

MACALESTER HISTORY DEPARTMENT

# Mission Music:

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Conversion, Resistance, and a Californian Middle  
Ground

4/12/2011

Application for Admission to the History Honors,

Native American agency is not reflected in widespread California mission scholarship. Academia enshrines two traditional narratives. One, which is part of the California state grade school curriculum, depicts the missions as pinpricks of light against heathen darkness. In this institutionalized story, represented most heavily in elementary school textbooks, the Franciscans shepherded the Native Americans into the missions, where they proceeded to protect them from their natural propensity for war and instill civilization in their souls.<sup>1</sup> The alternative mainstream perspective paints a different picture. This counter-narrative describes the missions as prison camps and the Native Americans as exploited slaves.<sup>2</sup> Although these histories seem diametrically opposed, they share one important element: Both of these mission histories reify an overarching American theme of the vanishing Indian. This process of essentialization denies indigenous communities' ability to adapt and evolve, that is, to be subjects within the course of history rather than external or victimized populations. Both Walter Mignolo and Richard White examine this essentialist rhetoric, Mignolo with his repudiation of what he calls "the denial of coevalness," and White with his discussion of "the middle ground." Mignolo's work, *The Darker Side of Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, dubs the traditional reduccionist framework as the "denial of coevalness"—that is, the belief that Native American progress began with the arrival of European civilization. Mignolo then confronts "the denial of coevalness" with "the denial of the denial of coevalness," a new academic movement in which the traditional rhetoric is repudiated with the introduction of indigenous voices and historical perceptions in the mainstream academic record.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of textbooks employing this perspective still used in modern California elementary school education, see John B. Anderson and Benjamin M. Watson. *California's Missions*. Arroyo Grande: Hubert A. Lowman, 1978, Francis J. Weber. *The California Missions*. Editions du Signe: 2005, and Randy L. Womach. *The Best Ever Book of California Missions*. Redding: Golden Education Center, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of this extreme victimization of Native American subjects, see Russell K. Skowronek, "Perceptions of Life at the Ohlone (Costanoan) Missions of Alta California," in *Ethnohistory* 45:4 (1998): 675

Richard White's concept of the "middle ground" is in many ways the forbear of Mignolo's "denial of the denial of coevalness". In *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, White proposes a "middle ground," a social space of constant cultural production that results from the friction between two disparate cultures. According to White, the creation of this hybrid culture follows three essential stages. First, both groups attempt to fit each other into extant cultural categories. Next, the friction between the groups produces a struggle to retain the spirit original culture. Each group shifts the rules of society to alleviate specific situations. After a period of time and repeated self-adaptation, each culture begins to evolve. Finally, because neither group can achieve its agendas through force, each must persuade the other group that mutual action is desirable. Both groups thus seek congruencies (real or imagined) between the disparate cultures. Thus, although Native Americans and European missionaries functioned within an unequal power structure, both participated in the production of a new hybrid culture. This analytical framework permits distinct native agencies and emphasizes their continuing contribution in modern culture.

Because many indigenous histories are transmitted orally, Native American involvement in the mission structure can be difficult to pinpoint in the traditional written record. It thus behooves the scholar to seek native voices in alternative sources, particularly within cultural productions, such as music, which both cultures shared—music and dance. These sources are particularly valuable because Spanish missionaries consciously sought such congruencies in order to establish a common ground and later encouraged native participation.<sup>3</sup> The proposed paper will thus first examine the use of sacred music within the Franciscan California mission to facilitate the Christianization and Hispanization of the California-area Native American

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<sup>3</sup> Sandos, James A. *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 129

populations—and how the resultant musical community moderated colonial power dynamics, creating a hybrid “middle ground”.

Next, I will place these conversionary tactics and the consequent society in California in comparison with the similar methods employed by the Jesuit *reducciones* with the Guarani of what is today Paraguay. This juxtaposition should be especially fruitful because the Jesuit *reducciones* among the Guarani were widely regarded as a template for the creation of a Christian utopia in the frontier Americas—and thus set the standard of colonization throughout the Spanish Empire.<sup>4</sup> Although the Franciscan evangelism predated Jesuit involvement, the success of the Jesuit Guarani “utopia” was legendary by the time the Franciscans penetrated California in 1769. It is therefore likely—and ironic, considering the Jesuits were expelled in 1767—that the Californian Franciscans appropriated Jesuit *reduccion* techniques. Further, the Jesuits exploited the Guarani’s extant musical tradition to facilitate conversion, as the Franciscans would later do in California. Most importantly, this paper will explore the extent the musical middle ground allowed the manifestation of native agency within the mission system, as evidenced by the extensive musical record and personal accounts, both those of native communities and those of the missionaries themselves.

I have already conducted an investigation of the Franciscan California missions between 1769 and 1821 between the beginning of official Spanish colonization in 1769 until Mexican Independence and secularization in 1821. Within this analysis, I deployed Richard White’s theoretical framework of the middle ground to characterize the interaction between Native American populations and European colonists within the contact zone. The “contact zone,” according to Mary Louise Pratt, is a social space in which neither of two disparate powers has

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<sup>4</sup>Wilde, Guillermo. *Religion and Power in the Missions of the Guarani*. (Buenos Aires, Argentina:Talleres Graficos Mitre y Salvay, 2009) 9-20

the power to destroy the other by force.<sup>5</sup> Within this smaller project, written for Ernesto Capello's course "Transnational Latin Americas" (HIST 394), I worked to both establish the existence of a musical middle ground community and to familiarize myself with current scholarship on California mission music. I also drew on the most readily available primary documents, particularly focusing on both missionary and native accounts, following the critical primary source analysis methodologies I have developed as a third-year history major. I plan to augment this preliminary research while abroad with further investigation in the General Archive of the Indies (located in Seville, Spain), which houses the world's largest collections of colonial Spanish primary documents. As I am currently studying at the University of Sevilla, I will have access to these resources. The General Archive of the Indies offers such sources as viceregal reports and missionary correspondences about the discovery, evangelization, and development of Alta California, the diaries of Junipero Serra, the primary New Spanish advocate of the California missions, and discussions of Russian incursions on the West Coast. With these sources, I will continue to reconstruct the official conceptual framework in which the missions were constructed—Spain's interest in California, the temporal and religious role of missions on the frontier, and Junipero Serra's specific motivations for beginning colonization of California in 1769.

Further, thanks to the ready availability of material on the Jesuit reducciones among the Guarani, in the General Archive of the Indies, I will also be able to collect information on the utopian agenda in what is today Paraguay. As this region was similarly situated on the frontier of Spanish colonization, my comparison will allow me to better understand whether the missionary middle ground experienced in California was an isolated development, or whether it represents a more universal process within borderland Spanish evangelical communities. The comparison

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<sup>5</sup> Pratt, Mary Louise. "The Art of the Contact Zone." From *Profession 91*. (New York: MLA, 1991) 33

with Paraguay will circumscribe the California missions' use of art and music for conversion within the larger Spanish missionary tradition. This contextualization is particularly important because the Jesuits defined missionary practice in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; after they were expelled from the Spanish colonies in 1767, the Franciscans inherited or appropriated many of their successful conversionary techniques.

In addition to examining the traditional written record, I will conduct a musicological analysis of the ample extant musical documents, many of which have been collected by Craig Russell and made available online. I also hope to find a repository of musical and artistic records within the General Archive of the Indies. Mission sacred music constituted primarily monophonic and simple polyphonic Gregorian chant, which I have necessarily studied in two music theory classes; I plan to augment this musical background with a third theory class. I will be working with Mark Mazullo of the Music Department to identify the presence of anomalous—that is to say, potentially indigenous—practices within the musical record.

Suggested Timeline:

- April-May 2011: Contact Craig Russell and Lorenzo Candelaria about further musical resources and avenues of study
- May-June 2011: Investigation in the General Archives of the Indies, collection of primary Documents
- Fall 2011: Deeper investigation of Middle Ground framework established in HIST 394, using primary documents collected in the General Archives of the Indies. Begin analysis of musical documents within context of Gregorian chant Tradition with Mark Mazullo. Contact experts in California Native American Music.
- Spring 2012: Compare and contrast mission music with both traditional native music and traditional Gregorian chants. Decide whether Native American agency was expressed in mission music, examine mission music's impact on modern manifestations of native music. Evaluate modern California grade school curriculum.

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