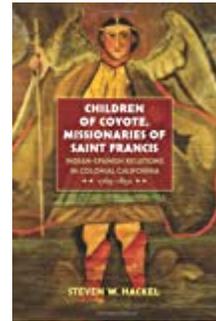


**Steven W. Hackel.** *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. xx + 476 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2988-2; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5654-3.



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## Mission: California

Despite waves of recent scholarship about Indian-Spanish relations in the Americas, many outside the field cling to stereotypes about blood-thirsty conquistadors, lascivious missionaries, and noble but benighted savages. In California history, erasing stereotypes is complicated by the debate over the possible canonization of the head of the Franciscan missions, Jun pero Serra. Depending on one's position, California's friars were saints or monsters, its natives, heroes or victims. Even scholars have found it difficult to remain above the fray. Whether apologists for Catholic proselytizing or advocates for Native American rights, they have fought bitterly over what happened in the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spanish missions along the California coast.

Steven Hackel succeeds where few before him have. Carefully reasoned, thoroughly researched, and intellectually balanced, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis* provides a humane, clear-eyed examination of life in the California missions and, specifically, natives' attempts to cope with their rapidly changing world. Hackel refuses to accept without investigation his predecessors' claims about disease, ecological changes, marriage, social

control, work, living conditions, and politics. Through a case study of San Carlos Boromeo, the administrative center of Alta California just south of Monterrey (may we all enjoy such a lovely research setting), Hackel mines letters, sacramental registers, and trial records to unearth Indians' behavior. He then compares his findings with evidence from both regional missions and other Spanish frontiers when and where possible. He divides his study into three parts. The first considers the pre-contact societies and initial Indian-Spanish relations, the second treats interactions in the Spanish missions topically, and the third analyses the collapse of the mission system after the Mexican-American War.

Hackel explains that California's natives, the "Children of Coyote" in his sometimes cumbersome phrasing, faced the onslaught of two concurrent revolutions. The first was a demographic collapse as dramatic as any in the history of Indian-European contact. Natives' numbers declined so precipitously that survivors grappled with the possible loss of their cultural integrity. The second revolution was ecological which reduced natives' already limited economic and strategic options and ac-

tually encouraged them to darken the missions' doors. The need for food, fears about survival, and the deterioration of villages and landscapes prompted the very young, the elderly, and unmarried women, in particular, to seek succor from the Franciscans. While scholars have demonstrated the effects of demographic disintegration and ecological transformation on Indians during European contact before, Hackel's statistical analysis of church records reveals who exactly entered the missions and who opted to remain in the surrounding countryside. He is also able to show the rate at which Indians of all ages and sexes accepted Spanish shelter and Catholic baptismal waters. Once natives made those choices, their new lives in the missions actually accelerated the changes in their world. Hackel convincingly demonstrates that the growth of Indian mission populations was gradual and unforced, though the alternatives were certainly not ideal.

In part 2 of his analysis—the bulk of his work—Hackel investigates issues of mission life: the religious program, sexuality, social negotiations, labor, and jurisdictional struggles. California mission history defies easy explanation; it bucked the colonial trends of Spanish America. When eighteenth-century colonial reformers turned missions into parishes, erected presidios, and encouraged military alliance and economic ties with Indians, California colonizers employed the centuries'-old strategy of "civilizing" and "saving" natives through missions. So Hackel shows how a discarded tactic operated in a new colonial climate and comes up with some interesting conclusions. Friars taught baptized natives only the rudiments of Catholicism but expected them to obey the recondite rules of church doctrine. They punished Indians for transgressions of all sorts while they sent mixed messages about native self-governance. Missionaries enforced strict sexual behavior while overlooking or excusing instances of promiscuity. For their part, natives learned to alleviate the pressures and inconsistencies of mission life with *paseos* (seasonal leaves from the mis-

sions), by exercising control over political elections, hiring themselves out for labor, learning a skilled craft, resisting missionaries' demands, or rebelling. Hackel seems to have been influenced by Inga Clendinnen's *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570* (1987) in that, as he engages the evidence, he reasons through various interpretations. The result provides a wonderful guide for graduate students learning to address the interpretive quandaries that come with studying Indians and missions through European texts.

Hackel's determination to leave no stone unturned, for the most part, succeeds. Despite the volumes length, some may wish for a select bibliography. Hackel's ample footnotes will suffice. Moreover, Hackel will supplement his book by making available on-line a database of invaluable records about the California missions. And yet, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis* misses one major component of the mission experience. Hackel admits that he is after behavior, not theology. But if friars believed their native neophytes incapable of mature comprehension of Catholic dogma, as Hackel demonstrates, then why were the friars there in the first place? For explanations, read *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (2004) by James A. Sandos. Together, these two books address every major question about California mission history and will be required reading for students and scholars of Indians and the Spanish frontiers.

It is sometimes difficult for us to grasp that Spanish missionaries did not intend the myriad evils their efforts to convert native peoples brought. It is also difficult, at times, to define Indians' adoption of novel technologies, methods, and ideas as cultural survival. Hackel ends his study on an upbeat note, contending that the descendants of California's mission Indians are in a process of cultural revival. I wonder if revival is the same as survival or, instead, replication of what their ancestors had done centuries ago: making a new life.

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