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Special Feature Introduction: Indigenous Persistence in Colonial California

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SPECIAL FEATURE INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Persistence in Colonial California

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There are more than one hundred federally recognized Native American tribes found within the present-day borders of California, a roughly equivalent number of indigenous Californian communities who are either unrecognized or currently petitioning for recognition by the United States government, and another eight indigenous reserves just across the international border in Baja California, Mexico. This impressive array of more than 200 Native American communities is not surprising, given what oral narratives, early ethnography, and precontact archaeology tell us about the densely populated sociopolitical landscape comprised of many hundreds of small-scale autonomous tribes that existed before colonization in the late-1700s. Separating these two eras of Native California, however, is the colonial period—a time when indigenous peoples faced directed culture change in the Spanish missions, joined multiethnic communities at mercantile outposts, and suffered greatly due to disease, violence, and the disastrous policies of elimination enacted during the early American period.

While the fact that Native Californian communities have persisted to the present is unquestionable, scholars have long grappled with how the events of the colonial period fit within the broader scope of indigenous histories. At the generous invitation and encouragement of Editor Adrian Whitaker, articles featured in these issues of the *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* (Volume 38, Nos. 1 and 2) explore colonial-era California through the lens of persistence. Here, we view persistence as an active process of rearticulation, in which native people drew on existing traditions and values to navigate new, colonial circumstances. This formulation rejects the

essentialist underpinnings of Kroeberian anthropology in California by stressing that continuity and change are not mutually exclusive. Instead, we can use the archaeological, ethnographic, and historical records to understand the pragmatic choices of indigenous people who employed a range of strategies to weather successive waves of colonial imposition (Panich 2013).

A key aspect of this framework is to move beyond the walls of colonial missions, forts, and ranchos, to consider the places that remained fixed in the memories, mobility, and cultural practices of colonized indigenous peoples (Schneider 2015). Many of these articles, for example, examine indigenous persistence within settings of missionary colonialism, but use data from those sites to determine native peoples' enduring connections to broader landscapes. From Tomales Bay to Baja California, these contributions investigate aspects of indigenous cultures that persevered and transformed during overlapping phases of missionary, mercantile, and settler colonialism promoted by representatives from imperial Spain, Mexico, Russia, and the United States. These contributions add to the important work of tribes and scholars (many of them Native American) spotlighting the decision-making of indigenous communities in colonial settings throughout California and the Great Basin. Taken together, the articles will ideally spark discussion around persistent social practices and encourage further reevaluation of the limits of colonial regimes, particularly as native people were quite capable of shouldering burdens, embracing change, and drawing on deeply-placed histories to navigate a route to safer terrain.

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2013 Archaeologies of Persistence: Reconsidering the Legacies of Colonialism in Native North America. *American Antiquity* 78:105-122.

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