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Quincy D. Newell. *Constructing Lives at Mission San Francisco: Native Californians and Hispanic Colonists, 1776-1821.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009. x + 267 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-4706-0.

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Constructing Lives

For much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, California Indian studies has been concerned with two lines of historical inquiry. For one, scholars have debated the treatment of California Indians in the missions that Spanish Franciscan priests created along the California coast. There has been a host of mission apologists (such as Father Francis Guest), ardent critics (such as Rupert Costo [Cahuila] and Jeanette Costo [Eastern Cherokee]), and people who have sought a middle ground between those polarized opinions (notable recent studies include those of Steven Hackel and James Sandos).[1] In addition to thorough investigations of the mission system, California Indian scholars have used the methods of social history to understand the ways in which the Indigenous people survived the cultural encounter in California. Dating back to biologist Sherburne Cook's examination of California Indian demography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continuing in Albert Hurtado's award-winning study of California Indians in the gold rush, California Indian scholars have utilized censuses, birth and death registers, and other sources that, in the capable hands of social historians, revolutionized United States historiography.[2] Religious Studies scholar Quincy Newell brings both lines of inquiry together in her engaging and imaginative study of Mission San Francisco Asis.

Newell's work clearly fits in the camp of those ethnohistorians who examine both sides of the mission experience in California. Her title explicitly brings Native Californians and Hispanics into conversation and the process of building lives in a new world. Newell seeks to "reveal the resourcefulness and flexibility that Bay Area Indians displayed as they responded to the Franciscans' missionary efforts and constructed their lives in and around the missions" (p. 3). Words and phrases customary to ethnohistory and the now decades-old "new Indian history" figure prominently on the pages of the book. Newell describes Natives as "adapting" to new ceremonies, labor practices, family patterns, marriage practices, kinship relations and opportunities for mobility. Further, she seeks to reveal "concealed" narratives about Native peoples (p. 3). Newell's examination of *compadrinazgo* (the twinned practices of godparenthood and coparenthood) in the missions demonstrates the book's strengths as a work of ethnohistory. Rather than discussing how Spaniards became godparents to Native children, as historian James Brooks did in New Mexico, Newell examines those Indigenous people who became godparents at San Francisco.[3] Newell finds that the average godparent had ten to eleven godchildren. Yet, certain Natives at San Francisco stood over a plurality of godparent ceremonies. Diego Olvera, a native from Mexico and a servant at San Francisco, had 463 godchildren. His wife Ubiumis, from the Native village Yelamu near the mission, had more than 300. Jacinto, an interpreter, had 164. Native people in the Bay Area selected potential godparents to reinforce personal alliances between people and augment kinship ties that were weakening because of the onslaught of disease.

Newell's work also applies social history methods to California Indian history. The primary sources that Newell uses are death and birth registers from Mission San Francisco. Rather than reproducing a text of dry statistics or lists of California Indians at the missions, Newell uncovers "hidden biographies" from these texts. This imaginative writing enlivens the analysis of the book. In order to examine the interplay between California Indians and the Catholic ceremonies, Newell uses the baptism of Pismote on December 23, 1782. Newell describes what Pismote must have experienced on that December day, such as the incoherent pomp and circumstance as well as sights, smells, and tastes of a Catholic baptism ceremony. Unfortunately, we lose sight of the biographies when Newell discusses labor practices at San

Francisco. Thankfully, she returns to the biography of Keqecég, a Ssalson, to reveal the ways in which Native Californian families changed at Mission San Francisco. On the whole, Newell wonderfully weaves together an anecdotal narrative with those familiar (but sometimes dry) social history sources.

In the end, Newell offers an important contribution to the study of California Indians, missions, and social history. Readers gain an important understanding of an understudied mission in the state. In this way, Newell heeds the recent words of another California Indian historian, George Harwood Phillips, who writes, "Even within a particular region, such as California, the way each mission was managed and the particular economic programs introduced–and thus the quality of life experienced by the Indians–varied."[4] Perhaps Newell could have strengthened the book by more explicitly addressing the uniqueness of Mission San Francisco Asis. In what ways did missions in the San Francisco Bay Area–including the nearby Mission San Francisco de Solano–differ from those in at San Gabriel or Los Angeles? This comment notwithstanding, Newell has produced a wonderful study of California Indian mission life.

Notes

[1]. See, for instance, Francis Guest, "An Examination of the Thesis of S.F. Cook and the Forced Conversion of Indians in the California Missions," *Southern California Quarterly* 61 (Spring 1979): 1-77; Rupert Costo and Jennette Costo, eds., *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1987); James Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Steven Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[2]. Sherburne Cook, *The Conflict between the California Indians and White Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 1942); and Albert Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[3]. James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[4]. George Harwood Phillips, *Vineyards and Vaqueros: Indian Labor and the Economic Expansion of Southern California, 1771-1877* (Norman: Arthur H. Clark, 2010), 21.

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