

HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF  
SOUTHERN  
CALIFORNIA

*Caste, Race, ...*

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA QUARTERLY  
SPRING 2010



VOLUME 92

---

No. 1

## CONTRIBUTORS

---

---

VLADIMIR GUERRERO, an independent scholar in Spanish California history, was the recipient of a Historical Society of Southern California Haynes Research stipend in 2007 and the 2008 Maynard J. Geiger Memorial Fellowship from the Santa Barbara Mission Archive-Library. He earned a Ph.D. in Spanish from the University of California, Davis in 1999 with a dissertation on the oral/aural Castilian epic. He received his M.A. equivalent from the University of Oslo and completed his undergraduate work at the universities of Pennsylvania and Oslo. His most recent publication is *The Anza Trail and the Settling of California* (Heyday Books, 2006).

JASPER G. SCHAD is Dean of Libraries, Emeritus, at Wichita State University. Prior to that, he was at California State University, Northridge, where he also taught U.S. history. He is currently working on the contentious encounter between established landscape painting and modernism in Los Angeles during the 1920s.

GEORGE J. SANCHEZ, Professor of History and American Studies at the University of Southern California, is also Director of the Center for American Studies and Ethnicity, Director of the Center for Diversity and Democracy, and Director of College Diversity at USC. He is the author of *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (Oxford, 1993), co-editor with Raúl Homero Villa of *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures* (Johns Hopkins, 2005), and author of the forthcoming *Bridging Borders, Remaking Community: Racial Interaction in Boyle Heights, California in the 20th Century* (University of California Press).

ON THE COVER: *California Oaks*, 1908, by Carl Oscar Borg (1879–1947). From the personal collection of Eva Scott Fenyes. Courtesy Pasadena Museum of History. Cover designed by Hortensia Chu.

# CASTE, RACE, AND CLASS IN SPANISH CALIFORNIA

By Vladimir Guerrero

*ABSTRACT: By comparing how three Spanish documents employ terms such as españoles, gente de razón, and various racial designators, Vladimir Guerrero establishes a base from which succeeding scholars can more accurately evaluate political realities, social fluidity, and racial meaning in the Spanish borderland of Alta California.*

## INTRODUCTION

Although it has long been recognized that non-European Spaniards played a significant part in the colonization of California, the extent of their participation remains poorly understood and underestimated. It is the object of this paper to demonstrate, on the basis of texts, that the vast majority of soldiers and settlers who came to California during the Spanish period were indigenous to the American continent. Close examination of civil, military, and religious documents from the northern frontier will establish that the different usage of race and caste terminology in the region obscured the true racial composition of the population.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the population of New Spain consisted of approximately equal numbers of whites, mestizos, and mulattoes the sum of which was outnumbered five to one by the indigenous majority.<sup>1</sup> Or, stated another way, of fifteen individuals, one would be white, two would be of mixed race, and twelve would be indigenous. This had come about because, given the conditions of social coexistence and high male-to-female-immigrant ratio, miscegenation had resulted in

a large multiracial population. Since three races can produce three new combinations in the first generation, twelve in the second, and thirty-nine by the third, the multiracial element was extremely diverse, resulting in a continuous spectrum of types. Social stratification by well-defined races being impossible, the concept of castes was adapted to the New World.<sup>2</sup> This more-flexible structure was appropriate to the reality of a situation where a given individual could fit in more than one caste. From as early as the sixteenth century, a *mestizo* of legitimate birth and social position could be accepted as an upper-caste *español*, while one with the same racial proportions born in poverty and out of wedlock would probably be considered a *mestizo*. By the end of that century, it was even possible under certain conditions for *mestizos* to purchase from the crown a certificate classifying them as *españoles*, a practice which, in the following century, was also extended to *mulatos*.<sup>3</sup>

The series of eighteenth-century "casta paintings" attempting to portray all possible racial combinations and identify them as *morisco* ( $\frac{3}{4}$  white,  $\frac{1}{4}$  black); *castizo* ( $\frac{3}{4}$  white,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Indian); *albino* ( $\frac{7}{8}$  white,  $\frac{1}{8}$  black); *cuarterón* ( $\frac{1}{4}$  white,  $\frac{3}{4}$  black); *lobo* ( $\frac{1}{2}$  black,  $\frac{1}{2}$  Indian); *coyote* ( $\frac{1}{4}$  white,  $\frac{3}{4}$  Indian); etc., illustrates the difficulty of a rigid racial classification.<sup>4</sup> These categories were neither scientific nor official nor standardized, and their usage was limited. In practice, society was layered into the three original races and at least two easily identifiable mixtures. Thus, in addition to the primary *español*, *indio*, and *negro*, the terms *mestizo*, to designate white-indigenous mixtures, and *mulato*, for white-black combinations, came into early use. Although originally intended for first-generation or fifty-fifty mixtures, their meaning quickly spread to the same racial mix over more than one generation regardless of proportions. Other possible terms for second-generation mixtures were, in the case of three-parts European to one-part Indian, *castizo*, and in the case of three-parts European to one-part African, *cuarterón*. However, as can be seen by their total absence from the California census of 1790, if these had ever been in use, by the end of the eighteenth century *castizo* and *cuarterón* had been replaced, at least in California, by *mestizo* and *mulato*. With time, both *mestizo* and *mulato* also came to be used for European-Indian-African or African-Indian combinations. In short, the terminology of caste was related to racial composition in an imprecise and inconsistent way, reflecting the fact that social position depended as much on socioeconomic and geographic factors as it did on race.



A casta painting from New Spain in the late eighteenth century titled "De India y Zambaigo, Albarazado" depicts a family in which the mother is Indian and the father is Zambaigo, a term for a mix of Indian and African heritage. The children of such a union are termed Albarazados. Casta paintings, visually defining racial combinations for census and social purposes, formed a significant genre in colonial New Spain. This painting—oil on copper, artist unknown—was a gift to the Southwest Museum from Charles F. Lummis. *Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; 457.G.58.*

In addition to the five labels marking the hierarchy (*español*, *mestizo*, *mulato*, *negro*, and *indio*), the collective term *gente de razón*, or people of reason, was in frequent use. Adult Indians in their natural state had been originally considered children, i.e., without use of reason (*sin uso de razón*), but through hispanicization, they could acquire the legal status of adulthood, or *gente de razón*. Thus, the term was originally applied to those Indians who, through baptism and acculturation, had become part of colonial society, and it served to distinguish them from those who had not.<sup>5</sup> The term, therefore, was not applicable to Europeans, where use of reason (the prerequisite to citizenship) was considered to be inherent in adulthood. Mixed-race individuals naturally fell into this group, but an Indian with little European exposure did not. Sufficiently hispanicized, however, a full-blooded Indian in the frontier could be a soldier, settler, tradesman, servant, etc., and as such, he would be a person of reason, or *gente de razón*, instead of an *indio*.

The term *gente de razón*, therefore, was not strictly a caste term, although, as will be seen from the examples in this paper, in the northwest frontier at the turn of the nineteenth century, it collectively designated the hispanicized, full-blooded Indian as well as the mixed-race individuals who made up the "castes" of that society.

#### TEXTUAL SOURCES

This paper draws evidence from Sonora and California documents dated from 1770 to 1820 and in particular from the following collections:

- The 1782 Report on the Yuma Rebellion and attachments (correspondence, journals, minutes, instructions, orders, and field reports), hereafter referred to as "RYR," compiled by Teodoro de Croix, commander of the Internal Provinces, in Arizpe, 28 February 1782, for José de Gálvez, the head of the Council of the Indies in Madrid.<sup>6</sup>
- The 1790 Census of California.<sup>7</sup>
- The information provided by the Alta California missions to a survey submitted by the colonial authorities in 1812 (hereafter referred to as "*Preguntas y Respuestas*").<sup>8</sup>

The 1790 census and the two collections complement and reinforce each other well. In the census, respondents use specific caste terminology such as *mestizo*, *mulato*, *indio*, etc., in an erratic and inconsistent manner, and half of them fail to identify themselves by such terms at all. This is

indicative that such social classification had little significance in the frontier. On the other hand, the report on the Yuma Rebellion offers many examples of a simplified race and caste terminology, where *gente de razón* is an umbrella term for all the castes and is used interchangeably with *español*. This simplified terminology is also used by the missionaries in the *Preguntas y Respuestas*. Thus, together, the two document collections illustrate why the respondents to the 1790 California census had forgotten the original significance of the caste terminology and failed to use it accordingly.

#### TERMINOLOGY: ESPAÑOL, GENTE DE RAZÓN, AND INDIO

A great many of the misconceptions concerning caste and race in California derive from the fact that some of the basic terms had several or curtailed meanings. For example, *español* was originally used as a term to designate collectively all the regional identities in the Iberian Peninsula. With the expansion to the New World, however, the Spanish kings became monarchs of a Native American population that was gradually also recognized as Spanish. The usage of *español*, then, expanded beyond its original sense to include the following meanings: a) geographic (from Spain); b) racial (white); and c) social (the highest caste). In practice, the intended meaning became evident only by the context in which the word was used, thus resulting in confusion. At the same time, the widely used *gente de razón*, which conveyed membership in colonial society, was racially vague and implied mainly a non-European origin. On the other hand, the term *indio* (which one would expect to be neutral) had acquired a negative connotation due to its application to the lowest caste. This curtailed its usage as a race designator because the assimilated *indios*, having improved their social standing, were considered *gente de razón* and preferred to identify themselves as such or as *mestizos* or, in frontier regions, as *españoles*.

#### DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The following text is the title of a document issued in 1780 by Teodoro de Croix, commander general of the Internal Provinces, giving instructions for two settlements along the Colorado River. It illustrates the political meaning of *español* without reference to race.

Instrucción que previene las reglas para el establecimiento de dos pueblos de españoles e indios sobre las márgenes del Río Colorado en territorio de la Nación Yuma.<sup>9</sup>

Instruction and rules for the establishment of two towns of Spaniards and Indians on the banks of the Colorado River in the territory of the Yuma Nation.

The parallel use of "Spaniards" and "Indians" to identify, on one side, the subjects of the king (regardless of race or origin) and, on the other, the members of the Yuma Nation, illustrates the political use of *español* to designate citizenship. Later in the same document, we learn that the "Spanish" population of each town would consist of ten soldiers (*soldados de cuera*) from the presidios of Tucson, Altar, and Buenavista; ten settlers (*vecinos de razón*); and six laborers to be recruited in Sonora. The description of the settlers as "*vecinos (townspeople) de razón*," as explained earlier, indicates their non-European origin. And the same applies to the *soldados de cuera*, which were colonial units recruited among the *gente de razón* in the frontier. These *soldados de cuera*, or presidial troops, stood in contrast with European troops such as the Catalonian Volunteers formed in Spain but, after extended deployment, open to European Spaniards recruited in America.<sup>10</sup>

After the destruction of the Colorado River settlements in 1781, Croix ordered Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Fages to proceed against the Yuma with the objective of rescuing the survivors and capturing the leaders of the rebellion. In his report from Sonoitac dated 20 December 1781, Fages wrote to Croix,

La adjunta noticia impondrá a Vuestra Señoría de las familias rescatadas que son las únicas españolas que existían vivas en poder de los Yumas.<sup>11</sup>

The attached note will inform Your Lordship about the rescued families, the only living Spaniards then held by the Yuma.<sup>12</sup>

And after identifying by name each one of the women and children rescued, Fages concludes,

Son las únicas de razón que había en poder de los Yumas, y las pocas que quedaron por rescatar no quisieron libertarse por ser nativas de dicha Nación Yuma y sus colindantes, aunque Cristianas.<sup>13</sup>

They are the only [women] of reason that were still held by the Yuma, and the few others that remained, although Christian, did not wish to be rescued as they are native to either the Yuma or adjacent nations.

There are two observations to be drawn from this passage: first, "*españolas*" is equivalent to "[*mujeres*] *de razón*" and, second, the local native Christian women who chose to remain with the Yuma are also considered "*gente de razón*" even though they chose not to be rescued. Thus, on the frontier, the *gente de razón*, even natives of local tribes (if culturally hispanicized), were *españoles*.

If the European leadership, Croix and Fages, referred to the local population as Spaniards, the *gente de razón* also identified themselves in the same way. A captive soldier, José Reyes Pacheco, questioned after his release, made the following statement:

Preguntado si supo que motivos ocasionó el alzamiento de los indios y que les obligó a ello, responde que no lo sabe por no entenderles su idioma, pero que oyó decir que no querían prevaleciesen allí los españoles.<sup>14</sup>

Asked if he knew what motivated the Indian uprising and what drove them to it, he answered that he doesn't know because he doesn't understand their language, but that he heard it said that they did not want the Spaniards to prevail there.

It is interesting to note here the choice of terms by different speakers. Although *español* and *gente de razón* were used interchangeably, because of an implicit bias in the term *gente de razón*, it is used more often by Europeans to refer to the castes than by the latter, such as Reyes Pacheco, to identify themselves. Conscious of the predominant hierarchy in New Spain, these non-Europeans, considering themselves both Spanish subjects and culturally Spanish, would tend to identify themselves as *españoles* in a caste sense as well, even when out of context.<sup>15</sup>

From the above, it is clear that at this point in time in Sonora, *español* was not used in (1) a geographic sense to denote a European origin; or (2) a racial sense to identify a white; or (3) a social sense to mean a member of the upper caste. *Español* was used in a political sense to denote a subject of the king or, in modern terms, a Spanish citizen. It is also clear that as used here, the term *gente de razón* was interchangeable with *español*. From these examples (typical of the dossier on the Yuma Rebellion), we can confirm that at the end of the eighteenth century in the frontier regions, where the European presence was negligible, the caste system of the metropolis did not apply. Here, all hispanicized individuals, regardless of origins, race, or caste, were *españoles*.

The same can be said of the even-more-remote Alta California as late as the first quarter of the nineteenth century, as will be seen from the

1. La Poblacion genal y peculiar de esta Mision es de solos Indios, pero tiene q. socorrer p. caridad, y q. careces el Parrico desde su fundacion un Pueblo de gentes, q. se conocen con el distintivo de razon, y es cabeza en lo civil de quatro Ranchos de la misma clase de gente. Tambien cuida esta Mision el otro Rancho perteneciente a la Jurisdiccion civil del Presidio de S. Diego, y de las familias de seis Soldados q. escoltan la Mision. Todos los individuos, q. pueblan estos lugares, y cuyo num. asciende a 526. son de varias castas. Cuantas, y quales sean, no sabemos, q. q. como hemos dho. todos se llaman de razon.

Reply of Mission San Gabriel, 28 June 1814, to the Carvajal Questionnaire. Preguntas y Respuestas. Courtesy of the Santa Barbara Mission Archive and Library.

following examples from the *Preguntas y Respuestas*. In response to the 1812 survey, the first question of which concerned the castes of the population, the missionaries of San Gabriel wrote,<sup>16</sup>

La poblacion general y peculiar de esta mision es de solo indios, pero tiene que socorrer por caridad, y por carecer de párroco desde su fundacion, [a] un pueblo de gentes que se conocen con el distintivo de razon, y es cabeza en lo civil de cuatro ranchos de la misma clase de gente. Tambien cuida esta mision de otro rancho perteneciente a la jurisdiccion civil del Presidio de San Diego y de las familias de seis soldados que escoltan la mision. Todos los individuos que pueblan estos lugares y cuyo numero asciende a 526 son de varias castas. Cuantas y cuales sean, no sabemos, ya que como hemos dicho todos se llaman de razon.<sup>17</sup>

The general and distinctive population of this mission is only Indians, but the mission, out of charity and for lack of a parish church since its establishment, serves a town of people known as *gente de razon* and has responsibilities for four ranches of the same class of people. The mission also serves another ranch under the civil jurisdiction of the Presidio of San Diego and the families of the six soldiers who make up the mission escort. The total population in question numbers 526 individuals of various castes. How many and which these are we do not know, because as we've said, they all call themselves people of reason.

And the reply from Mission San Buenaventura, which compiled and summarized all others:

La poblacion de nuestras misiones es de indios puros sin mezcla y sus padres ministros son europeos, a excepcion de dos que son americanos. Hay a mas

en cada misión las familias de su corta guarnición, cuyos individuos, unos son españoles, otros mestizos, mulatos y de otras castas, pero todos tienen ínfulas de conquistadores, son generalmente conocidos por gentes de razón, y apenas se piensa ni sabe en esta provincia de otro dictado.

The population of our missions consists of pure, unmixed Indians. The priests are European except for two who are American. In addition each mission includes the families of its small garrison, some of whom are Spanish, others mestizos, mulattoes, and of other castes, but all presume to be conquistadors. They are all known as people of reason, as in this province one hardly ever thinks of, or recognizes, any other caste.

It is interesting to note how the terminology is used (by Fray José Señán, president of the California Missions) in this reply. The Franciscan priests are either "Europeans" (from Spain) or "Americans." But the soldiers assigned to guard each mission are neither. They are "Spanish," and, grouped with mestizos and mulattoes; he adds, "they are all known as people of reason." At the same time, Señán, with a hint of disapproval, suggests that in this province where there are no castes and very few Europeans, the *gente de razón* fancy themselves "conquistadors." He seems to be suggesting that in the absence of a European presence, these New World Spaniards of Indian and mixed-race origins are presumptuous to claim the status of their adopted culture.

#### EUROPEAN PRESENCE

The frequent and traditional interpretation of "Spanish" to mean "European" or "white" (rather than a Spanish subject or a member of the upper caste) has led to the impression of a large presence of European Spaniards in California and Sonora. Careful study of the sources, however, reveals that this was not the case. Outside of the missionaries, the highest military officers, and special units such as the Catalonian Volunteers, European presence was exceptional. For example, in reply to the first question in the *Preguntas y Respuestas* discussed earlier, Mission San Diego replied,

En esta Misión de San Diego se administran a dos clases de gentes, a los neófitos y a los militares del inmediato Presidio de San Diego, entre los cuales se halla un Europeo.

The San Diego Mission serves two types of people, the neophytes [i.e., Indians undergoing instruction for conversion or already converted to Christianity] and the troops from the neighboring Presidio of San Diego, among whom there is one European.

And Mission San Antonio replied,

La población de esta misión está dividida en tres castas de gente: 1ª los dos padres misioneros y el cabo que actualmente está de destacamento, son europeos; 2ª los soldados que están de escolta y sus familias, son españoles americanos; 3ª indios puros naturales del distrito de esta misión.

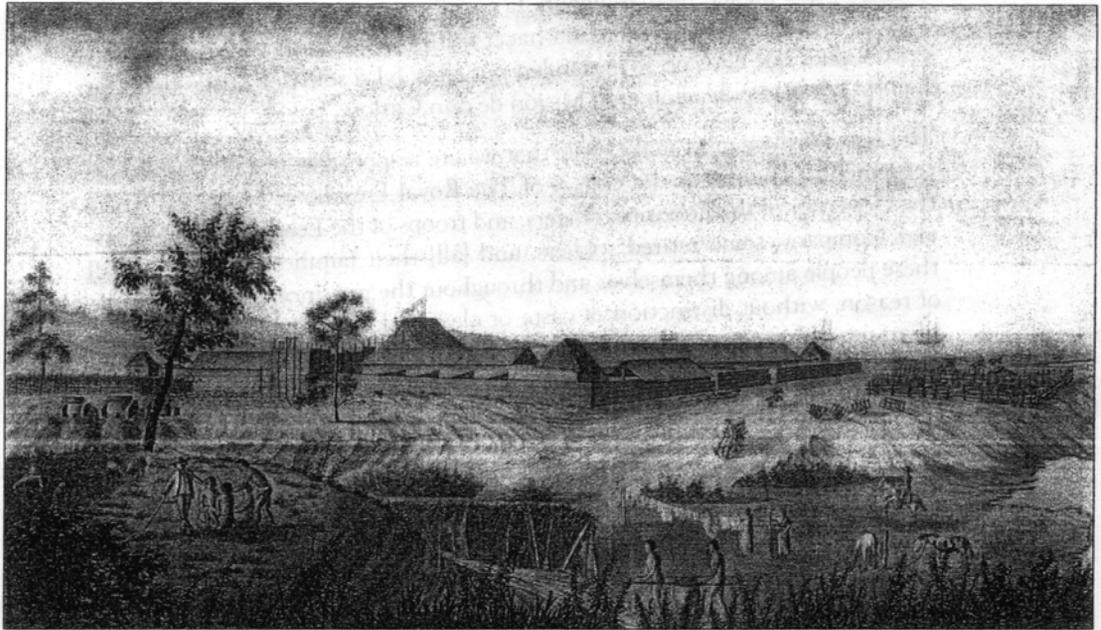
The population of this mission is made up of three castes: (1) the two missionary priests and the corporal presently stationed here are European; (2) the escort troops and their families are American Spaniards; [and] (3) the full-blooded Indians native to our district.

The second reply illustrates the simplified three-caste hierarchy of the region, the racial exclusivity of the first and third castes, and the mixture and integration of the second. The priests and the one corporal, described as Europeans (not Spaniards) to emphasize that they are white, make up the first caste. The presidial soldiers assigned to escort duty at the mission, whom he calls American Spaniards (predominantly full-blooded Indians or *mestizos*) and identified in the documents we have seen as the *gente de razón*, make up the second caste. And the "Indians native to our district," gentiles [i.e., Indians outside the mission system] and neophytes, make up the third.

The exceptional nature of a European in the second caste, for example among the Colorado River settlers, is illustrated in a letter from Pedro Fages to Fray Juan Agustín Morfi, dated Pitic de Caborca, 12 February 1782, which includes lists of all those killed or captured during the Yuma uprising.<sup>18</sup> Of a population numbering 178 *gente de razón*, only one, a ransomed captive, is identified as a European Spaniard: "Ángela Castro, viuda de Jóssef Estevan de España" (Ángela Castro, widow of Jossef Estevan of Spain). Although Jossef Estevan is not found in any of the other lists in the letter, he is named by José Reyes Pacheco as one of the settlers killed during the uprising.<sup>19</sup> While it was well known (and expected) that the commander, Santiago Islas, and the four missionaries were European, the soldiers and settlers recruited in Sonora were assumed to be *gente de razón*. That one of them was a European was unusual enough to warrant this fact being singled out.

#### PRESIDIAL TROOPS

The Indian presence among the presidial troops of Alta California can be surmised from the introductory remarks provided by the padres at San Carlos Mission in their reply to the 1812 questionnaire:<sup>20</sup>



Sketch of Monterey Presidio, 1791-1792, by Spanish artist José Cardero. In the foreground, hispanized Indian laborers in simple clothing are hanging laundry and building an adobe wall. In the left corner, following eighteenth-century conventions, an enlightened European is explaining things to scantily clad gentile Indians who appear raptly attentive. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

Primeramente advertimos que a nuestro cargo tenemos dos iglesias o poblaciones. La una es la capilla del Real Presidio de Monterrey donde reside el Señor Gobernador de la Provincia, jefes y soldados de la Compañía de Caballería de la Cuera, algunos soldados retirados y sus familias. Que todas estas gentes entre si y en toda la provincia se llaman gentes de razón sin distinción de clase ni casta y con tal que hablen medianamente la castilla son tenidos por héroes de estas nuevas tierras. Y así será excusado hacer distinción de castas o clases de estas gentes, pues que ellos no se entienden por ellas, [y] si solo por gentes de razón. La otra iglesia o población es la Misión de San Carlos. . . .

To begin with we must make clear that we are responsible for two churches or settlements. The first is the chapel of The Royal Presidio of Monterey, where the Governor of the Province, officers, and troops of the Leather Jacketed Cavalry Company, some retired soldiers, and [all] their families, reside. That all these people among themselves and throughout the province are called people of reason, without distinction of caste or class and, provided they speak Castilian passably, are considered heroes of these new lands. Therefore it will be unnecessary to make distinction of caste or class among these people because they do not understand themselves in these terms, but know each other only as *gente de razón*. The other church or settlement is Mission San Carlos. . . .

It will come as a surprise to many that the *gente de razón* were not all native speakers of Spanish and that for at least some, the mastery of Castilian (Spanish) as a second language was rudimentary. Furthermore, the inability to communicate in it at even a minimum level (*medianamente*) could jeopardize their status as *gente de razón*. That this is the situation after three centuries of Spanish contact tells us that at least some of the soldiers and/or their families were not multi-generational hispanicized mestizos but recently assimilated Indians from Sonora or Sinaloa.

Furthermore, that this was the rule rather than the exception is established by another example from 1800 written at Mission La Purísima Concepción in response to an inquiry from the governor of the Californias, Diego de Borica.<sup>21</sup> Asked about the language used for religious instruction and whether the Indian neophytes were forced to speak Spanish, the missionary Fray Gregorio Fernandez replied,

Los padres les hablamos en castellano. Procuramos que lo aprendan y hablen. Ellos hablan su lengua, y los padres, los soldados y los indios hablamos otra mixta de Mexicano, Otomite, Lipan, Apache, Comanche, etc., que es la que se usa entre los de la tropa.

[We] the priests speak to them in Spanish. We encourage them to learn it and speak it. They speak their own language, and the priests, the soldiers and the Indians we speak a mixture of Mexican, Otomite, Lipan, Apache, Comanche, etc., which is the [composite] language used by the troops.

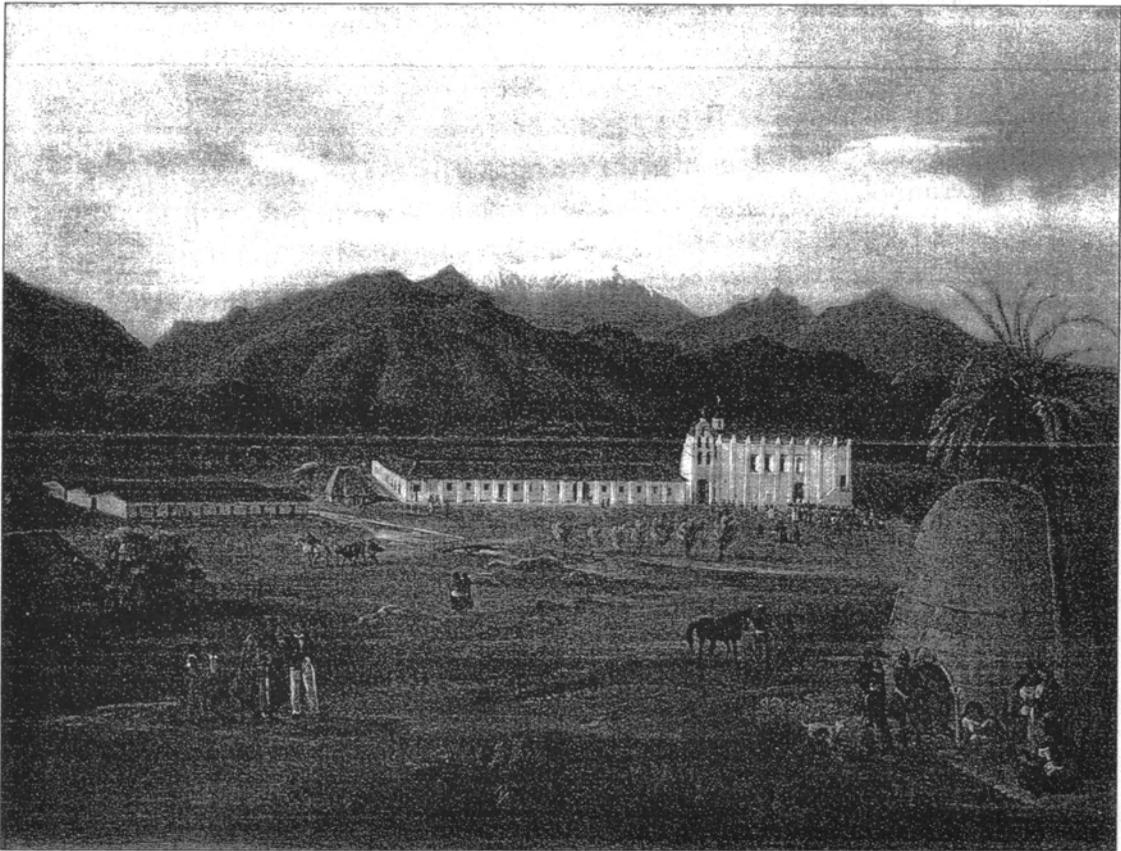
That the spoken language of the *soldados de cuera* at the turn of the nineteenth century was not the Spanish in which all the documents were written but a mixture of Mexican (Spanish) and several Indian languages of New Spain is an indication of the significant not-fully hispanicized indigenous Mexican presence among the presidial troops.

#### THE CENSUS OF 1790

The selected examples, typical of the referenced documents, illustrate usage of the terminology and portray the caste system of the frontier. The hierarchy of the capital obviously did not apply on the frontier, and the caste terms did not hold the same meanings there. Time and again, the missionaries explain that in Alta California there are only two kinds of people—on the one hand, the “civilized” or *gente de razón*, and on the other, the non-hispanicized indigenous people of California. To the commander general of the Internal Provinces, Teodoro de Croix, and to Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Fages as well, the contrast is also between the Spanish subjects (*españoles* of whatever origin, race or racial mixture) and the local Indians, in this case the Yuma and other tribes of the Colorado and Gila Rivers. In both Sonora and California, the *españoles* or *gente de razón* included the European leadership (Croix, Fages, the missionaries, etc.) as well as the non-European soldiers and settlers. That this society, which, away from the frontier, would have been stratified, was here united as Spanish subjects has often been interpreted to mean that they were European. As our examples have shown, however, this was not the case. A few were European, the great majority was racially mixed, and an undetermined number were full-blooded indigenous “Spaniards.”

In light of this information, we can understand why the California census reported caste designations for less than half of the population and why the terminology use was inconsistent. Since the census covered the whole of New Spain, it would require uniform and comparable data. Therefore, it was logical to include caste identification. What was not known by the distant administrators was the extent of the caste integration in the remoteness and isolation of the borderlands. Not only was the hierarchy reduced to two levels but the words acquired different meanings as this reply from San Luis Obispo illustrates:

Esta misión, no tiene más que indios, naturales de estos contornos y de la misma misión, pues toda la *gente de razón* que tiene la nación de fuerza aquí, para la quietud de esta nueva población, consiste en seis hombres que son mulatos o



Painting of San Gabriel Mission by the German artist and naturalist Ferdinand Deppe, 1832. In this painting near the end of the mission period, an Indian family in a traditional jacal on mission property speaks with a man in military garb. While the hispanized women are clothed, the Indian men wear traditional loin cloths. In the left corner a mission priest converses with a man in white trousers, perhaps a visiting seaman or Deppe himself. *Courtesy of the Santa Barbara Mission Archive and Library.*

mestizos de mulato e indio, menos uno que es español hijo de un europeo y de una neófita de la Misión de San Carlos, los cuales se mudan cuando sus jefes lo tienen por conveniente a los diversos destacamentos que mantiene la jurisdicción del Presidio de Monterey, a donde pertenecen.<sup>22</sup>

This mission has nothing but Indians, native to the area and to the mission itself, as all the people of reason forces that the nation [Spain] has here for the wellbeing of this new establishment consist of six men who are either mulattoes or mestizos of mulatto and Indian [parentage], except for one who is a Spaniard, the son of a European man and a neophyte woman from San Carlos Mission. These men are transferred at the discretion of their superiors to the various details under the jurisdiction of the Presidio of Monterey, where they are based.

There are several points worth observing in this passage. The missionaries, responding to the question of what the "caste composition of the population" is, reply that there are only local Indians as the people of reason who make up the mission escort, consisting of six men who are either: a) mulattoes (a white-black mixture); b) mestizos of mulatto and Indian parentage (a white, black, and Indian mixture); or c) a Spaniard (in this case described as a white-Indian mixture).<sup>23</sup> From the structure of the answer, it is obvious that the respondents are not dividing the people of reason according to the metropolitan caste system. Had they wanted to do so, their reply would have been, as requested, a list of the four castes named, and it would not have equated the local Indians and the *gente de razón* as counterparts. From the *Preguntas y Respuestas* answers (of missions San Carlos, San Antonio, San Buenaventura, and others) that we have seen, California at this time was a three-tier society in which the people of reason, regardless of origin, were one caste. However, the fact that these respondents in addition chose to mention the racial (or caste) composition of the group is perhaps a reflection of the fact that they were conscious the local social structure was exceptional. It was not that of the metropolis or that of those who originated the questionnaire.

It is also interesting to notice the ambiguities implied in the statement, "except for one who is a Spaniard, the son of a European man and a neophyte woman from San Carlos Mission." If the authors are using "Spanish" as a caste, they are negating the local system. However, as Europeans writing to their European superiors, this may be their intent. On the other hand, they may be using "Spaniard" in a racial sense to convey the "whiteness" of this individual who is half European in a population consisting almost entirely of hispanicized Indians. This extended meaning of the term would be consistent with the extended sense with which they use the racial term *mestizo* in *mestizos de mulato e indio*.

In short, this passage is a clear illustration of the ambiguities in the use of the terminology brought about by the simplification of the caste system in California.

In his excellent study on the census of 1790, William Mason comments, as other scholars have done, on the "tendency to change caste through time, usually to a lighter caste."<sup>24</sup> While stating that in 1790 "the population of California's colonials was about 1,000"<sup>25</sup> and that, of these, only "some 463 adults are listed with caste designations in the census,"<sup>26</sup> he does not comment on why approximately half of the population failed to assign itself a caste at all. And, in addition, he makes the following observation:

Of these [the 463 adults], 232 are listed as either *europesos* or *españoles*, about half of those listed. Why there was a differential in the listing of *españoles* as opposed to *europesos* by 1790 may tell us something about the term *español* and what it had come to mean by 1790 in Mexico, particularly on the frontier.<sup>27</sup>

While Mason obviously recognized that the meanings of the terms had changed—if *español* was intended to mean a white European, then it should have been interchangeable with *uropeo* and, if we knew why "there was a differential," it would tell us what "the term *español* had come to mean . . . on the frontier"—he did not attempt to explain the difference. Taking these points together: (1) that almost half of the population (463 of approximately 1,000) failed to identify themselves by the usual caste designations and (2) that half (232 of 462) of those who did used the term *español* to describe themselves, whether or not they would have been considered *españoles* in the metropolis, it is evident that the caste terminology and the hierarchy it reflected were not in use in the frontier.

Mason himself appears to have recognized this when he states, "What seems to have mattered, as far as the colonists on the northern frontier were concerned, was whether one was or was not *gente de razón*."<sup>28</sup> Yet, lacking the evidence that has been presented in this paper, Mason continued to assume that because the census called for caste identifications, the system was as relevant in the frontier as elsewhere in New Spain.

#### CONCLUSION

It is in light of the borderlands society and class system revealed by the evidence analyzed in this paper that we can understand the omissions and caste changes noted in the 1790 census. Alta California was a community where stratification had been reduced from five or more castes to two—the

first consisting of a multiracial, multiethnic population sharing the language, religion, and culture of Spain and the other consisting of a local indigenous society.

The remote isolation and the preponderance of the hispanicized Indians and racially mixed (Indian, African, and European) over the pure-white segment of the "Spanish" community resulted in this group, which made up 90 to 95 percent of the colonials, being the heart of the colony. Since, in 1790 Alta California, the Indians outnumbered the Spaniards eight to one, the combined community was a microcosm of what Spain had been in "Mexico" two centuries before.<sup>29</sup> But at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Spanish of California were not the conquistadors of the sixteenth. They were a new breed, the result of two and a half centuries of racial miscegenation and cultural assimilation of the indigenous and the European Spaniards.

Confronted with the request to identify oneself in accordance with a caste system that no longer impacted their lives, half of the colonials in California simply failed to answer, and those who did applied terminology that, according to the missionaries, was no longer in use. Therefore, it is understandable that many would substitute for caste the political term *español*, which distinguished them from the local indigenous members of the community. The *gente de razón* were the national, cultural, and political elite of Spanish California, and, as loyal subjects of the king of Spain, they were by right Spaniards.

#### NOTES

- 1 The racial composition and total population of New Spain at the time is approximated from J. I. Israel, *Razas, clases sociales y vida política en el México colonial, 1610-1670* (México, Fondo de cultura económica, 1980), 31, and from Colin McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of North American History* (New York, Viking Penguin, 1988), 52.
- 2 The concept of caste designates a social group having a distinct identity within the society of which it is a part. Caste may be partially determined by race, but race is not the primary determinant of a caste identity. The concepts of caste and race, although frequently designated by the same terms, are not interchangeable. According to Américo Castro, "[T]he word *casta* (caste) originated in Spain and was used to designate the people of three different religions who comprised its population." Américo Castro, *The Spaniards, An Introduction to Their History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1971), 542. In New Spain, caste identity was used to designate a group's rank or position within society.
- 3 John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 171-72.
- 4 Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2004). This is an excellent presentation of *casta* painting collections.
- 5 Gloria E. Miranda, "Racial and Cultural Dimensions of 'Gente de razón' Status in Spanish and Mexican California," *Southern California Quarterly* 70 (Fall 1988): 265.
- 6 Archivo de Indias, Audiencia de Guadalajara 517 (104-6-19).

- 7 William M. Mason, *The Census of 1790: A Demographic History of Colonial California* (Menlo Park, CA: Ballena Press, 1998).
- 8 The examples used are taken from the original manuscripts identified as the *Preguntas y Respuestas* collection at Santa Barbara Mission Archive Library and translated by the author. The collection has been published in English. Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., *As the Padres Saw Them: California Indian Life and Customs as Reported by the Franciscan Missionaries, 1813-1815* (Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara Mission Archive Library, 1976).
- 9 RYR. Order issued by Teodoro de Croix, Arizpe, 3 March 1780.
- 10 "The policy prescribed that new recruits hopefully would be Catalanians, but that 'should this not be possible, Europeans of good standing, age, health and disposition' ought to be considered." Joseph P. Sanchez, *Spanish Bluecoats: the Catalanian Volunteers in Northwestern New Spain, 1767-1810* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 103.
- 11 RYR. Letter, Pedro Fages to Teodoro de Croix, Sonoitac, 20 December 1781.
- 12 In this and subsequent examples, I have translated the passage in the context of the document from which it originates. In some instances, this results in apparent errors of translation. For example, although Fages states that "las familias rescatadas . . . son las únicas españolas . . . etc.," I know from the document that the list to which he is referring includes not only families but individuals (seven females and one male) as well. To be grammatically correct, then, Fages should have used the masculine "los únicos españoles" rather than "las únicas españolas," making it clear that the antecedent is not only "families" but "families and individuals, both male and female." Thus, my translation reads, "the only living Spaniards then held . . ." rather than "the only living Spanish families then held."
- 13 RYR. Letter, Pedro Fages to Teodoro de Croix, Sonoitac, 20 December 1781.
- 14 RYR. *Declaraciones de los cautivos liberados por Palma*. Report by Pedro Fages to Teodoro de Croix, Sonoitac, 20 December 1781.
- 15 A parallel preference can be observed today among the Afro-Cuban immigrants in the US. Having earlier identified themselves as *mulatos* or *negros* in their own environment, when confronted by American society they favor a national rather than racial identity and choose to be identified only as Cubans.
- 16 The phrasing of the question was, "Se expresarán en cuantas castas está dividida la población, esto es si americanos, europeos, indios, mestizos, negros, etc., sin omisión ninguna." (The caste composition of the population should be stated, that is, if Americans, Europeans, Indians, mestizos, blacks, etc., without any omissions.)
- 17 Reply of Mission San Gabriel, 28 June 1814, to the Carvajal Questionnaire. *Preguntas y Respuestas* collection at Santa Barbara Mission Archive and Library.
- 18 UNAM 4-83, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Copy obtained from Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library, Stockton, CA.
- 19 RYR. *Declaraciones de los cautivos liberados por Palma*. Report by Pedro Fages to Teodoro de Croix, Sonoitac, 20 December 1781.
- 20 Included as part of the *Preguntas y Respuestas* collection at Santa Barbara Mission Archive Library, Santa Barbara, CA, San Carlos Mission, 3 February 1814.
- 21 Although the original of this document was found among the *Preguntas y Respuestas* collection at Santa Barbara Mission Archive Library, it does not belong to the same series. It is dated December 1800 (twelve years before the *Preguntas y Respuestas* questionnaire) and replies to a different set of questions from a different source.
- 22 Reply from Mission San Luis Obispo, 20 February 1814. *Preguntas y Respuestas* collection at Santa Barbara Mission Archive and Library.
- 23 See note 16 for the phrasing of the question.
- 24 Mason, *Census of 1790*, 50.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Mason, *Census of 1790*, 62.
- 29 "In 1790 there were about 8,000 Indians in the mission registers, baptized and enrolled within the mission communities, which at the time numbered 11 . . ." Mason, *Census of 1790*, 2.