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## Continuity in Any Language: Memory, Ethnicity, and Acculturation in California, 1877-1878

Travis E. Ross

# CONTINUITY IN ANY LANGUAGE:

## Memory, Ethnicity, and Acculturation in California, 1877–1878

By *Travis E. Ross*

**ABSTRACT:** This article analyzes the memories of pre-1848 Alta California recounted in the 1870s to Hubert Howe Bancroft's agent Thomas Savage by a multiethnic group of men and women. The narrators, regardless of ethnic origin, overwhelmingly told stories that insisted on continuity between Alta California in the 1830s and 1840s and the US state birthed in the late 1840s. Even if they had been on opposing sides of political upheavals, they all insisted that their altruistic efforts had helped to transition California peacefully from Mexican rule to home rule and from home rule to US control while preserving both California's people and California's culture. This multicultural memory of continuity was later supplanted by rupture-based Anglo Californian creation myths.

*Keywords:* Hubert Howe Bancroft; *testimonios*; cultural memory; Californios; California identity

**B**eginning around 1870, Hubert Howe Bancroft—a successful San Francisco bookseller—dispatched research assistants to collect personal papers and oral memoirs from Alta California's aging population in preparation for his prodigious *Works*,

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a thirty-nine volume series on the history of the Pacific Coast.<sup>1</sup> In December 1877, Thomas Savage, one of Bancroft's research assistants, recorded dictations from the Englishman Michael Claringbud White—who sometimes used the Hispanicized name Miguel Blanco—and his mother-in-law, Eulalia Pérez, who had been born in Baja California as much as a century earlier.<sup>2</sup> Savage made little of the differences between them, mentioning White's emigration to California from England only as a matter of fact and Pérez's long tenure there as a matter of local curiosity. For Bancroft's interests, the national origins of a narrator had little to do with the kinds of facts that person might possess, and so Savage concerned himself only minimally with the diversity of the voices he recorded.<sup>3</sup> He required only that his subjects be willing and capable of retelling accurate details of Alta California's history from first-hand experience, which meant that those not born in Alta California had to have immigrated there by at least the early 1840s. Under those circumstances, Savage assumed that the national origins of his subjects would not influence the objective facts that they recounted.<sup>4</sup>

Like Savage, later scholars' historical imaginations have shaped their expectations in approaching these sources. As scholars have come to recognize the role that identity plays in the construction of historical memory, they have turned to Bancroft's Spanish-language

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1. For the definitive biography of Bancroft, see: John Walton Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946); for an account of the authorship, production, and sale of Bancroft's *Works*, see: Harry Clark, *A Venture in History: The Production, Publication, and Sale of the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Charles S. Peterson, "Hubert Howe Bancroft: First Western Regionalist," in *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002); Travis E. Ross, "The Golden Age and the Age of Gold: Memory and the Alchemy of History in California, 1877–1888," (University of Nevada, Reno, 2012), <http://gradworks.umi.com/15/12/1512528.html>.
  2. Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Testimonios: Early California through the Eyes of Women, 1815–1848* (Berkeley, California: Heyday, 2006), 95.
  3. In his bibliographic essay, Bancroft did distinguish narrowly between the quality of historical information he collected from "foreigners," asserting, "The testimony of foreigners, taken all in all, I regard as of less value than that of the native Californians; for although the latter may be the superior of the former in native mendacity, foreigners have in many cases taken but little interest in the subject." Hubert Howe Bancroft, *California Pastoral, 1769–1848* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1888), 792.
  4. In part, Savage's lack of interest in potentially ethnic memories resulted from his own historical imagination in which, I have argued, he envisioned his narrators' accounts of the past as similar to disorganized archives, filled with superfluous information and requiring the discerning eye of the critical historian in order to find facts amidst the clutter. He sought discrete pieces of information about the past rather than intentionally crafted stories about it. Travis E. Ross, "The Golden Age and the Age of Gold."

testimonies—sometimes identified as *testimonios*—in order to reconstruct the Californio counter-memory to the Anglo American founding myths of California that emerged after the Gold Rush.<sup>5</sup> These scholars have rightly argued that the Californios' memories challenged Anglo American attempts to forget California's Spanish and Mexican heritage.<sup>6</sup> But so, too, did the memories recounted by the acculturated Anglo Americans and the Europeans who had lived in pre-gold-rush Alta California and who had witnessed its transformation during the 1840s. In his interviews with Alta Californians who had lived in the region during the Mexican era, Savage recorded a multi-ethnic primary memory (one comprised of first-hand experiences) that challenged the Anglo-dominated secondary memory (a kind of cultural memory in which people recount events through which they themselves had not lived).<sup>7</sup>

This essay analyzes the stories that a multiethnic group of men and women, all of whom had lived in Alta California continuously beginning in the 1830s and 1840s, told to Savage in 1877 and 1878. It argues that the Alta Californians whom Savage interviewed overwhelmingly told stories that insisted on continuity between Mexican-era California and the US state, a surprising consensus given the cultural amnesia of later Anglo American arrivals and given the well-documented material discontinuity endured by so many Californios.<sup>8</sup> Narrators who had been on opposing sides of the same local upheavals all insisted that their efforts had preserved local autonomy while preserving both the maximum number of its people and the essence of its culture as California passed from one distant colonial power to the next. While they necessarily disagreed over whose side—or even

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5. Genaro M. Padilla, *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Glen Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres: Competing Mythologies in Northern and Southern California, 1850–1930," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (April 2001): 55–79.

6. For more on the attempts to forget—even to erase—California's Spanish and Mexican past, see: Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres"; David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

7. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 20–21.

8. Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846–1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

which revolutionary movement—had saved California, they all told stories with a common plot.

During the 1830s and 1840s, California saw a series of localized political upheavals that, in aggregate, worked to limit the authority of the Mexican central government to control its northernmost colony. Only a few of the narrators recalled the 1830s, and none of these were Anglo Americans, though two came to California from Europe. The events of the 1840s, by contrast, appear in the dictations of several Anglo Americans who had arrived in California near the end of the 1830s. As such, the accounts of the earlier decade provide a useful control group with which to compare the more diverse accounts of the 1840s. This essay begins by examining the six accounts of the 1830s recorded by Savage and the various ways in which they recounted the revolutions of the 1830s while uniformly presenting that decade as the apogee of Alta California's history. Second, it examines how a much more diverse sample of narrators recounted the 1840s and the enormous historical transformations that decade brought. Individual narrators of both decades often disagreed with the accounts given by others, with a particular division evident between northern and southern Californians, but even those divisions crossed ethnic lines, similarly dividing the stories told by the narrators of the 1830s and those told by Savage's larger and more diverse selection of informants regarding the 1840s. Most significantly, the narrators all chose to highlight the historical continuity between Alta California and the American state rather than to present the decade as an historical rupture. That narrative convention contradicted the nascent memory of rupture that began to take shape among Anglo Americans who had come to California after the Bear Flag rebellion with the expectation that the region would adapt to them rather than the other way around. By the time they told their stories in 1877 and 1878, the Alta Californians' stories of cultural continuity stood in opposition to the by-then dominant narrative of rupture and, in important ways, to the material reality of the Californios' lives.

#### THE 1830S

California experienced a series of violent power struggles throughout the 1830s as the new nation of Mexico attempted to assert its control over the region, which had experienced little outside control over the

previous fifty years.<sup>9</sup> Californian attempts to preserve the region's autonomy manifested in a series of localized political upheavals throughout the early part of the decade, culminating in the successful revolution of 1836 in which Juan Bautista Alvarado wrested the governorship of Alta California from his rivals.<sup>10</sup> When the narrators recalled those scattered and disconnected political upheavals, they necessarily took a great deal of license in order to make sense of an otherwise tumultuous decade.

In spite of the challenges, each of the six narrators constructed an internally consistent narrative out of the events he or she remembered from the 1830s in order to tell a story that explained how the people of California had risen in defense of their country and, in the process, had become Californians. The narrators did not agree with one another on what it meant to be Californian, and in some cases they had fought on opposing sides during that period. Gender, nationality, and geographic location all influenced which movement they identified with the popular will of "the people" of California during that period. For all their disagreements, these dictations posited an emerging Californian identity within California in the 1830s. Even when two narrators identified the popular will of the people with opposing sides of the same conflict, both narratives shared the assumption that during that period Californios gained a political consciousness. Taken together, they constitute a cultural memory that emphasized the people of California in the 1830s as responsible for initiating a movement against tyranny.<sup>11</sup>

The complicated, ever-shifting web of alliances that contributed to that pattern of political and social upheaval made it possible for a narrator to begin her or his story with almost any event, or with almost any governor or revolutionary, in order to construct a narrative leading to Juan Bautista Alvarado's 1836 installation as governor,

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9. Louise Pubols, "Becoming Californio: Jokes, Broadsides, and a Slap in the Face," in *Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation*, ed. Steven W. Hackel (Berkeley and San Marino: University of California Press and the Huntington Library, 2010), 132; Historian Leonard Pitt expounded upon California's isolation, describing it as "a sort of Siberian work camp" that absorbed from Mexico "hosts of petty thieves and political prisoners—18 in 1825, 200 in 1829, 130 in 1830, and so on." Pitt argues that the policy of banishing such undesirables to California created "an ambivalence toward Mexico and things Mexican." Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 6–7.

10. According to Pitt, many of the factions within California resulted from the organizational efforts of the political prisoners who had been sent to the region. Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 6.

11. For an excellent examination of identity formation during the 1830s, see: Pubols, "Becoming Californio," 131–155.

a position he held until 1842.<sup>12</sup> They chose from events and characters local to their own experiences, tying them to larger movements and outcomes in order to *make* them important. The death of the widely respected General José Figueroa, governor of California from 1833 to 1835,<sup>13</sup> led to a succession crisis that caused the revolts of 1836.<sup>14</sup> Upon Figueroa's death, José Castro served briefly as governor before he relinquished control to Nicolás Gutiérrez, the military commander. Gutiérrez held the office from January 2 to May 3, 1836, after which he transferred control to Mariano Chico.<sup>15</sup> Under political pressure, Chico fled the state on July 31, 1836, leaving Gutiérrez in charge again.<sup>16</sup> In November 1836, José Castro, Ángel Ramírez, and Juan Bautista Alvarado began an open rebellion against Gutiérrez in Monterey. Castro and Alvarado succeeded in wresting control of Alta California from Gutiérrez in Monterey and from Don Carlos Carrillo, who had controlled southern California. The Mexican central government had appointed Carrillo to the office of governor, based upon the recommendation of his brother José Antonio Carrillo, the representative of Alta California to the Mexican congress, in order to appease the Californios' desire for a Californian to govern California.<sup>17</sup>

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12. Of course, such freedom existed only at the theoretical level. In practice, Savage always played some role in directing the narrators to particular events of interest to him. However, Beebe and Senkewicz have noted that the narrators also held the power to redirect their narrative, as they argue that Angustias de la Guerra did when "she broke the flow of Savage's questioning to insert an event in which she had been a significant agent." Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Testimonios: Early California through the Eyes of Women, 1815–1848* (Berkeley, California: Heyday, 2006), 199.
  13. In his 1851 history of Alta California, Antonio María Osio described Figueroa as one who desired "to be respected rather than feared." He asserted that the people of California "found in him the fine qualities they had hoped for and a good friend who was always ready to help in any manner which did not conflict with his decorum and duty." Based upon those characteristics, Osio claimed that Figueroa "obtained everything simply by stating that those were his desires and that everyone should work together for the good of the country." Osio could find only one fault with Figueroa, a defect "which he could not remove, even by the power of his good intentions." Figueroa was an Indian, which Osio argued made Figueroa sympathetic to their plight and gave the Native Americans a sense of empowerment that made them, in Osio's eyes, more unruly. Antonio Maria Osio, *History of Alta California: A Memoir of Mexican California* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 125, 133–134.
  14. Among the other valuable appendices included within their volume, Beebe and Senkewicz put together a chronological list of the "Governors of Alta California and Important Events during Their Governorships." Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 427–428.
  15. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 427.
  16. George Tays, "The Surrender of Monterey by Governor Nicolas Gutierrez November 5, 1836: An Account from Unpublished Correspondence," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (December 1936): 338.
  17. Osio, *History of Alta California*, 304, n16.

Apuntes  
para la  
Historia de la Alta California

por  
Don Florencio Serrano  
(1877)

Bancroft Library  
1877

H. H. Bancroft Collection  
Bancroft Library

The title page of the *testimonio* of Florencio Serrano in 1877 taken down by Hubert Howe Bancroft's agent Thomas Savage. It reads, "Notes for the History of Alta California by Don Florencio Serrano . . . 1877" Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, C-D 156 (93:4, frame 0211)



Narrators Florencio Serrano and Antonio Franco Coronel both explored the relationship between the emerging popular Californian identity and the leadership of two opposing movements that attempted to harvest that popular energy. Neither narrator understood that Californian identity to preclude loyalty to any other nation. Rather, both recalled that Californians had demanded home rule. Serrano and Coronel recalled how different movements of Californians attempted to achieve that goal in conflicting ways.

Serrano was born in Mexico in 1810 to *criollo* (Spaniards born in Mexico) parents.<sup>18</sup> He came to California in 1834 as a part of the Híjar-Padrés colony, an attempt by the Mexican government to reassert political control in California after having largely abandoned the region during the war for Mexican independence.<sup>19</sup> Serrano recounted the 1836 revolt as the joint effort of Anglo Americans, “Californios[,] and some Mexicans,” in which common people attempted to secure Californian independence under the leadership of Ángel Ramírez, Juan Bautista Alvarado, and José Castro.<sup>20</sup> He argued that almost immediately after their first victory, the Californians “publically [*sic*] proclaimed the ‘free, independent, and sovereign state of California.’”<sup>21</sup> He interpreted the rhetorical shift toward California nationalism at the popular level as an indication that the common people had moved beyond “that which was believed at the beginning” of the revolution.<sup>22</sup> He never explained to whose beliefs he referred, but his assertion clearly indicated that whatever role its leaders had played in the outbreak of revolt, the will of the people had become a self-sustaining nationalist cause. In fact, Serrano argued that the “advanced views of the Californios caused Licenciado Peña, the principal promoter of the revolution, Don Ángel Ramírez,” and

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18. Florencio Serrano, *Testimonios de Florencio Serrano: Alta California Remembered, 1834–1850* (Petaluma, CA: William Wilkinson, 2009), 1.

19. The Híjar-Padrés party formed when its two leaders decided to capitalize on the decision by the Mexican government to secularize the missions of California. They convinced the government to give some of the land to colonies promising to settle California with industrious citizens of Mexico. Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 47–48; for a more extensive account see: Cecil Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement in Mexican California: The Híjar-Padrés Colony and Its Origins, 1769–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

20. Florencio Serrano, “Apuntes para la Historia de Alta California” (1877), MSS C-D 146; Serrano, *Testimonios de Florencio Serrano*, 65.

21. *Ibid.*, 67.

22. *Ibid.*

others “to separate themselves from the ranks of Castro” in order to form a counter-revolution.<sup>23</sup>

Serrano argued that on all sides, common Californians and their leaders attempted to appropriate the emerging Californian identity for their cause. Naturally, conflicts arose over those competing claims to Californian identity. Twice he recounted the “despicable act against the national colors” perpetrated by Castro in 1836. In the process of replacing the Mexican flag with the first of two newly made Californian flags, Castro had placed the Mexican flag on the ground and “stamped on it with scorn.”<sup>24</sup> While Serrano vehemently disapproved of Castro’s desecration of the Mexican flag, he never questioned the creation or the flying of a Californian flag.<sup>25</sup> Throughout his narrative, he presented the movement as a struggle between two groups of Californians who disagreed about whether loyalty to California demanded the rejection of all loyalties to Mexico.

Antonio Franco Coronel—who also came to California from Mexico as a part of the Híjar-Padrés colony—offered an opposite interpretation of the popular will, arguing that a few opportunists, including Ángel Ramírez, had attempted to co-opt Californians’ identity but that a popular movement had arisen in support of maintaining ties to Mexico.<sup>26</sup> Rather than a revolution of the people, Coronel remembered an orchestrated manipulation of the populace by a few elites who sought additional power in the region. In his dictation, he

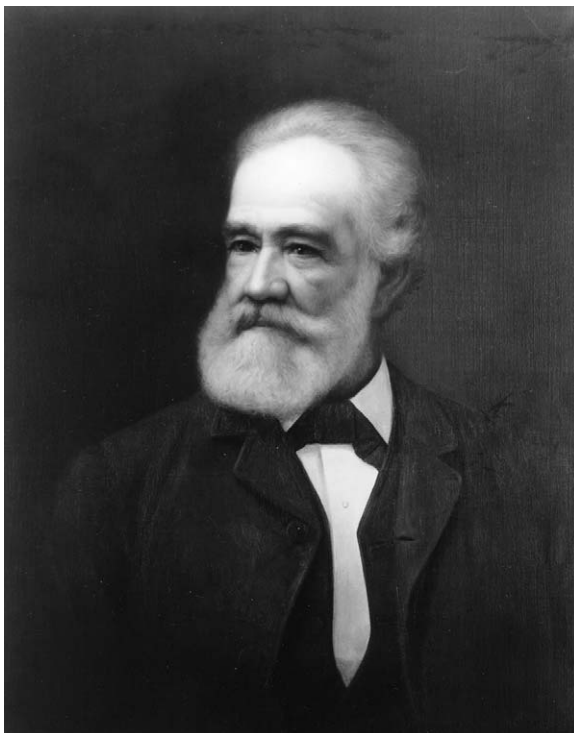
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23. Ibid.

24. Ibid, 57.

25. Teodoro González, who had come to California from Mexico as a prisoner, offered a brief statement of his memory of the revolution and counter-revolution in which he corroborated much of what Serrano recalled. González identified the counter-revolutionaries as Mexicans and recalled how he had demanded their release from military custody after they had been captured by revolutionary forces. He emphasized that the revolutionaries “turned them over without any opposition, thus respecting civil authority. I,” he said, “proceeded in this way in the discharge of my duty, and most especially with a view to preventing the mishaps which might have befallen the prisoners because of the ill-feeling of the Californians against them, but fortunately this was soon appeased.” González, like Serrano, recognized the vehemence of Californian nationalists in Monterey even as he represented himself as a sort of intermediary whose loyalty remained with the maintenance of law and order. Teodoro González, “Las Revoluciones en California, 1829–40” (1877), 8–9, MSS C-D 93 Trans.

26. Antonio Franco Coronel, “Cosas de California: Vecino de la Ciudad de Los Angeles . . . Dictadas Á D. Tomas Savage para la Bancroft Library Año de” (1877), MSS C-D 61; According to Coronel, Ramírez persuaded Castro and Alvarado, who “were young men then, and would not have aimed so high if it hadn’t been for Ramírez’s advice and maneuvers,” to join his cause by promising them more power. Doyce B. Nunis and Antonio Franco Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California: Cosas de California* (Santa Barbara, CA: Bellerophon Books, 1994), 17.



Portrait of Antonio Franco Coronel. *Courtesy of the History Collections, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.*

told how he and others fought because they rejected the Monterey revolutionaries' binary opposition between being Californian and remaining loyal to Mexico.<sup>27</sup> While he always represented that revolution as an illegitimate power play by a small number of people, Coronel argued that it had capitalized on an emerging popular Californian identity and the accompanying conviction that California ought to be ruled by its own people. Coronel agreed with the assessment of José Antonio Carrillo, Carrillo's brother, and the Californian representative to the Mexican Congress, in 1838, that "the Californians were loyal" to the central government of Mexico "only if they had a native son as governor" and that "the Mexican government [would be] well-served" if they remembered that fact.<sup>28</sup> Though

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27. After California became a US state, Coronel and the others in his family lost their property in a title dispute with the U.S. Land Commission, but he amassed a fair amount of wealth mining with which he was able to purchase and maintain a successful orchard and vineyard in Los Angeles. Nunis and Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 3.

28. *Ibid.*, 19.

he had lamented Carrillo's surrender, he found no fault in the eventual rule of Alvarado after the latter renounced his intentions of breaking with Mexico. In that act, Coronel represented Alvarado as finally capitulating to the popular will of the people, which opposed casting off Mexican authority.

Coronel did not portray himself or his movement as more Mexican than Californian. Rather, he explained that he and his companions had defended Carrillo because they had accepted the legitimacy of the governor's rule, finding him both legitimately appointed and a "native son" of California who had been "immediately recognized by the town council of Los Angeles and all of California south of Santa Barbara," all of whom identified themselves as Californians as fervently as their northern counterparts.<sup>29</sup> Coronel represented his and other southern Californians' willingness to fight against the northern revolution as a natural part of their identity as Californians rather than at odds with it.<sup>30</sup>

María Inocenta Pico and María de las Angustias de la Guerra, both women of prominent families in California, focused their narratives on specific, local events that caused popular sentiment to turn against Chico and Gutiérrez in defense of a local, prominent Californian man who had been wronged by Chico. Like Serrano and Coronel, Pico and de la Guerra did not understand the Californian identity as antithetical to Mexican identity. Rather, they argued that Chico's arbitrary actions against local Californians dramatized for the common people the need for home rule.

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29. Though he lamented Carrillo's surrender, Coronel remembered giving the same unquestioning allegiance to Alvarado after the Mexican government officially appointed him Governor of California, after which "there was no longer any excuse for this or any other part of the territory to deny Alvarado's authority." *Ibid.*, 18, 21.

30. José del Carmen Lugo, whom Savage believed to be ignorant of all of California's history because of his reclusive life on his ranch in San Bernardino, briefly recounted the events of the 1830s as a struggle between regional loyalties. According to Lugo, "Alvarado and Castro (Jose) came South with a considerable force expecting to bring pressure to bear on the people of the South. In time an arrangement was reached, and the force from Monterey retired to Santa Barbara, while those of the South, who had been concentrated at San Fernando[,] came back to Los Angeles. These arrangements did not satisfy the people in the North, but the people in Los Angeles demanded that they be carried out. Things continued in this unsatisfactory state and from time to time reports were heard that the Government in Mexico was proposing to send troops in numbers sufficient to subdue the rebel Californians." José del Carmen Lugo, "Vida De Un Ranchero: Los Angeles" (1877), MSS C-D 118; José del Carmen Lugo, *Vida de un Ranchero, a History of San Bernardino Valley*, ed. by Helen Pruitt Beattie, vol. 8, *Quarterly* (San Bernardino County Museum Association) 2 (Bloomington, Calif., 1961), 5.

In interviewing Pico, Savage hoped that she would relate the dictation from the perspective of her late husband, the military man Miguel Ávila.<sup>31</sup> Instead, she offered a narrative driven by ordinary women and men who rose up to defend her husband from an unjust arrest ordered by Governor Gutiérrez. Pico portrayed Alvarado and Castro as champions of the local community, which had responded violently to a series of highly personal affronts by the governor against the people of the pueblo. Savage approached Pico with the assumption that he could only gain second-hand information from her concerning the outbreak of revolution in which her husband had played an important and active role; instead, she dictated to him a narrative in which her late husband played a primarily passive role while she and other members of the pueblo had transformed California through their attempts to deliver him from his imprisonment.

For Pico, the events leading to the November 1836 revolution had begun earlier that year, when Gutiérrez wrongfully arrested Ávila for having chastised the wives of prominent men for bathing in a well.<sup>32</sup> Pico recalled how she went before Gutiérrez as a wife and mother, accompanied by her four-year-old son, to appeal for her husband's release. She recalled that Gutiérrez had responded heartlessly, asking if she "preferred to have them shoot [her] husband five times or have him exiled to Guadalajara for many years."<sup>33</sup> She responded coolly that "if he thought it was fair, then he should shoot [him] five times," adding that "there would be justice on earth as surely as there was justice in Heaven" for she was "determined that he would not see one bit of cowardice" in her.<sup>34</sup> Far from a weak woman who placed her faith in divine justice in the next life, Pico had emphasized earthly justice in a not-so-veiled threat.<sup>35</sup>

As Pico told it, the revolt against Gutiérrez in Monterey began when the pueblo, outraged by the mistreatment of her husband, rose up against him under Castro's leadership. The leaders of Monterey

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31. Born in Santa Barbara in 1810, she married the soldier Miguel Ávila in Monterey in 1826. When Savage interviewed her in 1878 her husband had been dead for four years. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 297–300.

32. María Inocenta Pico, "Cosas de California" (1878), MSS C-D 74 Trans., Bancroft Library; Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 304–305.

33. Pico, "Cosas de California"; Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 305.

34. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 305.

35. For an extended study of women's experiences in California, see: Virginia M. Bouvier, *Women and the Conquest of California, 1542–1840: Codes of Silence* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001).

had met immediately after her husband's arrest in order to secure his release, "by force if necessary. The revolt against Gutiérrez was triggered a few days after the arrest, which was one of the main reasons for the revolt."<sup>36</sup> She explained that her appeal to Gutiérrez and her refusal to show any fear before him had dramatized his injustices against the people, spurring them to action. Even after he released Ávila, Pico explained, Castro and Alvarado had decided to lead troops against Gutiérrez anyway, and she recounted how she had supplied them with all of the provisions she had: food, drink, gunpowder, and tack. Pico celebrated the victory as her own: "I had contributed greatly with my resources, my influence, and even with my own hard work. Many times my hands were the ones that put the bridles on the horses, and many of those bridles were made with pieces of my clothesline."<sup>37</sup> Pico represented the 1836 revolt against Gutiérrez not as a movement forced upon the people by elite, power-hungry politicians, but as an organic movement that arose from the people and in which she and other women played active and decisive roles. As she recalled it, the revolt that freed the Californians from a government that treated them "more despotically than what we had ever experienced during the absolute rule of the Spanish governors" resulted from the undaunted resolve of a wronged mother and wife, wielding her gunpowder and clothesline.<sup>38</sup>

Angustias de la Guerra,<sup>39</sup> whom Savage interviewed because of her reputation "as a lady of intelligence who, from her connections and position, was enabled to inform herself upon governmental affairs," portrayed the people of Santa Barbara as trusting of Chico and Gutiérrez to a fault, arguing that while the signs of their bad character were apparent to many, the final popular opposition to

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36. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 305.

37. *Ibid.*, 307.

38. *Ibid.*, 308.

39. Savage referred to de la Guerra as Mrs. Ord, using her ex-husband James Ord's last name, and so her dictation appears at the Bancroft under the name Angustias Ord. She, however, began her dictation with "I, María de las Angustias de la Guerra," and so I have elected to use the name by which she self-identified at the time of her interview. Beebe and Senkewicz highlight de la Guerra's diverse personal history. The daughter of José de la Guerra, a prominent Spaniard in California, and María Antonia Carrillo, a Californiana, she was first married to a Mexican and second to an American. Thus, "Angustias de la Guerra encountered many worlds. Her testimonio revealed that she saw the light and darkness in all of them." Angustias Ord, "Ocurrencias en California: Relatadas a Thomas Savage en Santa Barbara" (1878), MSS C-D 134, Bancroft Library; Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 201.



María de las Angustias de la Guerra, ca. 1885, with two young relatives. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, BANC PIC 1984.062:03-PIC.

their arbitrary rule built upon a series of unlikely events.<sup>40</sup> Like Pico, de la Guerra focused on the common people, especially women, and their interactions with the leaders of the revolution.<sup>41</sup> De la Guerra's dictation reads as a series of anecdotes that coalesce in the "right moment" to show how the people of Santa Barbara reluctantly rose against the leaders to whom they had desperately wanted to submit.

Her account began with a prophetic Indian named Cristóbal Manojó at Mission Santa Barbara and the cryptic promise to reveal how "this issue gave rise to serious incidents which I will relate at the right moment."<sup>42</sup> With that statement, one of the clearest acknowledgments by any of the narrators that they intentionally crafted their narratives in order to make a particular point, de la Guerra set about demonstrating how the people's anger had slowly and steadily built against Chico. As de la Guerra told the story, the sixty-year-old neophyte Manojó had avoided Chico and, when Father Jimeno asked why, Manojó had replied, "Oh, Father, it doesn't sit well with me to be around a bad man. This fellow is crafty. Don't you see it, boy? He wears glasses. I saw him when he arrived and I looked at his eyes. They were peering out from under the glasses. I'm afraid of him."<sup>43</sup> De la Guerra recalled that Jimeno had rebuked Manojó for his disrespect, insisting that Chico was a good man with an honorable position who deserved respect. In spite of his rebuke, de la Guerra claimed that Manojó refused to concede, telling the Father to wait to see.<sup>44</sup> Beginning with Manojó and his obstinance allowed de la Guerra to show how Chico's despotism had always been present, but how the Californians had chosen to deny it for as long as possible.<sup>45</sup>

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40. De la Guerra was born in 1815 to a prominent Californian family in San Diego. While she had moved with her family to Monterey in 1829, they returned to southern California before revolution erupted in Monterey in 1836. More than most of Savage's subjects, de la Guerra had significant connections in both northern and southern California. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 193, 196, 245.

41. Beebe and Senkewicz argue that throughout her long narrative she "seems to have bristled when Savage focused his questions on the deeds of various men. She insisted that she and other women had been active participants in the history of their land. At various points in her narrative, she broke the flow of Savage's questioning to insert an event in which she had been a significant agent." Thus, her tendencies to emphasize her and other women's roles in the events leading up to the revolt in 1836 is consistent with the rest of her dictation. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 199.

42. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 243.

43. *Ibid.*, 241.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, 243; the elderly Rafael González, who was born in Santa Barbara in 1797, offered only sparse glimpses of this period, relying consistently upon what he recalled having heard at that time rather



De la Guerra used Manojó to portray a sort of simple wisdom from a bygone era that foreshadowed the coming abuses of the Californians at the hands of Chico.<sup>46</sup> She represented Manojó as simultaneously bold and meek, assertive on the matter of his revelation concerning Chico and yet “afraid” of the man such that he hid from him.<sup>47</sup> So constructed, Manojó provided de la Guerra the opportunity to demonstrate that even a fool could have seen the signs of Chico’s poor character. Yet the Californians, like the priest who brushed off his warnings, remained temporarily blinded by their hope that he would be a “good man,” deserving of the respect due his office.

Having prophesied the horrors of Chico’s rule, de la Guerra immediately explained how Californians came to learn the truth of Manojó’s warning, recalling how they came to see “who won,” Manojó or Jimeno.<sup>48</sup> After a visit to the mission, Chico complained to the beloved Father Prefect Durán that the missionaries had welcomed him “as if he were an Indian and [accused them] of sticking him in the scullery.”<sup>49</sup> She elaborated in the pages that followed that Chico had insisted that the Fathers be punished and, eventually, that Durán be punished for taking their side in the matter. She meticulously built her narrative to “the right moment,” recalling in detail how the frustration

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than his personal experiences. As such, he did not attempt to interpret how those events shaped California. His recollections, though, did coincide with those of de la Guerra. He confirmed her account, for example: “The Political Chief, Mariano Chico, had tried to make Father Narciso Durán take ship for Monterey, but the people of Santa Barbara opposed it, and for that reason it was not carried out. The men and women went right down to the beach and showed such a decided determination that those who were escorting the father had to return him to the mission. Father Durán was dearly loved by the people of Santa Barbara because he was very good, virtuous, and noble.” Rafael González, “Experiencias de un Soldado de California: Santa Barbara, Calif.” (1878), 28, MSS C-D 92 Trans.

46. De la Guerra represented Manojó’s insistence as foolish persistence. From an insider’s perspective, Manojó’s actions align with Lisbeth Haas’s description of the ways in which Native Americans negotiated their identities, refusing to abandon their indigenous cultures, through “behaviors of acceptance and accommodation [that] easily intertwined with overt and subtle forms of resistance.” Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 29.

47. Haas’s gloss of the violence suffered by indigenous peoples in California from the conquest forward suggests that Manojó had good reason to fear not only Chico, but also Jimeno, when he spoke against the general. The missionaries engaged in a “systematic effort . . . to disrupt the passage of indigenous forms of knowledge, authority, and power from elders to their children, and to more easily inculcate Christian norms,” and Manojó’s insistence on his ability to see in Chico something beyond what Jimeno could see could certainly have conflicted with those efforts. Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California*, 26–29.

48. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 241.

49. *Ibid.*, 242–243.



A stereoscopic photograph of the parlor or *sala* of the de la Guerra house in Santa Barbara, 1876, about the time that Angustias de la Guerra was recounting her memories to Thomas Savage. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Banc Pic 1984.062:23-PIC.

of the people had mounted steadily until it eventually broke into open rebellion.

De la Guerra explained that the rebellion against Chico began when the women of Santa Barbara forcibly prevented the wrongful deportation of Father Durán. The *disputación*, an elected assembly that met at Monterey and that advised the governor,<sup>50</sup> decided to use Chico's abuse of the Father in order to "goad" the people of Santa Barbara, "who had never rebelled against the government before . . . into rebelling against Chico."<sup>51</sup> The whole pueblo quickly became involved in preventing Durán's deportation. While the "fathers, husbands, and brothers" of the women hid nearby, de la Guerra recounted how the women forcibly prevented Durán's deportation when he arrived at the beach, with some even resorting to the threat of violence. Rebellion, prefigured in de la Guerra's dictation by the prophecy of an Indian neophyte and spurred on by the *disputación*, ultimately burst forth when the women of Santa Barbara defended their beloved Father Durán against deportation.<sup>52</sup>

50. Ibid., 446.

51. Ibid., 243.

52. Again, Amador provided approximately the same explanation for the outbreak of the revolt against Chico in Santa Barbara, but he did so with only scant details. He claimed "he had

Michael Claringbud White and Agustín Janssens both possessed complicated ethnic heritages that shaped their narratives. Both of these men came to California from Europe (Janssens from Belgium and White from England), adopted Spanish names, and married Californianas.<sup>53</sup> White and Janssens provided Savage with the only narratives of this period by narrators who were neither Mexican nor Spanish.<sup>54</sup> They also provided two of the most ambivalent accounts of any of the narrators. However, their ambivalence resulted from their entrenchment within Californio society rather than from being outsiders. Both men recognized the need for home rule, but both opposed violence between factions specifically because they had strong connections to people on all sides.

Throughout the brief portion of his dictation devoted to the 1836 revolt, White rejected the revolutionaries' attempts to conflate support of their cause with being Californian. White's first experiences with Castro and Alvarado's revolt came in 1836 in Los Angeles, when Judge José Sepúlveda called upon him to bring "every man capable of bearing arms residing in my jurisdiction" to meet him in Los Angeles.<sup>55</sup> Accompanied by four men, White met Sepúlveda, Castro, Alvarado, and White's brother-in-law Alférez Isidoro Guillen

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misunderstandings with the Monterey town council, with the Deputation, and also with private individuals . . . [I]t is said that Chico was as quixotic as a Spaniard and was almost as crazy." Gregorio Mora-Torres, *Californio Voices: The Oral Memoirs of Jose Maria Amador and Lorenzo Asisara* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2005), 167.

53. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 241–242.

54. The mountain man and self-styled adventurer George Nidever, who came to Southern California overland in 1833, made sporadic mention of Castro, Alvarado, and their political dealings, but only insofar as his brief interactions with them informed his hunting stories. George Nidever, "Life and Adventures of George Nidever, a Pioneer of Cal. since 1834: Santa Barbara, Calif." (1878), MSS C-D 133, Bancroft Library; George Nidever and William Henry Ellison, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever, 1802-1883* (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1984), 45–49; the Anglo American Job Francis Dye briefly recounted the events of the 1830s, noting, "[I] kept myself, as ever, aloof from the political disturbances of the country. I know that several foreigners, Americans, English, Irish & other nationalities, aided Alvarado to secure him in his position as Gov., and that he & others attempted at first the foolish prospect of making Cal. a free & independent State, [met] with strong opposition in the South, where people were nearer to Mex. & likely to be the first victims if the Mex. Govt. decided to send a strong force and punish their audacity in ignoring its supremacy & authority." Thus, even as one who intentionally remained "aloof" from Californian politics, Dye recognized that Southern Californians did not oppose independence because they were more loyal to Mexico, but because they were more vulnerable to Mexican attacks. Job Francis Dye, "Recollections of California since 1832: Corralitos, Calif." (1877), 10–11, MSS C-D 69.

55. Michael Claringbud White, "California All the Way Back to 1828: Pomona, Calif." (1877), MSS C-D 173; Michael Claringbud White, *California All the Way Back to 1828* (Los Angeles: G. Dawson, 1956), 34.

in February 1837. Sepúlveda had asked him to meet with them in order to convince White to take troops to San Diego on behalf of the revolt. White rejected the request, claiming to be “a citizen of Mexico, but not a citizen of revolutions.”<sup>56</sup>

Sepúlveda continued trying to recruit him until White finally explained why he could never join the revolt: he had too many ties to people on the other side to support even the possibility of violence. Notwithstanding Sepúlveda’s assurance that he hoped to avoid violence, White told him that he could not go because his wife’s cousin, Macedonio Gonzalez, who had named White his son’s godfather, lived among those in the south against whom Sepúlveda intended to march.<sup>57</sup> Throughout his narrative, White challenged the simplicity of Sepúlveda’s conflation of his movement with being Californian. He identified his friend Gonzalez not as a Mexican but as one of the *abajanos*, “those from down below.”<sup>58</sup> White recalled how the revolutionaries’ conflation of their revolt with being Californian threatened many others who had equal claim to the title “Californian.”

Like White, Agustín Janssens presented the 1836 revolt in his testimonio as a movement that created false distinctions between Californians, threatening not only the unity of the region but also the lives of its people. Janssens focused his narrative to an even greater degree than White on his close ties to Californians on both sides of the conflict, beginning by noting that at the outbreak of the 1836 revolt he had shared a house in Monterey with Ángel Ramírez and Juan Bautista Alvarado.<sup>59</sup> Janssen framed his entire narrative with the assertion that—contrary to María Inocenta Pico’s memory—a few ambitious men had orchestrated the movement based upon existing plans rather than as the result of any perceived injustices, arguing that “all the charges they presented against [Gutiérrez] did not amount to more than pretexts to bring about the plan of independence for California

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56. *Ibid.*, 35. White had come to Mexico in 1817 at sixteen years old but had only moved to San Francisco in 1828. So by 1837, he had lived as a Mexican for twenty years, but in California for only nine of those. *Ibid.*, 17–18.

57. *Ibid.*, 36.

58. Translation by the editor Glen Dawson. White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 36.

59. Agustín Janssens, “Documentos para la Historia de California” (1878), MSS C-B 83, Bancroft Library; Agustín Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens, 1834-1856*, ed. William Henry Ellison, trans. Francis Price (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1953), 49–50, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/calbk.172>.

which had been conceived for a long time.”<sup>60</sup> Beyond that, he seemed neither to know nor to care what roles people like Pico thought they had played in its beginning.<sup>61</sup>

Janssens presented the whole affair as an empty string of mob violence, void of any idealistic underpinnings, a situation he blamed on its leaders. He recalled how he had struggled to get those who found themselves on the wrong side of the revolutionary mob to safety in Southern California. He constructed the average Californian revolutionaries as drunk, prone to violence, and largely directionless because their leaders based the impetus for the revolt on such shaky grounds. As Janssens told it, while the “cause of independence was growing noisier,” it also grew less articulate.<sup>62</sup> By the time Janssens helped the Coronel family flee to Santa Barbara in November 1836, he noted that Señora Coronel had claimed that “the rebels had changed face, and the cry was now ‘Kill the Mexicans.’”<sup>63</sup> When asked by one of those rebels where he was from, Janssens, “seeing his evil intention, . . . answered that [he] was French.”<sup>64</sup> Janssens consistently portrayed himself and those in his party as political refugees threatened with incessant violence by a revolution that lacked the principles necessary to define an actual enemy. In opposition to that violence, however, he and other Californians risked their lives by dissenting from the revolution because it appealed only to the sort of shallow patriotism and easy binaries that motivate drunken mobs rather than proper citizens.

The narrators in the 1870s contributed to a shared cultural memory of 1830s California as a region in transition from colonial rule by outsiders to home rule by one of its own. For all of their disagreements about which movements had possessed authentic popular support, they all implicitly defined the Californian identity broadly, choosing only to explore it negatively through recounting how small minorities had attempted to usurp it only to be thwarted by popular action. The Mexican immigrants of the Híjar-Padrés party, the

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60. Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens, 1834–1856*, 50–51.

61. As a preface to his assertion that Castro, Alvarado, and Ramírez had no legitimate charges, Janssens plainly stated, “I don’t remember, or perhaps did not know, the motives that they could have had.” *Ibid.*, 50.

62. *Ibid.*, 53.

63. *Ibid.*, 55.

64. *Ibid.*, 57.

Californianas, and the acculturated Europeans examined here took the fractured movements of a divided region in a tumultuous decade and collectively presented the California populace's ability to strike down pockets of dissent through popular, if disorganized, action as the heartbeat of a diverse and resilient culture. That insistence on making order from chaos and on positing Alta California as a culture that spanned political struggles would define the much more diverse and numerically greater narratives of the 1840s, which similarly struggled to find order and continuity in a decade of upheaval, transition, and conflicting loyalties.

#### THE 1840S

If the memory of California's origins were to diverge ethnically on any particular event, one might expect it to do so concerning the series of local events in the 1840s that alienated California from Mexico and led to its annexation by the United States. Later generations of Anglo Americans, including Bancroft in his published histories of California, would remember that watershed decade as the creation of California and—if they even thought much about what came before—as the gulf separating the thirty-first state from its Spanish and Mexican past.<sup>65</sup> The Alta Californians—even the Anglo American narrators who had only arrived there beginning in the late 1830s—unanimously proclaimed that they had participated in the preservation of Alta California, variously defined by its people, its cultural forms, or its social structures, during the tumultuous 1840s.<sup>66</sup> The narrators uniformly recounted a historical progression that resulted from intentional actions by Californians who recognized the need to preserve the people and culture of their home under any flag. Certainly the stories that the narrators told differed from one another, but their differences—even their disagreements—did not align along clearly racial or ethnic lines.

Rough patterns emerge from the stories that Savage and his assistants collected. One group of testimonies emphasized the actions of

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65. Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres," 58–59.

66. In his classic social history of the Californios, historian Leonard Pitt wrote of the decimation of the northern ranchos by the 1870s. Pitt notes that residents of California made up their own minds about who or what was to blame for the massive displacement of the Californios. That study relied only on the Spanish dictations examined here, though the variety of explanations increases rather than decreases when they are considered together. Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 103.

elite Californians and Mexicans, particularly General Micheltorena, as central to the transformation of California during the 1840s. Second, some narrators celebrated the self-sacrificial actions of average Californians in defense of their homes and families in direct opposition to the greed and excess of its leaders, portraying the martyrs as the real heroes of the decade. A third set of narrators described how they themselves had acted as intermediaries in order to transition California through the 1840s as peacefully as possible, regardless of which national power came to possess it. Finally, a fourth category of dictations posited specific villains whose actions had threatened the future of California, recounting how the people of California had persevered successfully to preserve the country.

Several narrators focused on the ways in which political leaders cooperated—occasionally in secret—in order to safeguard the future of California. Their narratives share an emphasis on the selflessness of those leaders, recalling how many of them chose to preserve the social fabric of California rather than attempt to maintain their power once the will of the people had moved against them. Highlighting that altruism allowed these narrators to portray Alta California's political leaders not as those who had lost control of the country, but rather as those who sacrificed themselves for it.

Serrano and Janssens fixated on the close relationship between the military governor General Manuel Micheltorena (1842–1845) and José Castro, who led the revolt that deposed Micheltorena in 1845. Serrano recalled the rebellion as an orchestrated drama in which Micheltorena and Castro colluded in order to allow the former to transfer the country peacefully into the hands of the latter after the hearts of the people had turned against the old general.<sup>67</sup> Serrano claimed that, years later, Castro had shown him a note from Micheltorena that read, “[A] revolution has begun. More disgracefully, at the head of it are found young hotheads. I don’t want there to be persecutions and personal vengeance. Put yourself at the head of it to regulate it and we will understand one another. Manuel Micheltorena.”<sup>68</sup>

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67. Serrano told how he had chastised Castro after the general had bragged about expelling Micheltorena. Serrano argued, “The Californios haven’t expelled Micheltorena like you say. What, according to my understanding, has happened is that if the General didn’t promote the revolution, at least he knew how to take advantage of it as it was convenient for him to leave California very quickly.” Serrano, *Testimonios de Florencio Serrano*, 119.

68. *Ibid.*, 123.

Janssens argued cogently that when the two leaders did meet in battle, Micheltorena had resigned from the fight *because* he knew that he could win it. California “needed population, civilization, and progress” and, for the few bachelor soldiers the Mexican force might lose, those Californians who would be killed “would leave families, and he could never blot out this memory. He said that he would use every means and exhaust every resource to prevent the shedding of blood.”<sup>69</sup> Faced with the unyielding determination of the Californians to rule themselves, Janssens recalled how Micheltorena had taken the only remaining avenue available to him: surrender. In their respective narratives, both Serrano and Janssens emphasized Micheltorena’s interest not in the preservation of California as a possession of Mexico, but rather in the preservation of its people.<sup>70</sup>

The California-born José María Amador, the Mexican-born Antonio Coronel, and the Anglo American William Wiggins all blamed the Californians’ pathological desire for home rule for the eventual annexation of California by the United States.<sup>71</sup> They all recalled Micheltorena as a tragic character, noting how he had attempted to save California from its own bickering citizens, only to find them finally unified against him on account of his universally

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69. Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens, 1834–1856*, 124.

70. Agustín Escobar recalled how Castro had similarly chosen surrender to avoid the loss of Californian lives in his campaign against Frémont. Escobar claimed that Castro had refused to engage Frémont based on his assertion “that there was no necessity to spill blood. He did not want to be responsible for spilling California blood.” Unlike Janssens, however, Escobar disapproved of Castro’s preference for preserving Californians rather than for preserving Mexican California. He recalled, “All were anxious to fight and became disgusted with Señor Castro for having stopped them. Among our men there was an excellent rifle company who would have won the combat.” In spite of his disapproval of Castro’s inaction, Escobar’s recollection of Castro essentially matched Janssens’ portrayal of Micheltorena. In both cases, the narrators remembered how military leaders chose not to fight a battle that each man would have won, preferring instead to save the lives of Californians for its future, even if that meant surrendering control of the country. Agustín Escobar, “La Campaña de ’46 contra los Americanos en California: Monterey, Calif.” (1877), MSS C-D 72; Carlos N. Híjar, Eulalia Pérez, and Agustín Escobar, *Three Memoirs of Mexican California*, trans. Vivian C. Fisher (Berkeley: Friends of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, 1988), 110.

71. José María Amador was born in the presidio of San Francisco in 1781. Mora-Torres, *Californio Voices*, 31; José María Amador, “Memorias sobre la Historia de California: Natural del País Que Nació el Año de 1781 Y vive Hoy cerca del Pueblito de Whiskey Hill. Lo Escribió, Dictado por el Autor, Thomas Savage para la Bancroft Library” (1877), MSS C-D 28, Bancroft Library; Coronel was born in Mexico City in 1817 and moved to California in 1834 with the Híjar-Padrés party along with Serrano and Janssens. Nunis and Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 3; Coronel, “Cosas de California”; Wiggins came to California in 1840 from St. Louis, Missouri. William L. Wiggins, “William L. Wiggins Reminiscences” (1877), 3, MSS C-D 175.



maligned troops.<sup>72</sup> In these dictations, Micheltorena appears as the selfless victim of the Californians' penchant for deposing Mexican governors, a condition exacerbated by the failure of the Mexican government to properly equip him for his task. Coronel lamented the general's plight: "The government failed to support him, he had no confidence in his troops, the Californians considered him their enemy," concluding that "an American invasion was inevitable."<sup>73</sup> Wiggins argued that the Mexican government "pretended to have control, and sent military officers to rule the country, . . . and indeed the whole native population . . . would not endure their stay but a short time."<sup>74</sup> Coronel recalled the bitter irony of that tendency in the context of Micheltorena's departure, which left "California again governed by her native sons," though it would be for the last time.<sup>75</sup>

None of the three expressed many regrets over the transition to US control. Serrano argued that "thoughtful persons" in California had begun to realize that the United States offered the only possible future for Californians. "[A]t this distance of time," he concluded, "I have become convinced that if the United States had not occupied the country in such an opportune time this place would have ceased to exist as a civilized society."<sup>76</sup> For narratives devoted to demonstrating the pathological inability of the Californians to submit to leadership from Mexico, Frémont at least brought the political stability that Castro and Alvarado never had.

While many of the narrators identified Micheltorena as the hero of 1846, others assigned equally heroic roles to a variety of average Californians for their sacrifices in defense of family and home. In those cases, their heroism almost always involved the defense of family and community, highlighting the social survival of Californian

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72. Though her dictation said little about the revolution itself, Juana Machado offered perhaps the most succinct recollection of Micheltorena's troops. She stated, "Micheltorena brought with him a large retinue of officers and an infantry Battalion Permanente Fijo de Californias. It was made up of thieves and criminals taken from the prisons in Mexico as well as prisoners from Chapala." Juana de Dios Machado Alipás Ridington, "Los Tiempos Pasados de la Alta California: San Diego, Calif." (1878), MSS C-D 119; Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 140; Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 6.

73. Coronel, "Cosas de California"; Nunis and Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 29–30.

74. Wiggins, "William L. Wiggins Reminiscences," 175.

75. Nunis and Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 30–31.

76. Serrano, *Testimonios de Florencio Serrano*, 127.

communities in the face of political turmoil. In this way, a small number of Californians recalled how heroic efforts at the local level had preserved their society regardless of who controlled California.

Inocente García, who was born in Los Angeles in 1791, recalled how he had come to fight Micheltorena against his will. He had done so in order to secure the release of his son-in-law, José Mariano Bonilla, who had been arrested by Castro's forces.<sup>77</sup> The true heroes, as he told it, were those, like him, who had avoided the violence insofar as was possible, participating only in defense of home and family. García recounted Frémont's victory over the Californios similarly, focusing primarily on how he had worked to avoid it, lamenting only those details that directly affected his estate. He recalled with little fanfare how the "Californios made a vain attempt to stop" the American advance, "and were soon convinced of the futility of their efforts, and they fell back."<sup>78</sup>

Juan Bernal, brother-in-law to José María Amador, largely ignored Frémont and his rebellion, choosing instead to recount the senseless murder of three heroic Californios at the hands of American troops. He recalled how a man named José de los Reyes Berreyesa and his two nephews, surnamed Haro, encountered members of the Bear Party. Berreyesa had been killed, and in response both of his nephews in succession demanded that the troops also kill them to allay their grief. Bernal included no idealistic cause, nor did he narrate any actual fighting. Rather, he identified the Californios' commitment to their family members as the source of their heroism and the cause for which they chose to die. Nationalistic causes and the violence that perpetuated them emerge as senseless and ineffectual in his telling.

Three Anglo American men and one Californiana recalled how they had used their relationships to the most powerful men in Californio society in order to smooth the transition between the changing regimes.<sup>79</sup> These narrators used their own lives to express

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77. Inocente García, "Hechos Historicos de California: San Luis Obispo" (1878), MSS C-D 84, Bancroft Library; Inocente García, *Hechos Historicos de California, as Told to Thomas Savage, 1878*, ed. Antonio Isaac Bonilla, trans. Thomas Workman Temple (Santa Barbara, CA: Flair Studio Printing, 1974), 43.

78. García, *Hechos Historicos de California, as Told to Thomas Savage, 1878*, 49.

79. Additionally, George Nidever (see note 54) presented himself as an intermediary figure. Characteristically, he emphasized only his use of his intermediary status for his own gain rather than to facilitate peace in California. He remembered California, before and after its annexation by the United States, as a land occupied by roving bands of international war parties. He recalled Frémont's party as one among the others, albeit the one to which he was loyal and that delivered

in microcosm the cultural divide that they remembered between Alta California and California under the United States. In recalling how they helped to bridge that divide, they also used their lives to illustrate the ways in which Californians intentionally preserved continuity between the old and the new.

María Inocenta Pico's brief treatment of the 1840s focused on how Ávila had acted as an intermediary in the transformation of California.<sup>80</sup> He had chosen not to fight against the Americans and had, afterward, "regarded himself as a citizen of that republic. He tried (as far as his influence could extend) to get his Californio countrymen to take advantage of the benefits the new regime offered for progress."<sup>81</sup> She remembered that both she and Ávila had employed their influence to quell the constant, popular rejection of authority in hopes that stronger government might provide opportunity for advancement.

Benjamin Davis Wilson, originally from Tennessee, portrayed himself as the broker of a bloodless peace. He recalled how Governor Pío Pico had enlisted him to carry to Commodore Stockton a message, telling him of Pico's "intention to abandon the country," and Pico's hope that Stockton, as he phrased it, "will not ill treat my people."<sup>82</sup> Here Wilson recalled, as so many had concerning Micheltorena, that Pico showed more interest in preserving the safety of the people of California than he did in preserving his power over them. He also claimed that José Antonio Carrillo had enlisted him to carry a similar message to Stockton, promising "no more blood will be shed on either side during . . . the war in Mexico, where the fate of this country must be decided upon."<sup>83</sup> According to Wilson, Carrillo implored Stockton that "in the name of humanity" he should "not . . . march forces

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him from what he recalled as perpetual harassment at the hands of the Californios for his associations with Frémont. He appreciated Frémont insofar as he benefited from the actions of his party, though he equally appreciated the "three or four Californian women at my house besides my wife" who "at all times knew of my movements but . . . never offered to betray me, but on the contrary kept me informed of what was going on among their countrymen." He remembered California in turmoil and elaborated on the ways in which he established and manipulated relationships with Anglo Americans like Frémont, Californios, and even Englishmen. Nidever, "Life and Adventures of George Nidever, a Pioneer of Cal. Since 1834"; Nidever and Ellison, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever, 1802–1883*, 66.

80. See footnote 31.

81. Pico, "Cosas de California"; Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 304.

82. Benjamin Davis Wilson, "Observations on Early Days in California and New Mexico: Lake Vineyard" (1877), 61, MSS C-D 177.

83. *Ibid.*, 85–86.



Benjamin Davis Wilson with his second wife, Margaret Hereford Wilson, about 1852, with two young family members. Wilson's first wife, Ramona Yorba, died in 1849. *Courtesy of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, GPF-3034.*

thro' the country, as this would cause the spilling of blood and engender bad feeling [between] two [groups of] people who in all probability will have to live together."<sup>84</sup> Thus, Wilson recalled his part in negotiating peace regardless of war's outcome.

William A. Streeter, a dentist born in New York in 1811, came to California for the sake of his health in 1843 after spending the previous year in Peru. His recollection of the alliance between the Californios and the Americans against Micheltorena essentially agreed with Wilson's narrative, but Streeter attempted to reconcile his memory of that cooperative effort to save California with the conflicting recognition that, by the 1870s, the Californios had largely lost California.<sup>85</sup> Streeter

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84. *Ibid.*

85. Streeter asserted, "It was not his (Castro's) intention to drive all the foreigners from the country as had been currently reported, but that the revolution was against Micheltorena because he refused to send his cholos, or hijos, as he called them, back to Mexico" and "that it was owing to this report that most all of the foreigners had joined Micheltorena, by advice of Sutter." William A. Streeter, "Recollections of Historical Events in California, 1843-1878: Santa Barbara, Calif." (1878), MSS C-D 159; William A. Streeter and William Henry Ellison, "Recollections of Historical Events in California, 1843-1878 (Continued)," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (June 1, 1939): 158; William Wiggins also essentially agreed with this narrative from his experiences on Micheltorena's side. He recalled, "During the action the foreigners serving in both contending armies came to

placed significant blame upon the Californios' refusal to acquiesce to American culture in the ways that the Anglo Californians had under Mexican rule, arguing that the average Californio of 1878 was an "American citizen in name only" who refused to "assimilate with the Americans."<sup>86</sup> Streeter recalled the decline of the Californios' cultural and economic status in the American period as a failure on their part to assimilate rather than faulting Anglo American settlers of the Mexican era for having abandoned their compatriots after 1846. María Inocenta Pico, Wilson, and Streeter all argued that they had preserved California by changing with it, but they each recalled how so few of Alta California's citizens had been able to do the same.

Finally, a few narrators recalled specific villains in order to demonstrate how the majority of Californians had worked to preserve the country against a minority that had threatened to destroy it. In this way, a Californiana, a Californio, an Englishman, and an Anglo American all recalled similarly how the democratic actions of the people of California had preserved it against the selfish and destructive actions of specific military leaders. In opposition to so many memories of the 1840s that blamed popular revolt for having severed California from Mexico, these narrators praised the democratic impulse in that decade for having preserved the culture and the people of Alta California.

Francis Pliny Fisk Temple, a native of Massachusetts who had come to Monterey in 1841 at the age of nineteen, narrated the deposing of Micheltorena as a democratic action taken justly by an elected body—the assembly—against a man who had, "as the Californians say, . . . broke faith with them."<sup>87</sup> Similarly, José del Carmen Lugo recalled how the Assembly, recognizing that Micheltorena was determined "to punish those who had risen against him," identified him as "a person prejudicial to the country, ignoring his authority, and authorizing the older head, Pío Pico, to take the reins of government

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an understanding among ourselves to withdraw from the contest and let the Mexicans & Californians fight it out. The foreigners on our side withdrew and, without our knowledge, those on the other side stuck to Castro, and the result was that Gen. Micheltorena was taken prisoner and afterwards left the country with his troops & officers that he had brought from Mexico." Wiggins, "William L. Wiggins Reminiscences," 10.

86. William A. Streeter, "Recollections of Historical Events in California, 1843–1878 (Concluded)," ed. William Henry Ellison, *California Historical Society Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1939): 274.

87. Francis Pliny F. Temple, "Recollections of Francis Temple, a Resident of Los Angeles and a Pioneer of 1841: Events from 1841–1847" (1877), 4, MSS C-D 162.

into his hands.”<sup>88</sup> Both of these narrators recalled how California’s democracy had saved it from the whims of its military ruler and his deprived troops.

White and de la Guerra both blamed the American Captain Archibald Gillespie, in whose hands Frémont had left Los Angeles after capturing it in August of 1846, for having squandered what might have been a peaceful occupation of the city for the duration of the Mexican-American War.<sup>89</sup> Both recalled how southern Californians would have preferred peace under US rule to open rebellion if not for Gillespie’s abuses. White argued that had a “sensible officer been left in command,” one who had recognized the need to treat the Californios as integral parts of the existing California society rather than as a conquered people, then “the Californians would have continued to acquiesce to the occupation of their country by the Americans.”<sup>90</sup> Each argued that through popular revolt the southern Californians had achieved their desired end: peace for all Californians without concern for which flag flew.

Mauricio González provided one of the narratives most critical of the material conditions produced by the military transition to American occupation. González, according to Savage, owned and lived in Alvarado’s old house, and yet Savage made note that he “has to work, earning a scanty support for himself and family with an express waggon [sic], having lost all his other property. It is well known that [at] one time of his life he was in much better circumstances.”<sup>91</sup> The

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88. Lugo, *Vida de un Ranchero, a History of San Bernardino Valley*, 8:8.

89. In his edited publication of White’s dictation, the southern California bookman Glen Dawson outlined the chronology of the Flores revolution as follows: “August 13, 1846, Fremont and Stockton took Los Angeles without opposition; early September, Captain Gillespie and some 50 men were left to hold Los Angeles; September 23 there was outbreak by the Californians in Los Angeles; September 26 was the Battle of Chino, described by White, with the American force surrendering to the Californians; September 30 was an exchange of prisoners and Gillespie forced to withdraw to San Pedro; October 9, the attempt to retake Los Angeles fails at the Battle of Dominguez; December 6 Kearny and his men fight the Californians at Battle of San Pasqual; January 8 and 9, Americans approaching from San Diego fight battles of San Gabriel and La Mesa, the last battles on California soil; January 13, 1847, Fremont and Andres Pico sign treaty of Cahuenga.” White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 52–53.

90. White recognized that the Californios would have preferred Mexican rule if they could have had it, and so he qualified his statement that the Californios would have continued to acquiesce to American occupation, adding: “at least until something favorable to Mexico had resulted from the campaign there.” White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 56.

91. Mauricio González, “Memorias . . . de la Historia [de] California: Monterey, Calif.” (1877), 1–2, MSS C-D 91 Trans.

disparity between his wealth in Mexican-era California and his relative poverty by 1877 illuminates his narrative, in which he argued that the economic takeover of California, rather than the military campaigns, had transformed it into an American state and the Californios into a conquered and dispossessed people.

González's memory of the true nature of the war for California emphasized that the military campaigns did more to rob the Californios of their livelihoods than of their lives. González asserted plainly, "The real war on both sides was against the horses and cattle."<sup>92</sup> Because the Californios who had lost property—horses, cattle, and land—had little proof of what they had lost, any attempts to reimburse them had no relationship to their actual lost property. Without such a relationship, González argued that there had existed no guarantee of continuity for the Californios between their past and their present. Living in Alvarado's historic house and yet deprived of his own former wealth, González's memory certainly reflected his own life's trajectory over the intervening three decades.<sup>93</sup>

The proliferation of voices in Savage's oral history project from the 1830s into the 1840s did not alter the underlying assumption that popular action had always united the majority of Californians against the narrower minority of usurpers and opportunists, successfully preserving the people and culture of California across both tumultuous decades and all the way up to the 1870s. As a generation, they found continuity across the lives they lived under multiple flags that belied their ostensible ethnic divisions. Because that continuity rested in the preservation of people, identities, and sentiments toward California rather than on flags or regimes, it dropped from visibility when later generations of Anglo Americans looked back on that era. When Anglo Americans (including Savage and Bancroft) who had headed to California after the Bear Flag revolt with the expectation

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92. He never claimed that the United States government had failed to compensate Californians for their lost property maliciously. Instead, he remembered how "the American government paid even for many that were not taken by the forces, but many that were taken remained unpaid for," thus identifying the source of the problem as bureaucratic clumsiness. *Ibid.*, 32.

93. For information concerning the impact of the Land Law of 1851, which created the Board of Land Commissioners to investigate Mexican titles that had been guaranteed under the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, see: Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 79–87; Linda Heidenreich, "This Land Was Mexican Once": *Histories of Resistance from Northern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 89–91; Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 83–103.

that they would create an American California recounted the history of the state, they failed to see the ties that bound the Mexican past to the American present. The Spanish and English voices that Savage recorded, regardless of their accents, spoke of continuity because their own lives spanned that historical period. They recalled together how they had made Alta California in the 1830s as a place distinct from Mexico and how they had preserved that distinctiveness over the 1840s and into the 1870s.