holes and corrals where the herds were. They awoke at daybreak, sometimes joining the patrón in morning prayers, and then got to work. “Throughout all California,” observed Dr. John Marsh, visiting in 1836, “the Indians are the principal laborers; without them the business of the country could hardly be carried on.” Commented Juan Bandini in 1828, soon to become a ranchero, “Riding on horseback and lounging lazily is the gamut of their days and the women bear all the responsibility of the house.”

“While the men are employed in attending to the herds of cattle and horses, and engaged in their other amusements,” noted an Anglo traveler of the 1840s, “the women (I speak of the middle classes on the ranchos) superintend and perform most of the drudgery appertaining to housekeeping, and the cultivation of the gardens.” “These beautiful creatures,” Bandini wrote in 1828, “are without doubt more active and industrious than the men.” The patrona worked hard setting the host of Indian women attached to the rancho to work sweeping, sewing, cooking, washing, and gardening. The *de razón* women supervised the milking of cows and the making of cheese to ensure that the milk was clean and strained. Making bread, candles, and soap and cutting wood for cooking was their responsibility, as was the planting and tending of small gardens. The embroidery of clothes took much of their time. Some few of the girls from prominent families learned to read at the home of one of their mothers, and certainly they mastered the social graces, but what little formal education existed in Spanish and Mexican California was for the boys. The tediousness of the interminable work both of the Indias and the patrona is striking. Both had exhausting jobs: the disinclined Indias were responsible for most of the work but could not comprehend *de razón* ways and tastes, and the patrona had to coax household production from her muddling charges. A ranchero patriarch fondly, if not wishfully, recalled that the women “were virtuous, industrious, and constantly devoted to the needs of their families, which were never neglected.” . . .

This Indian labor produced not only the subsistence of rancho California, but a fundamental part of its seigneurial social relations and ideology as well. The *gente de razón* built on this base their remarkably new seigneurial status. There was some fusion of Indian and *de razón* cultures. Material goods and alcohol, together with the supply of food after the disruption of the ecosystem, drew the Indians, gentile and nominal Christians, into the rancho productive and cultural system. Of course, the fusion went only one way—the *gente de razón* adopted only a few Indian herbal medicines. It would be fascinating to know what sort of relationships prevailed when members of the pueblo married Indians, but the historical record is silent about this matter. It does not appear, however, that any Indian ways came into Hispanic California culture through intermarriage. The Indians served only the old soldier families' efforts to achieve their elevated social position. Perceptions and the reality of relations between the two groups were dissonant. The patrona of the influential Vallejo family declared:

All our servants are very much attached to us. They do not ask for money, nor do they have a fixed wage; we give them all they need, and if they are ill we care for them like members of the family. If they have children we stand as godparents and see to their education. If they wish to go to a distant place to visit a relative, we give them animals and escorts for the journey; in a word, we treat our servants rather as friends than as servants.

An Anglo traveler with an aversion to the grammatical period observed in 1834 that the stock was "herded by the indians, who cost them but a trifle more than they eat, in fact they always contrived to keep the poor indian in debt, or at least to make the poor devil think so, they were seldom paid more than two or three bullock hides per month or six dollars in goods, this they always drank in Arguadiante [*sic*] on Sunday."

As incongruous as these two views of the same relationship may seem, they are not contradictory. Yes, the Indian servants were very much attached to the *gente de razón*, but not because of affection. Rather, after the unraveling of their old way of life and the thorough intrusion on their lands the Indians had no choice but to bind themselves to the ranchos. Fiestas, cloth goods, and aguardiente smoothed over the grimy bond. In this personal and seigneurial relationship the patrón took care of his charges' fractured needs for subsistence and conviviality. There was no place for a fixed wage, a concept foreign to the Indians anyway. An easy familiarity between the two peoples may well have characterized much of their day-to-day relationship, given their powerful mutual dependence, in spite of the vast difference in social position. Indian laborers drank to excess, paid no apparent attention to their health, and did not try to advance from their lowly condition, not because they suffered deracination, but because they remained, like children, *sin razón*. This situation not only suited the labor needs of the *gente de razón* but made them feel more confident about their socially ascendant and reasonable selves as well.



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