CALIFORNIO RESISTANCE TO THE U.S. INVASION OF 1846

A University Thesis Presented to the Faculty

of

California State University, East Bay

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master in History

By

Patricia Campos Scheiner

March, 2009
CALIFORNIO RESISTANCE TO THE U.S. INVASION OF 1846

By

Patricia Campos Scheiner

Approved:

Dr. Robert Phelps, Associate Professor

Bridget Ford (2006), Assistant Professor

Date:

3-11-2009

March 11, 2009
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two. Californio Origins</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three. Californio’s Politics</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four. The Consequences of the Mexican-American War In California</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five. The “Unofficial” War in California: Fremont, the Provocateur, the Bear Flag Rebels’ Actions, and the Battle of Olompali</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six. The “Official” War in California: The Battles of San Pedro, Natividad, San Pascual, San Gabriel and Mesa</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven. The “Trojan Horse,” and the “Fifth Columns”</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight. Conclusion</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
Introduction

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner, one of the most influential American historians of the early 20th Century, argued that the core of American history could be found at its edges and that the American people, proceeding towards the West in their struggle with the wild frontier, had conquered free land. As such, United States’ history was largely the study of Americans’ westward advance, and became the supposed critical factor in their political and social development. In reference to Turner’s argument regarding the Western frontier, Patricia Limerick, in her work from 1987 entitled, “The Legacy of Conquest,” proposed that, “… we give up a preoccupation with the frontier and look instead at the continuous sweep of Western American history....” Rather than the observer standing in the East, looking towards the West as a destination, now, the West becomes, instead, a place.1

In 1845, New York lawyer-editor, John Louis O’Sullivan described “Manifest Destiny” as the belief in, “…the inevitable fulfillment of the general

---

law which is rolling our [U.S.] population westward...."² This belief, held at a
time of national sentiment of territorial expansion, helped to push forward
the expansion towards the West, justifying the U.S. annexation of Texas first,
and later, based also on another of the "Manifest Destiny's" beliefs that of the
Anglo-Saxon superiority – perhaps by divine right – that California would
too, fall away from an "imbecilic and distracted Mexico."

The study of the region of California and the Californios, the Hispanic
inhabitants residing in the California territory – at the time of its annexation to
the American nation, is a crucial element to the overall understanding of
American history. Furthermore, the study of the California conquest reveals
a more significant and global issue, that of the ever-moving American
frontier, a frontier made up of people, their confrontations, and clashes.
Therefore, this study becomes the study of Western American history in
particular, and of American history, in general.

Contrary to the idea held by many historians and overlooked in school
textbooks, the conquest of California by the United States in 1847 was not
without resistance from the local population. In such a context, the study of
documents and memoirs of the Californios becomes relevant in order to

---
² John O'Sullivan. "Annexation," United States Magazine and Democratic
Review 17 (1845): 5-10.
analyze the cultural and political climate in California prior to and during the Mexican-American War. 3

It is the goal of this thesis to establish that in spite of the Californios’ military disadvantage, their long history of internal political rivalries, and their many rebellions against the Governors of Mexico City who were sent to this province, Californios were united in their determination to fight the United States’ invasion of the region. Further examination of the battles between the Californios and the U.S. forces at Olompali and Santa Clara in the North, at Natividad in the center, at San Pedro and San Gabriel near Los Angeles and, finally at San Pascual and La Mesa in the southern part of the territory, will demonstrate the Californios’ fierce resolve to defend and to resist annexation by the United States.

Studying the history of CALIFORNIO resistance to the United States invasion provides an important insight into understanding the Californio, who at the end of the war were abruptly absorbed into the fabric of United States society, their integration or the lack of, becomes an important part of U.S Western Frontier History, impossible to ignore in the overall study of 20th Century U.S History.

3 Also see Leonard Pitt, The Decline of the Californios, 1846-1890 (Berkeley: University Press, 1966).
In 20th Century historiography an important development was to refute the idea that history was not a strict science, as the German historian, Leopold von Ranke had asserted in the 19th Century. Rather, historians started to apply scientific method to reveal what was considered to be truth from falsehood. They collected the facts of past events, interpreted these events into generalizations, and finally, using a literary historical, narrative format, they presented this historical narrative to their fellow men.

As a result, historiography in the 20th Century moved away from the larger narrative to a more fragmented, historical approach of the past. One of these historians, Patricia Limerick, defined the history of the West as the intersection of Anglo-America, Afro-America, and Asia.

She also maintained that the Southwest, with its diversity of languages, religions, and cultures, continued to be a chapter in Western American history.

In this history of the West, the US conquest and its advance towards the Western frontier are a central part of American history. Adding to the study of the American West, the study of the present day states of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota and
South Dakota, becomes the study of conquest and its consequences. For Limerick, in order to understand American history, we must expand the concept of the frontier to include the study of the diverse groups of people inhabiting the Trans-Mississippi West. In so doing, we must include all of the diverse ethnicities whose voices were largely ignored by previous schools of American historiography.

When Anglo-Americans entered Texas and later, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and California, they had to live side-by-side with the Mexicans, but the age-old conflict between Catholics and Protestants, dormant since the time of the Reformation, sparked old rivalries and racial mistrust. Thus, the old stereotype of the Black Legend, which started in Europe during the Reformation, and in which the English people portrayed the Spanish people as predatory, cruel, and malevolent, now re-surfaced in the new world.  

Americans who journeyed into Mexico's northern frontier in the early 19th century transmitted their impressions of the region to easterners eager for information. These ideas only served to perpetuate Anglo-American's

---


preconceived ideas of Mexican inferiority. Francis Parkman, on his tour of
the Plains and Rockies in 1846, added to this misconception about the
Hispanics he observed in Missouri when he wrote, “Thirty or forty dark
slavish-looking Spaniards, gazing stupidly out from beneath their broad
hats.” Mexicans, in his opinion, were “squalid”, with “their vile faces
overgrown with hair”, and who were “mean and miserable.” Another
visitor, Richard Henry Dana, in his widely read, Two Years before the Mast,
described California as, “... a country embracing four or five hundred miles
of sea-coast, with several good harbors, ... the waters filled with fish, and the
plains covered with thousands of herds of cattle, blessed with a climate than
which there can be no better in the world; ...In the hands of an enterprising
people, what a country this might be.”

In the mid nineteenth-century the Americans viewed the Californio
ranchers as inferior and not worthy of their Anglo values because of their
religion and customs. To make matters worse, at the time of the Texas
declaration of independence in 1834, the Mexican government underwent a

---


7 Ibid., 240.

8 Also see Cecil Robinson, With the Ears of Strangers: The Mexican in American
radical change from a loose, federalist system to a central, Republic led by Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna as its President.9

At the same time, the United States’ desire for territorial expansion and the acquisition of a Pacific port, blinded the government of President Polk from seeing how the annexation of Texas had been a mortifying, international insult for Mexico, and how the proposal to purchase the California territory was unthinkable to a proud Mexico. For the aggressor and ultimate victor of the Mexican–American War, the war had been a righteous fulfillment of one more chapter in its Manifest Destiny. For the defeated Mexico, the war was just another aggressive land grab by the United States in addition to the indignity of losing Texas.10

The war resulted in Mexico losing fifty percent of its territory.11 It was thus, not surprising, to find among Mexicans that this loss served to create a negative view of the victorious Americans, a feeling that continues to linger even today, and, thereby, creating a cultural divide. Not all of the misunderstandings between the conqueror and the conquered, however, can be blamed on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Studying the deep-rooted


characteristics, inherited from Mexican ethnicity, would facilitate the correct interpretations of the Californios' actions, before, during, and after, the U.S. invasion.¹²

The question for the Californios and the Americans in 1846 was legitimacy. Who had the legitimate right to this fertile and abundant land: the Anglo-American, entitled to such as a result of their self-created Manifest Destiny or the Californios, a blend of the original, Indian people of Mexico who were also subjugated by an earlier European conqueror? It is a question that is still very resonant today, one in which the Mexican immigrant is consider an intruder in an area which was theirs two hundred and fifty years earlier.¹³

Limerick stated the issue clearly when she wrote that, "...beginning [with] the story of Occupied America in 1836, with the Texas Revolution, or in 1848, with the treaty, fudged a vital fact: the Hispanic presence in the Southwest was itself a product of conquest, just as much as the American presence was."¹⁴ In such a context, the study of the documents and memoirs

---


¹³ Also see Robert Glass Cleland, The Early Sentiment for the Annexation of California: An Account of the growth of American interest in California from 1835 to 1846. PhD Dissertation Princeton University.

¹⁴ Limerick, The Legacy, 255.
of the Californios becomes even more relevant. Understanding General Flores’, Commander Castro’s, and Governor Pico’s actions and motivations during the U.S. invasion of 1846 as well as their fierce, lonely resistance, provides a key to understanding the very core of the Californio mestizo. For what reasons were the Anglo-Americans land-grabbing California? What did the invasion mean to the Californios’ core beliefs those that catapulted them into risking their lives and fighting, these battles against all odds?

It may come as a surprise outside of the small circle of students of California history to know that from September of 1846 to January of 1847, California was the battleground of a war of resistance to the U.S. invasion of 1846 and that this war of resistance was a part of the Mexican-American War during the Presidency of James Polk. In this little known chapter of American history, the U.S. troops engaged in several battles with the local Californio leaders, who strongly resisted the American attempts to annex their territory. These fierce, local “caudillos” and their followers, for a short while, were able to win back all major southern California settlements, those, which had been occupied two months earlier by the Americans. Per the personal dispatch of October 25, 1846 from Captain William Mervin, commander of the war ship U.S.S. Savannah, “I found the whole country from Santa Barbara to San Diego in possession of the enemy with a well
mounted and equipped cavalry supposed to be at least eight hundred strong and daily being augmented from all parts of the Country.  

The military actions of 1846 exemplified the strong resolve Californios had to fight against the American invasion for their territory, even without material support and reinforcements. It is possible that history would have “understood,” if Pico and the other Council members, who, having realized Mexico City’s total abandonment of them and failure to support their cause in defense of California, would have preferred to capitulate to the enemy, giving up their homeland to the Americans. This thesis, however, will set forth numerous examples of the Californios’ creativity to surpass their lack of arms, ammunition, and troops.

Finally, it was not only military and political leaders with patriotic fervor who moved the province to repel the invasion, but also the regular Californio, who stood behind his leaders fighting and witnessing the unfair struggle. Conversely, the passionate declarations from General Flores, Commander Castro, Governor Pico, and prominent Californio, Osio, were interpreted by the American military men, and later perpetuated by

---

15 William Mervin to Robert Stockton, October 9, 1846, National Archives, San Bruno, California, R.45.
politicians and historians, as just empty theatrical speeches. Further analysis of the Californio's idiosyncrasies and origins, however, would prove to find error in dismissing these pronouncements. Such analysis would sadly prove the cultural differences that existed, and to some extent, still exist, between the Anglo-American and the Mexican societies.

In their society, the Spanish-Mexican-Californio emphasized individual worth, which was based on honor, respect, and machismo (virile manliness). Californios considered the worth of an individual to come from their being, rather than the individual's achievements, which are Anglo-American based values. As a consequence, Flores' and Castro's pronouncements, in the American society of 1846, were seen as mere, "bombastic 'pronouncements'," and not worthy of serious consideration.

---

16 For more on impressions of Mexican California by Americans, see William Heath Davis, *Sixty years in California* (San Francisco: University of New Mexico Press, 1889).

17 Also see Weber, *The Mexican*.

Unfortunately, lack of consideration to these and future crucial, cultural differences would continue into the twenty-century misunderstanding between the two groups.¹⁹

After signing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the Mexican-American War, the Californios, together with the Mexicans living at the time of the treaty in what is today the Southwest, (New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Utah, and part of Colorado), would become Mexican-Americans, the second largest minority in the United States and the largest in the Southwest. Therefore, understanding their legacy becomes a necessity in understanding the fabric of American society.

The study of Californios and their culture during the period of resistance to the U.S. conquest, takes on a larger meaning: allowing the society of today to correct past cultural misunderstandings. It is hoped that the study of the Californios, as they were and as they became the group now known as Mexican-Americans, will provide the multicultural language needed to avoid the repetition of past mistakes. To understand Californio society, it becomes necessary to recognize and to acknowledge all aspects of past historical events, including those that were obliterated from the common, national

legacy. Only when historical corrections are made, can we, as a multi-cultural nation, build upon this understanding of the past and then, move forward with our common, national interests and our strong multi-cultural richness.
Chapter 2

Californio Origins

Before analyzing the Californios' resistance to the U.S. invasion of 1846, we must examine the history behind the conquest and the settlement of the California Territory and as part of the colonization by Spain of what was New Spain (Mexico). This examination is intrinsic to understanding the way California's resistance to the American invaders was initiated, sustained, and, ultimately, how it failed.

In the 1700's, Juan Cabrillo, a Portuguese conquistador, claimed the land for Spain, but the region remained nearly forgotten until 1769.20

Unlike the colonization of the United States by the Puritans, who brought their entire families to settle the new country, the Spanish conquistadores did not bring any women with them. The consequences of this action resulted in an immediate fusion of the two races. The two races contained strong characteristics for the formation of a new race: the "mestizo."

Mexico was a region dominated by great indigenous civilizations. Long before the advent of Christianity, in the area of the Mexican plateau, many

---

different and advanced Indian cultures existed. Some of these groups were: the Olmec, the Mayan, the Zapotecs, the Teotihuacanos, the Toltecs and the Aztecs. The latter group, the Aztecs or Mexicas, would later provide the name to the region known as Mexico. 21

Added to these complex Indian cultures living in the central American area and, what is now, the Southwest of United States, the Spaniards imposed their Catholic religion and a “veneer of European culture” 22 This superficial European contact, however, did not erase thousands of years of Indian cultural identity. 23 The conquering Spaniards tolerated and often adopted part of the Indian cultures’ elements, especially in the arts and crafts that the Indians, under the supervision of the Spaniards, used on the construction of their towns and cities, including the sacred art of the Spanish, Catholic churches.

The Spaniards often followed the indigenous people’s social structures and customs found in these advanced Mexican societies. During the sixteenth century, when the Spaniards expanded their conquest northward to what is now the western portion of the United States, they took this new, blended race or mestizo with them as their soldiers, farmers, miners, herdsmen,

---

22 Meier and Rivera, *The Chicanos*, 4-5.

23 Ibid., 11.

craftsmen and servants. In the larger region of the Southwest two settlement types developed, one in Arizona and New Mexico and the other in Texas and California. In New Mexico the Spanish colonization was based on mining with the support of the Nahua Indians and in Arizona was mainly based on the first efforts of the Spanish Father Eusebio Kino and his mission work among the Pima Indians. On the other hand the Spanish colonization of Texas and California was the direct result of deterring foreign powers to settle in these two regions. In Texas the French wanted to establish a colony down the Mississippi River and in California the English and the Russians wanted to establish commercial outposts. 24

In the California territory the Franciscan friar, Junipero Serra a brilliant

theologian and an accomplished administrator, settled in 1765 the first
mission at San Diego. For the next fifty-four years, the Franciscans settled
and maintained twenty more missions along the California coast.

The Spanish government sent military forces to accompany the
Franciscans. Three important presidios, namely San Diego, Monterrey and
San Francisco, were also established. And small, civilian townships or
pueblos developed around these presidios, this was the Spanish settlement of
California until the year of 1810.

At that time in the city of Mexico, the creoles initiated the movement for
independence which twelve years later resulted in the successfully break
away from Spain.\(^{25}\) This movement started in the early 1800's, when the
Creole population formed secret societies to combat the Spaniards for
political and economical freedoms and not necessarily for social or racial
liberties. One of these men, Father Miguel Hidalgo, the pastor of the little
village of Dolores, essentially started the Mexican uprising against the
Spaniards on September 16, 1810 with his famous “Grito de Dolores.” At that
time, Father Hidalgo, a Creole, had invoked the nationally revered image of
the Virgin of Guadalupe and started a call to arms against the Spanish
authorities. What followed was the beginning of a countrywide uprising led

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 225-26.
by the mestizos, who were Indians and creoles of Spanish descent. The mestizos, beginning with this early revolution, became the real force behind the movement for independence. 26

Father Hidalgo was able to recruit a force of 50,000, made up of irregulars, Indians and mestizos. Unfortunately, Father Hidalgo was captured and executed soon after the independence movement began. This act caused the movement to lay dormant until another clergyman, Father José María Morelos, a mestizo from Morelia, organized the mestizos and Indians who declared Mexican Independence in November of 1813. However, Morelos did not have enough support from the majority of the Creole population for his ideas on promoting social and political equality in Mexican society. In 1815, he was also captured and executed by the Spanish authorities.

In Spain, in the year 1812, the Parliament drafted a liberal constitution, which limited the absolute powers of the Spanish Kings. In 1820, King Fernando VII was forced to accept the liberal constitution, an act that, understandably, drew much opposition in the Peninsula as well as in the Spanish colonies. Meanwhile, in Mexico, another Creole, Agustín de Iturbide, a Royalist, who utilized the remnants of the independence movement of

Morelos and Hidalgo to successfully declare independence in 1821, channeled the Spaniards’ discontent into the movement for independence. One year later, Iturbide named himself, Agustin I, Emperor of Mexico, causing the liberal factions of the first two revolutionary movements of Fathers’ Hidalgo and Morelos, guided by a young officer and a very important figure in the future of Mexico’s country history Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, to rebel against Iturbide and depose him from power in March of 1823. 27

These series of liberal and conservative movements that finally resulted in the independence of the country would became the root cause of the constant unrest in the political map of Mexico as well as the way the Governors were appointed to the California territory.

When Mexico finally gained its independence in 1821, it adopted a federalist constitution in which all the territories comprising the Republic were given a significant level of autonomy. Twelve years later, Mexico became a Republic. New Spain's territories of Alta California and Baja California, however, did not participate in the war of independence, and only twelve years later, in 1822, did the Californians discover that they had become citizens of the newly independent Republic of Mexico, and were no

27 Also see George Tays, Revolutionary California: The Political History of California from 1820 to 1848. Mf (photocopy) Special Collections, Bancroft Library, Berkeley: University of California, 1934).
The Californios of 1822 were who had to live under a political system imposed by a distant and mostly indifferent Mexican Government. They also were required to obey a constantly changing stream of Mexican governors sent by Mexico City, who reflected the antagonistic turmoil of political ideologies in the Capital. This dichotomy of opposite beliefs, between liberal and conservative, began in Mexico City and then trickled down into California politics.

In addition when Mexico gained its independence, the central government wanted to dismantle all traditional Spanish institutions. The missions were establishments administered by a very Spanish institution, the Franciscan Order of Padres. And most of the Californios also thought that the mission system had outlived its purpose of colonizing the territory and viewed them as just economic obstacles to the development of the territory. Added to this Californios' view between 1822 and 1846, the new Republic of Mexico, mired in poverty, political instability, and distracted by threats from


30 Also see Weber, *The Mexican.*

30 Also see Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535-1846* (Santa Clara: Santa Clara University, 2001).
other directions, essentially ignored the California territory. The soldiers who came from Mexico to garrison the three forts of San Diego, Monterrey and Yerba Buena, were unqualified for the job and showed no interest in serving so far from the capital.

By 1846, California’s Mexican inhabitants had developed their own subculture. California's geographical isolation from the capital of Mexico City, some 2000 miles away, its politics and government was in part responsible for the making of a different type of Mexican, the Californio, a friendly and gregarious rancher who almost never saw or lived in Mexico City. As a result of their isolation, the Californios were more eager to open their homes to outsiders and to share their table as well as their home life with the rare Mexican or foreign visitors to the territory. Californios occupied vast expanses of land and raised cattle to produce hides and tallow. Their goods filled the holds of English, French, Russian, and especially of North Americans’ vessels. The North Americans required great quantities of hides in order to supply its manufacturers of shoes and ladies’ bags in the city of

---

31 For more on California during the Mexican period, see Mexican California, ed. by Carlos E. Cortes (New York: Arno Press, 1976).


Boston. In turn, these ships also arrived laden with cargo to sell to the
Californians, who did not have any industries and, who bought everything
from these foreign vessels, even the candles, which were made with the same
tallow that the Californios themselves had produced on their own ranches.34

In December of 1831, the Franciscans departed the California territory
because the Mexican Congress approved the Secularization Proclamation.
The Missions were to be administered by the local government and their
lands were to be divided, and then sold to locals. The Indians, who were
living and working in the missions, left and went to live in the pueblos. As
such, the era of the missions ended, and the era of the Californio Ranchers
began.35

During the transition from the mission system to the large ranches, a
power vacuum was created. The government in Mexico City was itself
embroiled in internal, political squabbles and as a result, it did not maintain
its influential presence in this distant territory. Moreover, the Central
Government sent a number of failed administrators to these territories, but
they proved to be unable to relate to the locals and their needs. These career
bureaucrats were actually ill suited to deal with the independent and

34 For more on trade and commerce in Mexican California, see Duncan and
Dorothy Gleason, eds., Beloved Sister: The Letters of James Henry Gleason, 1841-1859

35 Also see Priestly, The Mexican.
somewhat isolated California society. They were politicians who were unaccustomed to being so far away from Mexico City. They tended to deal despotically with the local population and the California leaders.  

As a result, from 1830 to 1845, California was politically subjected to a series of failed revolutions and counter-revolutions between the Mexican-appointed governors and their local assemblymen. The Assembly only met when the Mexican-appointed governors ordered them to do so. As a result, the relationship between the governors and assemblymen was generally confrontational and antagonistic.

Probably, the fact that the territory was so distant from the Mexican capital had made the Californios fiercely independent in their politics and economy. California relied on its trade with foreign vessels, and especially with ships coming from Boston on the East Coast of the United States for all of its manufactured goods. It is, therefore, sadly ironic that the reasons for the Californios to welcome foreign ships and traders would also be the cause of their own annihilation.

The Californios had to trade, but with trade also came the exposure to

---

36 Also see Tays, Revolutionary California.

37 Also see Weber, The Mexican.

38 For more on trade and commerce in Mexican California, see Gleason, Beloved.
foreigners and to immigration. In 1826, a beaver trapper named Jedediah Smith was able to cross the Mojave Desert, arriving by land to California’s Central Valley of San Bernardino. His land crossing, thus, opened the gates even wider to a variety of new settlers who journeyed by land to California. The "Anglo-Saxon" immigration Westward, thus, became unstoppable.

The historian Doyce B. Nunis, Jr. called the phenomenon of slow, foreign infiltration into Alta California, “The Trojan Horse.” If we closely study the way that these immigrants came to California, we can see that they came looking for adventure and for riches as a result of the many rumors and stories the sailors told, stories about a huge, open and sparsely populated territory. The population of California in 1846 was comprised of 7,000 Spanish-Mexicans and of 800 foreigners, the majority of whom were Americans. Once these foreigners arrived, the local Mexican authorities left them alone to work, and in many cases, they amassed great fortunes. Some of these hard-working foreigners married the daughters of the Californio ranchers. One of these prominent immigrants was Abel Sterns who settled in Los Angeles and who traded in wines and hides. He married one of the daughters of the famous San Diego caudillo, Juan Bandini. Another

---

39 Gutiérrez and Orsi, Contested Eden, 299.

40 Ibid., 307.
prominent foreign settler was the Swiss immigrant, John Augustus Sutter, who established New Helvetia, which was a territory of eleven square leagues in the Sacramento Valley. Sutter built a fort on his immense property after the then Governor Alvarado granted him permission.41

Since the founding of the Republic of Mexico in 1822, the Mexican government attempted to create a policy to regulate foreign immigration into California, one which required all foreigners to obtain legal passports in order to remain in the territory. However, without financial support to this northern territory, Californio leaders could not enforce these laws.42

Prominent Californios, such as Guadalupe Vallejo, the military commander in the Northern area of California wrote to the central Government to explain the tenuous situation of the territory with the influx of so many American settlers, Russian trappers, and Indians, threatening the province. Vallejo needed financial support, arms, ammunition and men to be able to administer and to guard such wealthy territory from foreign powers.43

Mexico, however, which was always embroiled in internal political rivalries, could not offer the support the Californios so desperately needed.

41 Also see General John Augustus Sutter, Personal Reminiscences. 1936, Special Collections Bancroft Library, (Berkeley: University of California, 1936).

42 Also see Beebe and Senkewicz, Lands of Promise, 425.

43 Ibid., 423-427.
Incidentally, this lack of support was not something new in Mexico’s handling of its California territory. In Antonio María Osio’s memoirs, the Californio referred to the neglect from the central authorities in Mexico dating back to the Spanish Monarchy. The Royals sent the necessary financial resources to explore and to develop Baja California, but Mexico denied these funds to the province and its inhabitants: “…but since that time [during the Spanish Monarchy] the Mexico Government had declared itself the stepfather of California, denying its protection, like to a bastard child…”

Juan Bandini, a successful businessman from San Diego, who was originally from Chile, but then became a naturalized Mexican, wrote a report in 1830 which explained some of the reasons for the transformation of the missions into viable commercial trade centers. This act, thus, led to the opening of alternative ports for the trade in hides and tallow. The commerce of hides and tallow was the mainstay of the economy of the territory. It was such a large part of the economy that the currency of California in the 1820’s was not paper money, but rather, it was hides. Dale’s book on the “Conquest of California” describes this phenomenon: “…the mainstay trade in early

---


45 For more on trade and commerce in Mexican California, see Gleason, Beloved Sister.
California lay in cattle hides and tallow ... Cowhides were called “California banknotes” by the Americans\textsuperscript{46}.

In addition to the outdated and commercially crippling mission system that strangled Californios’ commercial opportunities, Creoles also had to cope with the constant threat of foreign encroachment into their territory. They had to utilize their own meager military resources to maintain adequate supplies and soldiers in the territory’s presidios, but they were in dire need of materials for the troops. Pico’s memoirs described the soldiers as lacking in basic necessities: “I personally saw, at the presidio of San Diego in the Rancho Nacional, four soldiers going to bed in a big tub made of skins, covering themselves with dry hay because they had absolutely nothing else with which to protect themselves from the cold.”\textsuperscript{47} The Mexican authorities knew of the presence of foreign powers on their borders, which were willing to encroach upon Mexican territory, but they neglected the soldiers and the military installations.

Since 1806, the Russians maintained a presence in California, which they had gained from the Spanish government as a temporary trade concession to supply their Alaskan colony. They built a wooden trading post called

\textsuperscript{46} Walker, \textit{Bear Flag}, 33.
“Rossiya”, or Fort Ross, only fifty miles north of San Francisco Bay. In addition to the Russians, the first American settler arriving in California in 1816 was a merchant seaman from Boston named Thomas W. Doak. Other Americans came to the territory during the Spanish period, but most of them arrived during the Mexican period.

Equally important to the Russian and American encroachments into their territory early in the nineteenth century, the government of the United States began to believe in the right of their country’s destiny “by divine providence to control and settle the area from the eastern seaboard to the Pacific Ocean,” or what was known as the Manifest Destiny Theory. Many American settlers shared this belief when they began arriving by land to California in the 1830’s. Unlike in the 1820’s, few of these newcomers had the intention of becoming Mexican citizens and of embracing Mexican culture. On the contrary, they settled around Sutter Fort in the upper Sacramento River area, distrustful of the Mexican authorities.

---

49 For more on Fort Ross, see E. O. Essig, “The Russian Settlement at Ross,” CHSQ. 12 (1933): 191-209.

50 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, 56.
The Californios learned to live with these foreigners despite the lack of support from their own Mexican Government. They were maverick politicians with a strong sense of self-determination and self-reliance, qualities acquired through life in the farthest, northern province of the Mexican Republic where they were accustomed to living without the financial assistance from Mexico City.

---

Chapter 3

Californio’s Politics

The Californio belonged to a tight network of Creole families interrelated by blood and marriage. As such, they occasionally fought amongst themselves for political supremacy. However, when a common enemy confronted them, they quickly dropped their differences and formed strong alliances in order to fight together.\textsuperscript{52}

One of these confrontations became the Rebellion of 1831 when several prominent Californios, among them Pío Pico, María Osio, and Guadalupe Vallejo, organized against the newly appointed Governor, Manuel Victoria. The newly installed conservative Mexican President Bustamante, a pro-church sympathizer who had deposed, by force, the liberal Government of President Guerrero, had nominated Victoria California military and political Governor. Victoria had come to Alta California resolved to stop and reverse his predecessor, Governor Echeania’s act of secularization of the Missions. In December of 1830, the central government in Mexico City enacted the promulgation of the secularization of all missions’ holdings, part as economical necessity to retrieve from the Franciscans their vast land holdings

\textsuperscript{52} Also see Osio, \textit{The History}. 
for redistribution among the strong local men, and part as a reaffirmation of dismantling an Old Spanish conservative institution. When Victoria arrived in the territory he signed a decree reversing the secularization, however, Victoria’s decree of January 6th of 1831 needed the approval of the California Deputation to be legal. Now, the Assembly could only be convened by the governor, who in the case of Victoria was not interested to have his reversed decree challenged by the same Californios who were in favor of the secularization of the missions and members of the Assembly. Vallejo, Pico and Castro were among the assemblymen who urged Victoria to convene the legislative body; at the same time they were also the same men who would have directly benefited from the lands made available by the secularization act. In a manifesto Victoria describes the locals as, “... snakes, which he [Victoria] will smash, because of their [Vallejo, Ortega, and other Californios] secret intentions to overthrow his government and his plan to stop secularization.”

The situation between the councilmen of Los Angeles, headed by the first assemblyman, Pio Pico, and the Governor Victoria came to breaking point when Pico found out that Victoria wanted to arrest him for insurrection. Pico an extremely popular Southern politician got the support from the locals for an uprising against Victoria. Some of these important political leaders of

---

53 Pico, Don Pio, 40.
Los Angeles area were Jose Antonio Carrillo, Captain Don Pablo de la Portilla and the Los Angeles Mayor, Vicente Sanchez. And in San Diego, the powerful businessmen and councilmen, Juan Bandini also joined the rebellion. Commander-General Echeandia was elected to be at the head of the forces that confronted Victoria. Near Los Angeles in a place called Cahuenga, Victoria with Captain Romualdo Pacheco and a force of around 30 soldiers confronted the Californios. Pacheco was shot dead by one of the Californios and Victoria was wounded on his face by a blow from the saber of Tomas Talamantes a rancher from Los Angeles area. Next day, Victoria surrenders to the Californias forces and was sent to San Diego and from there back to Mexico City. Pio Pico then took the post of political leader.

Unfortunately as soon as the common threat of Manuel Victoria, or any other despotic Governor sent by Mexico City disappeared, Californios went back to their rivalries.54

Californios’ divisions were partly rooted in California being “de facto” two regions: one, located to the south of San Luis Obispo and ending at the Baja California border, was called “abajenos (those below)”, and the other, to the north of San Luis Obispo up to Bodega Bay, was called “arribeños (those

---

54 For more on Mexican California, see Cortes, *Mexican California*. 
above). Historically, Monterey had been the capital, but with time, the pueblo of Los Angeles became the largest pueblo in the territory and it claimed its right to be the political seat of the territory. In 1830, Bandini described it as the, "... pueblo of Los Angeles, which is worthy of consideration because it has the wealthiest population in California and a number of different foreigners also reside there..." Not only did the prominent businessman, Juan Bandini, want the capital to be moved to Los Angeles, but the political leader Pío Pico also wanted to see the hide and tallow commerce developed in his pueblo.

Other prominent Northern Californio leaders wanted to maintain Monterey as the capital and major harbor for California. Among them were Juan Alvarado and José Castro. Disagreements were common among the prominent Creole Californio families. At times, mere family feuds would sometimes turn into serious disagreements with serious consequences for the future of an independent California. One case in point was the ongoing Vallejo-Alvarado feud.

Juan Alvarado, for example, was a cousin of the powerful Guadalupe Vallejo and a close relative by marriage to the military man, José Castro who

---

55 Pico, Don Pío, 43.

56 Also see Beebe and Senkewicz, Lands of Promise.
epitomizes how typical the inter-related Californio family was. These families belonged to the generation of the post-California mission period.\textsuperscript{57} Sons of Spanish military soldiers, they came of age during the influential period of the last California Spanish Governor, Pablo Vicente Sola. Sola, an unusually liberal politician, acquired all of the essential works and authors of the Enlightenment Era for his personal library. Sola took these young Californios under his wing, especially Alvarado, who had lost his father at a young age. Sola exposed the young Californios to his well-stocked, secular library. Through Sola’s library, Alvarado and Vallejo were introduced to the liberal philosophy of the late eighteenth century Europe. They also experienced the Mexican political turmoil created by the constant fighting between conservatives and liberals since the start of the independence movement in 1812. As a result, these Californios were torn between the liberal, secular European ideas of the eighteenth century and the conservative, Catholic values of their families and of Mexican society.\textsuperscript{58}

From 1829 to 1845, California was in constant, internal turmoil provoked by the eagerness of these Californios to experiment with the newly acquired ideas of self-determination, ideas that usually clashed with the interests of the

\textsuperscript{57} For more on Mexican California, see Cortes, \textit{Mexican California}.

\textsuperscript{58} Also see Juan B. Alvarado, \textit{Vignettes of Early California: Childhood Reminiscences of Juan Bautista Alvarado} (Book Club of California, 1982).
mainly indifferent Mexican-appointed Governors. It was in 1824, during Juan Alvarado's interim governorship, when he made a decision which, at the time, was likely rooted in a family rivalry, but which twenty years later, would have an unforeseen, negative outcome for the Californios' ability to defend their territory against the Americans.

In 1814, Governor Alvarado had issued a land grant of 40,000 leagues to the infamous John Sutter, to whom he also gave political and judicial powers. In his memoirs, Sutter wrote that, "... Gov. Alvarado gave me a grant of eleven leagues, and I became a citizen with a commission as representative of the government — Representante del Gobierno y encargado de la justicia — with judicial powers, he [Alvarado] was afraid to give me a military title for fear of Vallejo ..." 59 John Sutter, as we will see in Chapter III, would prove to be a real Trojan Horse for the Californio cause. First, in 1830, when he aided the Mexican Governor, Micheltorena, against José Castro and Pío Pico in the Cahuenga Battle and later, when Sutter provided the base of operations for the Bear Flag rebels as well as the place of imprisonment for the Vallejo brothers. 60

---

59 Sutter, Personal, 2.

60 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
Sutter also played an important roll during the rebellion against Governor Micheltorena in 1842. Micheltorena, the would be last Mexican Governor, arrived in the province bringing a band of ex-convicts, or “cholos,” who terrorized the local population with petty crimes, such as robbery and actions of disrespect against the Indian population. Although several complaints had been filed against these soldiers, and there were repeated requests from the local Californios to send these unruly men back, Micheltorena refused to grant the request. Finally, the Californios with José Castro as a commander of the forces, confronted Micheltorena, who first promised to send back his offending soldiers, but later, rescinded his order. Instead, Micheltorena allied himself with some of the foreigners living in the territory, among them, the powerful landowner, John Sutter. In January of 1845, the ambitious Sutter joined forces with Micheltorena. In his memoirs, Sutter described these events in detail.

Soon after I reached home I received orders from the Governor [Micheltorena] to march. On the first of January 1845 I set out with music and flying colors for Dr. Marsh’s farm near Monte Diablo. My force consisted of four hundred men, 100 riflemen under Captain Gantt, 40 soldiers’ cavalry who had deserted General Vallejo and

---


62 Alvarado, *Vignettes*, xi.
joined me. Native Californians and the balance were artillery and infantry ... next day we all set out towards San Jose.\(^{63}\)

While Micheltorena was recruiting foreigners to support his cause, José Castro requested Pío Pico, as the senior Assemblyman of Los Angeles, to convene all members and to vote on the resolution to confront the Mexican Governor. The Assembly agreed that Micheltorena’s behavior of rescinding his first order to send back “his cholos” was, “destructive to the country and that the senior voting member should take charge of the reins of government.”\(^{64}\)

The battle took place near the Cahuenga Pass close to Los Angeles. Castro, Alvarado, and Andrés Pico were commanding the Californio forces. After a skirmish without casualties, Micheltorena retreated to Los Angeles, surrendering to Pío Pico. Sutter was detained by the Californios, and after swearing his allegiance to the local Californio government of Pío Pico; he was set free to return to his Fort. This was a mistake because, shortly afterwards, in 1846, Sutter again plotted against the Californios, this time, aiding the Bear Flag rebels by allowing them to keep prisoners in his Fort, such as the Vallejo

---

\(^{63}\) Sutter, *Personal Reminiscences*, 89.

\(^{64}\) Pico, *Don Pío*, 105.
brothers, Guadalupe and Andrés, for the entire duration of the war of resistance against the U.S. invasion.  

Alvarado’s decision to give Sutter, a settler who did not have to first become a Mexican citizen, such an extraordinary land grant and such unprecedented political powers, would prove to have grave consequences for the outcome of the U.S. invasion of 1846. As a result, Alvarado’s intention to curb his cousin Vallejo’s power in the regions would backfire against the entire Californios’ cause.  

For his part, Alvarado feared Vallejo’s powerful, political influence in the Northern area of the territory, which came from his cousin, who years’ earlier, had been granted vast tracts of land from the Mexican Governor Figueroa. Figueroa’s intention of granting this land to Vallejo, a private rancher, was to maintain a strong California presence in the North of the territory, thus deterring foreign advances. Unfortunately, Figueroa’s fear would become a reality when Sutter’s strategic Fort aided the American cause against the Californios who had not considered the military expertise of

65 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.

66 For more on John Sutter, see Albert L. Hurtado, John Sutter, A Life on the North American Frontier (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).
General Andrés Vallejo and the well-supplied Guadalupe Vallejo's Sonoma Garrison.\textsuperscript{67}

Another decision made by Alvarado with long lasting repercussions was his selection of the Englishman, William Hartnell, for the important post of Mission Lands Administrator. Alvarado could have nominated Vallejo instead, but he attempted to curtail his already powerful cousin and he nominated Hartnell. Hartnell was a naturalized Mexican, but was more inclined to grant land to foreigners, resulting in another factor, which eroded the Mexican Creole population's influence in the territory. On the other hand, as in any dysfunctional family, as soon as a common threat jeopardized the common interest of the territory, the Californios set aside their differences and came to each other's aid, only to return to their rivalries as soon as the danger disappeared.\textsuperscript{68}

There are countless examples of this rivalry turned into unity and vice-versa during the period from 1831 to 1846. One such example occurred after Governor Manuel Victoria's defeat in the first Cahuenga Battle by the combined forces of Pío Pico, an "abajeños" and of José Castro, an "arribeño."

\textsuperscript{67} For more on Guadalupe Vallejo, see Alan Rosenus, \textit{General M.G. Vallejo: And the Advent of the Americans} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

\textsuperscript{68} Also see Pico, \textit{Don Pío}. 
Soon after the wounded Victoria left the territory, Pío Pico, the first Assemblyman, became the interim Governor. However, as soon as Victoria ceased being a threat to the Californios' way of life, the common rivalries resurfaced. Although the rebel participants had been the ones who later appointed Pico to a position of leadership, as soon as Pico took command, tensions began to surface among the Californios. One of those Californios opposing Pico was his childhood friend and the Mayor of Los Angeles, Manuel Dominguez, who started to plot against Pico with the intent of deposing him.

In his memoirs Pico recounted that fact,

> Various persons tried to persuade Alcalde Manuel Dominguez to recognize me as Jefe político but he refused, alleging as the sole reason that we had been reared together as boys, Perhaps Señor Dominguez favored what Echeandia had said in an official letter to the deputation about my lack of ability to discharge such a thorny task.\(^{69}\)

It is possible that the familiarity of growing up together stopped these men from peacefully coexisting in a state of political equality, but at the same time, this same familiarity provided the natural fluidity to quickly became allies in case of need.\(^{70}\) This same phenomenon occurred following the rebellion against the Governor Mariano Chico, who arrived in April of 1836

---

\(^{69}\) Pico, Don Pío, 55.

\(^{70}\) For more on Mexican California, see Cortes, Mexican California.
and scandalized the Californios by persistently introducing his mistress into California society, who was also on the roll as his niece. To a very moral and pious closely interrelated society, such as it was in 1830’s California, this type of behavior was scandalous, and more than unacceptable. Chico was then ousted in July of 1836 only three months after his arrival. However, as soon as the Mexican governor was sent back to Mexico City, another crisis arose in the territory. This time, two powerful “arribeños” from the northern area of the territory, Castro and Alvarado, wanted to declare California independent from the Mexican Republic. With this intention they descended upon Los Angeles with a military force. Pío Pico, however, was able to convince his brother in law, Alvarado, to retreat with his forces back to the North, thereby, avoiding a more serious confrontation.71

The last important case of Californios’ uniting to confront a common external cause was after the rebellion with the last Mexican appointed Governor, Manuel Micheltorena. After losing the Cahuenga Battle to the Californios, Micheltorena returned to Mexico City, and Pío Pico, the senior member of the Los Angeles Assembly, was sworn as the new political “Jefe” (Boss) of the territory. However, Pico’s leadership did not last long when

71 Pico, Pío. “Narracion Historica”, 1877 MS 31, Special Collections, Bancroft Library (Berkeley: University of California), 59-60.
Castro, allied with Alvarado, decided to confront Pico. Starting towards Los Angeles from San Jose, Castro received news of Commodore Sloat’s arrival in Monterey which prompted Castro and Pio Pico to quickly set aside their long time differences and rivalry to meet in San Luis Obispo in order to prepare their united resistance against the common enemy.  

A quote directly from Pico’s manuscript creates a better understanding of this Californio society phenomenon of on the one hand, battling between themselves for power and authority, to then, on the other hand, almost instantly turn around, literally embrace one another, and join forces in order to confront the common enemy threatening their independence:

Things had come to such a point that I was convinced that Castro and I could not exist at the same time in the department and that one or the other had to go. I gathered a force of one hundred fifty men and started towards the north. A short distance from San Luis Obispo I received an official note from the commandant-general advising me of the capture of the country by the North Americans—that is, the taking of Monterey by Commodore Sloat...Shortly thereafter Castro arrived with his troops. Being all united, we embraced in token of reconciliation and all manifested great enthusiasm for the cause of our country, vowing to defend its independence and to die for it.  

These powerful family ties worked in two ways for the Californios. One way was that jealousy and family feuds often interfered with sound political

---


alliances among Californio strongmen based upon a unique asset: relation by blood and marriage. This latter way allowed them to fight on common fronts and it was an asset in negotiating agreements. An example of this occurred on January 13, 1847, after the Battle of San Gabriel in La Mesa. José de Jesús Pico, cousin of Andrés Pico, was able to negotiate the honorable armistice between Colonel John Fremont and the Californio Pico.74

As we will see in detail in Chapter V, the Californio forces confronted the U.S. forces at the San Gabriel River and at La Mesa plateau, retreating to higher ground above the riverbank.75 At that time, Andrés Pico was the officer in command of the powerful Californios’ “lancers,” the deadly cavalry who defeated Kearny’s Dragoons in the Battle of San Pasqual. Fremont, who arrived from the Sacramento area and who had not seen any serious war combat, learned that Andrés Pico was resolved to continue the fight and that he was entrenched with his forces ready to again confront Stockton’s forces. In a cunning move, Fremont halted his march towards Stockton’s camp and called upon Andrés Pico’s cousin, José de Jesús Pico, who decided to convince Andrés of the futility of continuing to fight without

74 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
75 For more on family ties and loyalties, see Tutorow, The Mexican-American.
the support from the Mexican government as well as to consider an honorable surrender.\textsuperscript{76}

A Californio would choose to intercede within his own family, on behalf of an outsider, foreigner and enemy for an important reason. The circumstances that brought about Jesús Pico’s interceding with his cousin Andrés at Fremont’s request are important in understanding this reason.

In late 1846, in the town of San Luis Obispo, Fremont’s forces arrested José de Jesús Pico who had violated his early parole by not participating in any further resistance activities against the U.S. Fremont then decided to hold a court martial to judge Pico. Finding him guilty, the military court sentenced Pico to die by firing squad on December 17, 1846. However, Fremont commuted Pico’s sentence after Pico’s wife pleaded Fremont for mercy. Pico was so thankful to the American explorer for sparing his life at the request of Doña de Jesús Pico, that he pledged his allegiance to Fremont for life.\textsuperscript{77} When Fremont asked José de Jesús to intercede with his cousin Andrés to surrender, José de Jesús not only accepted the request from his past savior, but also his leverage as a Pico family member to negotiate Andrés’ lanceros’ surrender.

In a community where family ties were considered to be an important and respected asset, alliances and pacts were facilitated by the fact that most of

\textsuperscript{76} Also see Osio, \textit{La Historia}.

\textsuperscript{77} Walker, \textit{Bear Flag}, 234.
Californio society was made up of members related by blood or marriage. The Mexican society valued kinship ties and loyalty to family much more than individual achievements. Californios were no exception to that rule.78

Looking back at the tumultuous Californio history comprised of internal tension as well as alliances formed against a common, outside enemy threatening their way of life, some of the tensions at the time do not appear to actually be a threat to the Californios' cause. Unfortunately, in retrospect, that would make a significant difference in the outcome of the Californios' defeat at the hands of U.S. Naval Squadron of the Pacific in 1847. It is also true that the Californios allied themselves in spite of their own differences, putting aside their rivalries, in order to confront their common enemy, fighting the many Mexican appointed governors to the province as well as at the same time, fighting against the U.S. invasion.79 The interconnectedness of the Californios by marriage and blood facilitated the ability to make fluid agreements and bridged old, ongoing family feuds by uniting to confront a common enemy.

78 Also see Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos.

79 Also see Tutorow, The Mexican-American War.
Chapter 4
The Consequences of the U.S.-Mexican War on California

In 1821, the new Republic of Mexico had welcomed the American settlers. Several hundred of these settlers arrived in the provinces of Texas and Coahuila. In 1830, alarmed by the large numbers of settlers, the government of Mexico tried to control some of this flow of Americans to its territory on the Rio Grande. The newly elected president, James Polk, was a major proponent of "Manifest Destiny," which held that the United States was a country destined, "...by divine providence to control and settle the area from the eastern seaboard to the Pacific Ocean." President Polk, and many others influential politicians, among them, Senator Thomas Benton, the father-in-law of Captain John C. Fremont and a key figure in the later U.S. invasion of California, believed in the right of the United States to "annex" Texas and to expand the U.S. territory towards the Southwest.

In 1827 the Mexican Congress passed several laws with the purpose to curtail the aggressive Anglo-American immigration into Texas, among them was the one establishing customhouses and presidios along the Texas-Unites

---

80 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, 56.

81 Also see Eugene C. Barker, Mexico and Texas, 1821-1835 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965).
States border. The collections of the custom's fees became a great point of confrontation between the Mexican authorities and the Anglo-Americans of Texas. In 1832 the Anglo-Americans settlers elected Stephen Austin, a land grant impresario who had being responsible to bring many of these settlers to the region, to go to Mexico City to petition from the Mexican government some concessions on the issue of customs collection. 82

The Mexican government denied the Americans' request and jailed Austin. However, Austin was able to send a letter back to the American settlers encouraging them to revolt and declaring independence from Mexico. On November 7, 1835, Texas declared independence. In response, Mexican President Santa Ana sent 4,000 federal troops under the direction of General Martin Cos to control the rebellious foreigners. A group of Texas rebels was able to defeat General Cos at his headquarters in San Antonio, the Alamo. After that shameful defeat, Santa Anna decided to lead a force into Texas in order to subjugate the rebellious province. After two victories, at the Alamo and Goliad, in which Santa Anna whipped the rebels, on April 21, 1834, at the Battle of San Jacinto, Santa Anna was taken prisoner. In the treaty that followed the Mexican defeat, the Treaty of Velasco, Santa Anna agreed to Texas independence in exchange for his freedom. 83 As expected, the Mexican

82 Also see Priestly, The Mexican Nation.
government did not accept the Velasco treaty, but by then, the Texans refused to be part of Mexico. In 1840, the United States, France, and Great Britain recognized Texas as an independent country.\textsuperscript{84}

In March of 1845, the United States annexed Texas, an action that Mexico had warned, would be seen as a declaration of war. President Polk sent John Slidell to negotiate with Mexico about the Texas-Mexico boundary and the possible purchase of California. However, Mexico, harbored intensely negative feelings towards the United States for their annexation of Texas and as a result, it did not even receive Slidell to discuss these issues.\textsuperscript{85}

Having failed to acquire California and to negotiate the boundaries of Texas, President Polk sent General Zachary Taylor to Texas to position his army there in case of a war with Mexico, a move, which could possibly result in the acquisition of the entire Southwest. In May of 1846, as a result of a clash between Mexican and American troops at the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers, the United States declared war on Mexico. General Taylor crossed the Rio Grande, and by September, he had captured Matamoros and Monterrey.

\textsuperscript{83} Also see Barker, \textit{Mexico and Texas}.

\textsuperscript{84} Also see Robert Glass Cleland, \textit{From Wilderness to Empire, a History of California, 1542-1900} (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1944).

\textsuperscript{85} Also see Hodding Carter, \textit{Doomed Road of Empire} (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971).
While Taylor was in Monterrey, Mexico, Colonel Stephen Kearny was sent to the territory of New Mexico. The Governor of New Mexico, Armijo, disbanded his troops and abandoned the territory instead of defending his territory. The invading American army of seventeen hundred soldiers under the command of Kearny entered the capital of Santa Fe without opposition and assured the New Mexicans that, "...he came as a protector rather than a conqueror." 86

It is from New Mexico that Kearny, in September of 1846, marched towards California to join forces with Commodore Stockton in the conquest of the territory. In Chapter III, I will detail the Kearny campaign in the California territory, especially the Colonel’s change of fate after his meeting with Kit Carson in which the guide notified Kearny of the “Bear Flag” rebel insurrection and that California was already under American control. 87 This information was responsible for causing Kearny to decide to only take one hundred of his dragoons on his journey to the California territory, as it seemed that the fighting in that territory was completed.

With the official declaration of the Mexican-American War, General Winfield Scott landed in the Mexican port of Veracruz with 10,000 soldiers.

86 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, 66.

Mexico was deeply divided and Santa Anna did not have the complete support of the Mexican states. His army also lacked financial support as well as professional and experienced troops, making it difficult to confront the well-equipped U.S. Army.
Chapter 5

The "Unofficial" War in California: Fremont, the Provocateur, the Bear Flag Rebels’ Actions, and the Battle of Olompali.

Even before the preemptive American declaration of war against Mexico, the war in California had unofficially begun. American military ships were strategically positioned in all of the major California harbors in order to lend support, supplies and intelligence at a moment’s notice. They were ready for Washington to give the order to attack. In the Sausalito harbor, near the San Francisco Bay, the ship, the Corvette Portsmouth, was anchored there under the orders of Captain John Montgomery.88

Marine Captain Archibald Gillespie, who aroused suspicion, arrived in Monterrey, Mexico, as the guest of the American Consul, Thomas Larkin, who introduced him to the local Mexican society, not as a military officer of the United States, but as a sick, older gentleman looking to better his health in the Monterrey climate, which is a bizarre story considering the young age of Gillespie.89 In her memoirs, Señora Angustias de la Guerra Ord wrote that the local Mexican population was suspicious of the official explanation given to General José Castro about Consul Larkin, the military commander of the territory, regarding the presence in Monterrey of the young officer: “...I note that nothing was said about Gillespie being an officer of that ship. We called this to Castro’s attention, suggesting the idea that Gillespie was an emissary

88 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.

89 Also see Larkin, The Larkin Papers.
who came for no good and that it would be well to arrest him and send him to Mexico..."  

At the same time, a steadily increasing stream of American adventurers was encroaching upon the Californios. Among them, the most notorious and the one with undeniable political ties to the U.S. Government, was the ambitious Captain John Charles Fremont. Fremont counted on political support from his father in law, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, of Missouri, an important supporter of American expansionism and Western exploration. Through him, Fremont met President James Polk, who had commissioned the exploration of the territory to the west of the Rockies and into California in particular, to the self-confident Fremont.  

In January of 1846, Fremont visited Monterrey and in the company of Larkin, asked Castro’s permission to spend the winter in the San Joaquin Valley with his sixty-two land surveyors. Castro granted Fremont’s request in consideration of Consul Larkin, but asked that the Lieutenant be kept out of the most populated coastal areas.  

However, by mid February, and in direct violation of Castro’s request, Fremont camped fifteen miles from the populated San Jose mission. Almost immediately, Fremont and his men got into trouble with the locals. The owner of a large ranch on the outskirts of Santa Clara, Don Sebastian Peralta,  

---


91 For more on the Bear Flag, see Hawgood.

92 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
complained to San Jose’s “alcalde,” or the city mayor, about the stealing of horses from his ranch he believed were committed by Fremont’s men. When Peralta went to Fremont to complain, the Lieutenant dismissed the Californio’s complaint against his men, threatening Don Peralta with a whip if confronted again. Fremont’s handling of the Californio grievances was, to say the least, disrespectful and confrontational, especially for an American officer working on foreign soil.

After the Peralta incident, Fremont moved his camp closer to the Salinas Valley, but in March, a grave incident against a Californio took place between three of Fremont’s surveyors and the rancher Don Angel Castro, who was the uncle of General Castro and a long time judge for the San Juan Bautista mission. The Americans tried to sexually assault Don Angel’s daughters, but luckily, Don Angel was able to thwart the attempted rape. Don Angel told the aggressors that he preferred death to dishonor, and grabbing one of them by his neck, he snatched the American’s pistol and threw him on the floor, stopping the barbaric act. The disrespect of a women’s honor was a grave and unforgivable affront in Spanish-Mexican culture. Don Angel’s successful termination of the attack avoided a possibly long lasting hatred towards the American military forces in California, even when the “official” war started in the territory. It was always the intention of President Polk’s policy to avoid, as much as possible, Californios’ sentiments

---

93 Osio, La Historia, 100.

94 For more on lives and customs of the Californio ranchero, see Jane R. McClosky, 6 Horses and 10 Head: Two Hundred years of the Rancho San Pascual, 1770-1970 (Pasadena: Boy’s Club of Pasadena, 1971).
of hate towards the U.S. annexation of their territory.95

After the Peralta and Don Angel incidents, General Castro prepared a military force to confront Fremont, who was openly disobeying the terms of his permit. Fremont had moved his camp further South to an area called “Gavilan” or “Hawk’s Peak.” There, he built a rustic fort and hoisted the American Flag; which was the ultimate act of provocation against Mexican authority, especially since the two countries were not at war yet.

General Castro pursued Fremont to Hawk’s Peak, but his forces did not engage Fremont. Consul Larkin had reached Fremont beforehand with a dispatch urging him to leave the area immediately, and, thus avoiding a battle with Castro. Although no shot was fired at Hawk’s Peak, the incident was the first potential military confrontation between the Californios and a member of the United States Army Forces. By March 9, 1846, the war in California, at least in intent, had already started.96

After Hawk’s Peak, Fremont and Castro continued their preparations for war, a war, which, for all practical purposes, had already begun, even without being officially declared. As such, on June 5, 1846, Castro went to Sonoma to confer with Vallejo. He asked Vallejo for mounts and military supplies. After a short meeting, Castro rode back to his camp in Santa Clara and sent eight men under the command of Lieutenants Francisco Arce and José María Alviso to round up the one hundred and seventy mounts Vallejo

---

95 Also see Cleland, From Wilderness.

96 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
had released from his ranch at Soscol. On their way back to Castro's camp, a force of twelve American men intercepted Alviso and Arce. This force was not only made up of American settlers or regular soldiers, but also of buccaneers, such as Henry Ford, a former U.S. Army deserter, Ezequiel Merritt, a trapper, and Granville Swift, a sharpshooter. These men, with no known official business, entered the camp of Alviso and Arce and, at gunpoint, took all of the horses destined to General Castro. They then sent a provocative threat to Castro, an official Mexican authority, to come himself to take back his horses. Although there are divergent opinions regarding Fremont's direct involvement in the hold-up of Arce and Alviso, we could deduce that Ford, Merritt and Swift, who had met Fremont the day before at his camp in Butte, would not have openly challenged as powerful a Mexican authority as the Commander of the California territory without Fremont's backing.

On June 14, 1846, the rebels, who had attacked Arce and Alviso under the command of William Brown Ide, went to the house of the Military Commander, Colonel Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, in Sonoma and took the General, his brother, General Salvador Vallejo, the Frenchman, Victor Prudon, and Guadalupe's brother-in-law, the American, Jacob Primer Leese as prisoners. The rebels hoisted a made-up flag depicting a star and a bear on white canvas with the inscription “California Republic.” The Californios

---

97 Ibid., 121.

98 Also see Harry D. Hubbard, Vallejo Ed. Pauline C. Santoro (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1941).
knew that these so-called “Osos” were just “a front” for the American military forces’ conquest of their territory even before the two countries issued an official declaration of war.99

After the take-over of Sonoma, Ide sent two of his men, Tomas Cowie and George Fowler, to procure guns and gunpowder from the property of Henry Fich near the Petaluma River.100 When the two men failed to return to camp the next day, on June 24th, Ide sent Ford and eighteen American volunteers to look for them. On the ranch of Camilo Yniga, a Miwokan Indian, in a location called Olompali fifteen miles from the San Rafael Mission, Ford and his men stumbled onto a group of mounted Californios (lancers). One of de la Torres’ men, Lieutenant Cantua, started an advance attack on Ford’s men, who, taken by surprise, galloped into a corral made of very thin sticks, which offered very little protection. The Americans, feeling cornered, talked about the possibility of surrender, but instead, they heard de la Torre’s drums calling for retreat. De la Torre had failed to use the Olompali terrain, made up of ravines, small hills and thick woods to hide and to attack Ford’s men. Instead, he retreated to the mountains, leaving behind the dead body of Lieutenant Cantua.

In a rare case of agreement, Gillespie and Osio agreed on Torres’ failure to use the Olompali terrain to his advantage against the Americans. Although the Californios had a bigger force, de la Torre missed a good opportunity to win the first California battle of the war between the


100 For more on the Mexican War in California, see Hussey, “New Light.”
Americans, a force made up of irregulars, and the Californios. On this military confrontation, Gillespie wrote, "...fifteen shots had scarcely been heard before de la Torre, and his boasting party of seventy were in full flight having three dead, and two wounded upon the field."101 Osio added, "...de la Torre did not have enough military expertise or common sense to plan for a possible American ambush..."102

The battle at Olompali was the first combat between American forces and the Californios.103 It was the only battle the Bear rebels or "Osos" engaged in during their short-lived attempt at creating an independent California. The battle at Olompali occurred on June 24, 1846, thirteen days before Commodore John Sloat, raised the American flag in Monterey, on July 7, 1846, signaling the official state of war between the two nations. Using the Bear Flag rebels, President Polk was able to start the hostilities in California as well as the war against Mexico. On the backdrop of events at Olompali, and after the imprisonment of General Vallejo in Sonoma, a sensationalistic rumor started circulating about the disappearance of Ide’s men, Cowie and Fowler. During the search for the two “Osos,” Ford and his men had taken a

101 Archibald Gillespie to the Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft, 25 July, 1846, MS 89, R 33, National Archives, San Bruno, California.
102 Osio, La Historia, 103.
103 For more on the Mexican war in California, see Hussey, “New Light.”
Mexican deserter named Garcia prisoner. Garcia had boasted of witnessing one of de la Torre’s officer’s, José Padilla, capturing Cowie and Fowler, torturing them and finally, killing them using the method popular during the Spanish Conquest of Mexico of disemboweling the victim.104

In Gillespie’s report dated of July 25, 1846, he described the torture and killing of Cowie and Fowler by one of the De la Torre’s lieutenants, José Padilla. He wrote, “The Californios first shot the two Americans, tied them to trees, cut off their privates, scared their breast on either side, broke their jaws, and disfigured them with knives …they then threw the bodies into a ditch...”105

In another account, however, Osio detailed his version of the events of June 24th at Olompali. There was not one reference to Cowie and Fowler’s supposed torture. It seems improbable that a force commanded by Juan Padilla and also by Ramón Carrillo, the brother of Francisca Carrillo Vallejo, had perpetrated such an act. Nothing in the Californios’ conduct before and after such an episode causes us to believe that they would commit such a

104 Also see Osio, La Historia.

105 Officer Gillespie and Other Military Officers from the Pacific Squadron’s Dispatches to the Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft, MS 89, Reel 33. National Archives, San Bruno, California.
barbaric act. 106

Regarding this episode, Ramón Carrillo testified in August of the same year to Judge Santiago Arguello that Cowie and Fowler were captured and shot. It seems that the entire event was based on Garcia’s account, a man who had a criminal record before and after the war. Whatever the details of the Cowie and Fowler deaths, the event “demonized the Californios”,107 who were otherwise a friendly part of the Mexican Government with a long history of tolerance towards American settlers.

It is necessary at this point to add, that although much was said about the Cowie and Fowler affair, in which Californios were portrayed as savages and unnecessarily cruel, almost nothing had been written about the retaliation that the American troops, specifically Fremont’s Battalion, engaged in against three California civilians.108

After the news of the brutal killings of the Bear Flag members got to Fremont, who was stationed at the Mission of San Raphael, Fremont’s lieutenant and guide, Kit Carson, surprised an old California man and his two sons who were crossing the San Pablo Bay. He took them prisoner and

106 Also see Pitt, The Decline.

107 Rosenus, General M.G. Vallejo, 148.

108 For more on Americans impressions on Mexican California, see William Heath Davis, Sixty years in California (San Francisco: A. J. Leary, 1889).
asked his superior for instructions on what to do with these men. According to some accounts, Fremont ordered Carson to kill the three men. There are not many reports on the case. However, in the biography written by Simeon Ide about his brother, William B. Ide, an American settler who became a military rebel and commander of the Bear Flag party, Ide maintained that Carson confessed to the murders years later when he visited Simeon’s house in Sonoma:

The Americans... by way of retaliation for this shocking barbarism, killed three peaceable Californians at San Rafael, who had not taken up arms against them, neither had they taken any part in the massacre of the two young Americans. This was done, it would seem, under the who were not attacking the Fremont party, neither had taken part of the murder of the Bears, Cowie and Fowler, eye of Col. Fremont....

The rumors about Cowie and Fowler’s cruel deaths served to appease the American public’s outrage at the unmistakable preemptive attacks on a sovereign Mexico at a time when no official declaration of war between the

---

two countries existed. And yet, the American nation had started the hostilities at “Hawk’s Peak,” with the assault on Alviso and Arce, with Vallejo’s imprisonment, and at the Battle of Olompali. These events happened before the official start of the war in California, which was marked when, on July 7th, 1846, Commodore John Sloat flew the American Flag in Monterey.

110 Also see Larkin, The Larkin Papers.
Chapter 6

The “Official War” in California: The Battles of San Pedro, Natividad, San Pascual, San Gabriel, and Mesa

On August 28, 1846, Stockton declared the entire California territory property of United States, “The Flag of the United States in now flying from every commanding position in the territory, and California is entirely free from Mexican dominion. The territory of California now belongs to the United States.”

Stockton’s declaration was a little premature. Looking back to these American statements we may be tempted to agree with the historical fallacy that the Californios were indifferent to the American invasion. But further analysis forces us to conclude that the American conquest of every major settlement in California by August 1847, in no way indicated a Californio surrender. On the contrary, Californios, particularly in the south, were unwilling to surrender their territory without fighting.

After the taking of Monterrey, in a dissolute and reproachful official communiqué, Governor Pio Pico wrote to Mexican officials regarding events in

---

111 Robert Stockton to the Secretary of Navy, George Bancroft, 28 August 1846. National Archives. San Bruno. Reel 44.

112 Also see Donald C. Biggs, Conquer and Colonize: Stevenson’s Regiment and California (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1977).
California from June to August of 1846, including his and General Castro’s reasons for leaving the territory to seek refuge in the state of Sonora.

Dear Sirs... General Castro had communicated me his decision to leave the country moved by the realization that there was not hope for victory in any of the fights against the superior enemy, and in direct consequence of total lacking of war materials and ammunitions. Even though the Government could have given the help requested by the General and myself and with the result of being able to reject the invaders.\textsuperscript{113}

Jose Maria Osio, another prominent Californio, also expressed the feelings of Monterey residents at the moment of the lowering of the Mexican flag on July 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1846, and the loss “... of their nationality and of everything they had worked so hard to create.”\textsuperscript{114}

General Flores, in September 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1846 in Los Angeles, moreover exhorted his compatriots to rise and defend their homeland against the US usurper,

\begin{quote}
No! A thousand times No! Countrymen, first deaths! Who will not feel indignant and who will not rise to take up arms to destroy our oppressors? We believe there is not one so vile and cowardly... raise the cry of war with arms in their hands, and of one accord swear to sustain the following articles...\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{113} Pico, \textit{Narracion}, ms. 31.

\textsuperscript{114} Osio, \textit{The History}, 232.

\textsuperscript{115} José Maria Flores’ Proclamation, October 1, 1846, Mexican Army, Section of Operations. National Archives, San Bruno. Reel. 29.
And finally, the military commandant in Mazatlan, Rafael Telles, in May of 1846 wrote,

I had known with really heavy heart of the treacherous Yankees act of seizing and invading that Department, act that rebel to you [Castro] and all good Mexicans of this territory... We will unite to recapture our rights and demolish the insolent usurpers from the north...

These declarations cannot be dismissed as “bombastic, empty threats,” but as evidence of a consistent patriotic fervor to defend and oppose the U.S invasion. No was resistance confined to words. Californios military actions from September 1846 to January 1847 also demonstrate their resolve to resist the U. S invasion.

On July 7th of 1846 at seven in the morning, Commodore John Drake Sloat raised the United States Flag in the port of Monterrey, he also sent an official notification to Mexican Military Commandant, Jose Castro to meet and discuss the terms for a California capitulation. General Castro refused to meet the Commodore and he started to move his forces towards Los Angeles with intention to organize the defense of the country.

---


117 Also see Biggs, Conquer.

118 Osio, La Historia, 104.
Although Castro was ready to join his forces with those of southerner Pio Pico, old rivalries and mistrust between the two jefes made an agreement impossible, and Governor Pico nominated instead, General Flores to head the military resistance of the territory. The action was unanimously approved by the Los Angeles legislature. Pico’s address to the councilmen requested the authority to confront the North Americans, as well as their advice on the best way to resist the American forces,

I [Pico] begged the assembly to advise what measures to adopt. The assembly resolved that I should leave the country, dismissing the officials of the department so that there would be no one in authority to negotiate with the enemy.\textsuperscript{119}

Pico and Castro left the territory towards the interior of Mexico. Their decision was also part of the Californios’ strategy to avoid an official surrender to the Americans, while buying much needed time to regroup local forces caught by the U.S military’s surprise attack of July 7th.\textsuperscript{120}

Once Flores took the military command, he immediately organized the resistance. On October 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1846, he issued a patriotic proclamation exhorting his compatriots,

\begin{quote}
Fellow Citizens: It is a month and a half that by lamentable fatality, fruit of the cowardice and inability of the first authorities of the Department, we found ourselves subjugated ad oppressed by an
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{119} Pico, \textit{Don Pio}, 134.

\textsuperscript{120} Also see Larkin, \textit{The Larkin Papers}. 
insignificant force of adventures of the United States of America, placing us in a worse condition than that of slaves... Shall we permit to be lost the soil inherited from our fathers, which cost them so much blood, and so many sacrifices? ... Who of you does not feel his heart beat with violence, who does not feel his blood boil, to contemplate our situation and who will be the Mexican who will not feel indignant and who will not rise to take up arms to destroy our oppressors? We believed there is not one so vile and cowardly: with such a motive the majority of the inhabitants of the districts justly indignant against our tyrants, raise the cry of war with arms in their hands, and one accord swear to sustain the following acts.121

Many Californios citizen proved their patriotism towards their Mexican heritage by answering the call of duty from Flores. As Osio’s memoirs show,

Many people around Monterey and San Francisco were willing to defend with one last effort the nationality which they held so dear,122 and Osio continued, “... in the city of Los Angeles alone, the commander could have enlisted more than three hundred horsemen, but because the lack of arms a company of only eighty men were formed with very little ammunition.123

Osio continues, “... Even with inequality of arms, ammunitions, and combatants, they [Californios] had enough patriotic will [to fight] because they wanted to keep and defend their nationality...”124

121 William Mervin to Robert Stockton, October 9, 1846, National Archives, San Bruno, California, R.45.

122 Osio, The History, 234.

123 ——, La Historia, 104.

124 Ibid., 106.
As a matter of fact, it had been the month before Flores’ declaration that Californio resistance started, because on September 23, 1846, General Flores, Captain Cerbulo Varela, Jose Antonio Carrillo, Andres Pico, and many more armed Angelinos met in a place east of Los Angeles, called Mesa, to prepare an attack on military barracks occupied by Americans in July. Marine Corps Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie was in command of the American troops. After few days of resistance, on September 29th, Gillespie surrendered the city to the Californios. He retreated to San Pedro Bay, embarking on the U.S. Vandalia to sail towards Mazatlan. 125

In addition to the attack on Los Angeles’s military barracks, Flores also dispatched Californio forces to the pueblos of Santa Barbara and San Diego, where Californio forces were able to expel the Americans, specifically units led respectively by Lieutenant Theodore Talbot’s in Santa Barbara and Zeke Merrit and John Bidwell in San Diego.126

After the news of the take over of the three settlements reached Commodore Stockton, he dispatched Captain William Mervine with 350 men and marines aboard the U.S.S. Savannah with orders to march towards Los Angeles to retake the pueblo. On October 6, Mervin joined the forces of

125 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.

126 Also see Tutorow, The Mexican-American.
Gillespie, and together started the march from the San Pedro bay to the Los Angeles pueblo. General Flores, who commanded two hundred men, some of them mounted lancers, waited for the American forces in the vicinity of the Dominguez family ranch.  

The Californios had very little ammunition and the little that they had was of inferior quality, as for their artillery, it consisted of only a ceremonial cannon that a resident of Los Angeles, Inocencia Reyes, had hidden and buried in her property during the American occupation in July.

Nevertheless, the Californios mounted the small cannon on a tree trunk and secured it to the back of a mule. Armed with this only piece of artillery, on the evening of October 7, Jose Carrillo ordered his men to fire their few muskets on Mervin’s troops, and using a “fire and move” tactic, the California force was able to at least force the Americans to waste some of their ammunition supply.

Next morning, October 8, 1846, from the hill opposite the Dominguez ranch, Carrillo’s Lancers, carrying heavy objects at the end of their reatas and

---


129 Also see Biggs, *Conquer*. 
producing heavy dust clouds that served as a "smoke screen", attacked Mervin and his marines. Carrillo’s lancers confused the Americans in thinking that they were much more in number and force,¹³⁰ and Mervin and his men retreated towards San Pedro Bay.¹³¹ This “Battle of the Old Woman’s gun,” also known as the “Battle of San Pedro” or the “Battle of Dominguez Ranch,” lasted approximately one hour and a half, and left five American sailors dead and five wounded. The victories of Flores at La Mesa and of Carrillo at San Pedro made the Californios hopeful that they could effectively defend themselves against United States forces.

Receiving the unexpected news of Mervin’s defeat at San Pedro and Gillespie’s retreat from Los Angeles, Stockton marched to San Diego to procure the needed horses and mules his forces needed as way of transportation. Unfortunately for the Americans, the Californios had already rounded up horses and cattle from the coastal ranches and drove them to the interior, depriving the Americans of vital transportation for their troops and artillery.

Fortunately for Stockton, once he arrived in San Diego, a few Californio collaborators, who provided a safe place for the American troops


¹³¹ Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
to rest, welcomed him. He was also able to procure much needed horses. Osio
recalled the few San Diegans, who assisted Stockton on his mission,

When the commodore [Stockton] arrived in San Diego, he
encountered some corrupted Californios and some Mexican traitors
that moved solely by greed they offered their help and resources
against their brothers, selling cattle and horses ... this fortuity and
unexpected aid at his [Stockton] disposal provided the necessary
mounts, and artillery transports to start his march towards Los
Angeles, now, well equipped for war. 132

Osio saw this event as crucial to the outcome of the battle for Los
Angeles. Indeed, it was in the next battle, The Battle of San Gabriel, that the
forces of Stockton, Kearny, and Gillespie, now well mounted and carrying
three pieces of heavy artillery, were able to defeat the combined Californio
forces of Flores, Carrillo, and Pico. 133

For his part Flores, hoping to receive reinforcements of troops and
supplies from the Mexican government, sent the American flag captured at
the Battle of San Pedro, back to Sonora, Mexico. 134 Failing to receive an
answer, Flores organized his own force of four hundred men in three
battalions, and placed them to defend against an expected American
offensive. One hundred men under the command of General Jose Castro,

132 Osio, La Historia, 106.
133 For more on the war in California, see Biggs, Conquer.
134 Osio, La Historia, ms. 1A-12.
were placed at the pueblo of San Luis Obispo with orders to watch for the possible advance of Fremont’s forces from Monterey; another hundred men under Captain Andres Pico’s orders, were positioned on the east side of the territory, guarding the possible approach of Stockton from the pueblo of San Diego; and the last two hundred or so men under his command camped in Los Angeles. 135

While all three Californios commanders waited on their positions for the U.S forces to attack, Jose Chavez, one of General Castro’s aid of camp, plotted to kidnap Thomas Larkin, the American Consul in California and the main financier of Fremont-Gillespie operation in the region. 136 Chavez was able to surprise Larkin on the ranch, Los Vergeles, where he was spending the night on his way to the town of Yerba Buena to visit his sick daughter, Adelina. Once Chavez captured Larkin, he joined in the Salinas Valley the forces of Manuel Castro and de la Torre and their 130 Californios. Together they headed towards the town of San Juan Bautista. There the Californio force surprised one hundred of Fremont’s irregular men, who were collecting horses and mules for their Commander and were now camped in the vicinity of Monterey.

135 Also see Hussey, “New Light.”

136 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
The Americans countered with their powerful rifles against the Californios' ancient muskets. The Californio Lancers, feigned retreat, enticing the Americans to pursue them. Once, the Lancers gained the necessary range, they turned their mounts around and charged the bewildered Americans, who retreated. This battle, known as La Natividad, lasted only thirty minutes, but resulted in seven American and two Californio casualties. Larkin was nearly shot during the battle, but survived and was kept prisoner by the Californios for another month. 

In the meantime, President Polk had chosen the veteran United States Army General Stephen Watts Kearny to take command and establish a civil government in the Mexican provinces of New Mexico and California. After successfully occupying New Mexico, Kearny received orders from the U.S Secretary of War, William Learned Marcy, to press on overland from New Mexico to California. On September 25th, 1846, Kearny left Santa Fe with three hundred men from the First United State Dragoons. On October 6th in the vicinity of Socorro town on the margins of the Rio Grande, he met with Kit Carson, who was traveling with fifteen men and six Delaware Indians in route from Los Angeles to Washington, bringing Stockton’s dispatches. Carson’s reports of the situation in California did not reflect the latest 

137 Also see Larking, The Larkin Papers. 

138 For more on the Mexican war in California, see Biggs, Conquer.
Californios' victories at Mesa, San Pedro and Natividad, and Kearny decided to dispatch two hundred of his Dragoons as well as almost all of his heavy artillery back to Santa Fe. He took only two howitzers and a small force of one hundred men on the last of his march towards California, over very dry and difficult terrain.\(^{139}\)

On November 22 after a grueling march across the Mohave desert, Kearny and his exhausted force of dragoons arrived in California. In an area near the Indian village of San Pasqual Kearny learned that a large group of Californio mounted men were camped in the vicinity.\(^{140}\) The general sent one of his Lieutenants, William Emory, to gather information regarding the Californio force. Emory returned to camp with four Mexicans prisoners, who were transporting a big troop of horses, as well as a Mexican courier with the information on Mervin's defeat at San Pedro and the resulting reoccupation of Los Angeles and Santa Barbara by Californio forces.

For his part, Andres Pico and his lanceros were guarding the road to San Diego against the Americans' approach and they were unaware that Kearny and Gillespie's forces were camped only one mile from them. Andres

---


\(^{140}\) Also see McClosky, *6 Horses*. 
Pico was alerted to the American presence by one of Kearny’s spies, Lieutenant Thomas Hammond, who was gathering intelligence on the Californio forces. Pico and his men who lacked a large cache of firearms and high quality gunpowder, did possess “seven-foot-long, needle-pointed, fire-hardened, ash-wood lances,” and immediately prepared for battle.

Realizing that he had lost the advantage of surprise, Kearny gave the order to Dragoon Abraham Johnston to lead the charge towards the Indian huts of San Pasqual. As soon as Pico saw the size of the American forces approaching, he decided to receive the Americans with his own counter charge, striking the advancing force and killing Johnston and dismounting Carson. Again using the tactic of a feigned retreat, the Californios rode away quickly, trying to lure the bulk of the American forces to a “specific spot where his lancers could exercise their skill accurately and without any obstacles.” Turning their mounts around, Pico quickly ordered a frontal attack. After the assault, many dragoons laid dead, the lance of Guero Higuera twice stabbed Gillespie and General Kearny was wounded in the back. Kearny and his men left the battlefield, retreating to a near by hill named Mule Hill above the San Pasqual village, to regroup.

141 Walker, Bear Flag, 216.
142 Osio, The History, 240.
The American forces gathered at the hill, and while Kearny recuperated from his wounds, Captain Henry Turner temporarily took the command of the company, sending a message to Stockton in San Diego with news of the outcome of the battle and their need for reinforcements.

On December 7, Kearny reassumed command of his forces and ordered that the march towards San Diego continue. On their way to the pueblo and at the banks of the river San Bernardo, the American forces were surprised and again attacked by a small force from Pico’s lancers, which forced the Americans to retreat and once again take cover on Mule Hill. While besieging the hill, Pico sent a messenger to Kearny to negotiate the exchange of two American couriers and one Indian guide Pico had captured on the way from Stockton’s camp in San Diego, for two Californios taken at San Pasqual. Kearny refused the exchange. Shortly thereafter, Kearny welcomed reinforcements from San Diego, in the form of two hundred and fifteen sailors and marines under the command of Lieutenant Andrew Gray.

Although Pico received reinforcements from General Flores as well, his one hundred men were no match for the Americans and their two howitzers.

143 Also see Thomas, *California Land*. 
On December 11, Pico decided to abandon the idea of a frontal attack on the hill and left towards Los Angeles. 144

Pico's retreat and his decision to not attack Mule Hill did not blemish the Californio commander and his lancers' great victory in the battle of San Pasqual, especially if we consider that Pico was outnumbered and lacked artillery. San Pasqual did infuse the Californios with a much needed morale boost, unequivocally refuting comments from some Americans against the Californios' lack of will to resist. 145 Kit Carson that had accused the Californios of having, "...folded pitifully, worse, no will." 146 On the contrary, San Pasqual proved the Californios' will to resist. As Commodore Montgomery stated in a dispatch to the U.S. Secretary of War Bancroft, "the Californians were a subtle and mischievous enemy, heretofore underrated." 147 Commodore Stockton likewise commented on the Californios' performance at San Pedro with, "...nothing short of a locomotive

---

144 Also see Biggs, Conquer.

145 For more on how the Californio was perceive by Americans, see Pitt, The Decline.

146 Walker, Bear Flag, 206.

147 Neal Harlow, California Conquered: War and Peace on the Pacific 1846-1850 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 209.
engine can catch those well-mounted fellows... would not permit a hoof except their own horses to be within fifty miles of San Pedro."\(^{148}\)

On December 29, 1846, Stockton's forces finally united with Kearny's and they were ready to confront the Californios, their combined forces consisted of five hundred armed soldiers, a few pieces of artillery and a large herd of horses and cattle to supply their troops.

On the Californio side, General Flores, realizing the enemy's superiority, considered his limited options. He camped his forces twelve miles from Los Angeles, overlooking the San Gabriel River on a mustard field, a good place to ambush the Americans. And on January 7th, he devised a plan to set the field on fire, which would possibly divide the enemy and present an opportunity to bring up his only cannon to produce maximum damage. Next Flores would send his lancers in, for a full charge on a confused enemy. Unfortunately, Flores could not put his plan in action, because, as Osio's remembers, "one of the spurious Californios, who had joined him [Stockton] in San Diego ... had familiarized him with the terrain,"\(^{149}\) discovered Flores's position and guessing the General's plan, changed the site of the crossing.

Once Flores' plan was discovered, the general was left with only one

\(^{148}\) Driver, Carrillo's Flying Artillery, 347.

\(^{149}\) Also see Osio, The History.
alternative, a direct confrontation. On January 8th, 1846, Stockton and Kearny's forces convened at Paso de Bartolo on the margins of the San Gabriel River. Flores ordered his only cannon to fire on the Americans forces. Unfortunately, the Californios' gunpowder was of inferior quality and they missed almost all the targets. Once the Californios' artillery failed, Stockton's forces started to cross under the protection of Lieutenant Davidson's two howitzers. Gillespie followed, commanding the mounted men, and finally Kearny and his dragoons crossed the river. Flores unsuccessfully tried one more time to round up his lancers and attack Kearny's troops, but with the constant firing of Stockton's artillery the Californios' efforts soon became futile and Flores ordered a retreat inland. The battle of San Gabriel lasted two hours, causing the Americans to lose three dead and twelve wounded. Californio losses amounted to three dead and almost the same number of wounded.

In spite of the fierce American attack on his forces, Flores resolved to continue fighting. He regrouped his troops six miles inland from the San Gabriel River on a plateau or mesa, and on January 9, led his lancers, into a frontal attack on the superior American forces. Stockton, who had already received reports of the Californios' positions, was able to deflect their attack, receiving the horsemen with forty minutes of artillery fire. In a heroic decision, Flores launched a second charge, this time attacking simultaneously

---

150 Nelson, California Land.

151 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
from the left and the right flanks. When this also failed he tried a third and final attack to the rear of the American’s formation. None of these three assaults were able to break the overwhelming power of the American artillery and Flores finally had to retreat. The “Battle of the Mesa” lasted two-and-a-half-hours, left five American wounded and one Californio dead and more than twenty wounded. Next day, on January 10th, the Americans were able to enter the pueblo of Los Angeles.  

While Pico was battling Kearny at San Pasqual and Flores confronted Stockton at San Pedro, on the northern part of the territory another confrontation was taking place. In late December, the former Californio military commander of Yerba Buena and a rancher from the San Mateo peninsula, Francisco Sanchez, imprisoned the American Mayor of Yerba Buena, Washington Bartlett, and five of his men, who were all engaged in a foraging raid on the peninsula. After receiving the news of the abduction on December 29, Commodore Montgomery in San Francisco ordered Marine Captain Ward Marston to rescue Bartlett and his men.  

On January 2, 1847 at their camp in Santa Clara near the mission of the same name, Sanchez’s forces of eighty lancers confronted Martson’s force of one hundred and twenty well-trained marines and sailors. Sanchez had been  

---

152 Also see Tutorow, The Mexican-American.  
153 Also see Walker, Bear Flag.
a soldier in the San Francisco Company since 1824 and a military commander at Yerba Buena. Proving his knowledge on military tactics, before the battle, he placed his men far apart from each other, "...to lessen no doubt the chance of the effect of the powerful artillery of Captain Marston," which explains why the light casualties of the Californio lancers.

The battle of Santa Clara left the Californios with four dead and five wounded and the Americans with two wounded. On January 6, Sanchez signed an unconditional surrender to the American forces.

Some historians had characterized the Santa Clara battle as a simple insurrection of locals against the Americans' practice of foraging supplies from Californios ranchers, without the proper military requisition or upfront payment. However, to label the armed resistance from Californios as an act of simple revolt against "harsh treatment by the Americans" is to believe that the people of northern California were different from the southerners who were then fighting at San Pedro, San Pasqual and San Gabriel.


\[155\] Ibid., 101.

On the contrary, the Battle of Santa Clara fits the model of resistance in the southern battles where warfare was largely based upon deception.\textsuperscript{157} Correspondence between Captain Martson and Captain Mervine demonstrates that Mervin censured Martson “for not annihilating the Californios,”\textsuperscript{158} as Mervin did not consider Sanchez as a disgruntled ranchers seeking restitution only for his cattle, but a trained military commander leading one-hundred and twenty horsemen into battle.

The Santa Clara battle was one more point of resistance in the wide-ranging defense mounted by the Californios against the American invasion. Together with the battle of Olompali and the incident at “Hawks Peak,” Santa Clara matched, in patriotic fervor if not in scope, the resolve of southern Californios to defend the territory.

John Fremont was conspicuously missing from any of these battles. He had been stationed in the San Fernando Valley, and although Fremont had received several dispatches from Kearny and Stockton requesting him and his battalion to join the main forces in Los Angeles, he failed to respond to any of them.

\textsuperscript{157} Phelps, \textit{On Comic Opera Revolutions}, 46.

\textsuperscript{158} Regnery, \textit{The Battle of Santa Clara}, 91.
Fremont knew that after the battle of La Mesa, General Flores had relinquished the command of the Californio forces to Andres Pico, and had left the territory for Sonora, in the interior of Mexico. Andres Pico was now the general commander of the Californios forces and with his skilful Lancers was ready to continue resisting the Americans. As Osio describes Andres resolve,

Pico, who had ample warning, decided not to avoid combat. He looked for a level area, free of obstacles, where he could lead his young soldiers into battle. They wanted an area where they could spur their horses freely, thrust their lances, and either triumph or die after a brave fight. 159

Fremont, realizing that Kearny and Stockton had not yet signed a peace treaty with the Californios, sent his prisoner, Jose de Jesus Pico, to his cousin Andres’ camp to try to negotiate an audience.

Jose de Jesus had fought the Americans earlier in the invasion, and after being furloughed with all the other Californios, had continued actively resisting the Americans. Taken prisoner by Fremont’s forces on December 27, 1846 in San Luis Obispo, he stood court martial, was found guilty and condemned to death. In an interesting turn of events, Fremont commuted his sentence after Pico’s wife requested an audience with the American officer

159 Osio, The History, 243.
and pleaded for his husband's life. After the commutation of his sentence, Jose de Jesus remained with Fremont and his California Battalion.\textsuperscript{160}

After the intervention of his cousin, Andres Pico agreed to see Fremont and the two men met in a ranch on the north end of the Cahuenga Pass on the outskirts of the pueblo of Los Angeles. There, Fremont was able to convince Pico of the futility of a continuation of the fighting without any support from the Mexican government, and after agreeing to Pico’s demands to let the Californios march in full formation into the center of the Los Angeles plaza, carrying the Mexican Flag unfolded, Fremont was able to secure a peace treaty from Pico. \textsuperscript{161}

On January 12, 1846 Fremont and Pico signed The Cahuenga Treaty, a peace armistice that officially ended the hostilities in the California territory. The treaty consisted of seven articles written by Theodore Talbot in English and Spanish. Among other things, the treaty allowed Pico and his men to return to civilian life and to be able to live peacefully as citizens under the United States’ laws.\textsuperscript{162}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item[160] Also see Nelson, \textit{California Land of Promise}.
  \item[161] Also see Tutorow, \textit{The Mexican-American}.
  \item[162] Also see Walker, \textit{Bear Flag}.
\end{itemize}
Californios had not participated in any of the decisive battles responsible for securing the territory.

The military actions of 1846 exemplified the strong resolve of the Californios to fight against the American's invasion of their territory, even without material support and reinforcements.\(^{163}\) Flores and Castro, together with Andres Pico and Jose Carrillo, led hundreds of Californios against U.S. forces.

Although the resistance in California had ended early in 1847, the war between Mexico and United States continued, within six months of their landing at Veracruz, General Scott and his men were outside of Mexico City on the Chapultepec Hill, where one hundred military cadets heroically fought the powerful American army to no avail. On September 14, 1847, the Americans occupied Mexico City.\(^{164}\)

President Polk sent a representative, Nicholas Trist, to the Mexican Capital early in 1847 in order to negotiate a treaty with the Mexican government. On February 2, 1848, the treaty between Mexico and the United States was signed in the village of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico lost 50 percent of its national territory, or the equivalent of more than one million square

\(^{163}\) Also see Pitt, *The Decline.*

miles, ceding to the United States the territory that now forms the states of
Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Texas, and half of Colorado.
80,000 native Mexicans, approximately 1% of the total Mexican population
after the war, were now living under the United States flag. In addition,
when Polk submitted the treaty to the U.S. Senate for ratification, Article IX of
the treaty, dealing with the political rights and guarantees to the inhabitants
of the territories seceded to the United States, was replaced by a shorter and
less clear version which read that, "...the residents of the territories affected
by the treaty 'shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their
liberty and property.'"\textsuperscript{165} Article X, which guaranteed the Spanish and
Mexican land grants, was completely deleted due to the potential to interfere
with the already accepted laws in Texas pertaining to land ownership.\textsuperscript{166}

On May 21\textsuperscript{st}, the Mexican government signed a Protocol, a document in
which the United States Senate had made the changes to the original Treaty of
Guadalupe Hidalgo. At the time of the Treaty's signing, President Polk gave
his assurances of respecting and guaranteeing property titles as well as civil,
political, and religious liberties. \textsuperscript{167} Later, these U.S. assurances and

\textsuperscript{165} Rosenus, General M. G. \textit{Vallejo}, 219.

\textsuperscript{166} Also see James Suchlicki, \textit{Mexico: From Montezuma to NAFTA, Chiapas, and Beyond} (Washington-London: Brassey's, Inc., 1996).

\textsuperscript{167} Also see Krauze, \textit{Mexico}.
guarantees were very difficult to enforce, especially for the Californios, when the United States Land Commission treated every California land grant as, "... invalid until 'proven up' by the owner." 168

In addition when American settlers moved to the former Mexican territories, they followed the American tradition of homesteading, and settled in the most desirable agricultural lands without bothering to check if Mexicans already owned these parcels. 169 The Mexicans, now U. S. citizens, had to learn to navigate in an unfamiliar legal, political, and social world. The Anglo-Saxon legal system and its procedures were very different than the more lax and imprecise set of Mexican laws, especially in regards to property ownership. One of these cases involved Guadalupe Vallejo who on March 24, 1862, lost the title to his Soscol Ranch in a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. The General lost the ranch, as well as tens of thousands of dollars borrowed against the property. 170

Vallejo and the other Californios would become over Mexican-Americans, the second largest minority in the United States and the largest in

168 Rosenus, General M. G. Vallejo, 219.

169 For more on land ownership and California land grant history, see Powell, Compromises.

170 Also see Rosenus, General M.G. Vallejo.
the Southwest. The study of the Californios, their culture, their resistance to the U.S. conquest, and their history of assimilation into the American society takes on a larger meaning: allowing, perhaps, the society of today to correct past cultural misunderstandings.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Also see Robinson, *With the Ears.*
Chapter 7

The “Trojan Horse,” and the “Fifth Columns”

When analyzing the Californios’ military campaign, we cannot dismiss that the fortuitous assistance of foreign settlers, such as Sutter, Larkin, Carson, or Ide, who provided some prominent Californio and American sympathizers to the U.S. forces during the invasion, also contributed to the Californios’ defeat. In order to analyze the “foreign factor”, it is useful to employ what the historian Doyce B. Nunis, Jr. called the phenomenon of slow, foreign infiltration into Alta California, known as “The Trojan Horse.” The Anglo-American immigration to California was divided into two different periods. The first one was between the 1820s and the 1830s, when the immigrants integrated into the Mexican society. They became Mexican citizens, learned the Spanish language, acquired land grants, and many times, they married into Californio families. This was what occurred with the American, Jacobs P. Leese, who arrived in the territory in 1833 and married into the Vallejo family and also with two ship captains, Henry Fitch in San Diego and John B. Cooper in Monterey, who in 1826 decided to

172 Gutierrez and Orsi, Contested Eden, 299.
173 For more on California from 1828 to 1832, see Cortes, Mexican California.
174 Also see Wright, A Yankee.
become permanent Mexican residents, Catholic, and to marry into important Californio families.

The second period of Anglo settlers was in the 1840s when American settlers entered by the Oregon Trail. They were a very different type of settlers. They came with their families, and for the most part, not with the intention of becoming Mexican citizens. These settlers usually settled far away from the main California cities in the coastal areas and they believed in the American expansionist theory of Manifest Destiny. A perfect example of this second influx was in the person of William B. Ide, who in 1846 left his family and his farm in the Sacramento Valley to lead the Bear Flag rebels. Settlers like Ide and his band of Bears had been influenced by two important American émigrés—John Marsh and Charles Weber—who had the idea of replicating the efforts of the Americans in Texas to “resist Mexican intrusion into their lives and property.”

The settlers’ resistance to becoming Mexican citizens and to embracing the native Californio customs was based on deep cultural differences that the second wave of immigrants brought with them. These American settlers came to the territory with a pre-formed idea about the Mexican-Spanish

---

175 Gutiérrez and Orsi, *Contested Eden*, 322.
society, one of which labeled the Californio as a by-product of the Spanish “Black Legend”.\(^{177}\) This legend painted the Spanish Catholics as “black-hearted, traitorous people, indolent, lazy, immoral, and depraved.”\(^{178}\) These accusations were passed down since the time of the Protestant Reformation and the European Religious Wars that plagued Europe.\(^{179}\)

Most of the trade in which the Californios engaged after the Mexican Revolution of 1810 was with the merchants and the captains from Boston, a city known to be the birth of Puritan Protestantism. Some of these men provided the first recollections, widely read on the East Coast of the United States, of California’s land and its inhabitants. That was the case of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., who aboard the ship Pilgrim visited California in 1835 and 1836, during the time of profitable trade of hides and tallow between Californio ranchers and Boston traders. In 1840, he published his recollection in a highly successful book, *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*. In it, Americans learned about California’s rich soil, rivers, and mild climate, but also of Dana’s biased opinion of the Californio character,

\(^{177}\) For more information on the “Black Legend,” see Maltby, *The Black Legend*.

\(^{178}\) Gutiérrez and Orsi, *Contested Eden*, 309.

\(^{179}\) Also see David Langum in “Californios and the Image of Indolence,” *WHQ*, 9 (April 1978).

\(^{180}\) Gutiérrez and Orsi, *Contested Eden*, 308.
which he described as "'an idle, thriftless people' who could 'make nothing for themselves,' not even wine. The men were 'thriftless, proud, and extravagant, and very much given to gaming,' while the women 'had little virtue' and 'their morality, of course, is not of the best.' Another well-circulated book, Life and Adventures in California, by Thomas Jefferson Farnham characterized California's landscape as a beautiful and rich country, but its people as lazy, unproductive, who wasted the riches of their land.

In sharp contrast to this cultural belief, was that of the American settlers who arrived in the late 1830s. The Californios' view of the American settlers was very different. Those Americans, who embraced Californio culture and language, especially if they were married into their families, were totally assimilated, without any discrimination. And the ones who did not convert to Catholicism and stayed away from the urban pueblos, kept to their customs and language, but were tolerated as long as they obeyed the political and societal laws.

Californios, with their characteristic generous hospitality, were famous among visitor merchants and traders for hosting lavish parties to any visitor.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{180}}\] For more on Rancho life, see Wallace E. Smith, This Land Was Ours: The Del Valles and Canullos (Ventura, Ventura County California Society, 1977).
staying in their ports. Unfortunately, the foreigners viewed Californios’ generosity with food, drink and entertainment as more proof of their decadent and wasteful way of life. In addition, the merchants, who happily charged double and triple for common household items to the isolated Californio rancher and his wife, did not respect their gullibility in paying such exorbitant prices for items that their counterparts, the American settlers, would never have agreed to pay.

Although the Mexican Government was concerned about the legal status of the foreign settlers, it never provided the province with enough financial support and staff to enforce its immigration laws. In California at the end of Spanish rule, the foreign population was only seventeen. By 1830, under Mexican rule, the foreign population increased to 150 residents, and by 1840, their number had jumped to 680 foreigners residing in the territory. For the most part, Californio leaders left these settlers to work and to live in peace. Yet, Mexican authorities were often very generous in their treatment of foreigners.

Such generosity may be seen when Guadalupe Vallejo waived the immigrations rules in order to facilitate the exhausted Bidwell-Bartleson party

---

182 Also see McClosky, *6 Horses*.

183 Also see Nelson, *California Land of Promise*. 
of thirty-two men, one woman, and a baby to stay in California, after the party had perilously crossed the Sierra on foot. Ironically, it was the same incident, which prompted Vallejo to write to the authorities in Mexico City in November of 1841, to urge them for assistance with troops and financial resources to protect the fertile and desirable California territory against foreign encroachment, Russian trappers, and Indian raids.

Without the presence of Captain Fremont in the territory, “and his exploring brigade,”184 these new immigrants could not have taken the Sonoma garrison or the Vallejo brothers on their own. American troops needed the crucial aid that Fremont provided and which secured safe channels for supplying the U.S. troops.185 Larkin, also, was a part of this “Trojan Horse” factor, using his influence and contacts at the U.S. Consul in Monterey. He was able to go between Fremont and Castro, and he was also able to, among other things, safely introduce Gillespie into the territory.

Gillespie, who was fluent in Spanish, provided valuable intelligence to Fremont before the war was officially declared. And yet, in spite of Californios’ history of tolerance towards its foreign settlers, and even after these settlers refused to comply with Mexican immigration laws, Gillespie

---

185 Also see Hawgood, John C. Fremont.
and Stockton insisted in portraying the Mexican authorities as despotic towards Americans settlers and this justified the need to protect their lives.

In a report to Washington, Stockton wrote, "The Mexican government and the Military Officers have, without cause, for a year past, been threatening the U.S. with hostilities," And in another dispatch of late July 1846, Stockton wrote, "I am constrained by every principle of national honor, as well as due regard for the safety and best interests of the people of California, to put an end at once, and by force, to the lawless depredations daily committed by Gen. Castro's men upon the persons and property of peaceful and unoffending inhabitants." On the contrary, there were no documented cases of Mexican authorities acting as despots towards American settlers. Rather, this was one more attempt, inspired by the success of the Texas uprising, to get American public opinion to support the invasion of California.

Conversely, in Monterrey, on July 25, 1846, Gillespie wrote to the

---

186 Also see Robinson, With The Ears.

187 Stockton, Dispatches to the Secretary, Reel 22.

188 Ibid., Reel 23.

189 Also see Weber, The Mexican.
Department of War in Washington that if Commodore Sloat had waited a few more weeks to invade Monterrey, the invasion would not have been necessary, because the foreign settlers would have done the job without the need for war.\textsuperscript{190} It was a strategy played-out since January of 1846, when Fremont had an audience with Castro to ask the California military commander for permission to,

\begin{quote}
To make scientific explorations in the country... However the matter he [Fremont] treated of with him [Castro] was only a pretext and in fact the true object of his visit was to place himself in contact with Consul Larkin.\textsuperscript{191}
\end{quote}

The second factor, which contributed to the Californios' defeat, was the few Californios who were U.S. sympathizers. These men would represent the "Fifth Column" in the Californios' war of resistance against the U.S. invasion. The same ships and traders that disseminated differences between Spanish-Mexican Catholic Californios and American Protestant settlers on the East Coast of the United States, had been also the traders who sold and distributed books, forbidden by the Catholic church, among well-educated, young Californios, like José Castro, Juan Bautista Alvarado, José Antonio Carrillo, Pablo de la Guerra and the brothers Guadalupe and Salvador Vallejo. These men were part of a select group who had studied under Father

\textsuperscript{190} Gillespie, \textit{Dispatches to the Secretary}, ms. 33.

\textsuperscript{191} Ord, \textit{Occurrences}, 57.
Patrick Short at William Hartnell’s Seminary. In this institution, these young minds read the forbidden works of Voltaire, Telemachus, Rousseau and the Protestant Bible. These works were probably responsible for the ideas these young Californios had which questioned absolute power and the authoritarian way that the Mexican central government had managed their California province.\textsuperscript{192} These men entertained modern ideas of independence and self-determination, dreamt of bringing progress to the rich California territory, a territory that, in 1830, was still submerged under the archaic mission system of working the land.\textsuperscript{193}

One of these men was the influential Californio, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo. He had always admired the republican ideals of progress based on education and individual effort, something he saw as imbued into the fabric of the society of the United States. Guadalupe Vallejo was proud to have one of the largest libraries in the territory and he had named all of “his children after some famous author or historical personality.”\textsuperscript{194}

Vallejo’s adherence to American ideals, although it is not clear how much so, aided the Americans in the take-over of their territory. We may

\textsuperscript{192} Also see Doyce B. Nunis, Jr., \textit{Books in the Sea Chests: Reading Along the Early California Coast} (Berkeley: California Library Association, 1964).

\textsuperscript{193} Also see Beebe and Senkewicz, \textit{Lands of Promise}.

\textsuperscript{194} Gutiérrez and Orsi, \textit{Contested Eden}, 310.
never know for certain because Vallejo was in the custody of the Americans from very early on and before the military confrontation took place between the Californios and the Americans. It is possible that the importance of Vallejo’s authority on the territory was the fact that the Bear Flag insurrection targeted Vallejo and his post of Command in the Sonoma Garrison.\(^{195}\)

Guadalupe and his experienced military brother, Salvador, missed all of the fighting. Californios fended off the U.S. invasion. On the other hand, it is clear how Vallejo felt about the American system of land grants after years of struggling to protect his vast land holdings.\(^{196}\) In some of his personal correspondence, we learn that Vallejo and his wife, Doña Francisca Benicia, were, “...acutely bitter about the way things were turning out.”\(^{197}\) On the other hand, we know that some prominent Californios were actively involved in the aiding of the Americans troops. In Don Pío Pico’s memoirs, he named two Californians who collaborated with the U.S. forces. After the first occupation of the city of Los Angeles, Pico hid from the Americans troops at his American brother-in-law’s house, Don Juan Forster. While there, he heard several conversations between his brother-in-law, Forster, and two

\(^{195}\) Also see Harry D. Hubbard, *Vallejo*, ed. Pauline C. Santoro (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1941).

\(^{196}\) Also see Rosenus, *General M.G. Vallejo*.

\(^{197}\) Gutiérrez and Orsi, *Contested Eden*, 221.
Californians, the prominent San Diego business men, Juan Bandini, and the former San Diego presidio commander, Captain Santiago Arguello. These two men, Pico wrote, urged Foster to turn over Don Pico to the American occupying forces, "All this I could hear from my room. I must mention that Bandini and Arguello were in alliance with the American forces." 198

The last Governor of California wrote about how surprising it was to know that, "Captain Santiago Emilio Arguello rode with a force of twenty-five Americans taken all the horses I had gathered for my trip to Sonora," and rode into San Vicente forcing, "the inhabitants to declare themselves for the United States." 199 Pico's recollections corroborated another Californio's memoirs, Osio's papers, when he wrote that during Commodore Stockton's trip to San Diego, after the American defeat in the Battle of San Pascual, "... some corrupt Californios and some Mexican traitors. They strongly hoped to improve their conditions. They offered themselves and their supplies to the commodore [Stockton] so that he could increase his ranks and resources in the war he was fighting against the men whom they should have regarded as their brothers." 200

198 Pico, Don Pio, 139.
199 Ibid., 140.
200 Osio, The History, 236.
The help Stockton got from these San Diegans made it possible for the Commodore to successfully plan their victory at San Gabriel, which ultimately broke the winning streak by the Californios at the battles of Natividad, San Pedro and San Pascual. The horses, cattle and safe places for the U.S. troops to train, which Stockton found at San Diego—where Bandini and Arguello were very influential men—ended the war strategy of depriving American troops of transportation. Because, since the arrival of Fremont and his band of surveyors, General Castro had given orders to drive all of the horses, mules and cattle from the coastal areas to the interior, and thereby, to deprive the Americans of transporting their artillery, ammunitions, war supplies and troops. Castro knew that the U.S. Pacific Naval Squadron was powerful and unbeatable at sea. In addition, the Californios did not have any naval capabilities with which to defend California’s ports from the Americans. However, the U.S. military superiority was ineffective without proper transportation between the sea and the California shores. The assistance, then, that these “corrupted” Californians gave to the U.S. forces greatly influenced the outcome of the war of resistance to the Yankee invasion of 1846.

201 Osio, La Historia, 106.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

After reviewing the detailed recollection of facts between March 9, 1846 and January 2, 1847, it is clear that the United States annexed California, but not without encountering considerable resistance from its inhabitants, the Californios, who viewed themselves as being attacked by a foreign country and who defended their homeland with patriotic fervor.  

It is a duty and an obligation of future generations of Californians, to try to rescue some of these hidden historical facts, and along the way, to correct the misconceptions of exactly how California came to be a part of this great nation. Teaching students of California history the real roll of these brave ancestors will enrich national history, in general, and state history, in particular, especially the history of the largest minority group in California, the Mexican-Americans. To learn about California’s mestizo traditions inherited from the Mexican-Californios’ heritage can only add richness to our already vibrant state.

It is, rather, something of which all Californians may be proud - to know that General José María Flores, Major General José Antonio Carrillo, and

---

202 For more on role of Mexicans, see Tutorow, The Mexican American.

203 Also see Pitt, The Decline.
Colonel Andrés Pico, all Californios of mestizo heritage, resisted the U.S. invasion, fought in the Battles of Natividad, San Pedro, and San Pascual, battles they won. In the words of the California historian, Professor Robert Phelps, from, "...Natividad ... to the exceptional horsemanship of the Californios, San Pedro to the lack of American mobility achieved by Carrillo's preemptive scattering of horses, and San Pascual to the perfect timing of Pico's counter-charge."204

Knowing the details of these events will hopefully infuse a sense of pride and of belonging to all Californians who share a common past, made up, after 1847, of two blended nations, the Anglo-American and the Mexican-Californio-American. Understanding the roots of this fusion are relevant in the context that studying and acknowledging both heritages would bridge the gap in understanding the Mexican-Americans, who today comprise the largest segment of California society.205

With this notion we move from the traditional, historical model of presenting the Californios' war of resistance from a mere few lines in the history books to what it really was: an important and relevant fight against occupation in order to preserve their nationhood. Calling the war, which the

204 Phelps, "On Comic Opera," 62.

205 Also see Davis, Sixty Years.
Californios waged against the United States, in the words of Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera, a "...Californio revolt," or in Dorothy F. Regnery's words, "... not an attempt to reject the American occupation, ... [or]... support Mexican sympathizers,"206 or finally, in Les Driver's words, "... an actual revolt,"207 is something different than what it was. More than a question of semantics, the use of these less-than-bellicose words should precipitate a more serious questioning of the annexation of California: Was the occupation of the city of Los Angeles by Gillespie in September of 1846, a mere revolt because the Angelinos were prohibited from socializing? Was the battle in the Santa Clara plains the result of disgruntled Californio ranchers complaining about the non-payment over the requisition of U.S. war supplies? Are these plausible reasons to explain why the Californios fought against all odds for almost six months against the combined American forces of Commodore Stockton and General Kearny? The answer to all of these questions is no: the Californios fought to defend their sovereignty.208

Californios were not new to fighting. On the contrary, since 1821, they had been fighting for the principles they thought they needed to defend. This

---

206 Regnery, The Battle of Santa Clara, v.

207 Driver, Carrillo's Flying Artillery, 337.

208 Also see Pitt, The Decline.
can be seen, especially, in their fight against the inattentive Mexican Central Government which sent political appointees to be Governors of California and who bluntly disregarded the local populations’ wishes and opinions. By the time the U.S. invaded California in 1846, the Californios had already practiced a long tradition of warfare against the Indigenous people of the region and against the despotic Mexican-appointed administrators. In one of these disputes, some of the same men that will lead the war of resistance against the U.S. invasion, namely, Pio Pico, Guadalupe Vallejo and Antonio Maria Osio, among others, had already participated in the bloody coup of 1830, which ousted the Mexican Governor, Manuel Victoria. Victoria intended to reverse the Decree ordering the secularization of the California missions, a decision opposed by these Californios. These young men represented the economic future of the California territory. They needed access to the fertile grasslands for their cattle, but they did not have access to it because the best grasslands were, since the time of the Spanish conquest, in the Franciscan friars’ hands. Later, in 1845, these same men also spearheaded a rebellion against another Mexico City appointee, Manuel Micheltorena, and his band of convicted soldiers, who terrorized the local population.

209 Also see Tutorow, The Mexican.

210 For more on land ownership on Mexican California, see Powell, Compromises.
It is with confidence that we may affirm that these Californios, the same ones who fought against their own Mexican government, actually fought to defend their territory against an U.S. invasion in the summer of 1846. Moreover, these men had the courage to confront a formidable enemy, as they were confident in their warrior experience gained over the years from fighting against California's Indian tribes and against the Mexican-appointed Governors in the territory.

Although Californios went head-to-head against the American forces in the battles of San Pedro, San Pascual, Santa Clara, San Gabriel, and Mesa, and they also had to confront and ward against the infiltration and attack from the second wave of immigrants which had begun in 1835.²¹¹ These American settlers, who were aided by the American Consul, Thomas Larkin, were supplied by Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie, and finally, were guided by the astute John Charles Fremont, who with his so-called band of surveyors, made it very difficult for the Californios to defend their country.²¹² It was Ide, Swift, Carson, Ford and his band of insurgents, who captured the Sonoma Garrison in June of 1846, who imprisoned the Vallejo brothers, who attacked de la Torre and his lancers at Olompali, and who, finally attacked General

---

²¹¹ Also see Cortes, *Mexican California*.

²¹² Also see Larkin, *The Larkin Papers*. 
Castro’s lieutenants, Arce and Alviso, and who transported 150 good horses to Fremont’s camp.\textsuperscript{213}

In this same way, the Californios’ war of resistance against the U.S. invasion would not have been a war if it were not for the presence of traitors working against their cause. The California campaign of 1846-47 was no exception. In San Diego, after the defeat of Kearny and Gillespie in the battles of San Pedro and San Pascual, some prominent San Diegans, like the businessman, José Bandini, and the military commander, Santiago Arguello, both aided Stockton and his troops in providing supplies to the Commodore, who desperately needed ways to supply his troops and to transport his naval artillery.

In sharp contrast to these few traitors who collaborated with the invaders, many ordinary men and women directly cooperated in the war of resistance. Inocencia Reyes was one of these women. She was a widow, who risked personal punishment during the occupation of Los Angeles in July of 1846, by disobeying Stockton’s orders to turn in all arms and weapons to the U.S. troops. Instead, Reyes buried a small ceremonial cannon in her backyard. Later, this piece of artillery would be instrumental in the Battle of San Pedro in which the forces of General Flores used it to attack Stockton’s forces.

\textsuperscript{213} Also see Hussey, “New Light.”
This battle, thus, became known as the battle of the “Old Woman’s Gun.”

Equally brave was the solitary action of Don Manuel Dominguez, who risked his personal safety by staying behind after his family fled their ranch, in order to serve as a lookout for Kearny’s and Stockton’s forces, and then, to inform General Flores.\textsuperscript{214}

The California War, which barely lasted six months, had all the elements of any other conventional, American war campaigns. It was the Army of the West and the Pacific Naval Squadron pitted against the Mexican Army of lancers and soldiers, who confronted each other in San Pedro, San Gabriel, Santa Clara, San Pascual and Mesa, where a “Fifth Column” factor, in the persons of José Bandini and Santiago Arguello, collaborated with the invaders by giving them supplies and safe passage in the city of San Diego. It had a “Trojan Horse” in the persons of John Fremont, who requested permission from the Californio authorities to gather topographic information to map the area, and Archibald Gillespie, who assured the Mexican authorities upon his arrival that he was in the territory to better his health, when actually, both men came into the California territory under false pretenses, hiding their real intentions, which later were confirmed, to infiltrate the California territory ahead of the official U.S. invasion on July 7, 1846. Finally, it had a peace armistice, signed at the Cahuenga Pass, on

\textsuperscript{214} Driver, \textit{Carrillo’s Flying Artillery}, 341.
January 12, 1846, by the two opposition military commanders, the American, John Fremont and the Californio, Andrés Pico. In conclusion, further study of this war of resistance by these fierce and brave mestizo individuals should be undertaken to provide future Californian generations with a unique guide to understand, value, and to foster the qualities that they share through a common ancestry.

Recognizing the military conflict between the Californios and the Americans from May of 1846 to January of 1847 for what it really was, a war of resistance to the U.S. invasion, would advance what Limerick set forth, that the study of the western frontier did not end in 1890, but rather, that it continues today, with the study of the West as a process, instead of a place in which different ethnic groups made up a new western frontier. Furthermore, the study of the conquest of the Southwest, with Californios as an intrinsic segment of this Southwestern group, would provide historians with a more accurate understanding of the expansion of the American frontier.215

Expanding the studies to include the previously ignored ethnic group, the Californios, one of at three subcultures which make up the larger ethnic group composed of a mixture of Indians and Europeans, were part of the 80,000 people living in the territory at the time of Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty

in 1848, which then became part of the United States of America. Thus, learning about the Californios’ true ethnic make up and their heroic performance defending their country would rescue this gem the patriotic Californios’ performance in a war of resistance, from the danger of falling into oblivion. It would, hopefully, foster a greater understanding among the Mexican-American and Anglo-American populations of today. It would also, perhaps, explain the uniqueness of California traditions, which is a magnet for new Mexican immigration. New angles and perspectives would add depth to the study of Western-American History and to one of its minority groups, the Mexican-Americans, the second largest and most rapidly growing, minority in the United States.

---

216 Also see Weber, The Mexican.
Works Cited

I. Primary Sources.


Castro, José. *José Castro to Robert Stockton*. August 10, 1846. Dispatches to the Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft. National Archives, San Bruno, California. MS 89

Flores, José María. *Proclamation, October 1st, 1846*. National Archives, San Bruno, California. MS 89


Osio, Antonio María. *La Historia de Alta California*, trans. by the author. MS 1A-12. Santa Clara: University of Santa Clara, 106

Pío, Pico. *Narración Histórica, 1877* MS 31. Special Collections, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Robert Stockton *Dispatches to the Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft*, MS 33. Reel 22. National Archives, San Bruno, California.

Vallejo, Mariano. Historical and Personal Memoirs relating to Alta California. San Francisco, 1875, Special Collections, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

II. Secondary Sources.


