
First published in 1966, *The Decline of the Californios* changed the way mainstream scholars wrote about nineteenth century California history. Unlike earlier histories that either demonized or romanticized the Californios, Pitt portrayed the Californios as worthy of serious historical scrutiny. In his now classic work, they emerged from the pages as flesh and blood -- men with social and political dreams and aspirations. Their land wealth came through hard work in the rapidly changing and unstable political climate of the early nineteenth century. Their decline was not due to sloth or Divine Providence, but to specific historical factors. While other, more sophisticated works have emerged since its first publication, *The Decline of the Californios* remains an important reminder of the historiographic changes that came with the social histories of the 1960s and 1970s.

Pitt opens his story in the 1830s and 40s, a time of political turmoil in Alta California, as well as the time when U.S. immigrants began to cross the Sierra Nevada in significant numbers. Californios greeted the newcomers with supplies and hospitality. The newcomers, Pitt carefully notes, arrived with racist preconceptions about the Californios who had colonized the area. In 1846 many of the newcomers joined together to take California for themselves and the rest, is now California history. Pitts’ discussion of what followed is part of what set his work apart from earlier monographs on the take-over of the West. In 1851 Senator Gwin passed his land act in the hope that it would push Californios off their ranchos and free up land for “Yankee settlers.” Pitt meticulously details many of the legal and extra legal maneuverings that followed, with the majority of Californios losing their land in the North. Many Californios in the South, he notes, were able to hold onto portions of their land until the droughts and floods of the 1860s. In the end, the Californios lost everything, yet continued to battle against the North American Invasion, through the press, through the courts, and through social banditry well into the 1880s.

*The Decline of the Californios* was outstanding in its time and continues to hold an important place in California History and the History of the U.S. West. Yet as Ramón Gutiérrez points out in the introduction to this latest edition, other more sophisticated works have emerged since its original publication. These newer works not only recognize the California Era as a time worthy of serious study, they problematize many of the sources Pitt utilized. In addition, and equally important, they recognize the importance of Californiana histories and California Indian histories to understanding the nineteenth century. Specific works that come to mind are Rosaura Sánchez’s *Telling Identities* (1995), Lisbeth Haas’s *Conquests and Historical Identities in California* (1995), and Genaro Padilla’s *My History, Not Yours* (1993), as well as the anthology *Contested Eden* (1998). Of particular interest in the anthology is Antonia Castañeda’s “Engendering the History of Alta California,” which, like her yet unpublished larger manuscript, centers on the role of gender as a historical force in nineteenth century California. The latest publication of *Decline of the Californios* is indeed an exciting event, both as a reminder of the important changes it brought to the field of California History, and a reminder of how far we have come in the last three decades.

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