



NATIONAL  
MUSEUM  
*of the*  
AMERICAN  
INDIAN

 Smithsonian

# CALIFORNIA NATIVE AMERICAN SURVIVAL AND RESILIENCE DURING THE MISSION PERIOD (1769 – 1834)

## A SOURCE INVESTIGATION



# WHAT ARE SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT NATIVE AMERICANS IN THE SPANISH MISSIONS OF CALIFORNIA?

- Let's look at two images.

# IMAGE ANALYSIS



*Rev. Father N. Duran and Indian Child [book illustration], ca. 1844.*

# IMAGE ANALYSIS



*"Old Padres spreading the Gospel to the Indians, Old Mission Plaza Church, Los Angeles" [picture postcard], 1913.*

# PRE-EUROPEAN CONTACT

Indigenous peoples have called the region known today as "California" home for many thousands of years, since before living memory and before written accounts prepared by European colonizers. Scholars estimate that before the arrival of European colonists, present-day California was home to between 300,000 and 1 million diverse Native people.

- Approximately 80 to 100 different languages spoken
- As many as 500 individual, self-governing societies<sup>2</sup>



# SPANISH COLONIZATION

- 1769: Spain sent soldiers and priests to colonize present-day California to prevent the Russians, British, and Dutch from laying claim to the area.
- The Spanish also sought a “spiritual conquest” of California by converting Native Americans to Catholicism through a mission system.



Louis Choris, *Danse des Californiens*, ca. 1815. Watercolor drawing depicting California Native Americans at the San Francisco Mission.

# SPANISH COLONIZATION

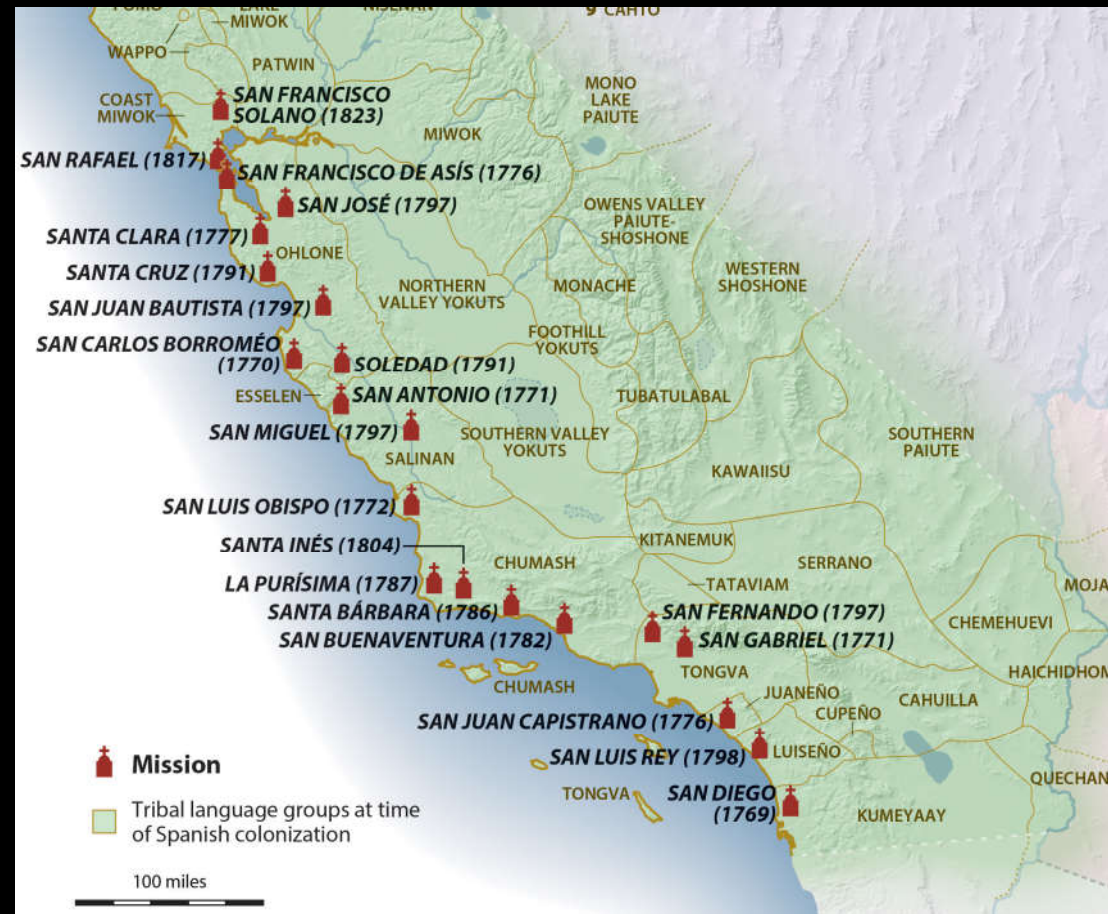
- Missionaries eventually created a network of twenty-one missions from San Diego to Sonoma.
- While Native conversion to Catholicism was a primary goal of the missions, the priests relied heavily on enslaved Native labor to build and run the missions successfully.



# SPANISH COLONIZATION

The mission system led to high death rates among Native peoples due to:

- **Disease** - Unsanitary, crowded conditions in which the missionaries forced Native converts to live often resulted in disease.
- **Starvation** - Missionaries did not always provide Native laborers with adequate amounts of food.
- **Mental and Physical Abuse** - There are numerous eyewitness accounts of Spanish missionaries and soldiers abusing baptized Native Californians







## PRIMARY SOURCE ACCOUNTS: TREATMENT OF BAPTIZED NATIVE CALIFORNIANS

- **1773: Decree from the viceroy of New Spain:** *“Just as a father of a family has charge of his house and of the education and correction of his children, the management of, control, and education of the baptized Indians [belongs] to the missionary fathers.”*
- **1798: Report from a former mission priest:** *“For any reason, however insignificant it may be, [Indians] are severely and cruelly whipped, placed in shackles, or put in the stocks for days on end without receiving even a drop of water.”<sup>3</sup>*
- **1780: California governor Felipe de Neve:** *“...the Indians fate [was] worse than that of slaves.”*



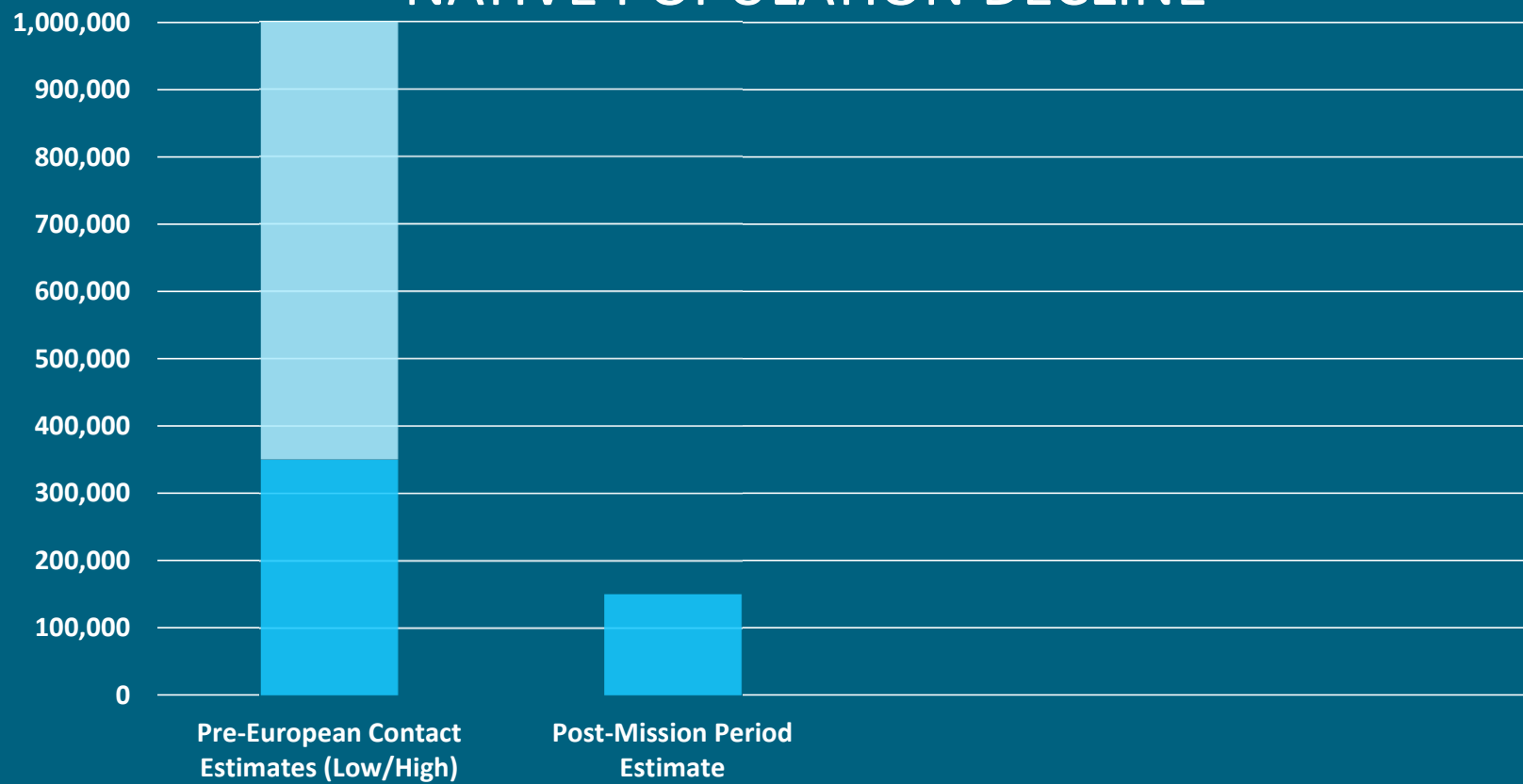
# NATIVE POPULATION DECLINE

Scholars estimate that before the arrival of European colonists, present-day California was home to between 300,000 and 1 million diverse Native people.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the mission period (1830s), that number had decreased by half to around 150,000.<sup>5</sup>

Consider these numbers:

- By 1833, Spanish missionaries had baptized around **81,500** California Native Americans.
- In the same amount of time, they buried over **62,000** baptized California Native Americans.<sup>6</sup>

# NATIVE POPULATION DECLINE





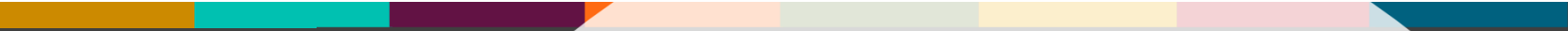
DESPITE SEVERE ABUSE AND OPPRESSION, NATIVE AMERICANS RESISTED THE MISSION SYSTEM AND THEIR CULTURES CONTINUED TO THRIVE, ADAPT, AND EVOLVE.

TODAY, WE WILL USE PRIMARY SOURCES TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

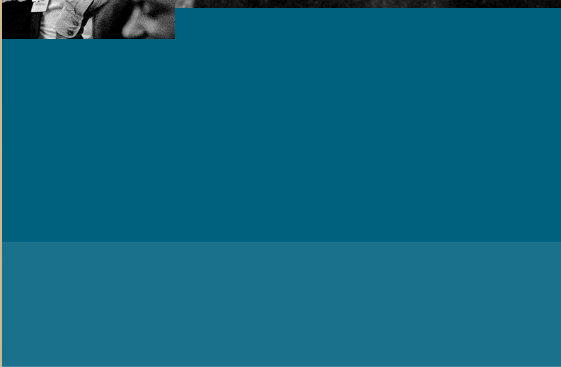
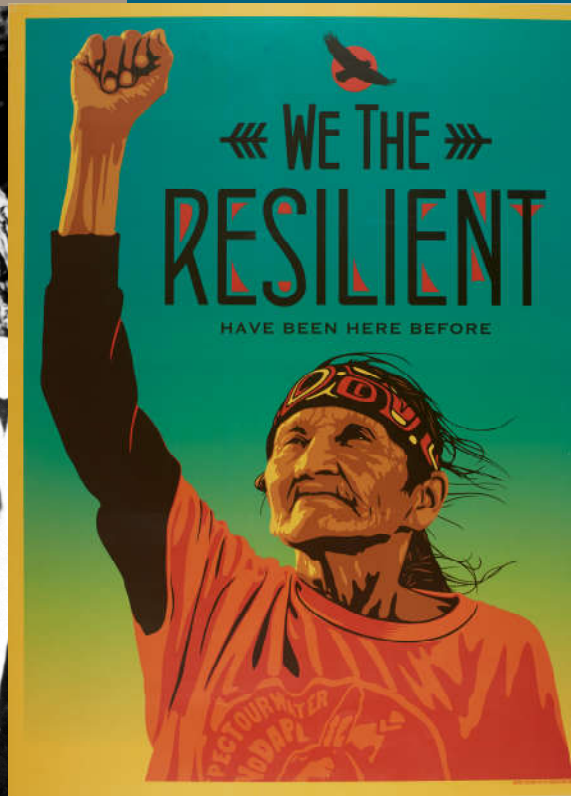



## CENTRAL QUESTION OF TODAY'S LESSON:

*Native Americans of California during the mission period: How did Native people resist and persist in the face of extreme adversity?*



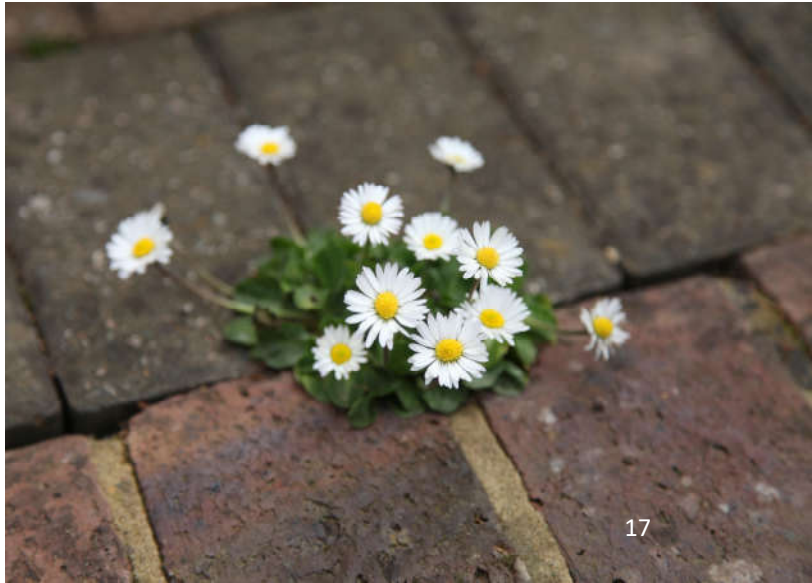
WHAT DOES  
RESISTANCE  
MEAN TO YOU?





WHAT DOES  
PERSISTENCE  
MEAN TO YOU?







## DEFINITIONS:

- To Resist: to exert force in opposition
  - Synonyms: to defy, to oppose, to fight, to withstand
- To Persist: to go on despite opposition or warning; to continue to exist, especially past a usual or expected time
  - Synonyms: to carry on, to persevere