

the second nation

They came for gold and silver and Catholic converts and a shorter way to the Spicy East, the latter their main impetus, the Second Nation, for the First Nation were immigrants, too. They were in a race with other temperate peoples, the French, the British and Russians especially through much of their dominant period, and then the Neuromericans and the heralding of the passing of dominance to the Third Nation that erupted with Manifest Destiny and the Gold Rush. Their prosperity and destitution waxed and waned with the triumphs and travails of their mother country, often in inverse correlation with their opponents. Although they failed to find the storied river of Anian, of *Buenaventura*, and a shorter route to the Spicy Lands (nor El Dorado, though it was there hiding in plain sight in the Sierra streams), their efforts in their grand ships, guided by magnetic compass and crude maps and stars and sun and moon alone, to traverse thousands of miles of featureless ocean, reflected a remarkable confidence, zest, resilience, and resourcefulness incomprehensible to most of today's coddled minds. They found some converts for their gaudy religion, though often through dishonorable and disrespectful and duplicitous means, often nearly indistinguishable from slavery, and they left a travesty of tears of disease-killed First Nation persons. Arrogant and imperious and dismissive and condescending and bigoted, all behaviors they were guilty of. But a minority of the first people likely heard their calling with the second, the *segundo*, and rose to relatively prominent positions, and obviously some accommodation was reached given rise of the *mestizos*. Many of the communities established, introducing a domesticated way of life to a landscape that previously had seen only mildly cultivated and wild lifestyles, were impressive in how they were built nearly from scratch – also beyond the comprehension of today's Internet-addled mind. Their legacy remains, etched in names all along the coast, penetrating inland in the southern and central parts of the insane state of California, giving my home mountain ranges of the Sierra Nevada and San Bernadinos their current appellations; found in the beautiful remnants of the missions, their remaining existence proof of the skill by which they were built; and in the golden skin and obsidian eyes of so many people of this insane state, fusion of first and second peoples to mingle and fuse with the third people to become a fourth and then beyond and only to end come the final blast from the sky, whether from god or man or space.

Yep, they are reviled today as pure evil, lusting for precious metals and gems and jewels, gold and opal, they're seen as greedy, racist, sexist whities, and they did condescend towards others based partly on genetics, and dudes were frequently top dogs, but, as in all life, nothing is absolute, and such a perception is woefully, distortingly incomplete. Precious metals really aren't, but they still have value for art as well as science (combined, to me, most beautifully in my gold- and silver-plated spoons and spinners that allure king salmon and steelhead like no other lures), so not a totally frivolous enterprise to till the earth for such rarities to at least a mild extent. Lest we forget, it was at the genesis and during the bloom of exploration when mighty Elizabeth reigned and ruled England with incomparable skill and energy, and Isabella was viewed as vital (or even more so) as her husband in Spain and oversaw the *Reconquista*. While often bigoted to peoples of their world new to them, many at least acknowledged the truth that these were humans, too, they'd some empathy, otherwise Isabella wouldn't've condemned slavery, nor would there have been such an effort to bend the new peoples to Spanish traditions – yeah, a condescending view – via the softer

route of the church and missions rather than the brutal shackles of secularism and plantation slavery. And so – the efforts, the effectors, a mosaic of the good and bad nearly all persons, all peoples, have the potential to express.

And so the spearhead of the Second Nation, those mariners who first penetrated to California and have their names reflected in, appropriately, a sea, a beach. Hated too by a disproportionately loud minority these days, even more so since they were the first of the *segundo*, and so the genesis of the disruptions and diseases that so decimated the *primo*. Indeed, that was tragic, but certainly not premeditated, and that does not erase how remarkable were their voyages. So many of those haters – and yeah, some of the hate is justified, but harboring hate alone is so very incomplete – are coddled, babied, nannied, can't even drive 10 miles from their urban center to another without the fuckin' smart-phone, can't change the oil in their ride, can't fix a faucet leak, can't grow a herb in a pot or kill a rabbit for a stew, and somehow can't at least acknowledge that the successful voyages of the Spanish so long ago with no electronics, no good maps, no supermarkets or light bulbs or any convenience of these over-domesticated days, only a featureless ocean of thousands of miles with only compass and astrolabe and celestial sky-marks to guide, and with only manpower, no computer power, to build and maintain their ships – fucking incredible. And while the haters sit at home and moan and mire on the couch because they've suffered "trauma" from a childish name-calling post on their social-media account, those mariners persevered through hot and cold and scurvy and starvation and infection, hauling sails and ropes and banging nails and hot metal on anvils. They could've only succeeded in such marvelous odysseys by harboring a healthy resilience, resourcefulness, and courage. And, I have to think, a healthy faith as well.

Their main drive was, proximately, the pursuit of the flowering of taste and fragrance and healthfulness of the spices, with secondary but also important motivations of more converts for their church, more ore to exalt both themselves and their country above that of their rivals. But, really, just as exercising and thereby growing one's legs allows a broadening of ability to traverse more lands, just as a lush larder of energy storage in the form of fat reserves or cached food facilitates experimenting with more foods, so, too, did the union and streamlining of Spain under the formidable rule of Izzy and her dude foster a rich environment to explore beyond the confines of the Iberian, and that surge occurring in a fortuitous time window. It was, at core, the evolutionary impulse of flourishing life that cast off the ships for such lands and waters unknown.

And they exhibited quite the zeal, the urge, to explore during the 1500s, Spain's most golden time, although California of today, yester-century's *Alta California*, remained largely a mystery, remained almost solely the domain of the First Nation, the Americans. The *segundo* just touched the coast of California here and there, mainly in a search for the arrowy Anian River supposed to slice through North America and be the shortest route to the Orient's riches. But the Spanish weren't the only ones plying the waters – the English were, too, and Drake's appearance fomented in the Spanish an ever-greater concern to claim California lands and beyond, both to thwart the English from plundering Spanish ships sojourning from the western Pacific and returning to the mother country around the Americas and then across the Atlantic, which would require pausing during the journey for retrofit and resupply, possibly to occur in California, as well as to claim the mythical Anian for future, faster voyages. But the flame of their zeal for California had dwindled to ember by the end of their golden century, snuffed by both their disastrous defeat

dealt to 'em by Liz's navy and the increasing degeneracy and stagnation of the monarchy that rippled throughout Spain's society. The latter, certainly affected by the increasing inbreeding of the royalty, could mount nothing more for California throughout the 1600s, attaining its nadir during the reign of that pathetically misshapen, inbred man - who deserves some sympathy - Chuck the Second of Spain, the last of the Habsburg line.

The roil after Chuck II's demise and the vicarious usurpation of the throne by the lordly Louix XIV through his grandson, despite all the horror of war exceeding a decade, breathed new life into Spain via less-inbred blood – some freshness with the Bourbon replacement. As always, conditions of the mother country rippled to the daughter country, and *Alta California* experienced renewed interest through the 1700s. By now, they'd enough experience with *Alta* to realize the resemblance of this New World region to those of the Old World, France and Spain and Italy. In other words – very welcoming to southern Europeans. Although errors regarding the geography persisted throughout the 1700s, belief in a Californian Anian River subsided to dust and dream. Interest shifted then to holding as much territory for the mother country as possible, once again a competitive reaction to the acquisitiveness of Spain's rivals, France and Russia but especially Great Britain. So exploration once again increased, more sorties along the coast but now accompanied by more-difficult land surveys, searing, arduous treks from arid northern Mexico through the xeric Colorado Desert, across the Lagunas and other southern ranges, and, eventually, up the coast to the limit of Spain's dominance, the bay of Saint Francis, and the many saltating locations from the south and then along the coast also bearing Spanish names, echoing the long-ago travels. They could see the towering Sierra Nevada and thus gave the mighty range her name, but they penetrated little into interior central and especially northern California, that region largely remaining the domain of the First Nation 'til the Third Nation began trickling in after severing of the territory from the mother country in the early 1800s. To garrison their New Spain, they sought to alter *Alta* to better resemble the home country, and that included bending the First Nation to *segundo*. Had they achieved their fantasy, they'd've had a much larger population to thwart the rival Eurasian nations as well as the new North American one increasingly threatening from the continent's east.

An understandable desire, to recreate Spain, in part with First Nation blood to expand the Spanish tribe, very complex, this change, this evolution, which exhibited the range of human endeavor – atrocity, dismissiveness, humaneness, resourcefulness beyond the remarkable oceanic voyages, and even some beauty. Seems not an instant was given to considering the wild and semi-cultivated lifestyles of the First Nation successful for the landscape, nor that their mere presence held claim to the land, on which the Spanish were trespassers, and which, a double standard, the Spanish then claimed ownership of and accused the Russians perching at Ross of trespassing. Subtraction of self-evident facts from truth, leaving only ink on paper as sources of legitimacy. The latter, while of course useful and valuable, is incomplete, insufficient, and the persistence that only ink on paper – or its modern-day facsimile, dots and lines on electronic screens – means anything continues to contribute to the burgeoning absurdity of the modern technocracy. But they did express humaneness along with the imperiousness, reflected in part by the Spanish leaders realizing that secular interests were liable to enslave rather than convert the First Nation, and this they attempted to circumvent with their Catholic church, through the persuasion of their Christian fathers. Some, such as Padre Garces, seemed remarkably open-minded and appreciative – that

father seemed more converted to the heathen ways than vice versa. Like nearly all groups of people, some veered the other way, being little more than ordained slave-drivers, with flogging and all, though much censure of this intolerant faction again reveals a greater concurrent humaneness. And the extolling of persuading First Nation people to Catholicism, in practice, seemed more a deception, in that once the Americans were within the padres' power, they were basically governed as if children, hunted down if they left their masters, having to seek their masters' permission for tasks no responsible adult should. Despite such efforts at humaneness, and no doubt a small minority of First Nation persons who heard their calling more in the *segundo* than their own, overall, it fuckin' sucked for most of 'em, many of whom died from disrupted health or newly arrived diseases, many of whom suffered from the slash of lash, girls and women locked up at night, jailed, and reflected in the many rebellions and deserters.

And it's a shame that the theater of much of that abuse is so beautiful, the mission. Amazing, and a testament to the skill and resourcefulness of the builders, that enough of so many remained to be restored. Although hazy now here in the later days of my desultory life, I can still recall images of a field trip or two to the San Fernando Mission, a worthy education expedition, though I fear these days, if they're even undertaken, the edifices are explained purely as chambers of horrors rather than reflecting all facets of human experience. And that is, since so many of insane-state California derive from blood of Spain and America, kind of at least partially, implicitly insulting. Digression aside, I remember walking through the stately, graceful corridors, the chapel that I have to think had wonderful acoustics and would've been an awesome amplifying resonator of music, the coolness of the shade proffered by the thick adobe, contrasting the blasting, heaving sun of that searing valley. And a rather elegant expression of a self-sustaining domesticated life, with spaces for repose of residents and travelers, for crafts, for community, for transportation. Sure seemed a fuckin' pretty appropriate building type for the place, no need for air conditioning, reflecting that, of possible European trespassers to excel in such a place, the Spanish were probably the best – hard to see how a Norseman would've flourished in such a place, like a lake trout trying to persist in a weed-choked largemouth bass pond.

The mission, though, wasn't alone in settlement types, complemented by the *presidio*, the warriors' nest, and the *pueblo*, largely the farmer's village. Together with the mission a triad, much resembling such organization that persisted from hundreds of years previous, the Medieval Period, when European life was dominated by the peasants, knights, and holy people – farmer and soldier and priest – who, together, provided all the domesticated people of a place needed: sustenance, protection, and wisdom. (Yeah, I know, and I agree – Christianity in its most virulent literal forms is absurd, but as metaphor, as with all religions, some more than others, much value to be gleaned. Too, lest we forget, the universities originally emerged as religious organizations – they've kind of reverted back to that role, though the dogma promulgated these days is a harsher version than those of so long ago – at least grains of creative behavior can be quarried from Christianity, as well as acknowledgement that we all have spirit, whereas the postmodern shit inculcated now – spirit dead, and you're just a dehumanized fuckin' number on the intersectional scale. Gross.) To the bone they were in *Alta*, often down to the bare necessities, and so a worthy organization to consider in these disorienting days. So many so bummed out in the modern world, over-connected and yet famished for connection, feeling so worthless, so many lives so fuckin' homogenous and rote, stuck inside a room where the weather never changes, stuck so many hours staring passively,

stolidly, at the flattening, circumscribed screen, on repeat, and to quell the worthlessness, a drug bonanza with the legal often worse than the banned, and then overblown reactions of ignorant outrage, blown up and financially feasted on by vultures fanning the fires. I'm pretty goddamn sure that shit didn't exist in the *pueblos*, where the citizens had their own small adobes, where they could be alone or with their families, intimate, space to reflect, but then had communal halls where they gathered in *real* connection, not diluted by flashing screens, then worked their own plots but, together, also had some common grounds should one person's private plot prove a failure – good insurance. They raised food, they worked stone and metal and wood, were magnificent equestrians (*i.e.*, they knew their transportation well), had their hands and feet in the flesh and bones of Mother Earth, in life, and that – that don't give ya time to be bummed out and seek the downward-spiral conundrum of ever-unsatiating gluttonizing of social media. The more people eat that shit, the less it fills.

Only good to kick people outdoors and sink their hands and feet into Mother Earth, get a fuckin' sunburn, sweat, strain, elevate 'em to citizens of the *pueblo*.

Statement of the obvious, or at least that which should be – societies are of people, people are life, life evolves, and so are societies never static – they're flows. And the flow of Spain once again stalled, paradoxically to both stagnation and chaos, a swirling whirlpool dammed, come the turn to the 1800s. The country dragged along and embroiled in the massive clashes of the ages of the French Revolution and Napoleon, spurned in part by the Enlightenment and the smaller clash that occurred on the east side of the northern New World. As always, the shockwaves of the Old World reached the New, and the desire to bash the castes, of both market and state, erupted. Likewise the diminution of religion, and that reduction originating and expanding from France reflected a similar feeling with the missions – yeah, they'd converted some of the first peoples, but not all, and many who had accepted that change clearly found it distasteful and returned to their former lifestyles of hunter and fire steward and fisher. (Such desertions drew the *segundo* inland into the southern Central Valley more than they likely would have, and thus Spanish names adorn far more of the places there now than in the northern valley.) And so, to the clamor for social and economic freedom was added religious freedom, the most obvious act of which would be transformation of the missions, failed in their primary mission, to *pueblos* – “secularization.”

And so the shift from an overseas monarchy to an independent republic; the evolution of the missions to *pueblos* and depots and, for some, ruins, accompanied by increased ranching, the reign of the *vaquero* and the *rancho* (their colorful dances must've been so beautiful, to eye and ear); an honorable elevation in humaneness, with emancipation of the Catholicized first peoples to citizens (something the nation on the east took decades more, plus early deaths of hundreds of thousands of lives, to achieve, at least on federal documents) and moderation of punishments doled out to lawbreakers; and the severing of ties with the mother country. But divisions remained, typical of newly born organizations, as was the case with the other toddler New World nation of the east that bickered about power invested in state versus country as well as how much dough the government rightly was owed, manifested in whiskey. In *Alta*, a division was sown that persists to this day, that between north and south, though the argument today stems not from political quibbles of legitimacy but from water. The turmoil never quite ceased – some births are tougher than others, the recovery period longer, or, in some cases, certainly more so in those older times than today in the developed world, the new life suffers a very early death. And so *Alta* as well as

the rest of the second Spain, Mexico, was vulnerable to an easy defeat and territorial swiping by the United States, the latter, like a wolf sniffing bleeding prey, so willing to pounce. (Grant thought so.) And so they did, like grown-up children baying that “he hit me first” to justify a subsequent bashing, gussied up in glossy language that ethically and organizationally, the US was superior to Mexico. Given the violence of the cartels and flood of immigration north these days, their imperious argument – well, seems partially verified. Then again, had peace reigned, perhaps Mexico and therefore *Alta* may have evolved along a different trajectory that would’ve realized a greater potential than of today. Regardless, the *segundo* was soon superseded by, enveloped in, the Third Nation, the trickle turned into a massive flood come the Gold Rush, and then their dominant period that persists to this day.

It seems impossible that any society is truly newborn, just as a species doesn’t just suddenly appear without an antecedent. They evolve, as life. Similarly, very few seem capable of death, of total obliteration, though vestiges of some very old ones, due to the distance of time, are no longer discernable, though perhaps fossilized yet to be unearthed. And so with the *segundo*, yeah, minimized by the Third Nation and the smaller peoples that arrived after and have stamped their history on modern California (the Chinese notably – their remarkable industriousness I view in their flumes and railways each ride up and down the Sierra, in their Heaven tree found alongside their infrastructure), but still discernable, in the cool, surreal atmosphere of the restored graceful missions, in the florid, poetic place names of the south and coast (even if mangled, such as “Loss Anjewless”), in the wonderfully balanced, full flow of a tight mariachi ensemble, and in the obsidian eyes and golden skin of the *mestizos* who still, after centuries, reap harvest from the land once known as *Alta*.

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