

**THE GUAYCUROS, JESUIT AND FRANCISCAN  
MISSIONARIES, AND JOSÉ DE GÁLVEZ: THE FAILURE  
OF SPANISH POLICY IN BAJA CALIFORNIA**

*Robert H. Jackson \**

---

\* Investigador independiente. Spring, Texas. e-mail: [academicanarchist@hotmail.com](mailto:academicanarchist@hotmail.com)

**RESUMEN**

Entre los años 1697 y 1767/1768, los jesuitas administraban misiones en Baja California. A causa del limitado potencial de la agricultura en la Península, los jesuitas debieron importar comida de provincias vecinas, y permitieron que gran parte de la población misionera viviera en asentamientos separados de la cabecera de la misión, y se sostuviera por medio de la caza y la recolección de plantas silvestres. Después de la expulsión de los jesuitas, José de Gálvez trató de reorganizar las misiones trasladando poblaciones indígenas a pueblos de misión con mayor potencial agrícola. Este ensayo examina las respuestas de los guaycuros, uno de los grupos indígenas de la península, a la política de Gálvez.

**Palabras clave:** Baja California - misiones - expulsión de los jesuitas - indios guaycuros

**ABSTRACT**

Between 1697 and 1767/1768, the Jesuits administered missions in the arid Baja California Peninsula. Because of the limited potential for agriculture on the Peninsula, the Jesuits had to import food from neighboring provinces, and allowed a large part of the mission populations to live in settlements apart from the central mission village, and to support themselves by hunting and collecting wild plant foods. Following the Jesuit expulsion José de Gálvez attempted to reorganize the missions, and shifted indigenous populations to missions with greater agricultural potential. This essay examines the response of the Guaycuros, one of the indigenous groups in the Peninsula, to the policy of Gálvez.

**Key Words:** Baja California - missions - Jesuits' expulsion - Guaycuro indians

## INTRODUCTION

In 1768 and 1769, the Spanish bureaucrat José de Gálvez spent some time in Baja California, a peripheral mission frontier region in northwestern New Spain. Gálvez came to New Spain with extensive powers to reform the colonial system, and he also oversaw the expulsion of the Jesuits. In Baja California Gálvez attempted to make the mission program more rational, which meant to be less of an economic drain on the Spanish government, that now assumed responsibility for the management and funding of the missions. The drive for reform, however, did not match the realities in the mostly arid Peninsula, that ultimately undermined Gálvez's reform initiative.

This essay examines the implementation of the Bourbon reforms on the Baja California missions, with specific reference to the changes Gálvez attempted to implement among the Guaycuros neophytes living on Dolores del Sur and San Luis Gonzaga missions, located in the arid Magdalena Desert region. The Jesuits had to modify the mission program on the two missions, because of limitations to agriculture in the arid environment they did not produce enough food to feed all natives living in the jurisdiction of each mission. Most Guaycuros lived under minimal supervision from the Jesuits, and their way of life had changed little. Gálvez wanted to implement rapid changes in the way of life of the Guaycuros, but his reform initiative failed. The Guaycuros neophytes resisted Gálvez's plan, that would have rapidly and radically transformed their way of life. This essay, then, shows the failure of Gálvez's reform of frontier missions, and the unrealistic expectations that the bureaucrat set into motion.

## BACKGROUND

In 1697, a band of Jesuits and soldiers arrived at a site called Concho, and established *Nuestra Señora de Loreto* mission. In the weeks following the founding of the mission the local natives attacked the small outpost, but failed to dislodge the incipient colony. The Spanish Crown had funded an aborted colony in the arid Baja California Península in the mid-1680s, but then had decided to no longer attempt to colonize the Peninsula. Jesuit Juan

Maria Salvatierra petitioned the royal government a permission for the Jesuits to establish missions at their own expense, which was granted. Over the next two decades the Jesuits established more missions in Baja California, and consolidated their presence in the districts surrounding Loreto.

In 1720, the Jesuits expanded south into the Magdalena Desert and the Cape Region that surrounds La Paz, the site of an aborted colony established in the 1530s by Hernán Cortés. The term Guaycuro designates a linguistic group that inhabited the arid Magdalena Desert that stretches between Loreto on the north, and La Paz on the south. Variations in spelling from Jesuit documents include Waicuro and Vaicuro. The Guaycuros were nomadic hunters and gatherers who lived in bands of related families, and generally occupied a clearly defined territory within which they collected food. The Jesuits usually denigrated the Guaycura for their dietary habits (Baegert 1952).

In the 1720s and 1730s, the Jesuits established six missions among the native peoples of the southern Cape region and the Magdalena Desert region. In the far south of the Peninsula the Jesuits encountered a relatively wetter climate that supported agriculture, including more specialized crops such as sugar cane. Moreover, with the establishment of San José del Cabo mission in 1730, there was a strategically located settlement that could supply fresh water and provisions to the Manila Galleon that coasted Baja California on its return voyage from Manila to Acapulco, on the Pacific Coast of Mexico. The colonial government had pressed the Jesuits for several decades to find a safe port for the Galleon to stop on the long voyage from Manila to Acapulco. The strongest resistance to the new colonial order occurred in October of 1734 in the south with uprisings and again in the early 1740s. Rebels in 1734 killed Jesuit missionaries Lorenzo Carranco and Nicolás Tamara, and also ambushed the second galleon to stop at San José del Cabo (Burrus 1984: 104-109). The Jesuits attributed the resistance of the natives to their capricious nature, and to the presence of natives of mixed European-indigenous ancestry, the progeny of pearly fishermen and corsairs who had coasted the pearl beds off the Peninsula for decades.

In 1721, missionary Clemente Guillen, S.J., established a mission known as Dolores del Sur at a site roughly half way between Loreto and La Paz among the Guaicuros. Guillen had been stationed at San Juan Bautista mission, established a short distance south of Loreto in 1705. The site chosen was known as Liguí, and initially had a large indigenous population but little water for agriculture. By 1721, few neophytes still lived at the mission. One cause for the decline of the mission was an attack on the settlement by hostile natives from San Jose Island, located in the Gulf of California (Venegas S/A: paragraphs 775-782, 887-890, 985; Burrus 1984: 89-92). Guillen moved the indigenous population of San Juan Bautista south to the site of the new mission

in August of 1721, which was described as having lands that could be irrigated from nine springs, and known as Apaté (Guillen [1744]).

The Jesuits formally established a second mission in the territory of the Guaycuros named San Luis Gonzaga, in 1737 at a site called Chiriyaki, near Dolores del Sur mission (Burrus 1984: 240-244). However, shortages of Jesuit personnel delayed the arrival of the first permanent resident missionary until the early 1740s. In late 1743, *visitador general* Juan Antonio Balthasar reported that San Luis was being established on a more permanent basis (Burrus 1984: 206-208). It should also be noted that in the 1730s several Jesuits who spent time at San Miguel *visita* of Comondu mission congregated and baptized several dozen Guaycuros, including eleven in the year 1735. One of the Jesuits was William Gordon, who left La Paz following the outbreak of the 1734 rebellion (San Miguel Candandegomo Baptismal Register; Jackson 1984: 99-101).

The goal of the missionaries was to create stable and politically autonomous indigenous communities on the model of the *pueblos reales* of central Mexico (Gibson 1964). In addition to conversion to Catholicism, the missionaries were to transform the natives into sedentary farmers, ranchers, and craft industrial producers who would participate in the new colonial order as providers of labor to the government and Spanish entrepreneurs and payers of tribute. However, in much of Baja California the Jesuits had to modify the basic elements of the mission program of social-cultural change. Instead of congregating the native peoples to a single mission village, the Jesuits had to allow them to continue to reside in their traditional seasonally shifting settlements, called *rancherías* by the Jesuits. Clemente Guillen, stationed at Dolores mission established among the Guaycuros, reported that it took him some twenty years to finally congregate the natives to a group of six settlements he identified as *pueblos*, which meant that they were different from the seasonally shifting native settlements. In 1744, the six villages were known as Dolores, the main mission village, with a population of 159; Limpia Concepcion with a population of 124; Encarnacion that counted 112 neophytes; Trinidad with 82; Redención with 130; and Resurrecion counting 142. The neighboring mission San Luis Gonzaga consisted of three villages: San Luis Gonzaga with 190 neophytes; Santa Maria Magdalena with 195, and San Juan Nepomuceno with 131 neophytes. Guillen also reported he had organized a village named Jesus María to the west near Magdalena Bay with 195 natives, and another 56 he hoped to settle at Jesus María. Because of the distance of the village from both Dolores and San Luis Gonzaga, the Black Robe hoped to establish another mission for these groups. The Black Robe noted that he had to visit caves and go into the nearby mountains to look for the natives. Once brought under the sphere of influence of the mission,

the Jesuits periodically brought the natives to the main mission village to receive religious instruction (Guillen [1744]).

The basis of the mission economies generally was Mediterranean-style agriculture, producing wheat, corn, some barley, and small quantities of fruits and vegetables. The missionaries at Dolores del Sur and San Luis Gonzaga had some crops grown on small irrigated plots of land, but did not produce enough to feed the neophytes (Guillen [1744]; Burrus 1984: 208). Hundreds of Guaycuros lived under minimal supervision from the Jesuits, and continued to live pretty much the way they had prior to the arrival of the Black Robes. They continued to hunt and collect wild plant foods including seeds, wild fruit, and roots (Guillen [1744]).

Most importantly, the Guaycuros experience minimal change in the organization of labor and time, and did not work in sustained agricultural labor at the two missions. The Jesuits also complained about the continued influence of *hechiceros* or shaman, and the persistence of traditional religious practices. Guillen noted that he challenged the authority of the shaman, and burned their "*cabelleras, tables, y otras diabolicos instrumentos*". Guillen also reported his efforts to stamp out certain cultural practices such as polygamy and infanticide, the murder of first born children (Guillen [1744]). However, the Black Robe really had no idea of what happened in the villages, and an argument can be made that the minimal oversight explains the lack of resistance to the Jesuits by the Guaycuros.

## REFORM OF THE PENINSULA MISSIONS

In 1768, King Carlos III ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spain and its dominions, and in Baja California *visitador general* José de Gálvez supervised the expulsion and a reorganization of the Peninsula mission system that now came under direct royal authority. Franciscans from the apostolic college of San Fernando in Mexico City replaced the Jesuits in Baja California. One initiative Gálvez implemented was to shift native populations to missions with greater agricultural potential, to ensure labor at those sites with the potential to produce larger crops and; thus, reduce the cost of importing food into the Peninsula. One mission that Gálvez targeted was Todos Santos, established as a mission in 1733. The final mission, Todos Santos, first developed as a satellite village of La Paz mission, established because of the availability of water and arable land. The neophytes settled at Todos Santos produced wheat, corn, rice, and sugar (Burrus 1984: 206-208). In 1733, the Jesuit Sigismundo Taraval established an independent mission at Todos Santos named Santa Rosa. Taraval was to direct the continued development of

agriculture at Todos Santos (Crosby 1994: 113). He survived the uprising in the year following the establishment of the mission, and wrote the most detailed account of the uprising and its suppression. In 1749, the Jesuits formally combined La Paz and Santa Rosa missions under the rubric of Nuestra Señora del Pilar, the name of La Paz mission, but the establishment was more commonly called Todos Santos.

Todos Santos produced a variety of crops, and was important to Jesuit plans for the continued colonization of the Peninsula. In addition to corn and wheat, the missionaries directed the planting of sugar cane and rice (Utrera [1753-1755]; Lizasoain [1761-1763]; Burrus 1984: 208). As noted above, operations at the mission included a sugar mill and distillery. In 1755, Utrera described Todos Santos as having "*bastante tierra, y agua*". In contrast, Utrera characterized Dolores as not having "*tierra, ni hay agua*" (Utrera [1753-1755]). Immediately following the Jesuit expulsion, Gálvez viewed Todos Santos as one of the missions in Baja California with considerable potential.

The Jesuits stationed in the six southern missions baptized thousands of natives. Guillen reported that between 1721 and 1744, he had baptized 1,849, but that many had died from smallpox and other diseases (Guillen [1744]). Disease and rebellion rapidly decimated the neophyte population. The 1734-1737 rebellion resulted in many deaths, and troops were sent from Sinaloa and rapidly spread venereal disease as they had sexual relations with native women. In the aftermath of the uprising epidemics killed hundreds of neophytes. For example, an outbreak in the fall of 1743 killed more than 500 natives at Santiago mission, and the population dropped from some 1,000 to 449 following the epidemic in 1744. The population of Dolores del Sur and San Luis Gonzaga totaled 1,000 and 516 respectively in 1744, but this number dropped to 458 and 288 twenty-four years later, in 1768. The population of Todos Santos was some 500 in 1730, and a mere 83 in 1768 (see Table 1).

Gálvez tried to promote agriculture at Todos Santos by relocating more than 700 Guaycuros from Dolores and San Luis Gonzaga to Todos Santos. Galvez ordered the suppression of Dolores and San Luis Gonzaga; and moved the neophytes from those two missions to Todos Santos. The surviving neophytes from Todos Santos went to Santiago mission. Many of the neophytes at Santiago had syphilis, and a surgeon was sent to treat the ill at the mission and those transferred from Todos Santos. At that time doctors treated syphilis with mercury pills, which was as bad as the disease in itself. Gálvez had 44 people from San Francisco Xavier moved to San Jose del Cabo. As a result of Gálvez's changes, Todos Santos had a population of 746 Guaycurans, the population of Santiago increased to about 261, and 115 now lived at San José del Cabo.

From the perspective of the Crown, interested in trying to reduce

expenses in Mexico and increase revenue, the movement of natives between missions made sense, but his plan backfired because the neophytes could not be transformed into a disciplined labor force in a short period of time. Moreover, in 1769 a measles epidemic decimated the population and many of the Guaycuros fled Todos Santos. In response to the failure of his plan to put the Guaycuros to work farming, Gálvez ordered the hiring of an overseer and agricultural workers too (Jackson 1986).

In the fourteen years following the redistribution of population a series of epidemics swept through Baja California, culminating with a smallpox outbreak in 1781 to 1782. Some 1,122 lived at three missions following the redistribution of population, but the first epidemic, measles in 1769, killed hundreds. In 1771, only 290 survived. At the end of the 1781 to 1782 smallpox outbreak the population of the three missions which further declined to 206 (see Table 1). In 1795, the government ordered the suppression of Santiago mission, and the removal of the neophytes to San José del Cabo (Jackson 1986:275). In 1808, the population of the last two missions, Todos Santos and San José del Cabo, had stabilized at 191.

The natives of southern Baja California had already proven their willingness to resist the new colonial order in several major uprisings, including between 1734 and 1737 and again in the early 1740s. Neophytes also fled the missions, and became apostates in the mountains. The devastating epidemics of the 1740s most likely profoundly broke the faith of the indigenous population in their own belief system since it could not explain the new and horrible diseases the Jesuits clearly understood. Traditional shaman offered little to alleviate the suffering of the neophytes. The Guaycuruan population of Dolores del Sur and San Luis Gonzaga certainly experienced the effects of epidemics, but not to the degree as in the missions further south.

Gálvez's relocation of the Guaycuruan to Todos Santos initiated a prolonged crisis that resulted from a major miscalculation on the part of the colonial bureaucrat. Gálvez wanted the Guaycuruans to be converted into a labor force overnight, and the neophytes resisted. Francisco Palou, O.F.M., noted that:

The Guaicuros Indians had never settled down in their native missions of La Pasion [Dolores] and San Luis, but lived in the mountains like deer, supporting themselves on wild foods, and attending Mass at the mission when it was the turn of their Village... The visitor [José de Gálvez] moved all these villages to Todos Santos to live in a settlement. As they were accustomed to live in the woods, it seemed hard to them, and they immediately began to run away (Palou 1966: 1: 143).



The Guaycuroes fled Todos Santos, and engaged in the theft or destruction of mission property. The Franciscans responded with the use of corporal punishment, an action that backfired. In 1770, a delegation of neophyte leaders from Todos Santos went to Loreto to complain about mistreatment at the hands of the overseer, and shortages of food (Jackson 1986: 276). However, Spanish officials in Loreto dismissed the complaints of the Guaycuroes, and were not about to undercut the new colonial system being created in the Peninsula based on Gálvez's instructions. The Franciscans introduced a more authoritarian regime than the Jesuits had had, and relied heavily on the use of corporal punishment to maintain discipline.

While Gálvez policy responded to the pragmatic needs of the Crown, it completely misunderstood the realities of the limited social and cultural change the Guaycuroes had experienced at Dolores and San Luis Gonzaga missions under the Jesuits. The neophytes had not been converted into a disciplined labor force over three decades under Jesuit tutelage, but were expected to learn new ways of work overnight. The missionaries brought with them a paternalistic attitude based on a well developed sense of cultural superiority, and believed that what they brought to the indigenous neophytes benefited them. A passage in Palou's account of the troubles at Todos Santos catches a sense of this paternalistic chauvinism:

The new settlers [Guaycuruan neophytes] have been so ungrateful for the good that has been done them in changing their fortunes that they have not been willing to settle down there, and only by threats to remain for a time, but more to destroy what the mission has than to advance it (Palou 1966: 1: 176).

## ANALYSIS

Gálvez ordered the closing of Dolores del Sur and San Luis Gonzaga, two missions that he considered to be marginal because of the limited agriculture production at the two sites, and the relocation of the Guaycuroes to Todos Santos. His plan to put the natives to work producing crops failed. The relocation to a new home and the use of force to put to Guaycuroes backfired. The natives fled, or resisted in a variety of ways including the destruction of mission property. Gálvez eventually had to hire settlers to work the mission lands, which defeated the purpose of Gálvez's plan to shift populations between missions. A 1773 census noted that of a population of 180, eighteen were fugitives in the mountains, three were fugitives on the coast ("*en la playa*"), and twenty-one were still fugitives in Loreto (*Padrón*

*de Yndios* [1773]). In the following year there were still eight fugitives absent from the mission, and the government had hired natives from Sonora and settlers to work at the mission (Armenta y Salcedo 1774a; Armenta y Salcedo 1774b).

The expulsion of the Jesuits and particularly the movement of personnel to and through the Peninsula on the way to San Diego spread epidemics through the missions that decimated the neophyte populations. In 1768, the neophyte population of Todos Santos was small, and infected by syphilis. Gálvez relocated some 700 Guaycuros to Todos Santos, yet within several years only a small percentage of the population survived. In 1771, 180 Guaycuros remained, down from some 700 three years earlier. Epidemics and the effects of syphilis greatly reduced the Guaycuros population during the fifty years following the Jesuit expulsion, and by 1821 the group was reaching the point of cultural and biological extinction.

The Jesuit policy towards the Guaycuros buffered the natives from the most adverse effects of Spanish colonization, except for the spread of Old World crowd diseases. One important aspect of Jesuit policy was the control of personnel from the mainland and the Peninsula. This changed following the expulsion of the Jesuits, and the arrival of José de Gálvez with his plans for reform. The Guaycuros populations of Dolores del Sur and San Luis Gonzaga declined during the Jesuit period, but depopulation accelerated following their expulsion, as a direct consequence of Gálvez's policies. The expulsion of the Jesuits proved to be disastrous for the Guaycuros.

Fecha de recepción: diciembre 2003.

Fecha de aceptación: diciembre 2004.

## REFERENCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

Armenta, Josef y José Salcedo, O.P.

1774. Padrón de los sirvientes Espanoles, Mulattos e Yndios existents en esta Mission de Nra Sra del Pilar, o de Todos Santos, y en sus ranchos de Ganado, agosto 19, 1774. Archivo General de la Nacion, Mexico, Provincias Internas, legajo 166.

1774. Padron en q[u]e se contiene el numero de Personas q[u]e se hallan existents, y pertenientes a esta Mision de Nra. Sra. del Pilar, o de Todos Santos en el sur de California, agosto 19, 1774. Archivo General de la Nacion, Mexico, Provincias Internas, legajo 166.

Baegert, Johann, S.J.

1952. *Observations in Lower California*. Trad. y ed. de M. M. Brandenburg. Berkeley/ Los Angeles, University of California Press.

Burrus, Ernest, S.J.

1984. *Jesuit Relations-Baja California*. Los Angeles. Dawson's Bookshop.

Crosby, Harry

1994. *Antigua California: Mission and Colony on the Peninsula. Frontier, 1697-1767*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press.

Gibson, Charles

1964. *Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Guillen, Clemente, S.J.

[1744]. Informe del principio, progreso, y estado presente de la Mission de Nra. Senora de los Dolores. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Jackson, Robert H.

1984. Demographic Patterns in the Missions of Central Baja California. *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 6: 91-112.

1986. Patterns of Demographic Change in the Missions of Southern Baja California. *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8 (2): 273-279.

1994. *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press.

Lizasoain, Ignacio, S.J.

[1761-1763]. Noticia de la Visita General del P Ignacio Lizasoain Visitador General de las Misiones de esta Prov[inci]a de Nueva Expana. W. B. Stevens Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

Padron de Yndios

1773. Padron de los Yndios de que se compone esta Mission de Todos Santos, junio 23, 1773. Archivo General de la Nacion, Mexico, Misiones, legajo 12.

Palou, Francisco, O. F. M.

1966. *Historical Memoirs of New California*. Trad. y ed. por Herbert E. Bolton. New York, McMillan. 4 vols.

San Miguel Cadandegomo

1730-1737. Baptismal Register. Cuevas Collection. Mexico.

Utrera, Joseph, S. J.

[1753-1755]. Muevo estado de las Misiones de esta Prov[inci]a de la Comp[ani]a de Jesus de Nueva Espana. W. B. Stevens Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

Venegas, Miguel, S.J.

s/f. *Empresas Apostolicas de la Conquista de Californias*. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

**TABLE 1.** Population of the Southern Baja California Missions, in Selected Years

Year	Dolores Del Sur	Santiago	San Jose Del Cabo	Todos Santos	San Luis Gonzaga
1730			946	500	
1733			1040		
1742		1000			
1744	1000	449			516
1755	624	232	73	151	352
1762	573	198	63	93	300
1768	458	178	71	83	288
1771		70	50	170	
1773		75	51	180	
1774		72	50	155	
1782		43	28	135	
1786		36	143	159	
1790		32	62	90	
1791		23	62	90	
1794		70	102	78	
1795			84	80	
1796			70	75	
1797			77	80	
1798			81	81	
1799			78	74	
1800			78	88	
1801			77	80	
1802			83	79	
1803			88	87	
1804			83	79	
1806			92		
1808			109	82	
1813				107	

Source: Jackson (1986 y 1994: 167-168).

