

# The Founding Father of California

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Junípero Serra, a Roman Catholic Spanish priest and member of the Franciscan Order, is considered the founding father of California. Born on the island of Mallorca, inhabited by the Spanish, Serra left his home, Petra, at a young age to study at Palma to join the Franciscan order. Serra was born in 1713 to his parents, Antonio and Margarita. Serra was given the name Miquel Joseph at birth, but later changes his name after officially joining the Franciscan order. Junípero was a “companion of Saint Francis whom Serra admired as “the greatest exemplar of holy simplicity”” (Hackel, 36). The decision for Serra to leave his hometown, Petra, for the city Palma to study for the priesthood “was a logical culmination of his education at the convent [in Mallorca], but his entering the clergy also made good economic sense for the Serra family given its limited means and the declining

conditions in Petra" (Hackel, 24). Mallorca, a short distance from Barcelona, Spain, often suffered food shortages due to crop failure. Nonetheless, the island of Mallorca was a breeding ground for Catholic Missionaries.

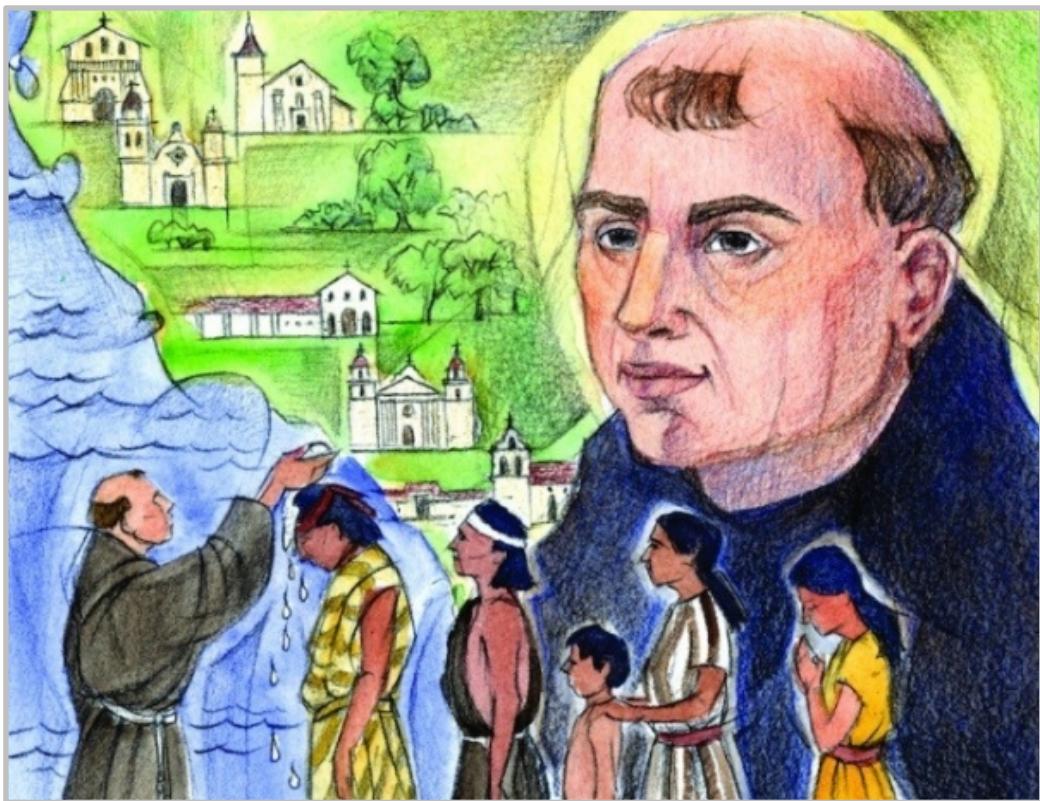
Once Serra made his one way journey to Mexico, he immediately began working to convert the Indians in Northern Mexico. "Spaniards considered the hallmarks of a civilized people: literacy, domestic agriculture, fine clothing, and permanent settlements" (Hackel, 88). The Native people just to the North of Mexico, the Pames were thought to be living a horrid existence by the Spanish. Despite having survived eons before European contact, the Spanish believed the Pames needed to learn agriculture and convert to Catholicism. Serra believed conversion began with building a personal connection, gaining trust, and "offering material benefits, not just abstract promises of potential salvation or threats of eternal damnation" (Hackel, 64). Perhaps not focusing on threats of eternal damnation is the reason Serra wasn't fond of Protestants who he believed "were not Christian cousins who shared similar beliefs and spiritual ancestors, but dangerous heretics who needed to be confronted" (Hackel, 64).

Before ever setting foot in California, Serra relied heavily on a manual written by Alfonso de le Peña Montenegro who was considered the leading authority on converting Indians. "Montenegro asserted that the whip was essential for the Indians' "devotion, decency, and good order"" (Hackel, 86). Serra had acquired his own copy of the manual before going North of Mexico, and eventually to California. Serra grew up under his father's strict discipline that embraced physical punishment. In Serra's world, good fathers punished their children with blows (Hackel, 200). It is believed Serra loved the Indians as children who needed to be converted to Catholicism, but once converted

"all baptized Indians subjected themselves completely to the authority of the Franciscans; they could be whipped, shackled or imprisoned for disobedience, and hunted down if they fled the mission grounds. Indian recruits, who were often forced to convert nearly at gunpoint, could be expected to survive mission life for only about ten years. As one Friar noted, the Indians "live well free but as soon as we reduce them to a Christian and community life... they fatten, sicken, and die" (PBS, 2001).

Converted Indians were forced to live in mission compounds that were built by Franciscans and with the help of Spanish soldiers. In these compounds Indian men were whipped in public when disciplined, while Indian women were whipped in privacy so as to cover their cries, but the humiliation of being publicly whipped

was appalling, especially because corporeal punishment did not exist in the Indian society (Fogel, 131). Whipping was a common form of punishment in “civilized” Spain. A convicted man in Spain would receive 200 lashes if convicted of theft or escape from prison (Fogel, 131). At one particular Mission in San Diego the “Indian women in the system were raped by the Spanish soldiers... If a husband intervened, as likely as not he would be shot (Page, 239). In 1850, California becomes the 31<sup>st</sup> state of the United States of America, and needed to clear the land of wild Indians to make way for settlers, gold rushers, and more missionaries. To aid in this dehumanizing endeavor the state paid local white citizens \$5 for each Indian head delivered to the city center. In 1863, Honey Lake citizens paid 25 cents for each Indian scalp brought in (Fogel, 161). The influx of non-Indigenous people drove off more Indian people, and some to extinction (Fogel, 162).



Almost as appalling as the humiliating public whippings, rapes, executions, and brandings was the attitude held by the Spanish and missionaries towards the Indians.

“Jesuit Johann Baegert wrote dispassionately of the devastation of Indians from disease and other factors: “They decrease annual. The world misses

little thereby and loses nothing of its splendor... As a general rule, it may be said that the [Baja] Indians are stupid, awkward, rude, unclean, insolent, ungrateful, mendacious, thievish, abominably lazy, great talkers to their end, and naïve and childlike so far as intelligence and actions are concerned” (Baegert, 53,58).

Serra held similar attitudes when he looked upon the Indian as only naked, hungry, idle, and rootless. But, California Indians lived in “village communities that were relatively autonomous, egalitarian, and willing to move seasonally to maximize food production” (Hackel, 165). Fernandinos, multi-ethnic or multi-racial Franciscans, believed “California Indians had the mental faculties of children [and] taught willing ones the most basic Catholic prayers and concepts – the Our Father, the Ave Maria, the Ten Commandments – and a simplified children’s catechism” (Hackel, 199).

Proponents of Serra and some missionaries of different denominations may contend that despite the humiliation, forced labor, diseases, spiritual abuse, rape, pillage, and stealing of the land that were all done in the name of God, at least the gospel came to the Indians. If God is omnipresent, then by definition he’s everywhere, even among the most isolated tribe in the world. Randy Woodley of the Cherokee nation, teacher, poet, missiologist and theologian asserts, “There is no place we can go where Jesus is not already active and present.” This would have included the Pames Indians who Serra first tried to convert north of Mexico. In a just world, the wrongs of the past would not be buried under stories of the good intentions, and the offender(s) along with the benefactors of the unjust systemic structures would admit their sin and sins of their fathers, and apologize to the offended. But, instead Pope Francis on his visit to the Americas in 2015 addressed a joint session of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States of America

“Tragically, the rights of those who were here long before us were not always respected. For those peoples and their nations, from the heart of American democracy, I wish to reaffirm my highest esteem and appreciation. Those first contacts were often turbulent and violent, but it is difficult to judge the past by the criteria of the present.”

Mark Charles, writer, author, and speaker, after hearing the Pope’s words wrote, “My heart sank. My body went numb. I could not believe my ears. The Pope was standing before a joint session of Congress of the United States excusing them for their genocidal history against the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island” (Charles, 2015). In July of 2015 Pope Francis while visiting Bolivia made an overarching

apology for the church's sins against the indigenous peoples in front of representatives of native groups of South America. "Pope Francis has gone to South America and apologized," said Norma Flores, spokesperson for the Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians, and continued, "Yet he is going to canonize the Individual responsible for the genocide of Native people (Thanawala, 2015). The rhetoric *I will not apologize for America* suggest America is exempt from being held accountable for its perpetuation of violence against Native Americans.



On August 24, 1784, Junípero Serra at the age of 70, left his room at Mission San Carlos Borroméo for a walk, returned to his cell, prayed, sipped some broth, and with a crucifix in hand laid down and died (Hackel, 235). To Native Americans, Serra was as much an "old priest" as he was a colonizer. "Serra left behind a dark legacy that inevitably occurs when colonizers from the other side of the planet

impose their will and religion upon an indigenous people" (Martinez, 2015). From the official California school curriculum:

"The historical record of this era remains incomplete due to the relative absence of native testimony, but it is clear that while missionaries brought agriculture, the Spanish language and culture, and Christianity to the native population, American Indians suffered in many California missions. The death rate was extremely high. Contributing factors included the hardships of forced labor and, primarily, the introduction of diseases for which the native population did not have immunity."

Opponents, even some who adhere to the Catholic religion, are disturbed that someone like Serra would be sainted after his treatment of the California Indians. In a letter to California Governor Jerry Brown, the Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, Valentin Lopez writes,

"Canonizing Junipero Serra effectively condones and celebrates his use of imprisonment and torture to convert California Indians to Christianity and appropriate native land without Indian consent or compensation. Canonization inflicts fresh pain upon those who are still suffering from historic trauma. State support of Serra's canonization perpetuates the factual distortion of California history and sends the message that native lives don't matter" (Brown, 2015).

Lopez is actively leading the campaign against sainthood for Serra. "We believe saints are supposed to be people who followed in the life of Jesus Christ" exclaims Lopez, and continues, "There was no Jesus Christ lifestyle at the missions" (Martinez, 2015). In Matthew 7:12, Jesus says to his followers, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." The way colonizers and oppressors justify their actions while at the same time denying Jesus' commands was by claiming Indian people were non-human or like children who need to be disciplined.

Much to the dismay of Serra and his supporters, Indian people are actual people who have been doing "theology" even before Europeans set foot on Turtle Island. Professor Terry LeBlanc, a Mi'kmaq-Acadian, is the Executive Director of Indigenous Pathways asserts "Indigenous Theology" is an oxymoron, because Indigenous people have always sought to know Creator, how to interact with Him, and how to treat others in a good way.

Juníero Serra founded a colonized state called California on land stolen from its rightful stewards:

- Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians of the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation
- Alturas Indian Rancheria
- Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians
- Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria
- Berry Creek Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California
- Big Lagoon Rancheria
- Big Pine Band Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley
- Big Sandy Rancheria of Western Mono Indians of California
- Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians of the Big Valley Rancheria
- Bishop Pauite Tribe (previously listed as Paiute-Shoshone Indians of the Bishop Community of the Bishop Colony)
- Blue Lake Rancheria
- Bridgeport Indian Colony
- Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians of California
- Cabazon Band of Mission Indians
- Cachil DeHe Band of Wintun Indians of the Colusa Indian Community of the Colusa Rancheria
- Cahuilla Band of Mission Indians of the Cahuilla Reservation
- Cahto Indian Tribe of the Laytonville Rancheria
- California Valley Miwok Tribe
- Campo Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of the Campo Indian Reservation
- Capitan Grande Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of California:Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians of the Barona Reservation; Viejas (Baron Long) Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians of the Viejas Reservation
- Cedarville Rancheria
- Chemehuevi Indian Tribe of the Chemehuevi Reservation
- Cher-Ae Heights Indian Community of the Trinidad Rancheria
- Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians of California
- Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California
- Cold Springs Rancheria of Mono Indians of California
- Colorado River Indian Tribes of the Colorado River Indian Reservation (Arizona and California)
- Cortina Indian Rancheria of Wintun Indians of California
- Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians of California

- Death Valley Timbi-Sha Shoshone Tribe
- Dry Creek Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Elem Indian Colony of Pomo Indians of the Sulphur Bank Rancheria
- Elk Valley Rancheria
- Enterprise Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California
- Ewiaapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians
- Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria
- Fort Bidwell Indian Community of the Fort Bidwell Reservation of California
- Fort Independence Indian Community of Paiute Indians of the Fort Independence Reservation
- Fort Mojave Indian Tribe (Arizona, California and Nevada)
- Greenville Rancheria
- Grindstone Indian Rancheria of Wintun-Wailaki Indians of California
- Guidiville Rancheria of California
- Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake
- Hoopa Valley Tribe
- Hopland Band of Pomo Indians
- Inaja Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of the Inaja and Cosmit Reservation
- Ione Band of Miwok Indians of California
- Jackson Band of Miwuk Indians
- Jamul Indian Village of California
- Karuk Tribe
- Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewart's Point Rancheria
- Koi Nation of Northern California
- La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians
- La Posta Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of the La Posta Indian Reservation
- Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe
- Los Coyotes Band of Cahuilla & Cupeno Indians
- Lytton Rancheria of California
- Manchester Band of Pomo Indians of the Manchester Rancheria
- Manzanita Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of the Manzanita Reservation
- Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria
- Mesa Grande Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of the Mesa Grande Reservation
- Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California
- Mooretown Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California
- Morongo Band of Cahuilla Mission Indians

- Northfork Rancheria of Mono Indians of California
- Pala Band of Luiseño Mission Indians of the Pala Reservation
- Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians of California
- Pauma Band of Luiseño Mission Indians of the Pauma & Yuima Reservation
- Pechanga Band of Luiseño Mission Indians of the Pechanga Reservation
- Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians of California
- Pinoleville Pomo Nation (formerly the Pinoleville Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California)
- Pit River Tribe (includes XL Ranch, Big Bend, Likely, Lookout, Montgomery Creek and Roaring Creek Rancherias)
- Potter Valley Tribe (formerly the Potter Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California)
- Quartz Valley Indian Community of the Quartz Valley Reservation of California
- Quechan Tribe of the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation (Arizona and California)
- Ramona Band of Cahuilla
- Redding Rancheria
- Redwood Valley or Little River Band of Pomo Indians of the Redwood Valley Rancheria California
- Resighini Rancheria
- Rincon Band of Luiseño Mission Indians of the Rincon Reservation
- Robinson Rancheria
- Round Valley Indian Tribes, Round Valley Reservation
- San Manual Band of Serrano Mission Indians of the San Maual Reservation
- San Pasqual Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of California
- Santa Rosa Indian Community of the Santa Rosa Rancheria
- Santa Rosa Band of Cahuilla Indians (formerly the Santa Rosa Band of Cahuilla Mission Indians of the Santa Rosa Reservation)
- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Mission Indians of the Santa Ynez Reservation
- Lipay Nation of Santa Ysabel (Previously listed as the Santa Ysabel Band of Diegueño Mission Indians of the Santa Ysabel Reservation)
- Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians of California
- Sheep Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians
- Sherwood Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California
- Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, Shingle Springs Rancheria (Verona Tract)
- Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians
- Susanville Indian Rancheria

- Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation (formerly the Sycuan Band of Diegueno Mission Indians of California)
- Table Mountain Rancheria of California
- Tejon Indian Tribe
- Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation
- Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
- Tule River Indian Tribe of the Tule River Reservation
- Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians of the Tuolumne Rancheria of California
- Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians of California
- United Auburn Indian Community of the Auburn Rancheria of California
- Upper Lake Band of Pomo Indians
- Utu Utu Gwaitu Paiute Tribe of the Benton Paiute Reservation
- Washoe Tribe (Carson Colony, Dresslerville Colony, Woodfords Community, Stewart Community and Washoe Ranches) (California and Nevada)
- Wilton Rancheria
- Wiyot Tribe (formerly the Table Bluff Reservation-Wiyot Tribe)
- Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation
- Yurok Tribe of the Yurok Reservation

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