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Land, Labor, and Production

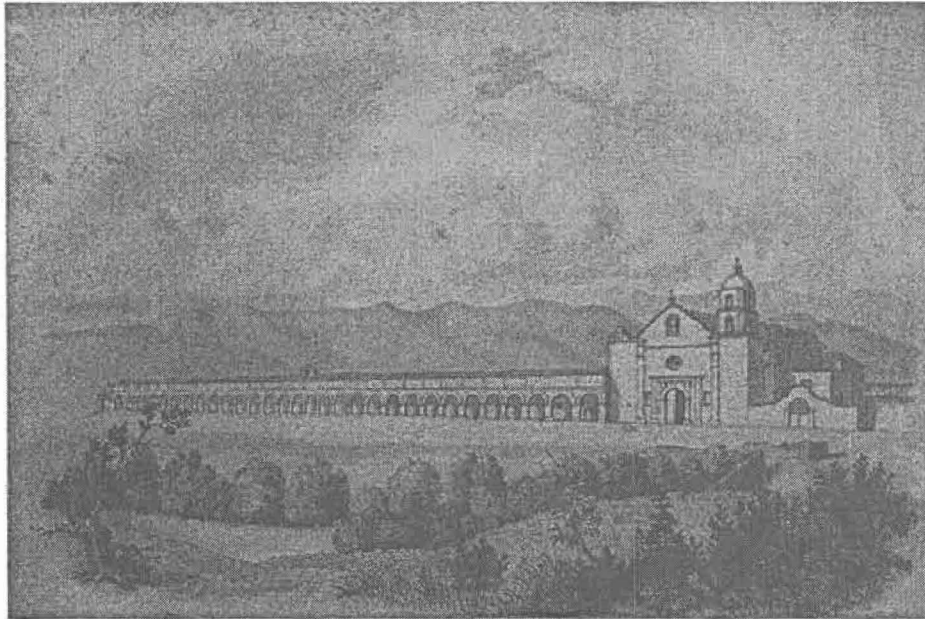
5. Land, Labor, and Production

The Colonial Economy of Spanish and Mexican California

Steven W. Hackel

As the sesquicentennial of California's admission to the Union approaches, California can boast of one of the most productive economies the world has ever seen: the Golden State annually produces more goods and services than all but a handful of the world's nations. But during the Spanish colonial period (1769–1821) and the Mexican national period (1822–1846), contemporaries lamented the lack of economic growth in Alta California. In 1796, the Franciscan missionary José Señán dismissed the region's settlers as lazy and unproductive, claiming that they preferred playing cards to plowing fields. Señán attributed most of their idleness to Spanish policies: the inflated cost of goods imported from central Mexico and the low market price of the settlers' agricultural products deprived settlers of incentive to produce beyond a basic subsistence level.^[1] During the Mexican period, when the new government relaxed restrictions on free trade, foreign trade and domestic production increased, yet to Mexicans and Californios alike, California remained a land of untapped economic potential.

Assertions that Spain and Mexico had failed to develop California's economic riches increased after the Gold Rush and subsequently became enshrined in historical interpretations of California. After James Marshall made his discovery of gold at John Sutter's mill in 1848, it seemed to contemporary observers that California, for the first time, was all bustle and boom. The foreign-born population of the region grew dramatically, as did the economic infrastructure necessary to meet its needs. California's ascendance to the center of world commerce was so sudden that many observers concluded that there had been little or no economic development in California before the Gold Rush. One keen observer of capitalism, Friedrich Engels, believed that California's growth was unprecedented for, as he told Karl Marx in 1852, large new markets had been created "out of nothing."^[2]



When the American amateur artist William R. Hutton drew *San Luis Rey Mission* in 1848, it had long ago entered into decline. At the height of its prosperity, however, San Luis Rey was one of the largest and most populous Indian missions in both Americas, part of the chain of Franciscan missions that dominated the colonial economy of California until their secularization in the 1830s at the order of Governor José Figueroa. In 1831 such was the success of San Luis Rey that Father Antonio Peyri could report that its herds of cattle and sheep each numbered over twenty-five thousand. *Courtesy Huntington Library*.

While contemporaries were right to marvel at the rapid expansion of the California economy during and after the Gold Rush, they underestimated the economy of California during the Spanish and Mexican periods. Before 1848, as recent scholarship has shown, Indians, Franciscans, soldiers, settlers, and traders engaged in modes of exchange and production that reflected local and national strategies of economic development. Furthermore, the development during the Spanish and Mexican periods of intensive agriculture, cattle ranching, artisan crafts, and foreign commerce transformed the landscape of California and its native peoples and introduced forms of labor and production that continued into the American period. Thus, economic activity in Spanish and Mexican California, although limited in scale compared to the boom after 1848, contributed to much of the economic growth in the Golden State during and after the Gold Rush.

Spanish Imperial Economic Philosophies

Spanish settlement in Alta California, unlike in many other areas of New Spain, was not motivated by a belief that the region and its peoples held great economic potential. Rather, Spain moved into Alta California in 1769 to protect the silver mines of northwestern New Spain from a feared Russian or English advance. To that end, from present-day San Diego to San Francisco, Spain created a coastal chain of twenty Franciscan missions, four military presidios, and three civilian settlements.

Spanish imperial ministers adhered to an economic doctrine known today as mercantilism. In contrast to capitalism, which relies on the state to develop a national economy hospitable for private business, mercantilism depended on the economy of the mother country to promote the growth of the nation-state.^[3] Colonies would produce goods and raw materials for the mother country and purchase the finished goods it manufactured. Royal monopolies, exclusive contracts, import and export duties, and restricted access to colonial ports protected fledgling industries at home and in the colonies and ensured that the colonial economy worked to the advantage of the mother country, not a rival nation state. These mercantilist beliefs and practices greatly influenced the development of the economy of Spanish California. But during the late eighteenth century, the Spanish Crown became increasingly preoccupied with reducing the expense of its overseas empire. Therefore, the economic development of Alta California and the relationships among its missions, presidios, and pueblos also bore the imprint of officials who sought to ensure that the colonists could feed, clothe, and protect themselves with a minimum of royal support.

Supply Ships and Economic Regulations

In Alta California, as elsewhere in the Spanish borderlands, the state formed the foundation for the colonial economy.^[4] The state provided the soldiers with purchasing power in the form of salaries, and it supplied the annual shipments of goods they purchased and consumed. At first, each Franciscan missionary (usually two per mission) received an annual stipend Of 350 pesos.^[5] Newly established missions were granted an additional 1,000 pesos for agricultural implements, church ornaments, and other goods necessary for the mission.^[6] These payments came from the state-controlled "Pious Fund," which had originally been established to support the Jesuit missions of Baja California.

During the first years of Spanish settlement in Alta California, soldiers, settlers, and padres depended on supplies imported from Mexico. José de Gálvez, *visitador general* (inspector general) of New Spain and architect of the Spanish occupation of Alta California, realized that Alta California would have to be supplied by sea, and

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he ordered the creation of a naval post at San Blas on the west coast of Mexico, in the present state of Nayarit, solely for that purpose.^[7] Shipments of goods to Alta California were well documented. For example, when the packet boat *San Antonio* set sail for Monterey in 1771, it carried ten additional Franciscans and a wide array of provisions for the missions and presidios: agricultural tools, cooking implements, and most important, basic foodstuffs such as biscuits, ham, sugar, corn, flour, rice, beans, wheat, wine, and brandy. Even chickens and pigs made the journey.^[8] Much to the despair of soldiers and missionaries, these supply shipments proved unreliable. Frequently, colonists, waited in vain for the ships to appear on the horizon, or else they found that their provisions had spoiled before they could be unloaded. When the ships arrived later than expected, missionaries and soldiers cut their rations to a minimum and relied on the food reserves of local Indians.

To address these and other problems, Fray Junipero, Serra, father-president of the Alta California missions, traveled to Mexico City in 1773, where he appealed directly to the viceroy. Serra's petitions led to the promulgation of the *Echeveste Reglamento*, named after its author, Juan José Echeveste, the official in charge of forwarding supplies to Alta California. This new regulation increased the padres' and soldiers' annual salaries, set a standard markup for products imported into the region, and streamlined the purchase and shipment of provisions to Alta California.^[9] Under the new regulation, the annual stipend of each mission rose to 800 pesos. Double rations for five years were allocated to padres in charge of establishing new missions. And soldiers' salaries, which were paid in kind, not coin, increased to 365 pesos a year. The Crown, however, took back this increase through a surcharge on all the "goods, clothings, and provisions" with which soldiers were paid.^[10] Echeveste allowed prices for imported goods sold at the presidio to fluctuate according to their levels in Mexico.^[11] Thus, forces in distant markets initially determined the purchasing power of soldiers and padres in Alta California. Overall, apart from authorizing a few sailors from San Blas to remain in the California missions as laborers, the *Echeveste Reglamento* did little to foster the colony's self-sufficiency or reduce the Crown's annual expenditures in Alta California.

In 1781, a new economic regulation, written by Governor Felipe de Neve (1775–1782), reorganized the finances of California and shaped the economy of the province until the advent of the Mexican period. One of the most serious problems Neve confronted in Alta California was the soldiers' poor morale, a condition he attributed partly to their low pay and the inflated prices they were charged for goods. Neve, therefore, gave his soldiers the equivalent of a raise. Although he reduced their salaries, he greatly increased their purchasing power by eliminating the surcharge on goods. Furthermore, soldiers were to receive one-fourth of their pay in coin.^[12]

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Drawn in 1791 by the Spanish expeditionary artist José Cardero, *Soldado de Monterey* depicts Gabriel Moraga, a young soldier at the Monterey presidio who served in the military for nearly thirty years, ultimately rising to the rank of lieutenant. Initially dependent on supply ships from Mexico, the presidios increasingly came to rely on the missions for foodstuffs and manufactured goods. Credits obtained in return by the Franciscans allowed them to import a range of important items, enriching the local economy. *Courtesy Museo Naval, Madrid Photograph courtesy Iris Engstrand .*

Mission Economic Growth

During the years when Spanish officials were articulating the structure of the economy of

California, the missions, which would soon dominate the colonial economy, emerged as productive agricultural enterprises. In 1774, although dry soil impeded agriculture at Mission San Diego, seeds sown at missions San Carlos, San Gabriel, San Luis Obispo, and San Antonio all yielded abundant harvests, giving the colony its first taste of self-sufficiency. In 1775, these missions produced 1,029 *fanegas* of wheat and 974 *fanegas* of corn.^[13] Missions Santa Clara, San Francisco, and San Juan Capistrano, all of which were founded in 1776 and 1777, quickly reaped abundant yields, and by 1778, the missions harvested enough agricultural foodstuffs to satisfy their own needs.^[14] Although annual production at the individual missions fluctuated, the exchange of surpluses between missions alleviated local shortfalls; manufactured goods, however, were still imported from Mexico. By 1805, nineteen missions cultivated crops, and their collective harvests of wheat, corn, barley, and beans totaled almost sixty thousand *fanegas*, nearly a thirty-fold increase in aggregate mission productivity during three decades. An increase in Indian laborers and more careful selection of fields combined with the padres' realization that wheat, their preferred crop, had a much lower yield than corn, contributed to the expansion of mission agricultural productivity.^[15]

Mission livestock also increased quickly, as the small herds of cattle herded overland from Baja California and Sonora in 1769 and the early 1770s multiplied.^[16] In 1773, the five missions had 204 head of cattle; by 1775, they counted 427 head. By 1805, mission livestock holdings were so enormous that they had become a nuisance to Spaniards and Indians alike: the missions and their ranchos counted over 130,000 sheep, 95,000 cattle, 21,000 horses, 1,000 mules, 800 pigs, and 120 goats.^[17] Missionaries controlled the best grazing lands, which they guarded from encroachment by Spanish settlers. Fewer than thirty active and retired soldiers successfully petitioned the governor for land on which to graze their own herds. These private ranchos, although enormous, never rivaled the missions' productivity, and grantees received only usufruct rights, not permanent title to the land.^[18]

In California, the presidios rapidly became dependent on the missions for food and basic manufactured goods. At first, the missions sold only food to the presidios, but after the 1790s, once Indians had learned new crafts and trades, the missions became veritable general stores. The soap soldiers used to clean themselves, the shoes and boots they pulled on in the morning, the saddles they rode in, the candies they read by, the beds and blankets they slept in, even the coffins they were buried in—these goods and others were produced and sold by the missions. The military's dependence on the missions became nearly complete after 1810, when civil war in Mexico undercut Spain's ability to provision Alta California.

This dependence, however, was not one-sided, and mission-presidio exchange

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was equally important to the survival and growth of the missions. In return for goods sold to the presidios, the missions received a credit, which they redeemed in Mexico City through their purchasing agent. Through sales to the presidios, a mission could amass a credit worth double or triple the eight hundred peso annual stipend allocated to its missionaries, thereby enabling it to purchase goods it could not manufacture, such as prayer books, trade beads, woolen blankets, fine cloth, paper products, cooking spices, and wine, chocolate, and rice.^[19]

The Pueblos

To reduce the military's dependence on the missions and supply ships, Spain established civilian communities, or pueblos, in San José (1777), Los Angeles (1781), and the Villa de Branciforte (1797), near present-day Santa Cruz, in the hope that their inhabitants would produce enough food to feed the region's soldiers. The pueblos' economies have received less attention than those of the missions, but there is little doubt that during the Spanish period, the economies of the civilian communities were directed nearly exclusively toward providing the military with agricultural foodstuffs. San José produced large surpluses of grain within several years of its establishment.^[20] According to Governor Neve, in 1781, the presidios of Monterey and San Francisco "were completely fed by the town of San José whose harvest exceeded 1,300 *fanegas* of grain."^[21] During the remainder of the eighteenth century, San José harvested surplus quantities of beans, wheat, and especially corn. Production at San José fell after 1796, perhaps as a result of the establishment, twenty miles north, of Mission San José, which gained control of the Indian laborers who had done most of the community's agriculture work.

While statistics for agricultural production in Los Angeles are scarce, it is clear that the pueblo sporadically produced impressive amounts of corn. Agricultural production in Los Angeles, however, also stagnated after 1800.^[22] The Villa de Branciforte, about which less is known, was the least productive of the three towns.^[23] Although the pueblos were able to sustain themselves and the presidios during only a few years, their surpluses constituted an important supplement to the grain

the presidios purchased directly from the missions. After 1790, in part because of the pueblos' productivity, supply ships no longer needed to carry flour, corn, or beans—the most important staples—from San Blas to Alta California.^[24]

Critics of Spanish economic policy—including Governor Diego de Borica (1794–1800)—argued that economic development of the towns in Alta California would never reach its potential until the *pobladores* were allowed to market their grain beyond the presidios. In February 1801, the *Junta Superior de Real Hacienda* agreed and approved Borica's plan to allow the *pobladores* to sell their surplus grain to the San Blas supply ships. This experiment proved an immediate success. In 1801, San

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José supplied the ships *Princesa* and *Concepción* with 1,830 *arrobas* of flour.^[25] Apparently, the town's horse-powered mill turned day and night to fill the order. In July 1801, Los Angeles *vecinos* also offered to supply wheat to San Blas. The pueblos' opportunities for trade expanded further in 1806, when they began direct trade with the supply ships.^[26] After 1810, however, civil war interrupted the San Blas-Alta California shipments, ending this developing market for the pueblos' surplus.

Throughout the colonial period the *pobladores* pursued agricultural occupations almost exclusively. The Crown's insistence that the *pobladores* produce agricultural foodstuffs and the ease with which the settlers and soldiers could purchase low-price household necessities from the missions stunted urban production of consumer goods and artisan crafts. In Los Angeles, for example, all of the eleven male heads of households in 1781 were identified as farmers; four of these, however, practiced additional trades: one was a blacksmith, two were cobblers, and a fourth was a tailor. In 1816, although the town's population was by then several hundred strong, of the eighty-seven males whose occupations were listed in a census, only three—a scribe, a cobbler, and a potter—practiced non-agricultural professions.^[27] Thus, even as the town's population expanded, its artisan sector stagnated.

Price Regulation and Crown-Sponsored Economic Initiatives

In Spanish California few aspects of the colonial economy were more tightly controlled than prices. José de Echeveste and Felipe de Neve both set prices for goods imported into the region. And after the missions and pueblos produced surplus agricultural products, the governors also set maximum prices for goods produced and exchanged within Alta California. In 1781, Neve established maximum prices for sixty-one commodities produced by the missions.^[28] Overall, during most of the colonial period, the governors reduced prices in California as mission production increased, and as these prices fell, the missions' forced subsidization of the military increased. Low prices reduced the potential income of the missions, but their effect on mission production awaits future study. Shifts in price, however, could encourage the padres to sell more of the missions' reserves. In 1786 and 1787, when a food shortage gripped California, Governor Pedro Fages (1782–1791) raised the price of corn, chickpeas, barley, chickens, and hens to encourage the padres to sell the soldiers some of the missions' surplus.^[29]

Fages's willingness to adjust prices to reflect current levels of production shaped the price schedule he issued in 1788. Animals raised in abundance at the missions and purchased regularly by the soldiers—bulls, cows, oxen, hogs, and sheep—and products produced from them—jerked beef, tallow, and hides—dropped in price. Corn, wheat, and flour prices were unchanged, the price of beans fell, and the cost

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of chickens and barley rose. For the most part, these early price schedules remained for the duration of the Spanish period with only slight modification. In 1799, Governor Diego de Borica raised the price of wheat and reduced the prices of horses, mares, and colts,^[30] and in 1802 Governor José Joaquín de Arrillaga (1800–1814) made only a few changes.^[31]

In addition to fixing prices and supporting the development of the missions, presidios, and pueblos, the Crown sponsored three distinct initiatives to speed the economic development of the region. The first two—the promotion of sea otter hunting and the introduction of hemp cultivation—emerged primarily out of the Crown's need for fur pelts and durable cordage to support mining and shipping industries outside Alta California. The third, the transplantation into the region of skilled artisans, however, was designed to expand the range of goods manufactured in Alta California and thereby lessen the province's dependence on imported goods.

As early as the mid-1770s, Spaniards in California had acquired sea otter pelts from coastal

Indians.^[32] In the mid-1780s, however, two factors rendered sea otter pelts especially valuable to Spanish officials. Their warm and luxurious fur was prized in China, where a prime pelt could fetch a considerable sum. More important, though, in Canton, furs could be traded for mercury, a metal that was in short supply in New Spain, although it figured prominently in the Crown's plans to maximize silver production there. In 1784, Vicente Vasadre y Vega requested royal authority to establish and oversee just such a trade, adding that his plan would prevent the Russians and English from expanding their otter hunting into Spain's waters. The Crown responded enthusiastically, and by 1786 Vasadre was in California overseeing the collection of pelts.^[33]

Despite its initial commercial success, bureaucratic obstacles soon thwarted this promising enterprise. Franciscans and soldiers competed with one another for the pelts Indians hunted; Spanish officials felt that Vasadre had paid too much for the skins; and the goods the Franciscans had been promised in return were slow to arrive. In themselves none of these problems could have doomed Vasadre's plan, but the powerful Philippine Company, which had been granted certain monopoly rights to trade with China, obstructed Vasadre's efforts in Canton. In December 1788, Vasadre abandoned the Far East, and in 1790 the Crown terminated Spanish California's first export industry. After 1790, padres and soldiers occasionally shipped pelts to San Blas; most skins, however, were either purchased or gathered by Anglo-American traders or Russian hunters, who ventured more frequently into California's waters after the mid-1790s.^[34]

A year after the Crown withdrew its support for the export of otter pelts from California, Franciscans began to cultivate a second and briefly more successful export commodity, hemp.^[35] Hemp cultivation figured prominently in Spain's attempt to revitalize its colonial economy. Production of hemp in Spain fell short of domestic

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needs, and the fiber was essential for the cordage and rigging materials required by New Spain's navy. To spur production, the Crown in 1777 despatched hemp-raising experts to several of its American colonies, and Alta California was selected as one province in which hemp cultivation would be especially promoted.^[36]

As early as 1791, a few of the northern missions had planted small quantities of hemp, but they had neither the time nor the expertise to produce large amounts.^[37] Hemp production took a more serious turn after 1795, when special instructions were sent from Mexico on how to cultivate the crop. In December Governor Borica ordered the settlers at San José to begin cultivation and authorized them to hire Indians from the surrounding region to help.^[38] The following fall, Indians and settlers harvested 560 pounds of hemp.^[39] Production at San José and the northern missions, however, never really took off, even though the Crown in 1801 or 1802 transferred to Monterey Joaquín Sánchez, a marine sergeant stationed in San Blas who was experienced at raising hemp.^[40] An accidental fire consumed most of the 1804 harvest, and the next year fog and bad weather reduced the yield to 150 pounds.^[41]

Hemp cultivation increased dramatically after the harvest of 1805, when Sánchez, having wisely concluded that he had taught the settlers of San José more than they were willing to learn, focused his efforts in the Los Angeles region.^[42] The following year, exports exceeded 1,800 pounds. Production further accelerated in 1807, when the governor increased the government's purchase price from three pesos four *reales* to four pesos per *arroba*. The results of Sánchez's relocation to the south and the government's increase in price became clear in 1810: the province produced a whopping 220,000 pounds of hemp, a total that alone probably exceeded the previous two decades' production.^[43] The Crown and colonists had finally found an export staple that could be abundantly produced in Alta California; but within a year, commercial production of hemp in Alta California was finished, an early victim in Mexico's struggle for independence. After 1810 there were too few Spanish supply ships to transfer hemp to San Blas, and in February of 1811, Governor Arrillaga told Sánchez to restrict hemp cultivation to the needs of the province.^[44]

At the same time that the missions began to cultivate hemp, the Crown transported a group of artisans to Alta California to teach Indians specific trades. Royal officials hoped that these men, through their work with the mission Indians, could eventually increase the range and number of goods produced in the region. Between 1791 and 1795, about twenty skilled artisans worked in Alta California on four- or five-year contracts.^[45] Most came from Mexico City or Guadalajara. Among those sent to California were men skilled in stone and brick masonry, carpentry, pottery, tanning, shoemaking, and blacksmithing. A few, namely two tailors and a lathe worker, brought skills that were of little or no value to the missions.^[46]

Even though their numbers were few and their stays brief, Mexican artisans left their mark on Alta California. In the mid-1790s, Indians working under their tute-



Constructed between 1810 and 1812 by the mason Claudio López under the supervision of Father José María Zalvidea of Mission San Gabriel, El Molino Viejo was the first water-powered gristmill in California. Since 1965 it has been the southern California headquarters of the California Historical Society. *Courtesy California Historical Society, FN-30501*.

lague completed the church at Mission San Carlos Borromeo, the reconstruction of the Monterey presidio, and large-scale projects elsewhere, such as water-powered flour mills at Missions San Gabriel and Santa Cruz.^[47] More importantly, the artisans proved to be valuable teachers. At Mission San Carlos, eight Indians learned carpentry, two mastered blacksmithing, and another eleven, stone masonry and brick-laying.^[48] According to Fray Fermín Lasuén, Antonio Domínguez Henríquez successfully taught textile arts throughout Alta California.^[49] Thus, long after most Mexican artisans left California, Indians at the missions and the presidios practiced European-style building and manufacturing techniques.

Indian Labor in the Missions, Presidios, and Pueblos of Spanish California

Spain's exploitation of the riches of the Americas depended primarily on Indian labor, and demography and historical precedent left little possibility for Alta Califor-

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nia to prove exceptional. Therefore, nearly everything grown or manufactured in the missions, presidios, and pueblos resulted from the labor of Indians. Few Spaniards or Mexicans emigrated to California; those who did employed Indians to do their manual labor. In Alta California, despite the rapid decline in the native population, the population of the *gente de razón* never approached that of the Indians. In the coastal portion of Alta California that Spain controlled, scholars estimate that Indians outnumbered the soldiers and settlers 59,700 to 150 in 1770; 57,000 to 480 in 1780; 43,600 to 1,060 in 1790; 35,850 to 1,800 in 1800; 25,900 to 2,300 in 1810; and 21,750 to 3,400 in 1820.^[50] Although *encomienda*, *repartimiento*, and slavery—the most infamous of Spanish labor systems—had been abolished by 1769, when Alta California was founded, the Franciscans', soldiers', and settlers' treatment of Indian laborers has been the subject of heated controversy ever since the colonial period. Today, Native Americans, church historians, and academic scholars continue to debate whether or not the Spaniards' labor systems amounted to slavery, genocide, or salvation for California Indians.^[51]

For the Franciscans, Indian labor amounted to more than the production of food and material goods: it was a morally enriching disciplinary activity that figured prominently in the Indians' conversion from savagery to civilization. To the padres, Indians lived as wild animals, at the whim of nature, without comfort or recourse to work. Franciscans, therefore, saw the transformation of savage Indians into industrious Christians as a wrenching process that was quite literally "unnatural" for the Indians. The recitation and memorization of the catechism and *doctrina* may have prepared the Indians' souls for salvation, but it was the missions' regimented daily work schedule that provided the structure and discipline the padres believed the Indians lacked. In the

missions, therefore, the daily schedules of work and prayer dovetailed. In the morning, a bell or an Indian *alcalde* summoned the community to prayer. An hour later, the able-bodied would begin working and continue until around 11:00 A.M. After a meal and a short break, labor would resume. According to the padres, work concluded an hour or so before sunset, in time for communal prayers; soldiers asserted that Indians worked until sunset.^[52] Indians worked at the missions five to eight hours a day, five or six days a week.^[53] Indians did not work for the missions on Sundays or religious holidays, which numbered as many as ninety-two days in the calendar of Catholic worship.^[54] Some of the work around the mission was piecework. Women, for example, could be required to grind a specific amount of grain per day; men could be held responsible for the manufacture of a certain number of adobe bricks. Indians were not paid a daily wage for working in the missions; rather, they were provided with food, housing, religious instruction, and an occasional change of clothing.

All able-bodied Indians, regardless of age, performed some sort of task. The type of work, however, depended on the season, the level of economic development of the

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mission, and the age, gender, and skills of the individual. Just as with language and religious instruction, the Franciscans placed their greatest hopes for Indian economic advancement in children, who they believed could be taught "with ease and without violence to grow accustomed to work."^[55] Children, therefore, were assigned simple chores, such as ensuring that weeds and birds did not damage vegetable gardens. Privileged young men and boys worked directly for the Franciscans as pages, acolytes, and sacristans. And a select group of men held the supervisory positions of *alcalde* and *regidor*. Most men were trained in trades, such as masonry, carpentry, or leather working, or performed basic manual labor around the mission or in the fields. By contrast, women worked in domestic activities: sewing, washing, culling wheat, and grinding *piñole*.^[56] Not all of the jobs in the missions were segregated by sex, however. At Mission Santa Cruz, for example, in 1825, forty men and forty-six women labored in the mission's textile workshops.^[57]

After the mid-1790s, when artisans began to teach specific trades at the missions, skilled Indians made up an increasingly large percentage of the mission labor force. By 1825, for example, 31 percent of the 277 laborers at Mission Santa Cruz worked on textile looms, and another 10 percent were listed as artisans or apprentices: carpenters (7), shoemakers (4), masons (4), gunsmiths (3), soapmakers (3), and blacksmiths (2).^[58] During the 1820s, the military frequently called on mission masons, bricklayers, and carpenters to maintain and reconstruct the presidios.^[59] For a few Indians, the acquisition of such specialized skills provided liberation from the missions. In December 1822, José Chaquiles, a cobbler, petitioned for emancipation from Mission Soledad, claiming that he had the skills to support himself. A month later he was making shoes in San José.^[60]

For the economic productivity of the mission, perhaps the most important aspect of Indian labor was its flexibility. When it came time to sow the fields or harvest the crops, bricklayers put down their tools, weaving workshops closed, and all of the mission's able-bodied laborers took to the fields. Shearing sheep, branding livestock, and other indispensable seasonal work, such as producing lime and salt, preparing the tannery, and making tiles so that the mission would have a reserve of roofing material for the soaking winter rains—all of these required a concentration of workers in one industry for a limited amount of time. During these periods of communal work, gendered notions of labor were displaced by the immediate needs of the mission community.

Most scholars have concluded that the average workload in the missions was not so onerous as to have damaged the Indians' physical health. But the coercive measures that Franciscans employed to enforce their labor regime proved both psychologically and physically damaging to the neophytes. Franciscans or Indian *alcaldes* frequently took roll at the missions to make sure that laborers were not shirking their duties. Indians who avoided work were first scolded. Then, if they did not mend

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their ways, they were whipped or imprisoned. Consequently, many Indians fled the missions. At the request of the Franciscans, soldiers attempted to force runaways back to the missions, an effort that succeeded haphazardly and only served to perpetuate the cycle of coercion and violence. As Sherburne F. Cook suggested in the early 1940s and Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo have recently argued, the psychological effects of the Spaniards' coercive measures probably contributed to the high levels of illness and mortality in the missions.^[61]

Illness—real and pretended—and absenteeism greatly reduced the labor force at the missions. "The healthy [Indians] are clever at offering as a pretext chronic ailments," Lasuén lamented, "and they know that they are generally believed, and that even in cases of doubt the missionary

dispenses them from work."^[62] Large-scale exoduses occasionally decimated a mission's workforce, but more common, especially in the later years of the mission period, was slow attrition. For example, in December 1825 nearly a quarter of the adult population at Mission Santa Cruz was unable to work because of flight or some form of illness.^[63] In the summer, when the Franciscans allowed Indians a few weeks leave from the missions to visit their unbaptized relatives or ancestral villages, the percentage of available workers frequently dropped to half the adult population.^[64]

In addition to linking high rates of mortality and desertion to the missions' coercive labor regime, scholars have argued that Indian laborers suffered incapacitating psychological disorientation when they tried to reconcile Spanish tools, technologies, and schedules with their own worldviews.^[65] This approach calls attention to the difficult transitions that the mission workplace demanded of Indians, but it hobbles the scholarship on labor in the missions by depicting Indian people as static, immutably bound to a wild landscape and a savage mentality. By arguing that Indians could not make the difficult transition to the modes of labor and forms of technology that the missions brought to Alta California, scholars—like the Franciscans—have largely disregarded or misunderstood the Indians who did adjust to mission labor. Ironically, in much of this scholarship, Indians are ascribed the power to reject the Franciscans' labor regime but denied the ability to incorporate aspects of it selectively into their own lives.

Had Indians not proven so adept with European technologies, Alta California would have remained a colony dependent on imported grains, where Franciscans, soldiers, settlers, and Indians lived and prayed in thatched huts. Perhaps as a way of assuaging psychological trauma and maintaining continuity, Indians blended old and new economic activities in their work at the missions and in their villages. Despite their attempt to fill the Indians' days with a novel routine of work and prayer, the Franciscan regime never completely displaced indigenous economic activities or manufacturing processes. Rather, mission Indians continued to gather roots, acorns, and grasses, and hunt fowl, game, and fish even as they worked in the missions' fields

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and workshops, thereby interweaving Indian and Spanish technologies, work rhythms, and productive processes.

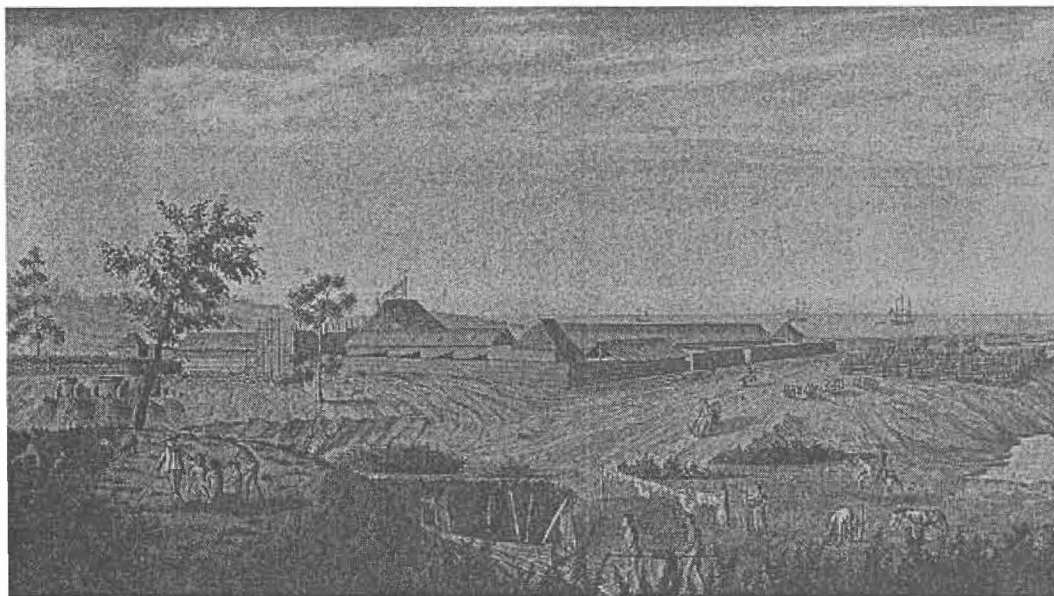
Outside the missions, the presidios constituted a second important site of labor in colonial California. Recent archaeological work even suggests that the presidios, in part because of their reliance on Indian labor, became significant areas of acculturation between Indians and soldiers during the colonial period.^[66] In Alta California, soldiers were few and averse to manual labor. Each of the four presidios usually had between forty-five and sixty men assigned to it. But only a small fraction of these soldiers was at the presidio at any given time. When available soldiers were forced to work on the construction of the presidios, they griped that the work was too hard and the pay too low; one soldier even complained that "slaves could not have been treated worse."^[67]

Faced with grumbling soldiers and crumbling presidios, the Spanish military leaders quickly turned to local Indians as a source of labor. Indian labor at the presidios took at least five different forms, yet scholars have focused on only two of these forms: convict labor and mission contract labor. Convict labor involved Indians—baptized and unbaptized—arrested for a crime and sentenced to presidial labor. The military did not pay convict laborers a daily stipend; it merely provided sustenance. Convict labor at the presidios was so common that Father Lasuén complained that the soldiers' "greedy desire to obtain free labor" led them to arrest Indians for crimes the Franciscans could have punished.^[68]

Even as they condemned the military's use of Indian convicts, the Franciscans readily supplied the military with contract laborers, who performed a host of tasks at the presidios, from cooking the soldiers' meals to rebuilding the presidio's walls. The presidios paid the mission—not the Indian laborers—one and one-half *reales* a day for each unskilled laborer and slightly more for carpenters or masons.^[69] As contemporary accounts and mission records make clear, the export of mission laborers to the presidios was extensive. For example, in the years 1787, 1797, 1808, and 1817, the Monterey presidio was charged for 544, 741, 2,880, and 484 days of Indian labor.^[70] In spite of their conviction that the soldiers' behavior would undermine the missions' religious teachings, Franciscans willingly supplied the presidios with a steady supply of Indian laborers. For in doing so, the padres added hundreds or even thousands of pesos to the mission's accounts in a given year.

Historians still need to learn more about the quantity and nature of convict and mission contract labor at the presidios, but the near-exclusive focus on these forms of labor has diverted attention from the considerable number of unbaptized (gentile) Indians who came to work at the presidios on a pre-arranged basis.^[71] The initial construction and maintenance of the presidios, when not undertaken by grumbling soldiers, was carried out by gentile contract laborers. For example, from April 1790 to September 1796 groups of Indians from the Santa Clara Valley worked one-month

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Soldiers and Indians busy themselves outside the Monterey presidio in a pen-and-ink drawing executed in 1791 by José Cardero, an artist with the Spanish exploring expedition commanded by Alejandro Malaspina. When Cardero visited the capital of California, work on the new presidio buildings, which had begun the previous year, was well advanced.

Like most other undertakings that contributed to the growth and development of the province, the Hispanic building program relied heavily on Indian labor. *Courtesy Museo Naval, Madrid. Photograph courtesy Iris Engstrand .*

shifts rebuilding the Monterey presidio.^[72] For one month's work, the military paid an unbaptized laborer one blanket, valued at between five and nine *reales*; by comparison, the military paid the mission thirty-six *reales* a month for each mission laborer. Thus, in June 1790, Governor Fages was justified when he boasted to his superiors that his employment of gentile Indians had saved "the major expense of paying the daily wages of the Indians from the missions."^[73] Unbaptized Indians, most likely, agreed to work for the military to obtain European goods without becoming entangled in the Franciscans' confining web. Labor at the presidio also guaranteed a daily ration of food, which was a powerful incentive during the mid-1790s, when drought stunted the region's wild seeds and killed many of its grazing animals.

Beyond the various forms of convict and contract labor, informal labor by baptized and unbaptized Indians formed a fourth form of Indian labor at the presidios. Unbaptized Indians frequently performed small tasks at the presidios, in return for food and trade goods. The Franciscans allowed mission Indians who had completed their assigned tasks to work at a presidio, and many mission Indians worked at the

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presidios in what little free time they had. On mission holidays, Sundays, and during the summer when the Franciscans let the Indians leave the mission for a few weeks, some men and women went to the presidios to cook food, wash clothes, mill grain, and carry wood.^[74]

This informal labor at the presidios was not limited to the few brief periods when padres gave Indians leave from the missions; many baptized Indians worked for soldiers on the sly, out of sight of the Franciscans. Thus, covert informal labor comprised a fifth and final form of Indian labor at the presidios. Covert informal labor at the presidios is poorly documented because by necessity Indians and soldiers hid most of it from the Franciscans, who kept the best written records on colonial California. With a small piece of leather or a handful of corn, soldiers often paid Indians to gather wood, grind corn, and wash clothes. This labor was so common that the soldiers, in paying the Indians for their work, often exhausted their weekly rations a few days after they received them.^[75] Men with special skills—shoemakers, tanners, and deer-skin workers—frequently slipped away to the presidios.^[76] Women, too, would occasionally leave the missions to sell wood or wash the soldiers' clothes. Thus, despite the Franciscans' opposition, mission Indians worked at the presidios covertly to supplement their diets, to obtain trade goods, and to maintain independence from the Franciscans.

In addition to the missions and the presidios, the two principal pueblos of Alta California—San José and Los Angeles—constituted a third center of labor during the colonial period. The majority of settlers, most of whom were retired soldiers, eschewed manual labor and hired local Indians to perform virtually all their tasks. In San José, settlers quickly became dependent on Indian laborers. As early as 1782, the military issued strict guidelines for the employment of local unbaptized Indians, prohibiting "the familiar intercourse which has been observed to occur between the households of the settlers and the pagan men and women." Requests for Indian laborers were to be channeled through a ranking military officer, who would contact a local Indian headman. Indians were to be paid for work done; coercion would not be tolerated in their recruitment. Tellingly, Indian women, who were frequently employed to mill grain or perform other domestic tasks, were not allowed to enter into the *pobladores*' homes, as had been the practice, because such "familiarity" had led to "grievances against both populations."^[77]

In the early 1780s, the settlers of Los Angeles developed a similar dependence on Indian laborers.^[78] But as many Franciscans and soldiers had discovered during the first years of the missions and presidios, much to their frustration, local Indians would only work for the Spaniards when doing so did not conflict with their own subsistence economy. In April 1784, Lieutenant José Francisco de Ortega must have felt that he alone cared about the pueblo's corn and wheat. With great concern, he reported to the governor that the settlers were "few and useless," and the Indians, who had tilled

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the land and planted the crop, had offered to help with the harvest, but only after they had finished their own seasonal gathering.^[79] That fall, after completing their own harvest, the Gabrielinos reaped from the *pobladores*' fields over 1,800 *fanegas* of corn, 340 *fanegas* of kidney beans, and 9 *fanegas* each of wheat, lentils, and garbanzos.^[80]

Within less than a decade of the establishment of Los Angeles, the expansion of the *pobladores*' and *vecinos*' fields and the steady increase in their livestock must have imperiled the Gabrielino economy and made full-time work for the settlers imperative. Thus, in January of 1787, Governor Fages modified for Los Angeles the guidelines issued for San José regulating the recruitment and employment of gentile laborers.^[81] Here, too, the governor sought to end the "pernicious familiarity" that resulted from the presence of so many Indian laborers: Indians were not to live in town or enter the settlers' homes, and they were to sleep under the watch of the sentry if they spent the night. Under these restrictive regulations, Indians worked in the settlers' fields, where they earned a third to a half of the crops they harvested.^[82] Gabrielinos also toiled in Los Angeles as vaqueros, cooks, muleteers, water carriers, and domestic servants. By the mid-1790s, the presence of so many Indian laborers had led to considerable acculturation between the Indian and Spanish communities. Many Indian laborers spoke Spanish and dressed like their employers, "clad in shoes, with sombreros and blankets."^[83] Moreover, many settlers spoke the Indians' language; some even married Indian women.^[84]

Only the Franciscans objected to the working relationships between Indians and settlers. The padres knew that the settlers offered the same material incentives the missions used to attract Indians: food, clothing, and beads. But in the missions, Franciscan oversight proved oppressive, housing was crowded, and disease ran rampant, whereas in the pueblos *pobladores* cared little about changing the Indians' religion or sexuality and required laborers to return to their own *rancherías* at the end of the day. The inability of the missions to compete with the attractions of the pueblos led La-suén to conclude that the towns and their inhabitants were "an immense hindrance to the conversion of the pagans, for they give them bad example, they scandalize them, and they actually persuade them not to become Christians, lest they themselves suffer the loss of free labor."^[85] More frustrating to the Franciscans than the loss of these potential converts was the disaffection of those who had previously professed their allegiance to the mission. Baptized Indians also sought work and refuge in the pueblos, even though Governor Fages prescribed ten lashes for neophytes who were repeatedly found in town without permission from the missionaries.

The Collapse of Royal Support

During the final decade of Spanish California, revolutionary movements in Spain and Mexico ruptured virtually all state support for California's missions and pre-

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sidios, rendering Alta California's ties to central Mexico increasingly tenuous. Neither padre nor soldier could count on an annual salary or the goods bought with them, and, as noted above,

promising industries, such as the export of hemp and grain, collapsed. The colonial project survived mainly through the productivity of the missions, which continued to feed and clothe the padres and Indians while providing soldiers and *pobladores* with food, basic commodities, and manufactured goods. Father-president Mariano Payeras estimated that after 1810 the missions provided five hundred thousand pesos in assistance to the presidios and the pueblos.^[86] The extraction of so much surplus labor and production exacted an enormous toll on the neophytes. "These poor people," lamented Payeras, "will be the most unfortunate and wretched in the world, if they alone, many only recently baptized and civilized, have to support so many troops for so long a time."^[87]

Between 1810 and 1821, only one official supply ship arrived from San Blas; however, a minimum of twenty Spanish merchant ships called in Alta California, and this maritime trade helped to buoy up the local economy.^[88] Most of the legal trade was carried on between missionaries and Lima traders, who largely took over the function of the San Blas supply ships. The Limeños purchased tallow—a fat rendered from slaughtered cattle—from the Franciscans and in return conveyed goods from Mexico bought specifically for the missions. The presidios also participated in this trade, although only through the assistance of the missions, which provided the cash and tallow that presidial commanders used to purchase goods from visiting ships.

Clandestine trade with Anglo-American, British, and Russian traders also helped padres and soldiers obtain imported necessities. Governors José Joaquín de Arrillaga and Pablo Vicente de Solá (1815–1822) publicly condemned this illegal trade, but in private, they orchestrated it.^[89] José Darío Argüello (acting governor 1814–1815) probably spoke for most soldiers, settlers, and padres in Alta California, when, in regard to this contraband trade, he observed wryly: "Necessity makes licit what is not licit by law."^[90] While the governors and Franciscans applauded their ingenuity in trading with foreign nationals, the isolation of Alta California from the economies of Spain and central Mexico steadily increased. And although this illicit trade met many of the immediate needs of the province, it fostered a dependence in the region on foreign markets that most Californios would soon regret.

The Mexican Period

The overthrow of Spanish rule in New Spain ushered in a brief period of hope that Alta California's economy would expand and become fully integrated into the national economy.^[91] In the mid-1820s the new Mexican government set up a commission, the Junta de Fomento de Californias, and charged it to devise plans for the defense and economic development of California. The junta's bold plans to transfer

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the San Blas shipworks to Monterey and establish alongside it a monopolistic trading house, the Asian-Mexican Company, however, bore no fruit. As Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado lamented, the program "died without being born."^[92]

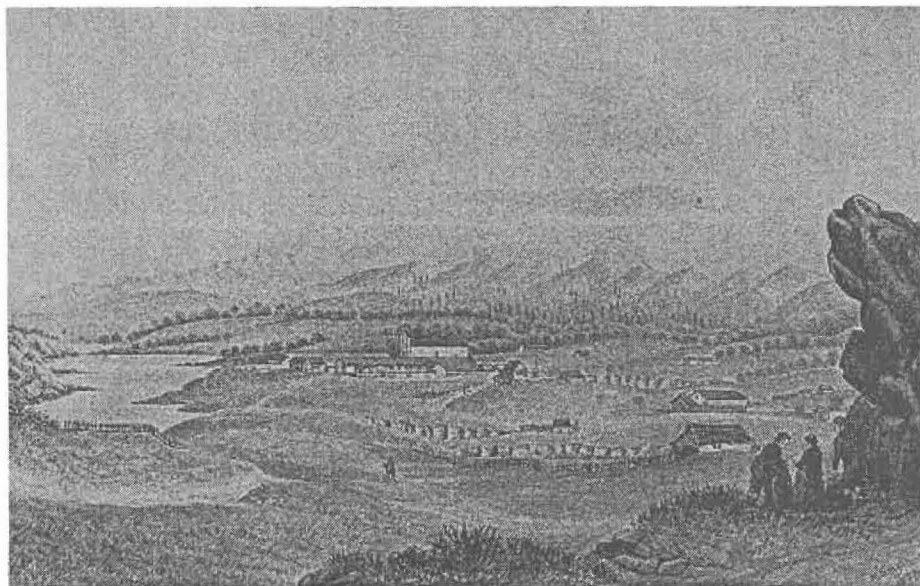
In fact, to the disappointment of the residents of California, independent Mexico did little to integrate California into the national economy or support the soldiers stationed in the region. And by most accounts, during the decade after Mexican independence, the economic well-being of the region's colonists, soldiers, and Indians further deteriorated. Don José María Herrera, the deputy commissioner of finances whom Mexico sent to Monterey in 1825, was nearly powerless to ensure the effective fiscal administration of Alta California. Soldiers, unpaid for years, refused to serve until paid or simply abandoned the disintegrating presidios.^[93] A spectacular, yet unsuccessful, mutiny occurred in Monterey in 1829, when soldiers seized the presidio and railed against the central government for sending them a governor who ignored their privations.^[94] The revolt did little to improve the conditions of the rebels; it did, however, prove something of a temporary setback for deputy commissioner Herrera. In May 1830, having been accused by Governor José María de Echeandía of playing a central role in the uprising, Herrera found himself imprisoned on the American ship *Volunteer* and bound for Mexico.^[95]

While California politicians complained that the central government neglected their basic needs, the new economic policies pursued by the governors alienated both soldiers and settlers alike. Although Mexico dispensed with Spain's restrictive mercantile policies and opened California to foreign trade, import and export taxes remained high, and after 1826 Monterey was the sole official port of entry.^[96] The inadequacy of Mexican coastal patrols and customs officials, however, left most Californians to practice the free trade they preached.^[97] A host of forced contributions, fee assessments, and taxes on everything from otter pelts to cattle brands whittled away at the *pobladores'* and soldiers' incomes. Finally, with the important exception of the Híjar-Padrés colony, which brought numerous artisans and teachers to California, the only colonists the Mexican Republic sent to California were foundlings and convicts. In large measure, because of these

economic policies, many Californios came to view the central government in Mexico and its representatives in Alta California with skepticism or outright hostility.^[98]

Despite the provincials' own frustrations with the local economy, the Mexican period stands out as an era of great and rapid economic transformation. Most importantly, with the opening up of California to international trade immediately after Mexican independence, California's reliance on foreign markets for the sale of its surplus goods accelerated dramatically. A host of foreign companies quickly vied for access to the region's developing hide-and-tallow industry. In June of 1822, months before the Spanish flag was officially lowered in Monterey, the English trading concern of McCulloch, Hartnell and Company negotiated a three-year monopoly on

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Monterey, the capital of Alta California, as portrayed in the autumn of 1827 by William Smyth, a young admiralty mate and amateur artist on a British exploring expedition commanded by Frederick Beechey. Though the presidio and a dozen or so adobes scattered about the surrounding plain composed the entire town, it was nonetheless the official center of this distant Mexican province, the seat of the custom house and the single official port of entry. *Courtesy Bancroft Library*.

the purchase of the province's surplus hides and tallow.^[99] Both the father-president and the governor could hardly contain their optimism about the expansion of the hide-and-tallow trade. "The poverty of the Province will disappear," wrote Fray Mariano Payeras, "... and it will be even less necessary to order items from Mexico City."^[100] To his secular counterpart, Governor Pablo Vicente de Solá, who had previously relied on *contrabandistas* to provision his troops, this legalized trade represented the opportunity for which the region had been waiting.^[101]

Through the early 1830s, the missions increasingly dominated the production of hides and tallow in California; the extent to which the Franciscans reoriented the mission economy to supply foreign demand for hides and tallow, however, has sparked recent debate. Some scholars have suggested that the padres maximized production of livestock by diverting surplus labor away from other agricultural pursuits and measures that could have arrested the decline of the neophyte population.^[102] One scholar has countered that the padres did not reduce the amount of grain sown and that poor climate conditions and soil exhaustion reduced mission agricultural productivity in the 1820s.^[103] Each of these arguments suggests new di-

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rections for research, and taken collectively they demonstrate how differently historical geographers, archaeologists, and historians interpret economic change.

In addition to opening California to international trade, the Mexican government transferred control over the most important economic resources in the region—land, livestock, and laborers—from the missionaries to the settlers. The Colonization Act of 1824 and the Supplemental Regulations of 1828 created mechanisms through which private individuals—Mexican nationals and foreign immigrants—could for the first time obtain title to land in California.^[104] The Supplemental Regulations, however, specified that mission lands, by far the most valuable and accessible, could

not be colonized "at present." The Secularization Act of 1833 swept this qualification aside, transferring the temporal authority of the missionaries to secular priests and opening up prime mission lands for pasturage and settlement. Taken together, these laws ushered in the greatest transfer of land and resources in California since the Spaniards first set foot in the region. As a result, by 1840 the private rancho had replaced the mission as the dominant social and economic institution in California, and all but a handful of former mission Indians had been rendered landless.

The privatization of land holding in California occurred at a dizzying pace. During the entire Spanish period fewer than thirty soldiers had received usufruct rights to land; in the first decade of Mexican rule, fewer still gained title.^[105] But after 1833, when the Secularization Act went into effect, Mexican governors approved some seven hundred petitions for land, most of which came after 1840.^[106] By 1846, retired soldiers, *pobladores*, and recent immigrants from Mexico controlled virtually all the best land along the coast, the interior valleys near the sea, and the Napa and Sacramento valleys situated farther inland.^[107] At least sixty-six women—mostly single or widowed—received grants after 1821.^[108] While exact figures remain elusive, approximately one-third of all grants in the 1840s went to settlers with non-Spanish, mostly British or American, surnames.^[109] Overall, some ten million acres of land, or 10 percent of the surface area of present-day California, had passed into private hands by the close of the Mexican period.^[110]

Political influence, economic power, and enormous land holdings quickly became synonymous in Mexican California. In 1846, Thomas Larkin estimated that a group of forty-six men of substance ruled California.^[111] Most grants issued during the Mexican period were for parcels of land between ten and twenty thousand acres, but some individuals or families, such as the Yorbas and the Castros, amassed tracts of several hundred thousand acres.^[112] Most of this land became pasturage for the large herds required for the hide-and-tallow trade that boomed during the 1830s and early 1840s.

The nature and growth of the hide-and-tallow trade, especially after mission secularization, reinforced the growing dependence of California's economy on Anglo-American trading concerns. Precise figures of the volume of the trade do not exist, but in all likelihood, more than six million hides and seven thousand tons of tallow

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Californio vaqueros lasso a steer in a painting by the Cuban artist Augusto Ferran that probably dates to the late 1840s. From late mission days through the era of the great ranchos, livestock raising was the most important industry in California. Cattle provided not only beef for local consumption but hides and tallow for international trade, which blossomed under Mexican rule, enriching large landowners and the American traders who dominated the commerce. *Courtesy Bancroft Library*.

were exported from California between 1826 and 1848.^[113] Virtually all of this trade was orchestrated by New England-based merchant houses.^[114] The demand for hides was greatest in the eastern United States, where manufacturers turned hides into shoes and other leather products. Traders from Boston purchased the California hides outright or, more commonly, bartered for them with a wide array of manufactured products, which they sold at three to four times their New England value. Shipped to Peru, tallow was made into soap and candles, and then sold to silver miners. Maritime traders encouraged rancheros or missionaries to go deep into debt, thereby tightening their monopoly on the trade.^[115] Anglo-American merchants such as Thomas Larkin and Abel Stearns, who purchased hides and sold Boston goods

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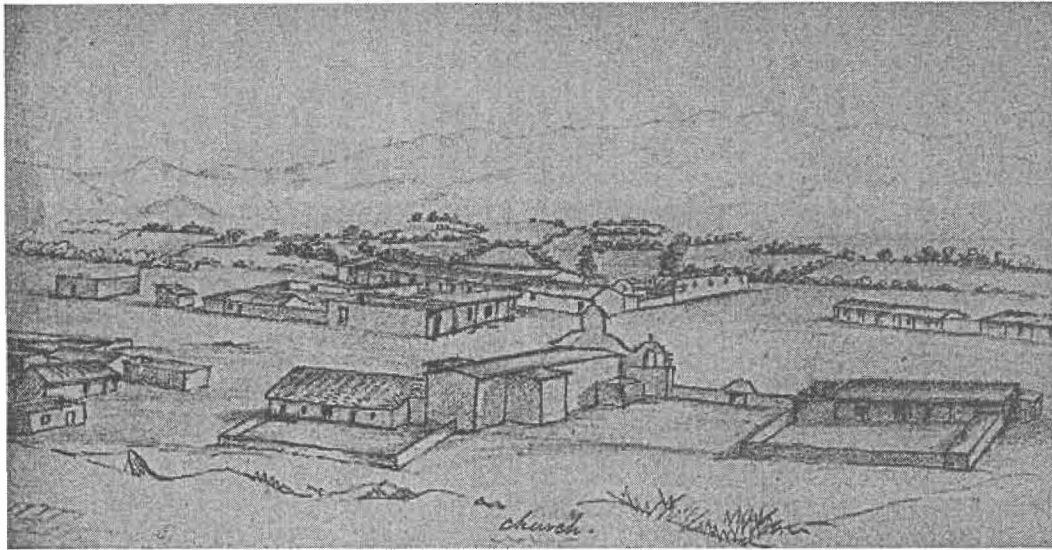
from their stores in California, also controlled a portion of the trade. After a fall in the price of hides on the Boston market rendered the trade unprofitable, and the deterioration of relations between the United States and Mexico in the mid-1840s made Boston traders wary of sending their ships into California's waters, decisions in the eastern United States, not in central Mexico or in California, precipitated the collapse of the hide-and-tallow trade. When gold was discovered in 1848, the heyday of the trade had already passed, and most remaining hide droghers quickly abandoned their ships for the gold fields.^[116]

The rise and fall of the hide-and-tallow trade owed much to Anglo-American entrepreneurs, but the production of these export goods depended first and foremost on the rancheros' access to the unemployed and landless Indians who had recently been emancipated from the missions.^[117] On the ranchos, former mission Indians performed the same basic tasks that had allowed the Franciscans to dominate the production of hides and tallow until 1834: they herded and slaughtered cattle, preserved hides, and rendered tallow. While the smallest ranchos employed only a handful of Indians, the largest, like Bernardo Yorba's Rancho Cañada de Santa Ana, employed more than a hundred workers to raise and slaughter livestock and dozens more to attend to the rancho's domestic chores.^[118] On these enormous ranchos, a gendered division of labor seems to have placed men in the fields and women in the adobes, where they sewed, washed, and cooked.^[119] Indian ranch hands usually lived in clusters of makeshift dwellings, where they continued to practice many elements of their culture. As recent archaeological work suggests, even well into the American period, Indians at some of the ranchos continued to manufacture their own pottery from local clay.^[120]

Indians who worked on the ranchos rarely received cash for their services. Most were caught up in a complicated system of reciprocal obligations that scholars have variously described as "peonage," "seigneurialism," or "paternalism."^[121] In this system Indians worked for the rancho for basic supplies and a daily ration of food, which they supplemented through their own vegetable gardens or any stray cattle they could pilfer from the rancho's herd. Some ranch hands, like their own employers, accepted goods in advance and then found themselves bound until they had repaid their debt.^[122] While by no means the dominant labor institution on the ranchos, a few unscrupulous rancheros did enslave Indians who had been captured on punitive raids.^[123] Most rancheros, however, combined aspects of these different labor arrangements to ensure the availability and compliance of Indian workers.^[124] Few rancheros became rich from the profits they derived from the Indians' work, but most made enough money to acquire some of life's comforts and to purchase fine cloth, extravagant garments, and luxury goods in an effort to distinguish themselves from their laborers and define themselves as an elevated social class.^[125]

Until quite recently, scholars believed that the ranchos, like the missions before

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William R. Hutton's drawing of Los Angeles in 1847 shows the white-washed adobes and village church fronting on the plaza, the heart of the principal pueblo of southern California. Though essentially an agricultural town, Los Angeles was also a provincial center for artisans, craftsmen, and merchants, including the Massachusetts-born trader Abel Stearns, a naturalized Mexican citizen and reputedly the richest man in southern California.

Courtesy Huntington Library .

them, had left little room for economic development in the pueblos. Since the late 1970s, however, historians have begun to recapture the complexity of economic growth and change in the pueblos, particularly in Los Angeles.^[126] True to its Spanish design, Mexican Los Angeles remained agricultural. By 1836 Los Angeles could count roughly 170 farms, orchards, gardens, and vineyards, and wine and brandy produced in Los Angeles and its environs were being poured in homes and taverns as distant as Hawaii and New England.^[127] While it seems clear that the missions remained the most important centers of artisan production in California until secularization, Los Angeles *pobladores* during the mid-1830s practiced thirty-one different occupations. The pueblos increasingly became centers for artisan work after mission secularization, and the Los Angeles community supported a growing merchant class and numerous artisans and craftsmen during the 1840s.^[128] Urban merchants and artisans may even have found local *rancheros* to be active consumers of their goods, for recent work suggests that the ranchos were not nearly as self-sufficient as previously believed. Only the very largest of the ranchos, it seems, actually employed their own artisans.^[129]

Although the economy of Los Angeles grew more complex and varied during the

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Mexican period, one factor remained fixed: Indians constituted the mainstay of the manual labor force. After mission secularization, the population of Indian laborers in Los Angeles rose steadily, although clearly not to the height or at the rate scholars have asserted. In 1830, approximately 198 Indians lived in Los Angeles; the number who worked in the town, however, remains unclear.^[130] Census lists taken later in the Mexican period provide important clues to the expansion of the Indian labor force in Los Angeles after secularization. The 1836 census enumerated 252 Indians in Los Angeles.^[131] Scholars have taken this figure to represent the number of Indian laborers in the town, but it seems implausible that all toiled for the settlers.^[132] When the infirm and children too young and adults too old to work are subtracted, a more reasonable figure of 225 laborers emerges.^[133] Eight years later, approximately 377 Indians lived in the town of Los Angeles, far below the asserted figure of 650; of these, 339 were likely laborers.^[134] Thus, the number of Indian residents and Indian laborers in Los Angeles increased in the years after secularization by roughly 50 percent, not 300 percent as scholars have suggested.^[135]

These reduced figures and new work on the economy of Mexican Los Angeles suggest that scholars need to revisit the belief that Indian laborers "inundated" Los Angeles after secularization, where many "remained perpetually unemployed."^[136] Furthermore, we need to reexamine the origins and magnitude of pathological behavior, such as drunkenness and homicide, that has been widely attributed to Indians in Mexican Los Angeles. These vices—and the repressive legislation that they prompted—have been described in the light of an underestimation of the strength of the Los Angeles economy, an overestimation of the number of Indians who lived in the town, and an unwitting tendency on the part of scholars to project the problems of contemporary urban Indians

into the past. Only after scholars have mined the census reports, criminal records, account books, and personal correspondence pertaining to California's three principal towns—San José, Los Angeles, and Monterey—will a full picture emerge of Indian participation in Mexican California's urban economy.

Conclusion

In the decades after Mexican independence, the laws that fomented economic development in the ranchos and the pueblos, namely the opening up of California to international trade, the Colonization Act of 1824, the Supplemental Regulations of 1828, and the Secularization Act of 1833—all manifested unforeseen political transformations. Gradually, the laws of 1824 and 1828 facilitated a dramatic increase in the number of foreigners residing in California. In 1821, only 20 foreigners lived in Alta California, but their numbers increased to 120 in 1830 and 380 in 1840. By 1845, 680 of the region's 7,300 non-Indian residents were foreign immigrants. After 1845, the

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number of immigrants increased dramatically; some estimates place the number at 7,000 in 1846, fully one-half the non-Indian population.^[137] Many of these newcomers, especially merchants, successfully married into the local elite and adopted much of Californio culture; most, however, never renounced their commercial ties to the United States.

Samuel Hastings, a shipmaster who plied California's waters in the early 1840s, testified to the political implications of these ties, predicting to Thomas Larkin that California eventually would go the way of Texas, and "American agents and American capital will be at the bottom of it."^[138] Although Hastings could not foresee the exact means through which the United States would acquire California, he recognized—as had Spanish mercantilists long before—that commercial interests could determine political allegiance. Upon the outbreak of the Mexican-American War in 1846, even before California had been seized by the United States, the economic ties between California and the United States—the most important of which dated to the hide-and-tallow trade—metamorphosed into political loyalty. Soon thereafter, these political and economic relationships hardened during the Gold Rush, hastening the admission in 1850 of California as the thirty-first state of the Union.

The men whose efforts and writings helped to promote California's statehood were often anti-Catholic, Hispanophobic, and quick, therefore, to dismiss the inhabitants and the economy of Mexican California as primitive and backwards. To Alfred Robinson, author of *Life in California* (1846), the Californios were "generally indolent, and addicted to many vices." Of their use of the land and the economy, Englishman Sir George Simpson scoffed: "Nature doing everything, man doing nothing."^[139] Fortunately, the scholarship of recent decades has challenged these and other incorrect early assessments. Stereotypes of idling dons, dusty pueblos, and placid missions are giving way to a more subtle understanding of how economic relationships in Alta California were a blend of the initiatives of Spanish and Mexican secular officials and the priorities and skills of the regions' missionaries, soldiers, settlers, and most importantly, Indians.

As scholars continue to revise our understanding of the economy of Alta California, they need to continue examining the tensions between local needs and national policies, the interrelatedness of social, cultural, and economic change, the full implications of Indian participation in the colonial economy, and the place of Alta California's economy within the Spanish colonial frontier. Historians should have ample opportunity and abundant cause for such inquiries. The current increase in scholarly and public interest in the colonial history of the Spanish Borderlands will, no doubt, spur new studies, while the charged nature of current economic ties between Mexico and California renders them all the more timely.

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Land, Labor, and Production
