

REVIEW

The Archaeology of Ethnogenesis: Race and Sexuality in Colonial San Francisco

Barbara L. Voss

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, 420 pp., 32
b/w photographs, 15 line illus., 12 maps, 25 tables, \$45.00
(hardcover).

Reviewed by Rebecca Allen

Past Forward, Inc.
P.O. Box 969
Garden Valley, CA 95633

One of the key concepts in Voss' recent volume *The Archaeology of Ethnogenesis* is the important notion that ethnicity is not static. As she traces the ethnogenesis—creation—of the Californio population at San Francisco Presidio, she notes that the self-identity of this group varied. It varied within the population, as well as over time. Identity is both personal and socially collective; consequently, the study of ethnicity must address both of these notions. The dilemma for the archaeologist is to relate “the materiality of objects” to shifting paradigms of social identification. Archaeologists are challenged to describe seemingly static material objects and yet address how these objects play into “the ongoing negotiation of social identities” (page 24).

The Californio population at the Presidio of San Francisco was a mix of Mexican Indian, African, and European ancestry. At one time, their ancestors were colonized by the Spanish presence in Mexico. At the edge of the Spanish Empire, the creation of the San Francisco Presidio (1776–1821) was a result of the colonized becoming the colonizers. The new colonists were transformed by this new location, as well as by the indigenous cultures that they encountered. Voss explores this changing social situation through the material culture left behind: the evidence of housing, diet, clothing, and everyday items. She weaves in evidence from historical documents and oral histories.

The study of “race” is central to Voss' work. What were the social identities of the colonizers? More

importantly to Voss' central thesis, how did social identities, classification systems, and self-identification change over time? Voss encourages archaeologists to discard the static, and instead consider “change as well as stability, permeability as well as boundedness, fluidity instead of fixity, and social agency as well as social structure” (page 12). The “ethnogenesis” of the Californios was both a strategy and a tactic to settle the land, and increase the population; it was a result of the interconnections between sexuality, gender, and ethnicity. Voss' discussion of these topics reinforces the idea of cultural identity as changeable, as all aspects of self-identity come into play.

Voss' theoretical discussions are densely written, although she clearly knows her subjects. Her discussion of the historical context—the story of the arrival and settling of the colonizers—is written in a more accessible manner. She presents the native landscape and peoples that the colonizers encountered, the history of the colonial institution known as the *presidio*, and their relationships to the colonial pueblos and missions. Voss notes that *all* residents within the colonized area were subject to the constraints of the colonizing governmental, religious, and military institutions. Very importantly, Voss recognizes that everyday actions within the San Francisco Presidio occurred against the backdrop of local, regional, and global events. Her discussion of the population (both colonizers and Native Americans) that inhabited the *presidio* is excellent: she seamlessly combines documentary and archaeological sources of information with intertwining concepts of race, sexuality, and gender. The chapter on the metamorphoses of Californio identity in the late Spanish and Mexican-era is also thoughtful and thought-provoking.

Descriptions of archaeological excavation and features have the almost inherent potential to become decidedly dull. Voss solves this dilemma with personal stories of excavations at the San Francisco Presidio. She had the challenge of interpreting not only her own fieldwork and research, but that of others—in all, 13 years of monitoring and excavation at the site. Voss suggests (page 142) that “investigating an urban archaeological site like the Presidio is methodologically and logistically challenging.”

The Californios made this site and landscape their own; Voss makes the archaeology, architectural transformations, artifact descriptions (ceramics, foodways, clothing), and history her own. Whether discussing military architecture, Native American presence (or lack of evidence thereof), or the particular “landscape biography” of one settler, Voss’ archaeological and historical discussion of how the colonists used material culture over time to create and reflect new cultural values is informative, yet almost effortless. It’s a major feat of interpretation.

Voss writes very well, and the book is engaging. I found myself occasionally balking at the repeated style of beginning each chapter with a summary of what is

to come. For me, it takes away from the discovery of reading, and often makes me feel as though Voss were attempting to program the reader to agree with her before the facts, texts, and nuances unfolded. This is a stylistic quibble, and may not distract other readers. Overall, the text belongs in the library of every student of Spanish and Mexican Alta California. Its implications for other colonial settings, particularly where the previously colonized became the colonizers, cannot be overstated. Her interviews with descendants of *presidio* soldiers demonstrate how much the interpretation of the past matters to the present. *The Archaeology of Ethnogenesis* will become an anthropological standard.



Strangers in a Stolen Land: Indians of San Diego County from Prehistory to the New Deal

Richard Carrico
El Cajon, CA: Sunbelt Books, 2008 (3rd. ed.),
216 pp., \$14.95 (soft cover).

Reviewed by Michael Connolly Miskwish
Adjunct Professor, San Diego State University
Campo Kumeyaay member

Richard Carrico has brought us a refreshing expansion of his original history of San Diego County tribes. His discussion of the Spanish and Mexican periods includes a succinct discourse on the attempts by various “schools of thought” to bend California Indian history to fit particular ends through the selective picking of facts or through overgeneralization. Another provocative position he explains is the likely continuity of people from the La Jolla and San Dieguito patterns to the later Hokan-Yuman speaking Kumeyaay. He goes even further in citing a hypothesis that the earlier groups were linguistically part of the Hokan linguistic family. This is a courageous position in light of the fact that some anthropologists and archaeologists would prefer that the modern Kumeyaay be considered distinct so they

could therefore be more easily dismissed when claiming human remains for reburial.

The discussion of the 1775 destruction of the Mission at San Diego is detailed and balanced. Carrico has included a significant discussion of the tribal social structure, as well as an examination of the resistance of particular individuals and communities. The identifications of tribal leader were welcome additions that go a long way toward humanizing Indian communities that are often portrayed as faceless backdrops to Eurocentric discussions of California history. There are descriptions of indigenous agricultural practices that include burning, planting, and transplanting to develop food sources, medicines, attract game, and serve as village fortifications. All of these either add to or dispel the characterization of the Kumeyaay as simple “hunter-gatherers,” he points out.

The health effects of colonization are discussed in detail, using data from the mission records and the later Mexican period. The results of some brief analyses on Kumeyaay human remains are enlightening with regard to the physical stresses placed on the missionized Kumeyaay.

The discussion of the rebellions of the 1830s and 1840s is a great addition to earlier editions. One gets a true sense of the complexity of overlapping and contradictory alliances and power struggles.