

## Chapter 1      The United States’ Spanish Heritage

When Anglo-Americans ventured westward, they did not enter uninhabited land. The region had been settled for hundreds of years. Before the Southwest belonged to the United States, it was Indian and Spanish, and after that Mexican. It was Spain that had initially brought Europe to the US’s southern and western half, from the Florida Keys to Alaska. Spain’s northern empire included not only Florida and the Great Southwest, but also areas in the deep South and lower Midwest. Spain, for example, founded towns that would eventually become Memphis, Tennessee, and Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Spain considered the frontier north of Mexico as a relatively unimportant part of its New World empire. Spanish objectives in the northern frontier were twofold: to convert the Indians to Catholicism and to serve as a buffer to protect wealthier areas of central Mexico.

In recent years, there has been a tendency to belittle Spain’s impact on the Southwest, even though it exercised sovereignty over the region for three centuries. Conflict with Indians and the failure to find major silver or gold deposits made it difficult to persuade settlers to colonize the region. Spanish settlement was largely confined to religious missions, a few small civilian towns, and military posts intended to prevent encroachment by Russia, France, and England. It was not until 1749 that Spain established the first civilian town in Texas, a town that eventually became Laredo; and not until 1769 did Spain establish permanent settlements in California.

Fixated on religious conversion and military control, Spain inhibited the region’s economic development. Following the dictates of an economic philosophy known as mercantilism, aimed at protecting its own manufacturers, Spain restricted trade, prohibited manufacturing, stifled local

## 20 Mexican American Voices

industry and handicrafts, impeded the growth of towns, and prevented civilians from selling to soldiers. The government required all trade to be conducted through Veracruz and levied high excise taxes that greatly increased the cost of transportation. It exercised a monopoly over tobacco and gunpowder and prohibited the capture of wild horses. Still, Spain left a lasting imprint on the Southwest.

Citizens of the United States commonly think of their society as a “melting pot,” in which diverse ethnic groups shed their traditional identities and are absorbed into a dominant culture. This view of acculturation is highly simplistic. In fact, the lines of cultural influence move in multiple directions. A better model of cultural interchange is the Mexican concept of *mestizaje*, which implies blending and mixture. The meaning of *mestizaje* can be illustrated by the development of the conception of the cowboy.

Cowboys adopted their outfits, their terminology, their customs, and even their songs from a Spanish and Mexican prototype. *Vaqueros* (a term that became the basis for the English word “buckaroo”), who tended cows (*vacas*), became cowboys. They rode on a saddle with a horn, which became the western saddle. *Vaqueros* used the horn as a place to hang their *riata* or lariat (rope), and after throwing their *lazo* (lasso), tied it to the horn. Other Spanish words incorporated into English include corral, rodeo, hombre, and bronco.

Cowboy dress was adapted from the *vaqueros*. *Vaqueros* wore a wide-brimmed hat (*sombrero*) to shade their face from the hot sun. They wore high-heeled, pointed boots to keep their feet in their stirrups as they galloped. They also wore leather *chaparejos* (chaps), to protect their legs from thorny chaparral bushes. *Vaqueros* sang ballads known as *corridos* and played the guitar as they tended cattle. Some of the most famous western songs were English translations of Spanish *corridos*.

Place names, too, bear witness to the region’s Spanish heritage. Los Angeles, San Antonio, Santa Fe, and Tucson were all founded by the Spanish. To this day, the Spanish pattern of organizing towns around a central plaza bordered by churches and official buildings is found throughout the region. Spanish architectural styles – adobe walls, tile roofs, wooden beams, and intricate mosaics – still characterize the Southwest.

By introducing European livestock and vegetation, Spanish colonists transformed the Southwest’s economy, environment, and physical appearance. The Spanish introduced horses, cows, sheep, and goats, as well as tomatoes, chilies, Kentucky bluegrass, and a variety of weeds. As livestock devoured the region’s tall native grasses, a new and distinctly southwestern environment arose, one of cactus, sagebrush, and mesquite. The Spanish also introduced temperate and tropical diseases, which reduced the Indian population by 50 to 90 per cent.

## The United States' Spanish Heritage 21

It is equally important that in attitudes toward class and race, Spanish possessions differed from the English colonies. While a small elite based its status on its racial background and ownership of land, most colonists were of mixed racial backgrounds, and racial mixture continued throughout the Spanish colonial period. In general, *mestizos* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish ancestry) and Indians were concentrated in the lower levels of the social structure.

Through much of its early history, Mexico's northern frontier was a more economically and racially fluid society than that found in central Mexico itself. Although there was a small elite that based its status on its racial background as well as ownership of land and livestock, most of the region's colonists were of mixed ancestry. Harsh frontier conditions reduced social distinctions. Gender lines appear to have been less rigid than in central Mexico. On the northern frontier, women were more likely to receive land grants and had easier access to courts. In some urban communities, such as Santa Fe and San Antonio, women outnumbered men.

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, class and gender distinctions in the Southwest had begun to harden. Large landholdings multiplied and debt peonage and other forms of servile labor increased. Expanding commercial opportunities enlarged the upper class, while growing numbers of Mexicans worked as laborers on *ranchos* and *haciendas*, where they produced hides, tallow, and agricultural products. Many small farmers and villagers sharecropped for larger owners. Some landowners seized captives in wars with Indians, or purchased or ransomed captives from Indian tribes and made these people serve as household or agricultural laborers.

Nevertheless, New Spain's northern frontier continued to serve as a beacon of opportunity for poorer Mexicans. The earliest Hispanic settlers forged pathways that would draw Mexican immigrants in the future.

### Questions to think about

1. Why do you think most students learn far less about the United States' Spanish heritage than its British heritage?
2. How would you describe Spain's legacy to the United States?
3. How did Mexico's northern frontier differ from society in central Mexico?

## I Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Exploring New Spain's Northern Frontier, 1542

*Cabeza de Vaca, who lived from about 1490 to around 1557, was the first European to explore North America and leave a written record. His reports that great wealth lay north of Mexico led the Spanish to explore Arizona and New Mexico.*

*Cabeza de Vaca was a member of a Spanish expedition that set out to colonize Florida in 1527. Under attack from Florida's Indians, Cabeza de Vaca and a number of other men sailed a makeshift barge westward, hoping to find a Spanish settlement in Mexico. Along the way, the men became the first Europeans to cross the mouth of the Mississippi River.*

*Cabeza de Vaca and 80 Spanish castaways landed on Galveston Island, along the Texas coast. For the next eight years, he and other survivors traveled overland, living with various Indian tribes, sometimes as slaves and at times as shamans (religious healers). Disease and conflict with Indians killed all but four of the travelers: Cabeza de Vaca, Alonso del Castillo, Andres Dorantes, and Dorantes' slave, the first African to set foot in what is now the United States, a Moroccan Moor converted to Christianity named Estevanico. In this passage from his journal, Cabeza de Vaca describes how his party finally met up with a group of Spaniards in Mexico – who were in the process of enslaving Indians.*

*After his epic journey, Cabeza de Vaca campaigned against slavery for Indians and Africans in the Americas and served, unsuccessfully, as governor of Paraguay.*

---

We traveled over a great part of the country, and found it all deserted, as the people had fled to the mountains, leaving houses and fields out of fear of the Christians. This filled our hearts with sorrow, seeing the land so fertile and beautiful, so full of water and streams, but abandoned and the places burned down, and the people, so thin and wan, fleeing and hiding; and as they did not raise any crops their destitution had become so great that they ate tree-bark and roots. . . . They brought us blankets, which they had been concealing from the Christians, and gave them to us, and told us how the Christians had penetrated into the country before, and had destroyed and burnt the villages, taking with them half of the men and all the women and children, and how those who could escaped by flight. Seeing them in this plight, afraid to stay anywhere, and that they neither would nor could cultivate the soil, preferring to die rather than suffer such cruelties, while they showed the greatest pleasure at being with us, we began to apprehend that the Indians who were in arms against the Christians might ill-treat us in

retaliation for what the Christians did to them. But when it pleased God our Lord to take us to those Indians, they respected us and held us precious, as the former had done, and even a little more, at which we were not a little astonished, while it clearly shows how, in order to bring those people to Christianity and obedience until Your Imperial Majesty, they should be well treated, and not otherwise. . . .

Having seen positive traces of Christians and become satisfied they were very near, we gave many thanks to our Lord for redeeming us from our sad and gloomy condition. Anyone can imagine our delight when he reflects how long we had been in that land, and how many dangers and hardships we had suffered. That night I entreated one of my companions to go after the Christians, who were moving through the part of the country pacified and quieted by us, and who were three days ahead of where we were. They did not like my suggestion, and excused themselves from going, on the ground of being tired and worn out, although any of them might have done it far better than I, being younger and stronger.

Seeing their reluctance, in the morning I took with me the Negro and eleven Indians and, following the trail, went in search of the Christians. On that day we made ten leagues, passing three places where they had slept. The next morning I came upon four Christians on horseback, who, seeing me in such a strange attire, and in company with Indians, were greatly startled. They stared at me for quite a while, speechless; so great was their surprise that they could not find words to ask me anything. I spoke first, and told them to lead me to their captain, and we went together to Diego de Alcaraza, their commander. . . .

Thereupon we had many and bitter quarrels with the Christians, for they wanted to make slaves of our Indians, and we grew so angry at it that at our departure we forgot to take along many bows, pouches and arrows, also the five emeralds, and so they were left and lost to us. We gave the Christians a great many cow-skin robes, and other objects, and had much trouble in persuading the Indians to return home and plant their crops in peace. They insisted upon accompanying us until, according to their custom, we should be in the custody of other Indians, because otherwise they were afraid to die; besides, as long as we were with them, they had no fear of the Christians and of their lances. At all this the Christians were greatly vexed, and told their own interpreter to say to the Indians how we were of their own race, but had gone astray for a long while, and were people of no luck and little heart, whereas they were the lords of the land, whom they should obey and serve. . . .

This clearly shows how the designs of men sometimes miscarry. We went on with the idea of insuring the liberty of the Indians, and, when we

## 24 Mexican American Voices

believed it to be assured, the opposite took place. The Spaniards had planned to fall upon those Indians we had sent back in fancied security and in peace, and that plan they carried out. . . .

Source: *The Journey of Alvar Núñez Cabeza De Vaca* (1542), trans. by Fanny Bandelier (1905).

## 2 Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, The Spanish Borderlands, 1540–42

*Beginning in 1598 in New Mexico, 1700 in Arizona, 1716 in Texas, and 1769 in Alta California, Spain planted permanent missions, military posts, towns, and ranchos in the Far North. As early as the 1700s, Spanish explorers had mapped most of the territory of the Southwest and established over 300 towns. Today, the American Southwest is a region of enormous geographical and cultural diversity. The small villages of northern New Mexico differ radically from the border cities and commercial farms of south Texas or the crowded barrios of Los Angeles. Diversity was also apparent during the years of first settlement.*

*From the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, Spain regarded the northern frontier as a buffer zone between empires. Worries about English and Russian inroads into California and French movements into the lower Mississippi Valley led Spain to dispatch soldiers and missionaries into Mexico's northern frontier. Over time, about 1,600 Hispanic settlers moved into New Mexico, 1,700 to Texas, and 1,750 to Baja and Alta California. A tiny settlement also emerged in Arizona around Tucson.*

*Spain used three basic institutions to settle the northern frontier: the religious mission, the presidio or military installation, and the pueblo or civilian town. In contrast to central Mexico, where the Spanish developed an economy based on agriculture and mining using Indian labor, the northern frontier commonly relied on missions or presidios. In New Mexico, missions were usually built at the edge of Indian villages. In Texas, missionaries succeeded to a greater degree than in New Mexico in drawing in nomadic Indians to new settlements. Missions merged with settlements established around military presidios and new cities emerged. San Antonio arose out of a combination of five missions, a presidio, and a civilian town. In California, a mission, the basic institution of settlement, was a self-sustaining community where friars and Indian "neophytes" (converts) lived. Within mission communities, Native Americans were taught blacksmithing, candle making, leatherworking, and livestock tending, and were forced to work in workshops, orchards, and fields for long hours. At the end of Spanish rule in 1821, there were 21 missions, four presidios, and three pueblos.*

## The United States' Spanish Heritage 25

*New Mexico, the first target of colonization, resembled central Mexico in having fertile lands and distinct Indian settlements. Spanish towns remained separate from the Indian countryside and intermarriage and interaction were limited. These distinctions continued into the twentieth century, with Indian tribes retaining much of their distinctive cultural heritage. Throughout the Spanish Southwest a caste society emerged, though it was far less rigid and hierarchical than that of central Mexico. Most colonists were of mixed racial backgrounds.*

*Between 1540 and 1542, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado explored New Mexico, Texas, and Kansas, searching for precious metals. His letter provides one of the first detailed European descriptions of the Southwestern environment and the inhabitants' attitudes toward the Spanish newcomers.*

---

The climate of this country and the temperature of the air is almost like that of Mexico, because it is sometimes hot and sometimes it rains. I have not yet seen it rain, however, except once when there fell a little shower with wind, such as often falls in Spain. The snow and the cold are usually very great, according to what the natives of the country all say. This may very probably be so, both because of the nature of the country and the sort of houses they build and the skins and other things which these people have to protect them from the cold. There are no kinds of fruit or fruit trees. The country is all level, & is nowhere shut in by high mountains, although there are some hills and rough passages. There are not many birds, probably because of the cold, and because there are no mountains near. There are no trees fit for firewood here, because they can bring enough for their needs from a clump of very small cedars four leagues distant. Very good grass is found a quarter of a league away, where there is a pasturage for our horses as well as mowing for hay, of which we had great need, because our horses were so weak and feeble when they arrived.

The food which they eat in this country is corn, of which they have a great abundance, & beans & venison, which they probably eat (although they say that they do not), because we found many skins of deer and hares and rabbits. They make the best corn cakes I have ever seen anywhere, and this is what everybody ordinarily eats. They have the very best arrangement and machinery for grinding that was ever seen. One of these Indian women here will grind as much as four of the Mexicans. They have very good salt in crystals, which they bring from a lake a day's journey distant from here . . . They have many animals – bears, tigers, lions, porcupines, and some sheep as big as a horse, with very large horns and little tails. I have seen some of their horns the size of which was something to marvel at. There are also wild goats, whose heads I have seen, and the paws of the bears and

## 26 Mexican American Voices

the skins of the wild boars. For game they have deer, leopards, & very large deer...

They say that they will bring their children so that our priests may instruct them, & that they desire to know our law. They declare that it was foretold among them more than fifty years ago that a people such as we are should come, and the direction they should come from, and that the whole country would be conquered. So far as I can find out, the water is what these Indians worship, because they say that it makes the corn grow and sustains their life, and that the only other reason they know is because their ancestors did so.

Source: Parker Winship, ed. *Coronado's Journey to New Mexico and the Great Plains, 1540-1542*, in A.B. Hart and Edward Channing, eds., *American History Leaflets* (New York, 1894).

### 3 Don Antonio de Otermin, Resistance and Accommodation in New Mexico, 1680

*Unlike English colonists, the Spanish tried to integrate Native Americans rather than to exterminate them or displace them from their land. As a result of Spanish efforts, the Southwest became a kind of melting pot, in which diverse people gradually formed a hybrid Hispanic or Mexican culture. The Spanish experience in New Mexico – the first area of permanent settlement in the Southwest – illustrates this process of hybridization and accommodation.*

*A basic justification for the Spanish conquest of the New World was the Christianization of the Indian population and its adoption of Spanish values and ways of life. In New Mexico, for which Juan de Oñate, a member of a wealthy mining family, laid the foundation in 1598 by establishing a colony in the upper Rio Grande Valley, the region's Pueblo Indians lived in fully fledged villages (or pueblos) and Franciscan missionaries built mission churches on the outskirts of existing villages. By 1680, 50 Franciscans had established 30 missions and 30 religious stations.*

*The Pueblo and the Spanish reached an uneasy accommodation. Perhaps 20,000 Pueblos converted to Christianity. The Pueblos adopted Christian forms of marriage, practiced Christian burials, and took part in feast-day processions. Yet even as the Pueblos underwent baptism and attended Catholic religious services, they continued to practice their traditional religious ceremonies – a fact that outraged the Franciscan missionaries. Periodically, the friars desecrated sacred religious shrines, known as kivas, destroyed religious objects, and flogged and publicly humiliated Indian ceremonial leaders. Meanwhile, the Spanish also required Indians to provide labor to erect church buildings and forced them to pay tribute (usually in the*



*form of cloth or maize) to encomenderos, colonists who were supposed to protect mission Indians from hostile Indian tribes.*

*In 1632, the Zuni pueblo of Hawiku staged a revolt against Spanish colonialism, as did the Hopi pueblo of Awatovi in 1633 and the Taos pueblo in 1639. Late in the seventeenth century, epidemics of smallpox, measles, and other diseases, crop failures and drought, and raids by the Apache and Navajo aggravated tensions between the Spanish and the Pueblos. In 1670, a missionary accused a Tewa Indian community of bewitching him. Four Indians were hanged and forty-three were whipped.*

*Popé, one of the Pueblo religious leaders who was flogged, led a wholesale revolt in 1680. Under Popé's leadership, the Pueblo sought to wipe out all traces of European influence. They slaughtered European livestock, cut down fruit trees, and bathed in rivers to wash away the effects of Christian baptism. Twenty-one missionaries were killed and Santa Fe was sacked. About 380 of the New Mexico's 2,500 to 3,000 inhabitants perished.*

*A dozen years passed before the Spanish returned to New Mexico. By then, certain Pueblo groups actually wanted the Spanish to come back. They were eager for Spanish protection against Apache and Navajo raiders and wished to resume trade with the Spanish. When the Spanish reentered the region in the 1690s, they reached a new accommodation with the Pueblos. They made fewer labor demands on the Indians and did not reestablish the encomienda system. They also issued substantial land grants to each Pueblo village and appointed a public defender to protect the rights of Indians and argue their legal cases in court. Franciscan missionaries made fewer attacks on the Pueblo religion, so long as the Indians practiced their rituals in secret.*

*Yet the Pueblos declined in number. From about 60,000 in the mid-seventeenth century, the Pueblo population fell to just 8,000 by 1750, mainly as a result of diseases introduced by the Spanish.*

*In this letter, dated September 8, 1680, New Mexico's governor, Don Antonio de Otermin, describes the Pueblo revolt.*

MY VERY REVEREND FATHER, Sir, and friend, most beloved Fray Francisco de Ayeta: The time has come when, with tears in my eyes and deep sorrow in my heart, I commence to give an account of the lamentable tragedy, such as has never before happened in the world, which has occurred in this miserable kingdom. . . . After I sent my last letter to your reverence . . . I received information that a plot for a general uprising of the Christian Indians was being formed and was spreading rapidly. This was wholly contrary to the existing peace and tranquility in this miserable kingdom, not only among the Spaniards and natives, but even on the part of the heathen enemy, for it had been a long time since they had done us any considerable damage. It was my misfortune that I learned of it on the eve of

## 28 Mexican American Voices

the day set for the beginning of the said uprising, and though I immediately, at that instant, notified the lieutenant general on the lower river and all the other *alcaldes mayores* so that they could take every care and precaution against whatever might occur, and so that they could make every effort to guard and protect the religious ministers and the temples – the cunning and cleverness of the rebels were such, and so great, that my efforts were of little avail. To this was added a certain degree of negligence by reason of the report of the uprising not having been given entire credence, as is apparent from the ease with which they captured and killed both those who were escorting some of the religious, as well as some citizens in their houses, and, particularly, in the efforts that they made to prevent my orders to the lieutenant general passing through . . .

On Tuesday, the 13th of the said month, at about nine o'clock in the morning, there came in sight of us . . . all the Indians of the Tanos and Pecos nations and the Queres of San Marcos, armed and giving war whoops. As I learned that one of the Indians who was leading them was from the villa and had gone to join them shortly before, I sent some soldiers to summon him and tell him on my behalf that he could come to see me in entire safety, so that I might ascertain from him the purpose for which they were coming. Upon receiving this message he came to where I was, and, since he was known, as I say, I asked him how it was that he had gone crazy too – being an Indian who spoke our language, was so intelligent, and had lived all his life in the villa among the Spaniards, where I had placed such confidence in him – and was now coming as a leader of the Indian rebels. He replied to me that they had elected him as their captain, and that they were carrying two banners, one white and the other red, and that the white one signified peace and the red one war. Thus if we wished to choose the white it must be upon our agreeing to leave the country, and if we chose the red, we must perish, because the rebels were numerous and we were very few; there was no alternative, inasmuch as they had killed so many religious and Spaniards.

On hearing this reply, I spoke to him very persuasively, to the effect that he and the rest of his followers were Catholic Christians . . . and . . . even though they had committed so many atrocities, still there was a remedy, for if they would return to obedience to his Majesty they would be pardoned; and that thus he should go back to this people and tell them in my name all that had been said to him, and persuade them to agree to it and to withdraw from where they were; and that he was to advise me of what they might reply. He came back from there after a short time, saying that his people asked that all classes of Indians who were in our power be given up to them . . . He demanded also that his wife and children be given up to him, and likewise that all the Apache men and women whom the Spaniards had

captured in war be turned over to them . . . If these things were not done they would declare war immediately, and they were unwilling to leave the place where they were because they were awaiting the Taos, Percuries, and Teguas nations, with whose aid they would destroy us.

Seeing his determination, and what they demanded of us, and especially the fact that . . . during this time they were robbing and sacking what was in the said hermitage and the houses of the Mexicans, I told him (having given him all the preceding admonitions as a Christian and a Catholic) to return to his people and say to them that unless they immediately desisted from sacking the houses and dispersed, I would send to drive them away from there. Whereupon he went back, and his people received him with peals of bells and trumpets, giving loud shouts in sign of war.

With this, seeing after a short time that they not only did not cease the pillage but were advancing toward the villa with shamelessness and mockery, I ordered all the soldiers to go out and attack them until they succeeded in dislodging them from that place. Advancing for this purpose, they joined battle, killing some at the first encounter. Finding themselves repulsed, they took shelter and fortified themselves in the said hermitage and houses of the Mexicans, from which they defended themselves a part of the day with the firearms that they had and with arrows. . . .

[On] Thursday . . . [t]here were only some light skirmishes to prevent their burning and sacking some of the houses which were at a distance from the main part of the villa. I knew well enough that these dilatory tactics were to give time for the people of the other nations who were missing to join them in order to besiege and attempt to destroy us, but the height of the places in which they were, so favorable to them and on the contrary so unfavorable to us, made it impossible for us to go and drive them out before they should all be joined together.

On the next day, Friday, the nations of the Taos, Pecuries, Jemez, and Queres having assembled during the past night, when dawn came more than 2,500 Indians fell upon us in the villa, fortifying and entrenching themselves in all its houses and at the entrances of all the streets, and cutting off our water, which comes through the arroyo and the irrigation canal in front of the *casas reales*. They burned the holy temple and many houses in the villa . . .

Finding myself in this state, with the church and the villa burned, and with the few horses, sheep, goats, and cattle which we had without feed or water for so long that many had already died, and the rest were about to do so, and with such a multitude of people, most of them children and women, so that our numbers in all came to about a thousand persons, perishing with thirst – for we had nothing to drink during these two days except what had been kept in some jars and pitchers that were in the *casas reales* – surrounded by such a

## 30 Mexican American Voices

wailing of women and children, with confusion everywhere, I determined to take the resolution of going out in the morning to fight with the enemy until dying or conquering . . . On coming out of the entrance to the street it was seen that there was a great number of Indians. They were attacked in force, and though they resisted the first charge bravely, finally they were put to flight, many of them being overtaken and killed. . . .

Thus, after God, the only succor and relief that we have rests with your reverence and in your diligence. . . . May [your reverence] come immediately, because of the great importance to God and the king of your reverence's presence here. . . .

Source: C. W. Hackett, ed., *Historical Documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and Approaches Thereto, to 1773*, vol. III (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1937), pp. 327–35.

#### 4 Captain F. W. Beechey, Missionary Activity in New Spain's Northern Frontier, 1831

*A major instrument of Spanish settlement along its northern frontier was the religious mission. Although Spain tried to establish missions throughout Mexico's northern frontier, the mission system was only truly successful in coastal California (though some missions were also successful in Texas). Through flight and armed revolt, Indians in most other areas successfully resisted missionizing.*

*In New Mexico, efforts to set up missions among the Apaches, Hopis, Navajos, and Zunis all failed. In southern Arizona in the late seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries founded missions at Tumacacori and San Javier del Bac. But after Spain expelled the Jesuits from its possessions in 1767 and the Yuma revolted in 1781, no missions remained in the area. Twenty-seven missions were established in Texas in the century after 1690, but by the end of the eighteenth century, Texas had only six functioning missions.*

*The first California mission was built in 1769. By 1821, there were 21 missions along the California coast. Unlike the New Mexico missions, which were churches and friars' quarters adjacent to Indian pueblos, the California missions were meant to be self-sustaining communities. Indian neophytes were taught skills such as masonry, carpentry, smithing, weaving, and leatherwork. By the 1830s, over 30,000 Indians lived in these missions, raising crops, tending livestock, and producing handicrafts. In this selection, Frederick Beechey, a British sea captain, describes the operation of the California mission system.*

---

The object of the missions is to convert as many of the wild Indians as possible, and to train them up within the walls of the establishment in the exercise of a good life, and of some trade, so that they may in time be able to provide for themselves and become useful members of civilized society. As to the various methods employed for bringing proselytes to the mission, there are several reports, of which some are not very creditable to the institution: nevertheless, on the whole I am of [the] opinion that the priests are innocent, from a conviction that they are ignorant of the means employed by those who are under them.

Immediately the Indians are brought to the mission they are placed under the tuition of some of the most enlightened of their countrymen, who teach them to repeat in Spanish the Lord's Prayer and certain passages in the Romish litany; and also to cross themselves properly on entering the church. In a few days a willing Indian becomes proficient in these mysteries, and suffers himself to be baptized, and duly initiated into the church. If, however, as it not infrequently happens, any of the captured Indians show a repugnance to conversion, it is the practice to imprison them for a few days, and then to allow them to breathe a little fresh air in a walk around the mission, to observe the happy mode of life of their converted countrymen; after which they are again shut up, and thus continue to be incarcerated until they declare their readiness to renounce the religion of their forebears. . . .

The Indians are so averse to confinement that they very soon become impressed with the manifest superior and more comfortable mode of life of those who are at liberty, and in a very few days declare their readiness to have the new religion explained to them. A person acquainted with the language of the parties, of which there are sometimes several dialects in the same mission, is then selected to train them, and having duly prepared them takes his pupils to the padre to be baptized, and to receive the sacrament. Having become Christians they are put to trades, or if they have good voices they are taught music, and form part of the choir of the church. Thus there are in almost every mission weavers, tanners, shoemakers, bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and other artificers. Others again are taught husbandry, to rear cattle and horses; and some to cook for the mission; while the females card, clean, and spin wool, weave, and sew; and those who are married attend to their domestic concerns.

In requital of these benefits, the services of the Indians, for life, belong to the mission, and if any neophyte should repent of his apostasy from the religion of his ancestors and desert, an armed force is sent in pursuit of him, and drags him back to punishment apportioned to the degree of aggravation attached to his crime. It does not often happen that a voluntary convert succeeds in his attempt to escape, as the wild Indians have a great contempt

## 32 Mexican American Voices

and dislike for those who have entered the missions, and they will frequently not only refuse to re-admit them to their tribe, but will sometimes even discover their retreat to their pursuers. The animosity between the wild and converted Indians is of great importance to the missions, as it checks desertion, and is at the same time a powerful defense against the wild tribes, who consider their territory invaded, and have other just causes of complaint. The Indians, besides, from political motives, are, I fear, frequently encouraged in a contemptuous feeling toward their converted countrymen, by hearing them constantly held up to them in the degrading light of *bestias!* [beasts] and in hearing the Spaniards distinguished by the appellation of *gente de razón*. . . .

The children and adults of both sexes, in all the missions, are carefully locked up every night in separate apartments, and the keys are delivered into the possession of the padre; and as, in the daytime, their occupations lead to distinct places, unless they form a matrimonial alliance, they enjoy very little of each other's society. It, however, sometimes happens that they endeavor to evade the vigilance of their keepers, and are locked up with the opposite sex; but severe corporal punishment, inflicted . . . with a whip . . . is sure to ensue if they are discovered. . . . It is greatly to be regretted that, with the influence these men have over their pupils . . . the priests do not interest themselves a little more in the education of their converts, the first step to which would be in making themselves acquainted with the Indian language. Many of the Indians surpass their pastors in this respect, and can speak the Spanish language. They have besides, in general, a lamentable contempt for the intellect of these simple people, and think them incapable of improvement beyond a certain point. Notwithstanding this, the Indians are . . . clothed and fed; they have houses of their own . . .; their meals are given to them three times a day, and consist of thick gruel made of wheat, Indian corn, and sometimes acorns, to which at noon is generally added meat. . . .

Having served ten years in the mission, an Indian may claim his liberty. . . . A piece of ground is then allotted for his support, but he is never wholly free from the establishment, as part of his earnings must still be given to them. . . . When these establishments were first founded, the Indians flocked to them in great numbers for the clothing with which the neophytes were supplied; but after they became acquainted with the nature of the institution, and felt themselves under restraint, many absconded. Even now, notwithstanding the difficulty of escaping, desertions are of frequent occurrence, owing probably, in some cases, to the fear of punishment – in others to the deserters having been originally inveigled into the missions by the converted Indians or the neophyte. . . .

Source: Captain F. W. Beechey, *Narratives of a Voyage to the Pacific and Bering's Strait* (London, 1831), 3: 1–23.

## 5 California's Mission System

*The missions constituted one basis of the Spanish plan to settle Alta California; the others were the presidios, or military garrisons, and the pueblos, or civilian towns. The missions were the most important, for they became the granaries and the educational, religious, and cultural centers for the Indians who lived in areas surrounding them. Several cities grew up around the missions.*

*Recently, three artists and a historian produced a multimedia exhibition on California's mission system. A book accompanying the exhibition included a multiple-choice quiz, which posed these questions:*

*The mission system is characterized by its:*

- a "benevolence"*
- b "civilizing influence"*
- c "social efficiency"*
- d "forced-labor system"*

*Before the arrival of the missionaries, in what is now the state of California, there lived:*

- a a larger number of Indians than anywhere else in what is now the United States*
- b Indians whose detailed knowledge of the ecology enabled them to meet the nutritional needs of this large population*
- c Indians with civilizations based on complex religions and ethical values*
- d all of the above*

*To appreciate the missions today, you must view them:*

- a in the gentle gold of predawn*
- b in the fiery afterglow of sundown*
- c under the silvery cast of the moon*
- d through rose-colored glasses*

*Aside from converting Indians, the missions' purpose was to turn them into productive citizens who could hold the land for Spain. Some missions, notably San Fernando, San Luis Rey, and San Gabriel, became centers of agricultural production, where armies of Indians provided unpaid labor. Others, such as San Francisco and Soledad, struggled against bad weather and Indian resistance to regimentation and Christianization.*

### 34 Mexican American Voices

*The Franciscans lured Indians into the missions with various trinkets and ornaments. When food was scarce, Indians came to the missions for food. Once they were baptized the friars did not allow them to leave. Within the missions, the Indians were lodged separately by sex and were required to work growing crops, tending livestock, and constructing mission buildings. Indian laborers formed sand, clay, straw, and manure into bricks and covered the exteriors with plain stucco or plaster. Indian women scrubbed clothes. Indians who tried to escape were flogged. To ensure that they remained, some Franciscans prohibited them from growing crops outside of mission lands and forbade them from learning to ride horses.*

*Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, California's Indians had not been a "primitive" people. They had complex systems of social and political organization and an elaborate system of religion, and had adjusted successfully to a wide variety of geographical and climatic conditions. But the missions were built under the assumption that their "pagan" cultural and religious practices had to be eradicated.*

*Smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, dysentery, and other diseases introduced by the Spaniards cut through the Indian populations. From approximately 300,000 in 1769, the number of California Indians fell to just 100,000 in 1834 when the mission system ended, largely as a result of disease, malnutrition, and a reduction in the birth rate.*

*In this selection, Pablo Tac, a Christianized Indian, describes life on a California mission in 1835, when the missions were being closed.*

#### 5.1 Pablo Tac, Life on a California Mission, 1835

In the Mission of San Luis Rey de Francia, the Fernandino Father is like a king. He has his pages, alcaldes, major domos, musicians, soldiers, gardens, ranchos, livestock, horses by the thousand, cows, bulls by the thousand, oxen, mules, asses, 12,000 lambs, 200 goats, etc. The pages are for him and for the Spanish and Mexican, English and Anglo-American travelers. . . . The musicians of the Mission [are] for the holy days and all the Sundays and holidays of the year, [along] with them [are] the singers, all Indian neophytes. Soldiers [are stationed there] so that nobody does injury to Spaniard or to Indian; there are ten of them and they go on horseback. There are five gardens that are . . . very large. The Fernandino Father drinks little, and as almost all the gardens produce wine, he who knows the custom of the neophytes well does not wish to given any wine to any of them, but sells it to the English or Anglo-Americans, not for money but for clothing for the neophytes, linen for the church, hats, muskets, plates, coffee, tea, sugar and other things. The products of the Mission are butter, tallow, hides, chamois



leather, bear skins, wine, white wine, brandy, oil, maize, wheat, beans and also bull horns which the English take by the thousand to Boston. . . .

When the sun rises and the stars and the moon go down . . . the old man of the house wakens everyone and [provides] breakfast which is . . . meat and tortillas, for we do not have bread. This done, he takes his bow and arrows and leaves the house with vigorous and quick step. (This is if he is going to hunt.) He goes off to the distant woods which are full of bears and hares, deer and thousands of birds. . . . His old woman staying at home makes the meal. His child, if he is a man, works with the men. His daughter stays with the women making shirts, and if these also have sons and daughters, they stay in the mission, the sons at school to learn the alphabet, and if they already know it, they learn the catechism, and if this also, to the choir of singers. . . . The daughter joins with the single girls who all spin for blankets for the San Luiseños and for the robe of the Fernandino Father. At twelve o'clock they eat together. . . . The meal finished they return to their work. . . . Before going to bed again they eat what the old woman and old man have made in that time, and then they sleep. . . .

Source: Pablo Tac, *Indian Life and Customs at the Mission San Luis Rey*, ed. Minna Hews and Gordon Hews (San Luis Rey, CA, 1958).

*Here, the widow Eulalia Pérez describes her responsibilities in 1823 as a housekeeper on a Casou-indlifornia mission.*

---

## 5.2 Eulalia Pérez, Duties of a Housekeeper, 1823

The duties of the housekeeper were many. In the first place, every day she handed out the rations for the mess hut. To do this she had to count the unmarried women, bachelors, day-laborers, vaqueros. . . . Besides that, she had to hand out daily rations to the heads of households. In short, she was responsible for the distribution of supplies to the Indian population and to the missionaries' kitchen. She was in charge of the key to the clothing storehouse where materials were given out for dresses for the unmarried and married women and children. Then she also had to take care of cutting and making clothes for the men.

Furthermore, she was in charge of cutting and making the vaqueros' outfits, from head to foot – that is, for the vaqueros who rode in saddles. Those who rode bareback received nothing more than their cotton blanket and loin-cloth, those who rode in saddles were dressed the same way as the

## 36 Mexican American Voices

Spanish-speaking inhabitants; that is, they were given shirt, vest, jacket, trousers, hat, cowboy boots, shoes and spurs; and a saddle, bridle and lariat for the horse. Besides, each vaquero was given a big silk or cotton handkerchief, and a sash of chinese silk or Canton crepe, or whatever there happened to be in the storehouse.

They put under my charge everything having to do with clothing. I cut and fitted, and my five daughters sewed the pieces. When they could not handle everything, the father was told, and then women from the town of Los Angeles were employed, and the father paid them.

Besides this, I had to attend to the soap-house . . . to the wine-presses, and to the olive-crushers that produced oil, which I worked in myself. . . .

I handled the distribution of leather, calf-skin, chamois, sheepskin, Morocco leather, fine scarlet cloth, nails, thread, silk, etc. – everything having to do with the making of saddles, shoes and what was needed for the belt- and shoe-making shops.

Every week I delivered supplies for the troops and Spanish-speaking servants. These consisted of beans, corn, garbanzos, lentils, candles, soap and lard. To carry out this distribution, they placed at my disposal an Indian servant named Lucio, who was trusted completely by the missionaries.

When it was necessary, some of my daughters did what I could not find the time to do. . . .

I served as housekeeper of the mission for twelve or fourteen years. . . .

Source: Carlos N. Hajar, Eulalia Pérez, and Agustín Escobar, *Three Memoirs of Mexican California* (University of California, Bancroft Library, 1877).

## 6 Junípero Serra: Saint or Emissary of Empire?

*Junípero Serra, a legendary figure in California's early history and under consideration for sainthood in the Roman Catholic Church, founded and headed California's mission system. After arriving in San Diego in 1768, he led a group of Franciscan friars who established a 600-mile chain of 21 religious missions that stretched from San Diego to Sonoma, north of San Francisco. Many of California's most important cities later grew up around the missions. Serra is called the father of California because he was the first to envision it as a whole. No candidate for sainthood has aroused more controversy than Fray Serra.*

*Serra's defenders say that he risked his own health and safety to ensure the salvation of California's Indians and toiled at their side. In their view, he represents a model of perseverance and self-sacrifice, abandoning a comfortable position of college professor on the island of Majorca to bring Catholicism to Mexico's northern frontier. His supporters claim that he opposed lengthy*

*imprisonment and capital punishment for Indians and sought to protect converts from Spanish soldiers.*

*Serra's detractors, who include many American Indian scholars and activists, revile him as an emissary of Spanish colonial rule, the architect of a system of forced labor and confinement that regarded Indian cultures as inferior and sought to eradicate them. They argue that California Indians were forced against their will to live at Serra's missions, where they were subject to slave-like labor and whipped if they disputed church teachings or tried to escape. As part of the missions' civilizing project, Indians were denied traditional sources of food and were required to eat only cultivated products. Even during his lifetime, Serra was criticized for mistreating Indian converts and using whips, chains, and stocks to enforce religious obedience.*

*Serra's defenders say that it is unfair to judge an eighteenth-century missionary by present-day standards. They ask that Fray Serra be judged in the context of the eighteenth century, when many European colonizers assumed a paternalistic superiority over native populations, when corporal punishment was widespread, and when many missionaries felt a divine imperative to Christianize and civilize nonwestern people. Vatican researchers argued that Serra was more a champion of the Indians than he was their oppressor and that there is no evidence that he ever personally beat Indians. Pope John Paul II acknowledged in 1987 that the Indian encounter with Spanish culture was "a harsh and painful reality" that entailed "cultural oppression" and injustices." But he went on to praise Serra who, he said, "had frequent clashes with the civil authorities over the treatment of Indians" and that Fray Serra "admonish[ed] the powerful not to abuse and exploit the poor and weak."*

*These selections reveal Junípero Serra's ideas about California's missions.*

## 6.1 Junípero Serra, The Importance of Laborers in the Missions, 1775

It is of the utmost importance that the missions be provided with laborers, to till the land, and so raise the crops for their maintenance and progress. We would already have made a start in so doing, were it not for the opposition of the Officer at the presidio. . . .

Along with the sailors aboard ship, there should be a number of young men from the vicinity of San Blas [a Spanish naval depot near present-day Puerto Vallarta, Mexico]. I should think that it would not be hard to find among them day laborers, cowboys and mule drivers. . . .

It is of no less importance that, when the livestock arrives, which Your Excellency, in virtue of your decree, orders to be forwarded from California for the equipment of the Monterey missions, some Indian families from the

## 38 Mexican American Voices

said California should come, of their own free will, with the expedition, and that they should receive every consideration from the officials. They should be distributed, at least two or three being placed in each mission. By taking such measures two purposes will be accomplished. The first will be that there will be an additional two or three Indians for work. The second, and the one I have most in mind, is that the Indians may realize that, till now, they have been much mistaken when they saw all men, and no women, among us; that there are marriages, also, among Christians. . . .

Source: Antonine Tibsear, ed., *Writings of Junípero Serra* (Washington, 1955, I: 295–327).

*In the selection here, from a letter written in 1775, Fray Junípero Serra asks the Mexican Viceroy, Antonio Bucareli, to treat rebellious Indians leniently.*

---

## 6.2 Junípero Serra, On the Lenient Treatment of Indians, 1775

As we are in the vale of tears, not all the news I have to relate can be pleasant. And so I make no excuses for announcing to Your Excellency the tragic news I have just received of the total destruction of the San Diego Mission, and of the death of the senior of its two religious ministers . . . at the hand of the rebellious gentiles and of the Christian neophytes. All this happened, November 5th, about one or two o'clock at night. The gentiles came together from forty rancherías, according to information given me, and set fire to the church after sacking it. Then they went on to the storehouse, the house where the Fathers lived, the soldiers' barracks, and all the rest of the buildings. . . .

Most Excellent Lord, one [of] the most important requests I made of the Most Illustrious Inspector General, at the beginning of these conquests was: if ever the Indians, whether they be gentile or Christian, killed me, they should be forgiven. . . .

While the missionary is alive, let the soldiers guard him, and watch over him, like the pupils of God's very eyes. That is as it should be. Nor do I disdain such a favor for myself. But after the missionary has been killed, what can be gained by campaigns?

Some will say to frighten them and prevent them from killing others.

What I say is that, in order to prevent them from killing others, keep better guard over them than they did over the one who has been killed; and, as to the murderer, let him live, in order that he should be saved – which is

the very purpose of our coming here, and the reason which justifies it. Give him to understand, after a moderate amount of punishment, that he is being pardoned in accordance with our law, which commands us to forgive injuries; and let us prepare him, not for death, but for eternal life.

Source: Antonine Tibesar, ed., *The Writings of Junípero Serra* (Washington, D.C., 1955).

## 7 Pedro Bautista Pino, Description of the Province of New Mexico, 1812

*From film and television the images are deeply imprinted in our imagination: of haciendas with red tile roofs and pastel-tinted walls; of romantic, moss-covered missions. Of the Old Spanish Southwest, we think of dons, señoritas, friars, and mission Indians.*

*These images are a relatively recent invention. In the 1880s, a group of California novelists, journalists, and business boosters began a movement to revive interest in California's Spanish and Mexican past. The best known of these popularizers was Charles Fletcher Lummis, the city editor of the Los Angeles Times. In order to sell southern California to prospective homeowners, he created an evocative mythology designed to lend romance to the land. He celebrated the days of the don and provided California with a distinctive architectural style. In the twentieth century, much of California's Spanish colonial heritage was reinvented through architecture, place names, food, and other cultural elements that had scarcely existed in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.*

*At the time, California's missions were falling into ruins. Anglo settlers had carried off the roof tiles and scraped the gold leaf from the altars. Missions had become taverns, stables, and hog barns. Lummis helped restore the missions in a way that was historically inaccurate but that has appealed to future generations. The missions became associated not with dusty agricultural tedium, religious asceticism, or sick Indians, but with a slower, more spiritual, and sensuous pace of life – a Mediterranean way more in harmony with the climate and geography than were the traditions the Anglos brought with them from the east.*

*In the selection here, Pedro Bautista Pino, New Mexico's representative in the Spanish parliament, offers a vivid description of the province in 1812; a portrait that clashes sharply with later romanticized images of the past.*

---

*Ecclesiastical government.* – The twenty-six Indian pueblos and the 102 settlements of Spaniards, which constitute the population of the province of

## 40 Mexican American Voices

New Mexico, are . . . served by twenty-two missionaries of the order of Saint Francis from the province of Mexico. . . .

For more than fifty years no one has known that there was a bishop. . . . The misfortunes suffered by those settlers are infinite because of the lack of a primate. The 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. . . .

*General means of making the provinces prosper.* – Agriculture, industry, and commerce are the three bases of all prosperity. The province of New Mexico has none of these because of its location, because of the neglect with which the government has looked upon it up to the present time, and because of the annual withdrawal of the small income that it is able to derive from its products and manufactures. It has already been stated that the annual importation into the province of products for its consumption amounts to 112,000 pesos, and that its annual income is only 60,000 pesos. Therefore, there is an annual deficit of 52,000 pesos. The salaries paid by the treasury to the governor of the province, to his assistants, and to the 121 soldiers may be said to be the only income that keeps money in circulation. This income is so small, as we have previously stated, that until recently the majority of its inhabitants had never seen money.

One can resort to those resources that nature has placed at the province's disposal: the great abundance of furs and their low cost is undeniable. There are, however, no present means of exporting them without great freighting costs.

*The scarcity of professional men.* – The province of New Mexico does not have among its public institutions any of those found in other provinces of Spain. . . . The benefit of primary letters [a basic education] 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. . . . For a period of more than two hundred years since the conquest, the province has made no provision for 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. . . .

Source: H. Bailey Carrol and J. Villansana Haggard, *Three New Mexico Chronicles* (Albuquerque, 1942).