



Borderlands in Change

The View from Below

The great imperial changes of the late eighteenth century had a profound impact on intercultural relations across the Americas. In eastern North America, the fall of New France deprived Indians of the chance to play rival European powers off one another and tipped the balance of power in the favor of Anglo Americans. Long-enduring borderlands of cultural accommodation gave way to frontiers of expansion and exclusion. The Great Lakes middle ground crumbled. In western North America, Spain acquired Louisiana from France, established a new colonial realm in California, and revised its policy with independent Indians. Spanish California was built around missions, but elsewhere Spanish authorities replaced the policy of isolating Indians into missions with the policy of incorporating them into Hispanic society. Across Spain's far-flung frontiers, war, coercion, and conversion gave way to diplomacy, trade, and accommodation.

These were dramatic changes that altered the broad geopolitical context in which Indians, Europeans, and rival empires negotiated their conflicts and coexistence. But the late eighteenth century also witnessed more subtle changes in how people from different cultures related to one another in everyday settings. These relationships were not immune to the imperial reorganization and macro-level changes discussed in the previous chapter, but often they followed their own distinct logic and rhythm. This chapter probes how these quotidian changes and continuities manifested themselves in such intimate borderlands spheres as food trade, slavery, and gender relations.

The previous chapter looked at borderlands from above, from a bird's-eye perspective, and it examined how empires, states, great wars, and high diplomacy shaped the history of cross-cultural relations in the Americas. This chapter looks at borderlands from below, from the perspective of ordinary people, small communities, and those on the social margins. The two chapters complement one another, providing together a multilevel view of North American borderlands in the late eighteenth century. They also illuminate the paradoxical nature of borderlands, that they are at once resilient and rigid, that they both spur and thwart historical change. The previous chapter showed how borderlands actors can adapt their strategies to external challenges; this chapter focuses on the persistence of long-evolved intercultural practices, which can defy massive geopolitical changes, imperial interventions, and state

control. It explores how borderlands people, by creatively preserving their traditions, can deflect outside attempts to subjugate, remold, and categorize them. It illuminates how borderlands can endure against daunting odds.

DOCUMENTS

In the first document, Athanase de Mézières, a French career officer who moved into Spanish service with the transfer of Louisiana to Spain, addresses Wichita Indians in a meeting at a Kadodacho Caddo village on the lower Red River in 1770. Mézières tried to impress upon the Wichitas that the shift from French to Spanish rule was real and permanent and that the Wichitas must recognize the Spanish king as their sovereign; to put force behind his words, Mézières had already persuaded the Caddos to put the Wichitas in a trading boycott. But Mézières's message was not all threats. As an inducement, he offered to the Wichitas a protective alliance and trade, the cornerstones of the French Indian policy that often had outdone the Spanish policy in securing native allegiances. Mézières concluded treaties with several native groups, but the geostrategic chemistry of the Texas borderlands changed when the United States acquired Louisiana in 1803. The second document depicts a meeting between John Sibley, the U.S. Indian agent for the Orleans territory, and Comanche chiefs at Natchitoches in 1807. Assigned to bring the southwestern Indians into U.S. orbit, Sibley cajoled Comanche representatives with gifts and ceremonies. He also delivered a speech in which he presented a kind of version of American history that he thought would appeal to his native audience. A Comanche chief's response leaves it open how impressed he was by Sibley's performance of borderlands diplomacy, but by the next decade Comanches were trading regularly with itinerant American traders, selling them horses stolen from Spanish Texas.

The next two documents focus on the multiracial borderlands of Spanish New Mexico, which seem to have been little affected by the Bourbon Reforms and their modernizing pressure: Spanish dreams of secure borders, regulated commerce, and political centralization seem to have crashed head on against local borderland realities. In Document 3, written in 1794, Fernando de la Concha, the governor of New Mexico, reports on the activities and attitudes of the province's eastern villagers. He is appalled by their autonomous inclination and suspicious of their loyalties, fearing that they were being corrupted by the Comanches and other Plains Indians. In the fourth document, Pedro Bautista Pino, New Mexico's representative in the Spanish parliament, describes the province in 1812, finding a wide gap between the projections of Bourbon reformers and the reality of the far northern borderlands. Pino analyzes the province's economy, ecclesiastical government, and educational and medicinal system, finding them all lacking, and insists that the province needed to be reinforced to counter the growing influence of the United States in the Southwest borderlands. When assessing Pino's report, it is necessary to keep in mind that it was written with the objective of securing more financial support for New Mexico from the Spanish government.

Document 5 captures the surprise of Joseph Holt Ingraham, an American writer and a professor, when he visited the town of Natchez in the southwestern corner of Mississippi in 1835. Natchez had been part of the United States since the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795, but Ingraham found it still mired in its borderlands past. Indians not only seemed to be a natural part of the urban scene: they even carried guns. Black slaves behaved in ways that seem to have violated Ingraham's expectations of slave conduct. And many white residents spoke French or Spanish or both. Ingraham's account bespeaks of how borderland traditions can endure long after the borderlands themselves have been incorporated into nation-states. Document 6 reveals different kinds of borderland communities. It is a copy of the Dohasan Calendar, a pictorial Kiowa calendar kept by a Kiowa Indian named Dohasan and his nephew, also named Dohasan, between 1832 and 1892. The calendar begins at the lower left corner and spirals toward the center, each pictograph marking a major event of each year. Although the Kiowas were deeply involved in the cross-cultural life of the Southwest borderlands, the things they recorded are often quite different from those found in Euro-American historical records. For example, the first symbol depicts a deadly encounter with a party of Americans, the second refers to a raid by Osages who beheaded their Kiowa victims, and the third to a meteor shower, which in Kiowa culture signifies the beginning of a new era. The last symbol in the center of the calendar represents a measles epidemic in 1892.

The last document focuses on the colonization of Alta California, which began in 1769, when Spaniards began to establish missions and presidios on the California coast. Document 7 is the first census of Los Angeles, taken in 1781, and it underscores the centrality of *mestizaje*, the intermixing of races, in Spanish California. In California, as elsewhere in New Spain's northern borderlands, Spaniards, that is, people of pure Spanish descent, were a minority amid mixed-race people who were divided into different ethnic and social categories, or *castas*. The Spanish social and legal hierarchy recognized hundreds of *castas*, and their definitions and meanings varied from region to region. The Los Angeles census includes Indians, Negros (people of full African descent), mulattoes (people with black and white parents), mestizoes (people with Spanish and Indian parents), *coyotes* (people with Indian and mestizo parents), and *chinos* (people with Indian and mulatto parents).

1. Athanese de Mézières Courts and Coerces Wichita Chiefs, 1770

The harangue which I made to these [Indians] was essentially as follows:

That at last had come the much-wished-for day when I was permitted to tell them by word of mouth of the matters which I had already communicated by means of the friendly tribes; that for this purpose I gladly came at the command of the captain-general of Luiziana, my chief, father and protector of the Indians; that it was his wish to be fully informed of their

disposition and that, if this seemed to me good, I had orders to assure them of his benevolence; that they could not doubt, in view of that respectable flag which they saw hoisted, that we had become naturalized as Spaniards; that our new and beloved monarch was the most powerful in the world, and emperor of the Indies; that, notwithstanding the fact that they had gained the indignation of so high a prince—the illustrious chief whom I represented and for whom I spoke in this small portion of his extensive dominions—he would grant them the peace which they had come to seek if they would but show themselves constantly deserving of such a boon; that the clemency and the magnanimity of the Catholic king equalled his immense power; that those of his subjects on whom he looked with the most love and compassion were the natives; that he pitied their helplessness and wished to remedy it; that the wish of this illustrious sovereign was that in the future none of them should be slaves of his other subjects, but their brothers instead; that they should profit by the good example and inviolable fidelity of the friendly Cadodachos [Caddos], whose hands, far from having been stained with our blood, had been dedicated, at the cost of their own, to the defense of our lives; that they should look to the north, at the Osages; to the west, at the Comanches; to the south, at the Apaches; and to the east, at the Spaniards of Luisiana, all their enemies; that they were placed in the midst of four fires, which, raising their horrible flames, would reduce them to ashes as easily as the voracious fire consumes the dry grass of the meadows; that they should inform me of the decision they had made in so obvious and so frightful a situation; that they should, above all, refrain from moving their lips to invent excuses which sooner or later their deeds would belie; and finally, that they should rest assured that there was no hope for aid except under the conditions above expressed, since the very name of Frenchman had been erased and forgotten; that we were Spaniards, and, as such, as sensitive to the outrages committed as we would be interested in avenging them as soon as they might be resumed.

Then I arose and, cordially and affectionately taking the hand of each one of the surrounding Spaniards, I tried by this demonstration to make more evident the close and sacred pact which binds us.

Then, when it was their [Wichitas'] turn to respond, after having consulted at length with one another, the one who was skilled in the Cadodacho language gravely, without confusion, and with calm countenance raised his voice and said:

That their discord with the Spaniards arose from the fact that, with the recent founding of the presidio and mission of San Saba, the Spaniards had treated as guests and given aid to their enemies, the Apaches; that they truly desire and ask for peace; that their punctual obedience in coming to secure it has been very disastrous to them, because the Comanches, who were formerly among their allies, having been irritated by this decision, are now waging a most cruel war against them, but that not on that account will they waver in their promises; that they deserve the greatest compassion; and that they implore with confidence that of the French, their ancient protectors.

I again took up the discussion and said:

Do not forget that there are now no Frenchmen in these lands, and that we are all Spaniards. I have and will keep in mind your promises in order to report them to my chief, to whom they will undoubtedly be pleasing, and he will receive you into the number of his children and of the happy subjects of our monarch. But meanwhile it is fitting, since you have committed so many insults, robberies, and homicides in San Antonio de Vexar and vicinity, that without loss of time you should journey to that city, with the interpreter whom I shall provide for you and two Spaniards who will accompany you, carrying a flag to protect you. There you will humble yourselves in the presence of a chief of greatest power who resides there.

2. John Sibley and a Comanche Chief Try to Impress One Another, 1807

As the Hietans [Comanches] were about taking their departure after receiving their presents, the Principal Chief produced a Spanish Flag and Lay'd it down at my feet, and desired the Interpreter to tell me, "that he receiv'd that Flag from Gov^r Cordero of S^t Antonio, & wish'd now to exchange it for a flag of the United States, that it might be known in their Nation.

I told him we were not at War with Spain and had no disposition to offend them, Otherwise I should have Anticipated his request by Presenting him with a United States flag before, but it might offend the Spanish Gov^r and be in the end disadvantageous to them; he said "they were very desirous of having Our Flag and it was the Same to them whether Spain was pleas'd or displeas'd and if I would give him One it Should wave through all the Hietan Nation, and they would all die in defence of it before they would part with it.

I regretted that it was not in my power to have taken a Vocabulary of their Language, there were so many different Nations here at the Same time I was Incessantly Occupied Amongst them.

I delivered to them the following talk.—Brothers,

By Arrangements with France and Spain two Nations beyond the great Water we the people of the United States have become your Neighbours, and all the great Country Called Louissiana as formerly Claim'd by France now belongs to us, the President of the United States the great friend & father of all the Red people Assures you he is your friend and will Continue to be so, so long as you are his friends, & friends to the People of the United States. It is now so long since our Ancestors came from beyond the great Water that we have no remembrance of it, we ourselves are Natives of the Same land that you are, in other words white Indians, we therefore Should feel & live together like brothers & Good Neighbours, we Should do no harm to One Another but all the good in our power.

Brothers, the boundaries between Our Country and Spain are not yet fixed, we therefore do not know how far towards the Setting Sun Our Limits will extend; but you may rest Assured that whether the Country that you inhabit falls within Our Boundaries or not, it will always be Our wish to be at peace & friendship with you; we are not at war with Spain, we therefore do not wish, or Ask you to be less their friends for being Ours, the World is wide enough for us all, and we Ought all of us to live in it like brothers,

Brothers, I think I ought to Caution you Against Opening Your Ears to the bad talks of Any people whatever who may Wish to make us enemies; but be always perswaded that we have not Come to this Country to do harm to Any of our Red brethren, but to do them good.

It is the wish of your great & good Father the President of the United States, that all his red Children should live together in peace And Amity with one Another, that all their paths may be Clean, that there may be no more wars between them, that their Children may Multiply, & their women no more fear the Tommehawk of an enemy.

An Hietan Said "their best Speaker was absent he went out to where their Horses were put, & had not return'd.

"From the Moment (said he) we heard of the Americans being Arriv'd at this place we were determin'd to come & see them our New Neighbours; and we are now all of us highly pleas'd that we have Come, on Our way we fell in with Some of Our friends who came Along to Accompany us, we are in want of Merchandize and Shall be Always Glad to trade with you on friendly terms, and now we have found the way & see that you have every thing we want we Shall probably visit you again.

3. Fernando de la Concha Laments the Corrupting Influence of Indians in the New Mexico Borderlands, 1794

Nothing is so difficult as knowing man, and only the practice of observing his conduct closely provided on occasions helps form some idea of his character. The knowledge which experience has given me in general of the inhabitants of the Province of New Mexico (excepting the Indians of the towns) is of little value. Under a simulated appearance of ignorance or rusticity they conceal the most refined malice. He is a rare one in whom the vices of robbing and lying do not occur together. Because of the dispersion of their settlements, the bad upbringing resulting from this, the proximity and trade of the barbarous tribes in which they are involved, the removal of more than two thousand laborers to another area would be very useful to society and the state. It is the environment that remains and every day propagates similar vices. These cannot be checked except under a new set of regulations and by means of a complete change in the actual system of control.

The people have made repeated unfounded accusations against them [Spanish colonial officials]. All of these I have examined with the greatest care, and they

have never been able to prove those which have been made. Seeking the source of these I have discovered easily that they do not spring from anything but the lack of obedience, wilfulness, and desire to live without subjection and in a complete liberty, in imitation of the wild tribes which they see nearby.

The new Governor must apply his entire attention to effecting the complete consolidation of the capital city. In the year 1789 an executive order from the higher authorities was passed to me in order that I should put it into effect without delay or without listening to petitions. Knowing the difficulties which attended it in that time, I stated the methods which to me appeared opportune for accomplishing it without serious damage on the part of the inhabitants, which was adopting the prudent means of not permitting rebuilding, repairing, or mending of the establishments which are widely dispersed. The chief officers approved, and in consequence I issued an edict which expounded this prohibition, under pain of the infractors incurring the penalty noted in it. From these measures already it has been given a regular form, but the work will never be completed if the least negligence is permitted, and if you are not vigilant and do not sustain the measure which is the dominant factor. The inhabitants are indolent. They love distance which makes them independent; and if they recognize the advantages of union, they pretend not to understand them, in order to adapt the liberty and slovenliness which they see and note in their neighbors the wild Indians.

4. Pedro Bautista Pino Assesses the Condition of New Mexico, 1812

It has never been possible to consider levying municipal taxes. Even though one proposed to collect them in kind, no outside market is available and the products consequently would rot in warehouses or it would cost the community as much to export as to produce them. Nor has there ever been a body authorized to promote the establishment of a treasury, or provincial sub-treasuries, or to report on behalf of the New Mexicans whatever might be deemed conducive to prosperity.

The foresight of the sovereign congress has supplied a remedy for this evil. Title 6 of our constitution ... places in the hands of the settlers everything relating to the happiness of the settlements. However, it is useless to organize ayuntamientos in New Mexico if the people are not accorded the circulation of money, or if they are not aided by provisions which may stimulate commerce.

The twenty-six Indian pueblos and the 102 settlements of Spaniards, which constitute the population of the province of New Mexico, are under the spiritual supervision of the diocese of Durango. These pueblos and settlements are served by twenty-two missionaries of the order of Saint Francis from the province of Mexico. In only one pueblo of the district of El Paso and in the capital are the parish priests secular clergymen. All of the missionaries and the priests receive an income

H. Bailey Carroll and J. Villasana Haggard, trans., *Three New Mexico Chronicles: The Exposición of Don Pedro Bautista Pino 1812; the Ojeada of Lic. Antonio Barreiro; and the Additions by Don José Agustín de Escudero, 1849* (Albuquerque: Quivira Society, 1942), 44-45, 50-51, 59, 94-95.

from the treasury, excepting those of the villas of Albuquerque, Santa Cruz de la Cañada, and the capital, who have no income other than the offerings at the altar.

It is noteworthy that the distance from the pueblos, in which the missionaries reside, to the Spanish settlements range from eight to ten leagues. In view of such long distances, therefore, not all the parishioners can go to one town to hear mass, nor can the parish priests say mass in two towns on the same day; it is also impossible to have vicariates, because the income or allotment assigned the missionaries for the spiritual administration of those towns is itself insufficient. The present allotments were made at an early date without considering the 102 settlements which have been established since the year 1780 for the preservation of the province.

For more than fifty years no one has known that there was a bishop; nor has a bishop been seen in the province during this time. Consequently, the sovereign provisions and the instructions of ecclesiastical discipline have not been fulfilled. The misfortunes suffered by those settlers are infinite because of the lack of a primate. Persons who have been born during these fifty years have not been confirmed. The poor people who wish, by means of a dispensation, to get married to relatives cannot do so because of the great cost of traveling a distance of more than 400 leagues to Durango. Consequently, many people, compelled by love, live and rear families in adultery. The zeal of the ministers of the church is unable to prevent this and many other abuses which are suffered because of the aforesaid lack of ministers. It is truly grievous that in spite of the fact that from 9,000 to 10,000 duros are paid by that province in tithes, for fifty years the people have not had an opportunity to see the face of their bishop. I, an old man, did not know how bishops dressed until I came to Cádiz [Spain].

[Improvements requested by New Mexicans] will prove their physical and moral needs; and they will make a place in the charitable heart of your majesty in order that the state of neglect and disregard in which the settlers have lived up to the present, because of the indolence of the government, may be changed. *Lastly, these official instructions will prove to your majesty the imminent danger of these provinces' falling prey to our neighbors, thus leaving the other provinces to the same fate, one after another. I trust your majesty may become aware of this fact, because the purchase of Louisiana by the United States has opened the way for the Americans to arm and incite the wild Indians against us; also the way is open for the Americans to invade the province. Once this territory is lost, it will be impossible to recover it. Since there is still time to prevent this disaster, your majesty should take advantage of this warning, which incidentally has been brought over by me, because a delay in furnishing remedial relief may permit the development of the evils which are feared by the one who has the honor of making them known to your majesty.*

The province of New Mexico does not have among its public institutions any of those found in other provinces of Spain. So backward is it in this matter that the names of such institutions are not even known. The benefit of primary letters is given only to the children of those who are able to contribute to the salary of the school teacher. Even in the capital it has been impossible to engage a teacher and to furnish education for everyone.

Of course there are no colleges of any kind. This condition gives rise to expressions of discouragement by many people who notice the latent scientific

ability of the children in this province. For a period of more than two hundred years since the conquest, the province has made no provision for any one of them in any of the literary careers, or as a priest, something which is ordinarily done in other provinces of America.

There are no physicians, no surgeons, and no pharmacies. I repeat, in the entire province there is only one surgeon, and he is supported by the 121 soldiers whose salaries are paid by the treasury. Whenever this surgeon makes medical visits to other towns, he has to be paid for them by the person who calls him. If he falls sick, one is obliged to try to find another doctor 300 leagues away. Imagine the condition of a person, gravely wounded, by the time the doctor arrives. The settlers who engage in campaigns at their own expense do not have even the comfort of a doctor to dress the wounds they received in action. And how is it possible for one man to take care of the needs of all the people in a territory consisting of 3,500 square leagues? I am leaving this matter to the consideration of your majesty.

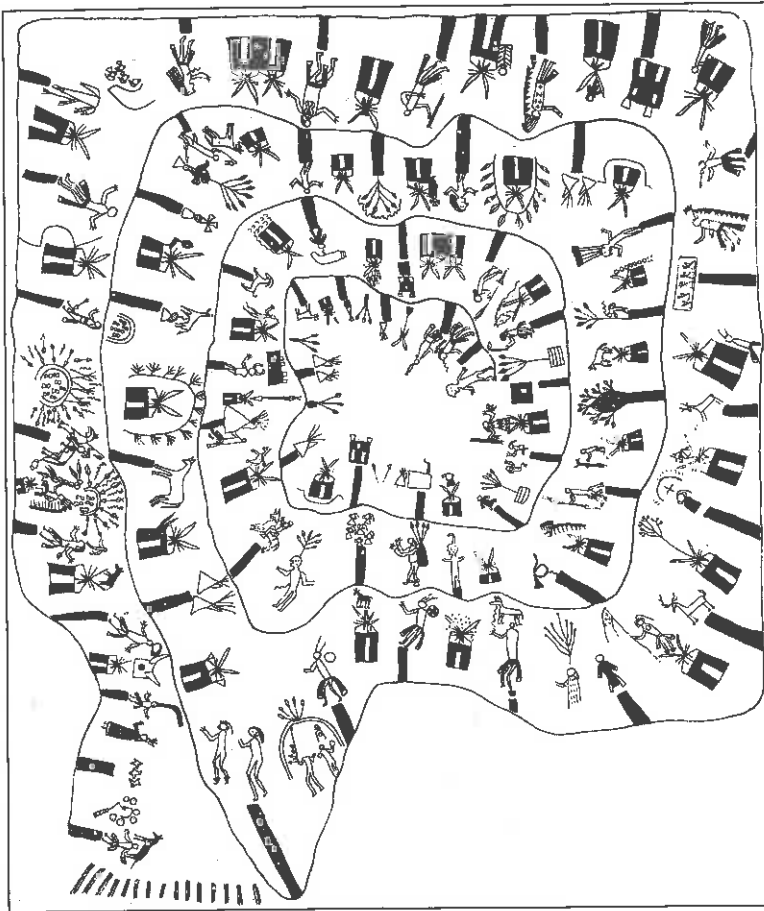
5. Joseph Holt Ingraham Observes Indians and Slaves in Natchez, 1835

As I was crossing from the bluff to the entrance of one of the principal streets—a beautiful avenue bordered with the luxuriant China tree, whose dark rich foliage, nearly meeting above, formed a continued arcade as far as the eye could penetrate—my attention was arrested by an extraordinary group, reclining in various attitudes under the grateful shade of the ornamental trees which lined the way. With his back firmly planted against a tree, as though there existed a sympathetic affinity between the two, sat an athletic Indian with the neck of a black bottle thrust down his throat, while the opposite extremity pointed to the heavens. Between his left forefinger and thumb he held a corn-cob, as a substitute for a stopper. By his side, his blanket hanging in easy folds from his shoulders, stood a tall, fine-looking youth, probably his son, his raven hair falling in masses over his back, with his black eyes fixed upon the elder Indian, as a faithful dog will watch each movement of his intemperate master. One hand supported a rifle, while another was carelessly suspended over his shoulder. There was no change in this group while I remained in sight; they were as immovable as statues. A little in the rear, lay several “warriors” fast locked in the arms of Bacchus or Somnus, (probably both,) their rifles lying beside them. Near them a knot of embryo chiefs were gambling in all the glorious freedom of “*sans culottes*.” At a little distance, half concealed by huge baskets apparently just unstrapped from their backs, filled with the motley paraphernalia of an Indian lady’s wardrobe, sat, cross-legged, a score of dark-eyed, brown-skinned girls and women, laughing and talking in their soft, childish language, as merrily as any ladies would have done, whose “lords” lay thus supine at their feet. Half a score of miserable, starved wretches, “mongrel, whelp and hound,” which it were an insult to the

noble species to term dogs, wandering about like unburied ghosts "seeking what they might devour," completed the novel and picturesque *ensemble* of the scene.

On the opposite side of the way was another of a different character, but not less interesting. Seated in a circle around their bread and cheese, were half a dozen as rough, rude, honest-looking countrymen from the back part of the state, as you could find in the nursery of New-England's yeomanry. They are small farmers—own a few negroes—cultivate a small tract of land, and raise a few bales of cotton, which they bring to market themselves. Their carts are drawn around them forming a barricade to their camp, for here, as is customary among them, instead of putting up at taverns, they have encamped since their arrival. Between them and their carts are their negroes, who assume a "cheek by jowl" familiarity with their masters, while jokes, to season their homely fare, accompanied by astounding horse-laughs, from ivory-lined mouths that might convey a very tolerable idea of the crater of Etna, pass from one group to the other, with perfect good will and a mutual contempt for the nicer distinctions of colour.

6. The Dohasan Calendar, 1832–1892



7. The First Census of Los Angeles, 1781

Census of the population of the City of the Queen of the Angels, founded September 4th, 1781, on the banks of Porciúncula River, distant 45 leagues from the Presidio of San Diego, 27 leagues from the site selected for the establishment of the presidio of Santa Barbara, and about a league and a half from the San Gabriel Mission; including the names and ages of the residents, their wives and children. Also an account of the number of animals and their kind, as distributed; with a note describing those to be held in common as sires of the different kinds, farming implements, forges, and tools for carpenter and cast work, and other things as received.

(1) Lara, Josef de, Spaniard,	50
María Antonio Campos, india Sabina,	23,
Josef Julian,	4,
Juana de Jesus,	6,
Maria Faustina,	2.
(2) Navarro, Josef Antonio, mestizo,	42,
Maria Rufina Dorotea, mulata,	47,
Josef Maria,	10,
Josef Clemente,	9,
Maria Josefa,	4.
(3) Rosas, Basillio, indian	67,
Maria Manuela Calixtra, mulata,	43,
Jose Maximo,	15,
Carlos,	12,
Antonio Rosalino,	7,
Josef Marcelino,	4,
Juan Esteban,	2,
Maria Josefa,	8.
(4) Mesa, Antonio, negro	38,
Ana Gertrudis Lopez, mulata,	27,
Antonio Maria,	8,
Maria Paula,	10.
(5) Villavicencio, Antonio, Spaniard,	30,
Maria de los Santos Seferina, indian,	26,
Maria Antonio Josefa,	8.
(6) Vanegas, Josef, indian	28,
Maria Maxima Aguilar, indian,	20,
Cosme Damien,	1.

(7) Rosas, Alejandro, indian	19,
Juana Rodriguez, coyote indian	20.
(8) Rodriguez, Pablo, indian,	25,
Maria Rosalia Noriega, indian,	26,
Maria Antonia,	1.
(9) Camero, Manuel, mulato,	30,
Maria Tomasa, mulata,	24.
(10) Quintero, Luis, negro,	55,
Maria Petra Rubio, mulata	40,
Josef Clemente,	3,
Maria Gertrudis,	16,
Maria Concepcion,	9,
Tomas,	7,
Rafaela,	6.
(11) Moreno, Jose, mulato,	22,
Maria Guadalupe Gertrudis,	19.
(12) Rodriguez, Antonio Miranda, chino,	50,
Juana Maria,	11.

ESSAYS

The first essay, by Daniel H. Usner Jr., professor of history at Vanderbilt University, explores the common world that Indians, Europeans, and Africans built along the lower Mississippi Valley in the eighteenth century. This flexible borderland, built around intercultural trade in basic necessities, was based on intimate face-to-face interactions that took precedence over the market-driven forces of the expanding transatlantic economy. In North America, the term frontier has traditionally been understood as an advancing edge of empires or states, as a line that separates one people, polity, or culture from another. Usner, however, places the frontier at the center of a regional world that followed its own rules and rhythm. Here the frontier connects. Wars, regime changes, and slavery stirred the eighteenth-century lower Mississippi Valley, but the frontier exchange economy endured, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes in plain sight. Debilitating change came to this borderland late, and its collapse illuminates the conditions under which borderlands worlds flourish and fail. Usner emphasizes the roles of sugar and rice cultivation as key forces; why were they incompatible with the older frontier exchange economy? It is important to remember that crops and farms do not create and destroy social systems; human choices do.

Alta California, the subject of the second essay, was in many ways unique among Spain's imperial projects. Its colonization began late, in 1769, and it was pronouncedly a missionary endeavor at a time when the mission system was in steep decline throughout the Spanish Empire: the reform-minded Bourbon kings

promoted military forts over missions and local economic development over proselytization, and by the mid-eighteenth century most missions had been turned into parishes. Yet, in Alta California, Spanish colonialism was anchored to missions, and its success hinged on Franciscan friars' ability to draw Indians in, convert them to Catholicism, and put them to work. To achieve this, Franciscans employed a variety of methods that ranged from persuasion to humiliation and violence, from religious indoctrination to painstaking monitoring of neophyte behavior. Despite its breadth and force, the Franciscan program was far from an unqualified success for the Franciscans, for the Indian converts fought passionately and creatively to protect their privacy and practices within the missions. Rather than sites of one-way cultural engineering, California missions became sites of cross-cultural negotiation; they were contact zones where both Indians and Spaniards adapted their plans and actions to the demands and expectations of the other. Steven W. Hackel, professor of history at the University of California at Riverside, examines these mutual accommodations through the lens of Indian leadership in the missions. Like colonists across the Americas, Franciscans tried to exert control over native societies by co-opting their leaders, only to learn time and again how the Indian elite continued to maneuver independently, using their strategic position to both implement and alleviate colonial control. Hackel also highlights a central thread in the history of Spanish California: the disputes between missionaries and secular leaders over the treatment of Indians. Hackel's essay can be compared with the Pueblo Revolt discussed in Chapter 2: How did the roles, objectives, and strategies of California and Pueblo Indian leaders differ from one another?

The Frontier Exchange Economy of the Lower Mississippi Valley

DANIEL H. USNER, JR.

It is an old fact and far from a new observation that the lower Mississippi Valley has been generally relegated to the margins of early American historiography. The region has been borderland territory for historians as it once was for the English colonies of the Atlantic coast, and its people have been largely ignored or casually dismissed as mere bit-players in the drama of American development—colorful, no doubt, but peripheral and unimportant.... The lands along the Mississippi River have remained an amorphous area “dimly realizing westward”... and waiting to be occupied by Anglo-Americans and their Afro-American slaves. This West, in a word, has been only dimly realized by historians as a place with a history of its own and a people whose tale is worth telling in its own right.

Even the most devoted historians of Louisiana are quick to point out that the colony in the Mississippi Valley constitutes “a study in failure” or “a holding action” in comparison with the English colonies along the Atlantic seaboard.

Daniel H. Usner, Jr., “The Frontier Exchange Economy of the Lower Mississippi Valley in the Eighteenth Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (April 1987): 166–192. Reprinted by permission.

Louisiana suffered from a low priority in the mercantile designs of both France and Spain. Immigration and population growth proceeded slowly, exportation of staple products to Europe fluctuated, and subsistence agriculture predominated over production of cash crops. But Louisiana's sparse populace and tentative transatlantic commerce can actually be used to the historian's advantage, allowing one to turn more attentively to dimensions of economic life that have been neglected in the lower Mississippi Valley as well as in other colonial regions of North America. Studies of economic change in North American colonies concentrated for a long time on linkages with home countries and with each other through the exportation of staple commodities. Historians are now turning to economic relationships that developed within regions, with greater attention to activities not totally dependent upon production for the Atlantic market.

Here I will examine the formation of a regional economy that connected Indian villagers across the lower Mississippi Valley with European settlers and African slaves along the Gulf Coast and lower banks of the Mississippi. The term *frontier exchange* is meant to capture the form and content of economic interactions among these groups, with a view to replacing the notion of frontier as an interracial boundary with that of a cross-cultural network. For this conceptualization of an interethnic web of economic relations I am indebted to anthropologists and historians who give as much emphasis to the prosaic features of livelihood as to the institutional structures of commerce. Small-scale, face-to-face marketing must be taken seriously, especially for understanding how peoples of different cultures related to and influenced each other in daily life.

A decade of immigration and slave trading to Louisiana, attended by death for hundreds of Europeans and Africans, resulted by 1732 in a population of only about 2,000 settlers and soldiers with some 3,800 slaves, at a time when the number of Indians of the lower Mississippi Valley, though rapidly declining from disease and war, was still in the range of 30,000. Large-scale immigration from Europe stopped by the mid-1720s, and only about 400 black slaves reached the colony between 1732 and the 1760. This slow growth of population—to approximately 5,000 slaves, 4,000 settlers, and 100 free people of color—meant minimal encroachment on Indian lands: most settlers and slaves lived along the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi River below its junction with the Red River. Trade relations with the Indians developed more freely because, for a time at least, the region's tribes were not markedly agitated by French pressure on their territory.

At first, given the scanty and erratic supply of trade goods from France, Louisiana officials relied on distribution of merchandise among Indian leaders in the form of annual gifts. In doing so, they accommodated by necessity to Indian protocols of trade and diplomacy. For the Indians, exchanges of material goods represented political reciprocity between autonomous groups, while absence of trade was synonymous with a state of war. Because commerce could not operate independently from ritual expressions of allegiance, such formal ceremonies as gift giving and smoking the calumet had to accompany economic transactions between Indians and Europeans. Conformity to these conventions recognized the leverage of such large tribes as the Choctaws and Caddoes on Louisiana's commerce and defense. They were essential to the initiation of the network of

trade for deerskins and food—both items important to the success of Louisiana—against the threat of English competition from South Carolina and Georgia.

Demographic and geopolitical changes that began in the 1760s, however, portended greater challenges to the trade-alliance network. Immigration into the lower Mississippi Valley resumed after Great Britain drove French settlers from Nova Scotia in 1755. By 1767, seven years after Spain obtained Louisiana from France, more than a thousand of these Acadian refugees reached the colony, forming new settlements along the Mississippi about seventy miles above New Orleans and at Atakapas and Opelousas on Bayou Teche. From 1778 to 1780, two thousand "Islenos" migrated from the Canary Islands and established their own communities, along the Mississippi and Bayou Lafourche below New Orleans. In 1785 seven ships carried another 1,600 Acadians from France to Louisiana. Meanwhile Great Britain was accelerating colonization on the eastern side of the river, having acquired West Florida by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Settlers from the Atlantic seaboard, many with slaves, increased the colonial population of West Florida to nearly 4,000 whites and 1,500 blacks by 1774. An even larger influx occurred after the outbreak of the American Revolution as loyalist refugees sought asylum in the Florida colony and settled mainly in the Natchez area. By 1783, when Spain gained sovereignty over West Florida and control over both sides of the Mississippi, the colonial population of the lower Mississippi Valley approached 16,000 Negro slaves, 13,000 whites, and over 1,000 free people of color.

By the 1780s, the Indian population in the region was, for the first time, becoming outnumbered by colonial inhabitants, while the colonial economy shifted toward greater dependence upon expanding commercial agriculture. Consequently, Louisiana officials exerted tighter political control over interethnic exchange in order to concentrate slave labor on cash crops and to reduce the mobility of Indian villagers. The frontier exchange economy did not fade from the lower Mississippi Valley, however, for efforts continued to be made into the nineteenth century by many old and new inhabitants to perpetuate small-scale trade across heightening racial divides.

Before 1783 the deerskin trade had encouraged widespread participation in a network of diffuse exchange from Indian villages to colonial port towns. Indian customs and French commercial weaknesses, ... required a formal sphere of trade-alliance relations, but many people across the region also relied upon informal and intimate forms of cross-cultural trade.

Many settlers and even slaves exchanged something for deerskins once in a while, and innumerable colonists passed in and out of the deerskin trade as a temporary means of livelihood. Others made a lifetime occupation from seasonally trading imported merchandise for peltry and other native products.

After 1762 the number of traders operating in Indian villages increased with the growth of the colonial population, and their ethnic composition became more English. By the mid-1780s, Spanish officials estimated that five hundred traders, employees, and transients were living in and around Choctaw and Chickasaw towns, while nearly three hundred more operated in Creek towns. Considered "vagabonds and villains" by colonial administrators interested in

orderly commerce, many of these men married Indian women and became affiliated with specific villages. The children born to this generation of traders and their Indian wives belonged to the clans of their mothers, and some became important tribal leaders by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Most deerskin traders learned to speak the language of the tribe with whom they dealt.... Many traders probably spoke Mobilian, a trade language or *lingua franca*, instead of or in addition to distinct tribal languages: "when one knows it," noted Lt. Jean François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, "one can travel through all this province without needing an interpreter." ... Mobilian was a convenient second language for many settlers and slaves as well as traders to use among Indians, and through the nineteenth century it continued to be spoken by Indians, Negroes, and whites in southern Louisiana and eastern Texas.

Deerskin traders and other peddlers played a dynamic role in the frontier exchange economy. While immediately helping distribute the produce of Indians, slaves, and settlers, they performed a long-term economic function. Indian hunters required an advance in goods before they pursued the winter season's thickly furred animals, forcing traders to wait until spring for their pay. In response to this seasonal pattern, traders acquired goods on credit from town merchants and obliged themselves to pay with interest within a year. By extending larger amounts of credit to more inhabitants of the area and by dealing more frequently in dry goods and export commodities, itinerant traders contributed to the commercialization of marketing in the lower Mississippi Valley.

The frontier exchange economy also involved trade in foodstuffs. Colonists in Louisiana, though ill supplied from home, were at first reluctant to labor to feed themselves by growing crops; fortunately for them, Indians were able to produce more than they needed for their own use. Thus there developed a lively trade, though one less visible to historians even than the diffuse trade in deerskins. While sailors and soldiers from France, with some Canadian *coureurs de bois*, were constructing the colony's first fort at Biloxi Bay, the Pascagoulas, Mobilians, and other coastal Indians eagerly swapped surpluses of corn, beans, and meat for axes, beads, and other useful items of European manufacture. During the first decade of the eighteenth century, colonial officials regularly sent parties up the Mobile and Mississippi rivers to purchase maize from Indians. In order to facilitate their trade with the French, some villages relocated closer to the coast and planted larger volumes of grain.

Many *habitants* of Louisiana preferred direct exchange with Indians for their subsistence, which proved easier than learning how to produce their own food from the soil and wildlife of an unfamiliar land. Trade with Indians for food also allowed a degree of freedom from the pressures inherent in colonial agriculture, causing alarm among colonial officials and merchants who hoped to build a colony that would export some profitable staple. [One] observer found in France's feeble commitment to colonizing the lower Mississippi Valley the reason why inhabitants had for two decades "done nothing else than try to get a little trading merchandise to obtain from the savages their sustenance, consisting of Indian corn, beans, pumpkins, or small round pumpkins, game and bear grease." The

Indian trade, by deflecting colonists from agriculture, thus helped frustrate early efforts to integrate the region into the world market for the benefit of both the colony and the mother country. What looked to officials like laziness was really a testimony to the vitality of the exchange economy.

Many of the several thousand African slaves shipped to Louisiana during the 1720s to expand commercial agriculture turned to small-scale cultivating and marketing of foodstuffs. As in other plantation colonies, the autonomous production and distribution of foodstuffs by slaves resulted from more than the economic interests of slaveowners. In addition to producing such export staples as tobacco, indigo, and timber, black Louisianians on both small and large grants of land, called *concessions*, grew food crops for their own consumption and occasionally for their owners to sell to other colonists. On their own time slaves attended to their personal subsistence needs and eating tastes.

Afro-Americans became aggressive traders in the food market of Louisiana. Many slaves were sent from plantations to the towns of Mobile, New Orleans, Natchez, and Natchitoches to sell poultry, meats, vegetables, and milk on their owners' behalf. They also sold foodstuffs and other items independently of their owners whenever and wherever possible. Although the colonial government intermittently enforced regulations upon slave peddlers, requiring them by 1751 to carry written permits from their owners, the open marketing of goods by slaves benefited too many people to be forcibly prohibited during the first half of the eighteenth century. The limited self-determination for slaves that stemmed from the production and trading of food had several advantages. It helped owners to maintain their slaves at a level of subsistence minimizing hardship, death, and rebellion; it provided consumers with a larger quantity and wider array of foods than would otherwise have been available; and it gained for slaves some means of autonomy from their masters. From these circumstances in the marketplace, not to mention those in colonial kitchens, came the heavy African influence upon Louisiana's famous creole cuisine.

The participation of Indian villagers, black slaves, and white colonists in fur and food marketing discloses closer interaction and greater cultural exchange among them than historians of colonial regions have generally portrayed. Clearly, Indians did not just hunt, blacks did not just grow crops for export, and whites did not merely choose to become either subsistence farmers or staple planters. However, a complex of forces circumscribed economic and ethnic relations and minimized the leveling potential of frontier exchange. The institution of slavery, European class divisions, racism, colonial policy, and violent conflict all contributed to the building of racial barriers in Louisiana and West Florida, especially after the demographic scale tipped unfavorably for Indians. The transformation of the lower Mississippi Valley into an agricultural export economy, which accelerated during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, further intensified the hierarchical stratification of both race and class.

Accelerated commercialization of the frontier exchange economy inexorably upset its traditional customs and patterns. Most notably, traders carried ever-larger quantities of rum into Indian villages, the distribution of gifts occurred

less often, and the tribes fell into chronic debt to merchant houses and thereby became more vulnerable to pressure against their land.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the frontier exchange network was rapidly being superseded by the commercial production of cotton and sugar. Even so, people living in the region did not wholly relinquish older forms of economic exchange. Even after the large tribes of the deep South were removed, Indians continued to peddle foodstuffs and other goods along the Mississippi and in Mobile, Natchez, and New Orleans. Hundreds of Louisiana Indians—Choctaws, Houmas, Chitimachas, Tunicas, and others—camped on the outskirts of New Orleans, usually during the late winter, and peddled in the city an array of foods and food-related items.

Afro-Americans resorted to surreptitious forms of exchange to compensate for their deteriorating trade opportunities. In violation of ordinances adopted in the early nineteenth century by the Orleans and Mississippi territories, many residents continued to exchange goods with slaves as well as Indians. Some of the very middlemen whose appearance marked the marginalization of slaves in the food market were willing to buy items from them. Peddlers called *caboteurs*, who traveled the waterways in pirogues and bought all kinds of produce for the New Orleans market, became infamous for their illicit trade with slaves. They were frequently accused of encouraging Negroes to steal from their owners, but pilferage by slaves had long been part of their resistance and survival under bondage.

Economic life in the lower Mississippi Valley during the eighteenth century, in which many later subsistence activities and adaptive strategies were rooted, evades historians who seek only strong commercial institutions and growing export values for their evidence. Within an extensive network of coastal towns and interior posts stretching from the Alabama River to the Red River, the region's inhabitants participated in a cross-cultural web of economic relations. When one follows the movement of deerskins and foodstuffs through this network, the importance of small-scale trade among diverse groups of people comes into focus. Louisiana was indeed an extraordinary North American colony, imposing even less demographic and commercial pressure upon the continent than did French Canada. But the backcountry of England's Atlantic seaboard provinces, as well as Canada and New Mexico, also passed through a long period of frontier exchange. The form and content of interethnic relations discussed here, and made more visible by Louisiana's history, can be profitably explored at the obscure crossroads and marketplaces of other colonial regions.

Surviving Mission Life in Alta California

STEVEN W. HACKEL

In 1769, Spain set out to defend the Pacific Coast against settlement by other European powers by developing a series of colonial outposts that eventually

Steven W. Hackel, "The Staff of Leadership: Indian Authority in the Missions of Alta California," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (April 1997): 347-376. Reprinted by permission.

stretched from San Diego to San Francisco. In this region, known to Europeans as Alta California, Spain depended on religious missions more than military fortifications or civilian towns to solidify its control. During the second half of the eighteenth century, missions had declined in importance in the rest of northern New Spain. In 1767, the crown expelled the Jesuits from Spain and its colonies and gradually converted most surviving missions in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas to parishes overseen by secular priests. But in Alta California, Franciscan missions steadily increased in number and power as the most important centers of interaction between Indians and Spaniards. By 1821, when Spanish rule gave way to Mexican independence, roughly 70,000 Indians had been baptized in the region's twenty missions. Even after more than five decades of demographic disaster brought on by the ravages of disease, mission Indians still outnumbered Spanish settlers and soldiers 21,750 to 3,400; missions outnumbered military garrisons by a ratio of five to one and civilian settlements by six to one.

The Franciscans' strategies to convert and control Indians in Alta California have sparked an intense debate that has recently involved the general public as well as scholars. Public interest has focused on the canonization of Fray Junípero Serra, founding father of the California missions, and more generally of Indian-Spanish relations in those missions. Promoters of the Spanish colonial past portray the Franciscans as saving childlike Indians from savagism; detractors depict the missions as brutal labor camps, committed to cultural genocide. Although participants in this dispute have generated a considerable number of articles and books, the involvement of Indian leaders in the running of the California missions remains largely unexplored. Neither side has sufficiently examined the extent to which the missions depended on the persistence of Indian leadership, nor has either explored how Indian authority was created and legitimated within the missions.

Most Alta California missions counted between 500 and 1,000 Indian residents, two missionaries, and a military guard of four or five soldiers. Because their numbers were few and their resources limited, Spaniards looked to Indian leaders to help organize and regulate the missions' life and work. To this end, they instituted and directed annual elections in which the mission community chose its own officials, thereby enabling Spanish religious and military authorities to rule Indians through Indians. This system, though hierarchical in form, was flexible in operation. Indian officials not only served the needs of Spanish overlords, but they also protected the interests of the Indian community and, in some cases, ultimately rebelled against the Spanish order.

Recent studies of Indian communities in colonial America have noted the importance of Indian leaders and the challenges of their position. Colonists frequently tried to advance their objectives by co-opting Indian leaders, on whom they attempted to impose European forms of leadership. This practice involved a risk, for Indian leaders could subvert as well as implement colonial objectives. They, too, had much to gain though even more to lose in these encounters, for by participating in European systems of governance, they could foster or hinder their own autonomy as well as that of their communities. Indians, therefore, responded in a variety of ways to imposed forms of governance, and Europeans

accommodated those forms to the communities they sought to control. These responses and accommodations are crucial to the ethnohistory of all of colonial America from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth, from New France to New England to New Spain.

In California, Spaniards encountered the most linguistically diverse and densely settled native population in all North America. Estimating that 310,000 Indians lived within the boundaries of the present state on the eve of Spanish colonization, scholars have classified these Indians into six culture areas and at least ninety distinct languages. Spanish settlement was concentrated in the coastal region between San Diego and San Francisco, where Indians probably numbered around 60,000 in 1769.

Despite this great linguistic and cultural diversity, Indians in Alta California pursued a common subsistence strategy. They were hunter-gatherers who used burning, irrigation, and pruning to maximize food sources. Women collected and processed the acorns, seeds, roots, and berries that constituted the mainstay of the diet; men fished and hunted game, birds, and sea mammals. Crafts were also divided by sex: women wove baskets, clothes, and household articles; men made tools and weapons.

Social organization in precontact California is poorly understood, but recent studies suggest that villages—the principal unit of organization—were stratified into a ruling elite, commoners, and an underclass. The elite was treated with respect, awe, and caution by commoners, who had no rank, and the underclass, who had no formal ties to an intact lineage. Social status was ascribed and authority was distributed hierarchically: elite males inherited political, religious, and economic power through their fathers' lines. Access to power and control of ritual knowledge distinguished the elite, who also wore the finest clothes, inhabited the largest houses, and avoided manual labor. The community owned the village land, but the elite determined its use. At the top of the village hierarchy stood a chief, who oversaw the production, allocation, and trade of the community's food and material goods. This was the complex and stratified Indian world Spain sought to control after 1769.

In California, soldiers and friars drew on policies, developed during the Reconquest of the Iberian peninsula and refined through two and a half centuries of colonization in New Spain, that promoted the incorporation of frontier peoples and regions into the expanding Spanish realm. In the Reconquest, the *municipio* (township) emerged as the principal vehicle through which new territories were settled and secured, and in the New World it became the primary form of local political organization. In areas settled by Spain, formal attachment to a municipality was not an option but a legal requirement and one of the preconditions for a productive and civilized life.

To eighteenth-century Spaniards, the California Indians' small huts and scattered villages were a sure indication of a savage and undisciplined existence. Like their predecessors elsewhere in New Spain, the Franciscans took as their first goal the resettlement of Indians into compact villages. In Alta California, as in Baja California and Sonora, where Indian settlements were dispersed, missionaries combined coercion and incentives to create new, large, Indian communities.

Furthermore, disease reduced that Indian population, undercut the native economy, and prompted Indians to relocate to the missions. As a result, Indians from different villages, who had had only occasional contact in trade or war, began to live, work, and pray together.

Officials in New Spain used the Castilian *cabildo* (town council) as a model for the political organization of these new Indian communities as well as of their own. In Spain, most towns were governed by a council composed of six to twelve *regidores* (councilmen). *Regidores* usually represented the economic interests of the most important families, and they served long tenures, sometimes for life. Two *alcaldes* (judges) served *ex officio* on the town council, but unlike *regidores*, who were their social superiors, they rotated off the *cabildo* after a single year in office. A *corregidor*, a crown-appointed outsider who represented both the town and the central government, presided over the *cabildo*. True to this model, most Spanish towns in the Americas were administered by a *cabildo* composed of four to eight *regidores*, two elected *alcaldes*, and various minor officials, all governing in concert with an *adelantado* or a governor. These New World *cabildos*, whose members were usually *encomenderos* or Spaniards with aristocratic pretensions, had authority over the basics of urban life: they drafted ordinances, punished wrongdoing, and regulated the local economy.

As conquered peoples, Indians rarely served on Spanish *cabildos*, but they retained a measure of control over their communities through annually elected *cabildos* of their own. Known collectively as the "Republic of Indians," these councils by the late seventeenth century were regulated by the *Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de las Indias*, which prescribed the frequency of elections and the number of officials. Most Indian *cabildos* in New Spain were composed of a governor, several *regidores* and *alcaldes*, and various lesser officials, in numbers proportional to the population of the settlement.

In establishing Indian *cabildos* in New Spain, Spaniards accommodated and to a certain extent institutionalized Indian forms of social and political organization. In central Mexico, newly appointed Indian governors continued the roles of preconquest dynastic rules: they had judicial and financial responsibilities and oversaw the use of land.

In addition to the governor, *alcaldes*, and *regidores*, most Indian *cabildos* had a religious official known as a *fiscal*. Because there were so few missionaries in New Spain, *fiscales* frequently held wide-ranging responsibilities. Elected or appointed annually, they managed local church finances, rang bells for mass, and gathered parishioners for religious celebrations. At a minimum, *fiscales* were "church constables" who punished villagers for violating Catholic teachings, but usually they were full members of the *cabildo*; most had previously served as *regidores* or *alcaldes*. All together, the officials of the *cabildo* formed an elite that controlled many of the most important aspects of Indian community life in New Spain.

As the seventeenth century drew to a close, Spanish settlement in northern New Spain took different forms than in central Mexico. *Presidios* (military garrisons) and missions became the primary means for extending Spanish control into the region and for protecting the silver mines and the roads linking them to central Mexico.

As governor of Alta California, [Felipe de] Neve implemented the national policy of assimilating Indians into the conquerors' political system. In Neve's words: "With the elections and the appointment of a new Republic, the will of His Majesty will be fulfilled in this region, and under our direction, in the course of time, He will obtain in these Indians useful vassals for our religion and state." Neve and his successors believed that extending to Indians the rudiments of Spanish municipal government would teach them a civics lesson that was at least equal in importance to the Franciscans' catechism.

The governor's inclusive political vision was challenged by the Franciscans' restrictive religious agenda. The friars wanted absolute control over the missions and the Indians who lived in them, and they believed that Indians so recently subjugated to the church and the crown could not possibly be ready for a measure of self-government, no matter how elementary its form. Moreover, they did not want the Indians to understand that the Spanish governor had civil and judicial authority over Indians, and the Franciscans feared that Indian officials would use their status to pursue their own goals. The Franciscans formally based their opposition to Indian elections on a legal technicality. The *Recopilación* specified that in each Indian town and *reducción* Indians were to elect officials and that *curas* (local priests) should supervise these elections. The Franciscans argued that they themselves were apostolic missionaries, not parish priests; therefore, the *Recopilación* did not apply, and the governor's order had no foundation in law.

At San Diego, where in 1775 the Tipai and Ipai had signaled their rejection of Spanish authority by destroying the mission and killing one Franciscan and two Spaniards, the governor's insistence in 1779 on elections in the rebuilt mission prompted the Franciscans to threaten resignation. Fray Junípero Serra called on the governor to suspend the elections in all the designated missions. The conflict came to a climax just before mass on Palm Sunday in 1779 when Governor Neve and Father Serra exchanged bitter words. Later that evening, overcome with agitation and unable to rest, Serra cried out: "¿Qué es esto Señor?" ("What is the meaning of it, Lord?") Serra was calmed by a voice from within that repeated one of Christ's admonitions to the Apostles: "Be prudent as serpents and simple as doves." Reassured, Serra decided to go along with the governor's orders but only in ways that would not "cause the least change among the Indians or in the mode of governing" that the Franciscans had established. Serra believed that, with God's help, he could join the simplicity of the dove with the cunning of the serpent and thus outmaneuver the governor and prevent the elections from decreasing Franciscan authority. After the early 1780s, elections of Indian officials usually occurred annually in the largest and oldest missions.

As Serra intended, the Franciscans quickly gained a large degree of control over the elections. Even though Neve sought to extend the crown's power into the missions, the Franciscans convinced him that only with their guidance would Indians and Spaniards profit from the elections. At several of the missions, according to Serra, Indian officials had committed crimes or behaved arrogantly, as if they were "gentlemen." By January 1780, when the second annual elections were to take place, several of the officials had abandoned their missions, while others were too ill to vote. Consistent with Spanish law, Neve specified that

only former Indian officials could vote, but he increased the missionaries' role in the elections, telling them to supply "direction" when necessary. The Franciscans usually supplied direction by controlling the nomination of candidates.

By narrowing the field of candidates, the Franciscans guaranteed the election of men whom they expected to facilitate their control of the mission.

In addition to securing for the missionaries a large measure of control over the elections, Serra tried to prevent Indian officials from learning that the military constituted a powerful secular counterpart to Franciscan authority. Serra instructed his trusted subordinate at San Diego, Fray Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, to speak to the presidio officer whose responsibility it was to confirm the Indians in office: "Ask him to carry out this function so that, without failing in the slightest degree in his duty toward his superior officer, the Indians may not be given a less exalted opinion of the fathers than they have had until now." Furthermore, Serra preferred that the Indian officials remain ignorant of the responsibilities with which the military charged them. "The document that is used in conferring these offices on them," Serra advised Lasuén, "may be as powerful as they wish, provided Your Reverences are the only ones to receive it and read it." Even after these precautions, the Franciscans resisted sending newly elected Indians to the presidios for installation. An inquiry in the mid-1790s by Governor Diego de Borica revealed that none of the current presidio commanders had ever been called on to give Indians their oaths of office.

The Indian cabildos elected in the California missions—like those in the missions of Sonora, Texas, and New Mexico—had fewer officials, smaller responsibilities, and less autonomy than those in the Indian *pueblos* and parishes of central Mexico at the same time. Rarely did a California mission have more than two *alcaldes* and two *regidores*. Nor was an Indian governor appointed. Throughout the missions of northern New Spain, the duties of ecclesiastical and civil Indian officials overlapped, but in Alta California, perhaps to a greater extent than elsewhere in the Spanish borderlands, Indian *alcaldes* and *regidores* served as assistants to the missionaries, much like the *fiscales* of central Mexico.

The subordination of Indian officials to the Franciscans was noted in 1787 by Governor [Pedro] Fages: "Although these authorities are granted some powers, they are necessarily dependednt on the missionaries, without whose direction they would not be able to exercise them." Franciscans treated Indian officials with the same heavy-handed paternalism that characterized all their interactions with Indians. Officials were subject to corporal punishment at Franciscan hands, and they were not permitted to bring charges against the missionaries. This disability set them apart from their counterparts in central Mexico, who frequently used legal channels to claim that their curates manipulated elections, misappropriated communal funds, and imposed excessive labor demands. In New Spain, to be left without the right to seek protection or redress through the law rendered one virtually defenseless.

Under Franciscan supervision, Indian officials in California nevertheless had wide-ranging authority over other mission Indians. According to the *Recopilación*, they were charged with ensuring that Indians attended mass and remained sober. They were to "keep guard" around the mission village at night and to "lead the people to prayer and to work."

The Franciscans, emphasizing religious indoctrination, used catechisms to ready Indians for baptism and confessional manuals to prepare them for penance and communion. Whether Indian officials helped translate these handbooks into local languages is not clear, but the records show that they were among the few Indians who participated in the sacraments of baptism and marriage as godparents and witnesses. On these occasions, the Franciscans relied on Indian officials to translate Catholic rites into terms that were comprehensible to their people. We do not know the content of these unrecorded translations, but in trying to explain Catholic rituals, officials may well have invoked concepts that gave the rituals an Indian meaning.

Never content simply to instruct Indians, the Franciscans tried to control their lives, especially their sexual behavior. To that end, most missions had single-sex dormitories for the unmarried, and Indian officials were charged with keeping unmarried men and women from having illicit contact. In 1797, Mission Santa Cruz even had one *alcalde* for men and another for women. In this area of responsibility, many *alcaldes* showed more regard for the desires of other Indians than for the demands of the Franciscans. In 1821, Modesto, an *alcalde* at Mission San Juan Bautista, took advantage of the illness of one of the friars and "delivered" the single women to the men. He was quickly suspended from office and replaced by Francisco Sevilla, a former *alcalde* who had "taken good care of the single women."

Franciscans also attempted to remake the Indians' daily routines, primarily through a rigid labor regime; here, too, Indian officials often played a crucial role. [Pablo] Tac recounted how *alcaldes* circulated through the villages telling people when and where to report for work: "Tomorrow the sowing begins and so the laborers go to the chicken yard and assemble there." When their calls went unheeded, officials punished those who they or the Franciscans believed were shirking. In 1797, Claudio, an Indian baptized at Mission San Francisco who later absconded, declared that one of the reasons he had run away was that the *alcalde* Valeriano "made him go to work" when he was sick. Homobono, who also fled, declared that Valeriano "hit him with a heavy cane for having gone to look for mussels at the beach," an outing that most likely took him away from his work at the mission. Not all Indian officials could be counted on to enforce the Franciscans' labor regime. In 1814, the *padres* at Mission San Francisco lamented that, when they asked the *alcaldes* to supervise work in and around the mission, "not infrequently the *alcaldes* and the men spend their time in play and remain away [from the mission] for another day despite the fact that their task is an urgent one."

Franciscans also looked to Indian officials to administer a share of the corporal punishment they considered necessary for the Indians' souls. Foreign visitors and Anglo-American immigrants emphasized that Indians "did a great deal of chastisement, both by and without [Franciscan] orders." However severe, corporal punishments by Indian officials did not take the place of beatings dealt directly by the Franciscans. Viewing themselves as the spiritual fathers of the Indians, Franciscans maintained that it was their responsibility to chastise them; they flogged Indians for repeatedly running away, for practicing native religious beliefs, and for performing a host of other acts considered disrespectful or sinful.

When Indians remained incorrigible after several floggings, the friars sent them to the presidio for more beatings and hard labor.

In addition to being the intelligible voice and strong arm of the Franciscans, Indian officials were meant to be the military's eyes and ears at the missions. Military officials expected Indian *alcaldes* to investigate and report crimes that occurred at the missions. When a man at Mission San Juan Capistrano killed his wife, it was Bruno, the mission *alcalde*, who heard the murderer's first admission of guilt and carried the news to Spanish officials. Indian officials, however, rarely cooperated as readily as Bruno; in fact, *alcaldes* exposed very few of the crimes committed at the missions. In 1808, after several Indians at Mission San José brawled and fled the mission, an *alcalde* failed to notify the Spanish authorities, a dereliction of duty that led the governor to brand him a criminal accomplice. More often than not, when Indian officials were called on to explain murders or robberies at their missions, their testimony proved unremarkable, merely echoing accounts offered by others.

Some actions of Indian officials, such as administering punishment, may have had no precedent in pre-mission village leadership, but many of their duties and responsibilities resembled those of earlier native leaders. Village leaders oversaw the production of the community's food while remaining exempt from basic manual labor; similarly, *alcaldes* participated in the productive life of the mission as coordinators, not laborers. Village captains made crucial decisions concerning the distribution of food; *alcaldes*, too, decided how to allocate the mission's food resources.

The *alcaldes'* perquisites of office resembled the advantages that had distinguished village captains from the rest of the Indian community. The elite had constituted a self-perpetuating oligarchy; similarly, in the early years of the elections, only Indian officials cast votes for their successors. Village captains, like Indian officials, were supported by the labor of the community. Both sets of leaders wore distinctive clothing and lived in special houses. And according to Julio César, an Indian baptized at Mission San Luis Rey, *alcaldes* were among the few Indians allowed to ride horseback, a privileged act in Spanish California. Despite these advantages, Indian officials—like village captains—enjoyed only a slight material advantage over their people, and that advantage was never secure, dependent as all Indians were on a fragile mission economy.

As intermediaries between cultures, Indian officials were often caught between the conflicting demands of the Indian community and the Franciscans. Indians such as Homobono and Claudio at San Francisco—and surely others who do not appear in the historical record—resisted the labor regime the *alcaldes* reinforced and so resented the *alcaldes'* use of their authority that they left the missions. Conversely, officials' conformity to Indian expectations often invited Franciscan condemnation. Baltazar, one of the first *alcaldes* at San Carlos Borromeo, ran afoul of Serra when he fathered a child by his wife's sister. Serra's god demanded that his people be monogamous, whereas Indians expected their leaders to be polygamous. The Indian community probably saw Baltazar's sororal polygyny as an emblem of his status; the Franciscans considered it proof of his depravity. They hounded him out of the mission, branded him a deserter, and tried to sever his connection to his people. Serra then accused Baltazar of "sending messages to the people here, meeting personally with those who leave here with permission,

and thereby trying to swell the numbers of his band from the mountains by new desertions of the natives of this mission."

Resistance by some *alcaldes*, such as Modesto and Baltazar, to Franciscan notions of marriage and sexuality and acquiescence by others, such as Francisco Sevilla and Valeriano, to their directives suggest the ambiguities of the *alcalde's* role and rule. Even though their behavior at times appeared unpredictable—even unacceptable—to Indians or Spaniards, Indian officials occupied a privileged space in the Spanish system as interpreters, mediators, and enforcers of the new colonial order. The influence of Indian officials within the Indian community, however, depended not only on the authority Spaniards invested in them but also on the legitimacy these men brought to their leadership positions. Based on kinship and lineage networks, this legitimacy, in turn, helps explain the ability of Spanish officials to orchestrate social, religious, economic, and political change within native communities and the ability of native officials on occasion to keep such initiatives at bay.

The historical record speaks far more directly about what Indian officials did than about who they were—an imbalance that is mirrored in the scholarship. Fortunately, records created by colonial administrators allow investigation of the place of Indian leaders in the complex web of kinship and lineage that defined the Indian community. Franciscans notified presidio commanders of election results and occasionally mentioned Indian officials in baptismal, marriage, and burial records. By combining these reports—fragmentary as they are—with information on family relations, village affiliations, and vital statistics contained in sacramental registers, we can sketch a composite portrait of the mission staff of leadership.

Mission San Carlos Borromeo presents the most complete materials for a case study. Its sacramental registers are intact and thorough, and more reports of its annual elections have survived than for any other California mission. Established in June 1770 as the second mission in Alta California and the first on the central coast, San Carlos Borromeo served as the early residence of the father president, who set policy for the region. Located about three miles from the Monterey presidio, the headquarters of the region's governor, Mission San Carlos was overseen by Franciscans until its secularization by the Mexican government in 1834. The record keeping of the Franciscans and the efficiency of the microcomputer enable one to identify and situate within the native community forty-six *alcaldes* and *regidores* who served at San Carlos Borromeo from 1779 to 1831, probably about half the officials during those five decades. References by Franciscans at San Carlos Borromeo to *fiscales* cease at roughly the same time that elections for *alcaldes* and *regidores* begin. The Franciscans may have continued to appoint *fiscales*, but in all likelihood they relied on *alcaldes* and *regidores* instead.

Typically diverse, the Indian community at the mission comprised Indians from the Costanoan and Esselen linguistic families who came from at least ten different villages. At the time the mission was founded, the population of the Monterey region seems to have numbered around 2,800. In almost every year, because disease was endemic, the Franciscans recorded more burials than births; only the baptisms of Indians from the surrounding area allowed the mission's population to reach a peak of around 875 in the mid-1790s. The mission population subsequently declined, and after 1808, when the friars recorded the baptisms of the last Indians they recruited

from the surrounding area, went into free fall. Disease continued to take a heavy toll, and by 1825, the mission had only about 300 Indians.

At San Carlos Borromeo, Indian officials were always baptized men who were married or widowed. They were usually older and had been baptized earlier than other men from their villages. Thirteen out of fourteen, for example, who served during the period 1779–1798 fit this pattern. Of those who served in 1792, Hilario José was one of the first adult Esselen men baptized, Atanasio José was older and had been in the mission longer than most Costanoan men, and Sancio Francisco and Nicomedes were older than most of the men from their communities.

During the mission's early recruiting years, Indian officials were likely to have been village captains or their close associates. For example, the sacramental registers identify Sancio Francisco and Abrahan—officials in the 1790s—as former village leaders. The baptismal record of Nicomedes, also an official in the 1790s, describes him as the “principal confidant” of the village captain Aristeo José. Later, the mission community tended to produce its own leadership. After the early 1790s, fewer captains came to the mission; those who did were not elected to leadership positions. As the mission population matured, it developed a cadre of men who spoke Spanish and were familiar with the Franciscan regime—qualifications that supplanted previous experience as village captains.

In native California, political leadership customarily descended from father to son. This practice carried over to San Carlos Borromeo, although it was disrupted by persistently high mortality. Of the thirty-seven baptized sons of village captains identified in the mission's records, only eight lived to their mid-thirties. Four of these gained positions of responsibility, three as officials, one as an interpreter. The high death rate among the young made it very hard for elite families to maintain a direct line of influence. Yet the son of a village leader who lived to adulthood had a far better chance of becoming a mission official than others his age. Officials who did not have blood ties to former village captains were frequently related to other leading Indians: two were the sons of officials, three pairs were brothers, ten pairs were brothers-in-law, and eleven officials had close ties to mission interpreters. In addition, many *alcaldes* were related by marriage to soldiers. For example, Atanasio José, an *alcalde* for many years, had a daughter whose first and second husbands were soldiers at the Monterey presidio. Other officials were related to privileged Indians from Baja California who worked closely with the Franciscans during the first years of the mission. Extended leadership families such as these suggest that in the face of high death rates, marriage provided a means for surviving members of powerful Indian families to maintain leadership status in the mission.

Spanish laws regulating *cabildos* promoted turnover in officeholding, but at San Carlos Borromeo, as elsewhere in New Spain, these laws proved ineffective, because they conflicted with the native practice of long-term rule and the Spanish desire to support cooperative local leaders. A common strategy to assure continuity of leadership was to rotate *alcaldes* and *regidores* in office each year. At Mission San Carlos, Oresio Antonio was *regidor* in 1810, 1812, and 1814 and *alcalde* in 1811, 1813, and 1815. Other officials sat out a year or two and then returned to office. As the rotational system suggests, differences between the responsibilities of *alcaldes* and of *regidores* faded over time. Important and cooperative Indians, provided

they could stay alive, were thus never far from office; some served continuously for up to six years, and others rotated in and out over more than fifteen years.

Indian officials reflected the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the mission community, as the mission's two language families and four largest village groups could each frequently claim one of the officials. After 1776, when Esselen villagers first came to the mission, San Carlos was composed of both Costanoan- and Esselen-speakers, the former enjoying numerical superiority over the latter throughout the mission's life. The Franciscans carefully noted the village affiliation of all Indians at baptism and monitored the changing composition of the population. If late eighteenth-century guidelines for the Franciscan missionaries at Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción in San Antonio, Texas, are typical of Franciscan electoral management in northern New Spain—and there is no reason to suppose otherwise—the Franciscans at San Carlos Borromeo worked hard to ensure that officials were drawn from the mission's largest groups. The San Antonio instructions, probably written in 1787 or 1788 by Fray José García, urged the missionaries to "remind" voters that the positions of governor and alcalde alternated annually between the most populous groups at the mission, the Pajalache and the Tacame. This correlation between the ethnic and linguistic composition of officials and that of the mission population reflected the needs of Spaniards and Indians alike. Franciscans and governors would have found it difficult to incorporate and control the Indians without assistance from native leaders who could effectively communicate with the mission's most populous groups, and powerful Indian groups might have rebelled had they been excluded from positions of authority.

Not until 1810, when twenty-six-year-old Teopisto José became regidor did a mission-born Indian serve as an official at San Carlos Borromeo. The policy of drawing the officials from the mission's different village and linguistic groups helps to explain why so few—only seven—were born in the mission. Indian officials were usually in their late twenties or early thirties when first elected. Thus Indians born in the 1770s at the mission could not have served until the mid-1790s, and yet they did not dominate the leadership positions when they reached maturity. Rather, the representation of different village groups, some of which did not come to the mission until the mid-1780s, took precedence over the selection of the individuals who, having spent their entire lives in the mission, might have been the most acculturated to Spanish ways and loyal to Franciscan wishes. Even after 1810, Indians born at the mission filled only one quarter of the leadership positions; those baptized before age ten took only slightly more than half.

To most Indians in Alta California, Spaniards brought disease, cultural dislocation, and an early grave; to some, they also provided political opportunity. The prominence of individuals like Baltazar, and the coherence of the groups they led suggest that the political system the Spaniards relied on to control the missions—and the Indians' ability to shape that system to their needs—fostered the preservation and creation of Indian authority. Indians who held legitimate authority among their people frequently served as officials, and the composition of the Indian *cabildos* reflected the divisions of village groups in the missions. When officials did not reflect the community, disgruntled or excluded Indians sought redress from Spanish authorities. When Indian officials contradicted or challenged Spanish

authorities, they courted dismissal. Still, it was never in the interest of Spaniards to replace uncooperative officials with Indians whose legitimacy was not recognized by their own people. Nor was it in their interest to level the distinctions of rank among Indians. To have done so would have provoked opposition from the Indians who could most effectively assist in controlling the missions.

Doubtless, there were Indian officials in the missions of Alta California whose malleability rather than their kinship or lineage recommended them to the Franciscans. But for the most part the alcalde system depended on the extent to which native villages, leadership, and traditions were incorporated into the missions. The authority of Indian officials in colonial California originated from more than brute force, Franciscan missionaries, or the Spanish state. It was carried over from native villages, legitimated and re-created in annual mission elections, and ultimately strengthened by the extent to which the staff of Indian leadership remained embedded in a network of shifting family relations that defined Indian communities throughout the colonial period.

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