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Adaptation to Conquest: The Mexican
Community of San Jose, 1845-1880

by

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Looking back over the forty year period since the invasion of California, sensitive observers of San Jose's history could not help but marvel at the town's rapid transformation from an isolated rural village to a sizable semi-industrial urban community. Many, indeed, agreed with a locally published business pamphlet which, while regretting the loss of Spanish and Mexican landmarks, viewed San Jose's metamorphosis as inexorable. "This result," argued the pamphlet, "is inevitable; for it is but a repetition of the old story of the triumph of the stronger and more vigorous over the weaker; of the peaceful, but nonetheless sure, extermination of the indolent native Californian -- half-Indian and half Spanish or Mexican -- by the hardy, energetic Anglo-Saxon and his descendants."¹ By 1886, the year that the pamphlet was published, the relatively small native population was virtually dominated by Anglo-Americans and other foreigners eager to take advantage of California's many resources. Government had quickly changed hands, statehood had easily been achieved, and new institutions sprung up everywhere. Manifest destiny unfolded swiftly.

Though changes came relatively quickly, transitions were not always easy or smooth. San Jose's population often resisted new situations, and only hesitantly adapted to the novel circumstances. Occasionally change was forced upon them; but people were never left totally without options to effect some power over their lives. For the Californio and Mexican immigrant population, the greatest room to maneuver remained in the more intimate areas of existence: marital relationships, familial responsibilities, the raising of children. Not surprisingly,

women were especially affected by the transformation of the worlds of work, education, and mass culture in California during the last half of the nineteenth century. Consequently, this paper will focus broadly on the response of Chicano* residents to the social and economic growth of San Jose from 1845 to 1880, and in particular on the adjustment of Chicano women in their struggle to balance traditional family concerns with the economic demands of a gradually industrializing urban economy.²

The Growth of San Jose

In 1845, San Jose was a small Mexican pueblo, separated from constant regulation by the government in Mexico City by hundreds of miles of formidable terrain. Although it was the first civil community founded in California (1777), San Jose's population did not grow significantly until after the Mexican Revolution. The pueblo's population more than tripled during the twenty-five year period of Mexican rule but probably still numbered less than one thousand when hostilities broke out between Mexican and American troops on July 9, 1846. Included in this figure were about one hundred fifty Anglo-Americans, most of whom were fully integrated into Californio society.³

Though the war resulted in U.S. government control of the area, it was the 1848 gold rush that transformed San Jose's demography. When gold was discovered, thousands of Americans and

*The term "Chicano" is used throughout the essay to refer to persons who were born in Mexico or were Spanish-surnamed California-born residents and their descendents.

Table 1
POPULATION GROWTH IN SAN JOSE, 1845-1880

	1845 ^a	1860	1870	1880
Total Population ^b	900	4,579	12,509	18,156
Chicano Population ^c	750	906	1,190	1,114
Chicano Proportion of Total Population	83.3%	19.8%	9.5%	6.1%

^aEstimates from Oscar Winther, The Story of San Jose, 1777-1869 (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1935), pp. 14-16.

^bFigures for 1860-1880 from Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County (Los Angeles, 1922), p. 18.

^cFigures for 1860-1880 tabulated from the Population Schedules of the U.S. Census.

other foreigners from around the world poured into the state. Many of these newcomers passed through San Jose, and some decided to settle there once the gold fever had subsided or their patience had run out. By 1850 the character of San Jose had totally changed.

The discovery of gold on the American River on January 28, 1848 also disrupted the economic lives of the Californios, who abandoned their wheat fields and ranches in and around San Jose to hunt for gold. The exodus of San Jose residents was so large that the winter crop of 1847-48 was left unharvested. Prices inflated enormously as the demand for mining supplies increased. A few San Jose entrepreneurs capitalized on the pueblo's strategic position as a supply station between northern and southern mines.⁴ Yet for the most part, economic growth remained at a standstill.

As the gold rush subsided and San Jose lost its bid to become the permanent state capital, the economy slumped in 1851. The character of San Jose's economy during the 1850s can best be described as erratic. On the positive side, local growth occurred as the quicksilver mine expanded at New Almadén, lumbering and milling industries developed in the Santa Cruz mountains, and fruit and wine production began in the valley. The arrival of overland stage-coach service in 1858 fostered the movement of easterners into San Jose and Santa Clara.⁵ But transportation still remained limited. A financial panic in 1854-55 put an end to railroad building for several years just when construction was to begin on a route between San Jose and San Francisco.⁶ By the late 1850s, San Jose's economy was reputed to be slow paced. Many residents blamed the town's sluggishness on the conservatism of the business community in the 1850s. Whatever the reason, however, business was dull, real estate slow, and money scarce.⁷

For the Californio elite, the fifties was a time of constant attack. Squatters used legal and illegal means to wrest land away from Californio ranchers and farmers, and many court disputes were settled unfavorably for the Californios. A sense of despair mounted among those who had once controlled almost all the land and now stood in conflict both with the legal system and the extralegal circumstances which had taken away much of their holdings. Nicolas Berreyesa, the largest landholder in San Jose in 1845, lost most of his land in a series of swindles while several close family members were murdered. He repeatedly warned his sons in the late 1850s that to avoid persecution they should

return to Mexico and remove all claims to land in the United States.⁸ Juan Bandini, Berreyesa's counterpart in Los Angeles, quoted from the Scriptures to articulate the conditions they found themselves in 1855:

Our inheritance is turned to strangers--
our houses to aliens.
We have drunken (sic) our water for money--
our wood is sold unto us.
Our necks are under persecution--
we labor and have no rest.⁹

By 1870, the dispossession of large landholders had accelerated at such a pace that ranchers disappeared altogether from the Chicano work force.¹⁰ Many ranchers and farmers who had not lost all of their property divided up their lands among their children, thereby decreasing the average size of landholdings within the group. Few plots remained large enough for ranching.

During the 1860s, the railroad transformed San Jose's economy completely. In January 1864, the line between San Jose and San Francisco was completed, greatly facilitating travel up the peninsula to the ports. Five years later the Central Pacific and Union Pacific were joined by a golden spike. Suddenly San Joseans could travel to New York City in only eight days.¹¹ These events created an economic boom in San Jose which surpassed the impact of the gold rush. In a single year, 1864, a silk factory, additional flour, lumber and woolen mills, breweries, banks, dry good stores and other firms were established. The export of agricultural products increased significantly with the improvement in transportation facilities. San Jose constructed new public buildings and began a variety of community projects.¹²

The 1860s saw a renewal of the steady flow of immigrants anxious to take advantage of California's many resources. The end of the gold rush had only temporarily reduced the influx of newcomers. The completion of the transcontinental railroad marked the beginning of a new era in travel between California and the other states in the Union. The railroad facilitated movement of families across the Rockies and industry began to benefit from a growing market, a cheap labor force, and a convenient location.

San Jose gradually took on a completely different physical appearance because of the increasing ethnic diversity of the town's population. Market Plaza, once the center of the old Spanish San Jose, became the residence of Chinese and Anglos as early as 1872.¹³ Ranch and farm areas outside the city proper were also transformed. In 1866 the route from San Jose to Santa Clara was described in this fashion: "On either side of this romantic Alameda there are now neat and sunny homes, with happy Anglo-Saxon children playing among the vines and flowers, and skipping over the ample grounds."¹⁴

The economic boom significantly affected the occupational structure of the Chicano community. During the sixties, male heads of households began to be more represented in the skilled and semiskilled ranks of the employment structure, and the percentage in unskilled occupations dropped by 24 percent. Very few Chicanos held white-collar and professional positions in 1870, but there was a slight increase in the number of Chicanos managing their own businesses. Almost a quarter of the male heads of households were now small farmers, a tremendous jump

Table 2
OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR THE CHICANO MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

Occupation	<u>1860</u>		<u>1870</u>		<u>1880</u>	
	Number of workers	% of workforce	Number of workers	% of workforce	Number of workers	% of workforce
Pastoral/Agricultural						
Rancher	5	6.6	0	0	0	0
Farmer	7	9.2	28	22.2	12	12.4
Professional	0	0	0	0	1	1.0
Proprietorial	3	3.9	10	7.9	4	4.1
White-collar	2	2.6	1	0.8	5	5.2
Skilled	5	6.6	20	15.9	17	17.5
Semiskilled	0	0	6	6.3	15	15.5
Unskilled						
Laborer	44	57.9	43	34.1	31	32.0
Other	18	13.2	16	12.7	9	9.3
Unknown or unlisted	0	8	0	0	0	0
Number in population	76		126		97	

Source: Federal manuscript census schedules, 1860, 1870 and 1880.

from 1860. On average, the Chicano population benefitted from the economic boom of the 1860s and were a vital component in the establishment of San Jose as a business center by the close of the decade. Other immigrants, especially the Chinese, probably replaced Chicanos on the bottom of the occupational structure. Despite these improvements, however, positions at the top of the employment structure remained restricted to Anglo Americans. Moreover, since Anglos were the main beneficiaries of the economic boom of the 1860s, the gap between Anglos and Chicanos in the occupational structure probably widened during the course of the decade.

At the beginning of the 1870s, grain was the principal agricultural product in the Santa Clara Valley. By the end of the decade, the grain fields had become orchards and vineyards.

With the acceptance of drying and canning processes as adequate ways to preserve fruit, the San Jose area completely reorganized its agricultural infrastructure. In the next decade Santa Clara would become the largest fruit producing area in the world, supplying one-third of all California's produce.¹⁵

By 1880, San Jose's population had multiplied twenty times since the Mexican-American War. The Chicano population, overwhelmed by Anglo immigration, grew by only fifty percent in the same period. The proportion of the population with Mexican heritage dwindled from over four-fifths in 1845 to less than one-sixteenth in 1880. Moreover, most of the growth that occurred within the Chicano population took place before 1860. In that same time span, Anglos in San Jose had completed less than one-quarter of their total population growth in the years between 1845 and 1880.

What caused the number of Chicanos in San Jose to stabilize so abruptly at around 1000 after 1860? To begin with, the Chicano birthrate fell rapidly after 1860. Moreover, immigration from Mexico slowed after the gold rush. Before 1848, only a handful of non-Californio Mexicans resided in the Santa Clara Valley. The discovery of gold brought a large and continuous migration from the states of Sonora and Sinaloa in the late forties and early fifties.¹⁶ Many of these miners, merchants or helpers, driven from the mines through violence or the Foreign Miners' Tax Law of 1850, settled in San Jose.¹⁷ But during the rest of the 1850s, Mexican immigration into San Jose slowed gradually. Although migration increased slightly again during the prosperous sixties, the decade following resumed the

Table 3
THE MEXICAN-BORN POPULATION OF SAN JOSE, 1860-1880

	1860	1870	1880
Total Chicano population	906	1,190	1,114
Mexican-born	235	394	240
Mexican-born proportion of total population	25.9%	33.1%	21.5%

Source: Computer analysis of manuscript census schedules.

declining trend in the number of Mexican-born residents. Additionally, there are indications that San Jose's Spanish-speaking community was geographically mobile. Many Chicano residents apparently left San Jose, migrating to other parts of California or returning to Mexico.¹⁸

One legacy from the gold rush period that persisted until 1880 in San Jose was an imbalanced sex ratio. Anglo miners and speculators flocked to California in search of gold, but few brought wives or families. Since almost no women migrated without attachment to a family unit, the number of immigrant women was very small. Although family emigration over the Rockies had been common during the 1840s and even increased in the early 1850s, these individuals were numerically overwhelmed by the single men that took to the trail during the period. The proportion of married emigrants fell from half to between 20 and 30 percent in the 1850s. Moreover, 85 percent of the single men on the overland trail were on their way to California, while only 66 percent of the families designated it as their final destination.¹⁹

Table 4
WOMEN IN THE CHICANO POPULATION

Year	<u>California-born</u>			<u>Mexican-born</u>			<u>Total^a</u>		
	Number of women	Total number	Percentage of women	Number of women	Total number	Percentage of women	Number of women	Total number	Percentage of women
1860	347	671	51.7%	93	235	39.6%	440	906	48.6%
1870	421	794	53.0%	220	394	55.8%	641	1190	53.9%
1880	438	863	50.8%	147	240	61.3%	590	1114	53.0%

Source: Federal manuscript census returns, 1860, 1870 and 1880.

^aIn 1870, the Census reported two Chicanos who were not born in either Mexico or California. In 1880, eleven were reported. They are only included in the total figures.

Men outnumbered women to such an extent that the 1850 census shows that less than eight percent of California's population was female. One researcher found that in the spring of 1849 there was only fifteen women in all of San Francisco.²⁰ In San Jose, the native Californians accounted for the bulk of the female population during these early years. The California-born Chicano community was the only group from 1845 to 1880 which offered a stable, balanced proportion of men and women.

Mexican-born residents presented a very different picture. Before 1860 the majority of immigrants from Mexico were men. The census conducted that year listed only 93 San Jose women born in Mexico. During the 1860s, this situation reversed itself, and by the end of the decade women made up the majority of the Mexican-born population. Since few women, be they Mexican or Anglo, travelled alone, this statistic indicates both a rise in family emigration from Mexico and a net outmigration of single Mexican males. This hypothesis is confirmed by the demographic data from

the 1870s which reveals a higher net outmigration for Mexican-born men than for Mexican-born women. By 1870 the total Chicano population of San Jose (both California and Mexican born residents) consisted of a majority of women, while in California as a whole women still comprised less than 38 percent of the total population.

Cultural Change and Its Impact, on Women

Looking back at the first years of American rule in San Jose, several historians have claimed that the sex ratio imbalance elevated Mexican/California women to a high social position. Frederic Hall, in his classic history of San Jose, described the effect the imbalance had on relations between the sexes. "At that time (1850)," he wrote, "men stood on tip-toe to get a sight of a female; she appeared as novel as a curiosity shop. Workmen would lay down their tools, run to the door, and gaze with delight at a passing lady. The thoughts of home came to them."²¹ Another author contends that women were "venerated and cherished," while a third alleges that Americans had brought with them ideas of equality between the sexes.²²

One event is consistently offered as evidence that at least some Mexican/California women were highly regarded by the incoming Anglo population. At the close of the first session of the new state legislature, a grand ball was organized by prominent San Jose residents to commemorate the town's role as California's first state capital. In late 1849, however, few Anglo-American women had migrated to San Jose. As a consequence, writes Frederic Hall, the countryside was "raked for

señoritas."²³ Chicano parents were assured that the event was special and proper, and the dance came off well to everyone's enjoyment.²⁴

But necessity and convenience engendered only temporary equality. As more Anglo women migrated to California, intergroup exchanges became more rare. If anything, the incident suggests that cultural interaction and its effects on Chicanos during the period must be scrutinized carefully.

Women in Spanish/Mexican California lived an existence similar to other women living on the frontier. Each was called upon to be cook, nurse, farmer, teacher, wife and mother -- in other words, they were expected to be "maids of all trades."^(sic)²⁵ Most women were proficient in the use of herbs for medicine, herbs which they usually grew in their own gardens.²⁶ They worked hard, contributing to many facets of their family's existence.

Yankees brought a whirlwind of change, but change affected the Chicano community in complex ways. Culturally there were many ramifications of the Anglo occupation. During the first ten years of American rule in San Jose, for example, laws were passed closing business establishments on Sunday and restricting gambling and other amusements, including bull fighting.²⁷

More often changes occurred without legislative mandate. One illustration is the relaxing of social sanctions against prostitution. One study of prostitution in the west notes that as American soldiers occupied towns in California, some California women were used as prostitutes despite condemnation of

them by other Californios. These women were called "Yankedos" for their violation of traditional religious and cultural guidelines, and were sometimes subjected to verbal and physical abuse.²⁸ Despite the fact that religion served as an oppressive force in Mexican society, it is hard to argue that in this instance women's position improved with the coming of the American toleration for prostitution.

Above all, what distinguished the cultural transformation of San Jose from that occurring farther south was its swiftness. For example, Albert Camarillo connects the gradual transformation from "Mexican" to "American" Santa Barbara during the 1860s and early 1870s to a set of economic booms and busts which occurred during that period.²⁹ In San Jose, in contrast, Mexican culture was dominated earlier and faster by the influx of Anglos looking for gold in northern California. According to one resident of the town, California-born girls began to adopt American methods in dancing as early as the 1850s.³⁰ Mrs. Francis Sunol-Angus, a woman whose life in San Jose spanned three governments, believed the gold rush brought "new disturbing elements" into town which included an increase in formality and ceremony among the upper classes.³¹ One historian reported that by 1865 San Jose already resembled an "easternized urban community" much more than a "sprawling rural village."³² Yet despite this rapid transformation, vital aspects of Mexican culture were slow to change as Chicanos struggled to maintain familiar visages of a bygone world. Mexican/California women were at the center of many of these cultural conflicts.

Women's Work

The absence of Mexican/California women in the paid work force limited the Chicano family's ability to respond to the economic changes we have been discussing. Although this situation gradually changed over time, it nevertheless remained one of the most enduring cultural factors from the Mexican past. Even after the erratic economic period of the 1850s, only seventeen women over the age of 16 worked for wages outside the home in all of San Jose. During the sixties there was little change in this situation, though a decade later the percentage of women working for wages increased significantly. Between 1860 and 1870, women in the total Chicano work force comprised between 8 and 12 percent, but by 1880 their numbers had increased to 22.6 percent of the work force.

What kind of paid work did Chicanas engage in outside the home? In Los Angeles, Leonard Pitt found that the main occupations of Spanish-American women were as domestics/servants, seamstresses/dressmakers, and prostitutes.³³ San Jose had a similar pattern. From 1860 to 1880 at least 60 percent of the employed women fell into one of those three categories.³⁴

It is no surprise that some California and Mexican born women became domestics and servants. Women had been working in their own homes without wages for centuries. In 1860 the largest group involved in this type of employment was California-born teenage girls living in the houses of employers. As time went on older women also began cleaning the homes of others, usually living with their own families in a separate residence.

Table 5
CHICANAS OVER THE AGE OF SIXTEEN WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME

	<u>1860</u>		<u>1870</u>		<u>1880</u>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Working	17	7.3	28	8.3	64	18.5
Not Working	£16	92.7	307	91.7	261	61.5
TOTALS	£33	100.0	335	100.0	345	100

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules.

The skills of needlework were usually passed down from mother to daughter in Mexican and Californio families. It was not until the sixties and seventies, however, that Chicanas began to be paid for producing clothing for people outside their family. In fact, Mexican women were crucial in forming one of the earliest chapters of the Needlework Guild of America at the New Almadén mining camp in the 1870s.³⁵

In the censuses of 1860 and 1880, between 17 and 21 percent of the Chicanas receiving wages were listed as prostitutes. Though none were listed in 1870, this is probably a result of moralistic census-takers' refusal to list prostitution as a legitimate employment category. The greater number of men in California, originating in the gold rush era, coupled with work restrictions that discouraged women from entering other forms of employment left many Chicanas with no other means of support. Chicana prostitutes were characteristically young, California-born women living alone or with children. Chile, Peru, Germany, and France also supplied prostitutes to California in the early 1850s.³⁶ As late as the 1890s, when San Jose's sex ratio had

Table 6
CHICANA HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS AND EMPLOYMENT

Year	Number of female heads	Percentage of female headed households	Number of female heads working	Percentage of female heads working
1860	54	36.0	9	16.7
1870	68	34.3	7	10.3
1880	56	36.4	14	25.0

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules.

balanced considerably, houses of prostitution still operated openly along El Dorado Street.³⁷

Since female participation in these three occupations was fairly consistent, to what can the jump in the number of women working be attributed? It is unlikely that it became acceptable to the Chicano community for married women to seek employment. No married women even appeared in the ranks of the employed until the 1880 census, and in that year only four were listed. Of course, few married Anglo women were working outside the home during the nineteenth century either. One conceivable explanation is the increase in the number of employed female heads of households. Throughout the period examined the proportion of female headed households was consistently around 35 percent, but the number of female heads who worked doubled during the 1870s.³⁸ By and large, however, when Chicanas were heads of households anytime in the nineteenth century they were usually supported by their children or extended family. The vast majority of Chicana heads of households continued to remain outside the paid work force.

Table 7
CHICANA WORKERS' RELATION TO THE FAMILY UNIT

Family Position	1860		1870		1880	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Head	9	47.4	7	22.6	14	19.7
Wife	0	0	0	0	4	5.5
Child	0	0	6	25.8	21	23.6
Related	5	26.3	3	9.7	1	1.4
Border	2	10.5	11	35.5	25	35.2
Living Alone	2	10.5	1	3.2	5	7.0
Other	1	5.3	1	3.2	1	1.4
TOTALS	19		31		71	

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules.

The most significant reason for the increase in working Chicanas is that it became possible for young single women to find employment, whether they still lived at home or were on their own. The increase in the number of daughters and female boarders in paid jobs accounts for more than two-thirds of the overall increase in female employment. The need for domestic labor in San Jose and the establishment of industries, like fruit picking and canning, in which cheap, unskilled labor was needed made it possible for women in their late teens or early twenties to join the work force. Almost all of the Chicanas entering the work force were born in California, a group more likely than the Mexican-born to be affected by the changing norms regarding female employment in the United States. This phenomenon indicates that the first generation of Chicanas born in the United States was more likely to disregard the traditional dictates of "women's place" in the Mexican community of San Jose.

The Family and Women's Lives

By 1880, the ideology of "woman's proper place" had changed, but only slightly. Most Chicanas continued to remain outside of the paid work force. Like most other American women, even those Chicanas who did work outside the home as single women usually gave up their jobs when they married. Since very few Chicanas remained single throughout their lives, paid employment, when it occurred at all, was usually temporary.³⁹ The lives of Chicanas in American California remained greatly influenced by the condition of their families.

In Spanish and Mexican California, patriarchy was the rule. Sons and daughters, even after becoming parents themselves, were to continue to honor their fathers with complete obedience. Traditionally, "the will of the (male) parent was supreme and not questioned."⁴⁰ Mothers were also to be obeyed, especially in the absence or death of a father. Pio Pico, the last Mexican governor of California, described himself as in "complete subjugation" to his mother until he was twenty-six years old. "My lady mother, who was very rigid with me, never permitted me out of the house after eight at night. . . ." ⁴¹

Strict obedience to parents' wishes even included the choice of a spouse. When a couple wanted to marry, the man had to send his father to negotiate with the father of his bride-to-be. Parents arranged all wedding plans, and at times actually chose their childrens' mates. It was considered improper for a future husband to propose in person.⁴² Once arrangements had been made final, the bride's dower was assembled according to the father's means. In San Jose the dower could consist of household

Table 8
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF MARRIED CALIFORNIA-BORN CHICANAS

Age	1860		1870		1880	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0-17 years	3	4.5	1	1.1	1	1.0
18-21 years	12	17.9	18	20.0	11	11.5
22-30 years	29	43.2	43	47.8	26	27.1
31-40 years	16	26.9	16	20.0	35	36.5
41-50 years	3	4.5	6	6.7	17	17.7
Over 50 years	2	3.0	4	4.4	6	6.3
TOTALS	67		90		96	

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules,

furnishings, cattle, or horses.⁴³ Arranged marriages could occur when a woman was fairly young. It was not uncommon for Mexican women to marry as early as age thirteen or fourteen, although the late teens was the approximate age of marriage for most of these women.⁴⁴

Chicanas continued to marry young until the 1870s. Over two-thirds of married California-born Chicanas in San Jose were thirty or younger in both the 1860 and 1870 censuses.⁴⁵ By 1880, this percentage had dropped dramatically to less than 40 percent. Two factors account for this drop. First, the group of women that reached the traditional age of marriage in the 1870s were the first born in the new state of California. They lived their entire lives within a society that had conflicting Mexican and American cultural norms regarding the proper age for women to marry. This conflict probably influenced many Chicanas to delay their marriages, as many Anglo women had been doing in the nineteenth century. More concretely, as the possibility of paid employment for women increased in the 1870s, more young Chicanas

Table 9
BIRTHRATE FOR CHICANAS IN SAN JOSE

Year	Number of children born	Number of women of child-bearing age ^a	Birthrate ^b
1860	29	208	139
1870	29	288	101
1880	22	279	79

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules.

^aDefined as women between 15 and 40 years of age.

^bChildren born per 1,000 women of child-bearing age.

Table 10
MARITAL STATUS OF CHICANAS IN THEIR CHILD-BEARING YEARS

Year	Number	Married	Single, Widowed or Divorced	
		Percentage	Number	Percentage
1860	94	45.2	104	54.8
1870	136	47.2	152	52.8
1880	121	43.4	158	56.7

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules.

opted for a job before getting married. Employment as dressmakers, cannery workers, or domestics supplemented the income of families looking to improve their economic situation. This avenue may have given Chicanas greater independence as single women or possibly made them more valuable, and more tied, to their families.

The delay in marriage significantly affected the birthrate in the Chicano community. Although it is difficult to assess complete patterns or child-bearing at ten year census intervals, the data does indicate that a general decline in the birthrate

began at least as early as 1860. As Chicanas married later in their lives, they would have their first child in their twenties. The increase in the number of women in child-bearing years who were not married meant a reduction in the number of Chicanas who would have children in the 1870s. As Mario García found for the Mexican immigrant women at the turn of the century in El Paso, the Chicana's responsibilities for the care of her children greatly influenced her participation in the paid work force.⁴⁶ The declining birthrate in San Jose is one indication that a social pattern was emerging that would continue to expand into the twentieth century. More Chicanas' lives would include employment, along with marriage and child-bearing, in the future. The transformation of traditional Chicano family mores had begun.

Intermarriage and Chicanas

One way cultural norms were tested in San Jose was through marriage between Chicanas and Anglo men. A significant increase occurred from 1860 to 1880 in the proportion of Chicanas married to Anglo men. By 1880 almost one-third of all married Chicanas had Anglo husbands. This pattern corresponds to one found prevalent in Los Angeles during the same period.

This relatively high rate of intermarriage occurred despite the numerous attempts to discourage it by both Chicanos and Anglos. In 1849, for example, alcalde Jose Maria de Jesus Gonzales of Monterey refused to authorize the marriage of Henry Burton to Maria del Amparo Ruiz because he was Protestant and she was Catholic. He received letters from around the state

Table 11
INTERMARRIAGE AND THE CHICANA

Year	Total number of Chicariás married	Total number of marriages w/ Anglos	Percentage of mixed marriages
1860	103	20	19.4%
1870	165	48	29.1%
1880	149	48	32.3%

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules.

expressing great satisfaction with his decision.⁴⁷ Despite efforts by management to discourage them, many mixed marriages occurred at the New Almadén Mine throughout the fifties and sixties.⁴⁸ Neither these efforts, nor the more informal attempts at constraint, curbed the growing number of intermarriages.

The most important feature of intermarriage in San Jose in this period was that it was almost completely limited to Anglo men and women of Mexican descent. In 1860, no Chicanos were married to non-Latinas in the town, establishing a pattern that would scarcely change for the next two decades. By 1880, only eight Chicanos were married to non-Latinas, and this group represented only nine percent of the married Chicanos in San Jose. Moreover, only two of those select Chicanos had been born in Mexico. Intermarriage in San Jose remained largely the province of Anglo men and Chicanas.

Why were Chicanas and Anglo men marrying in San Jose? Certainly the imbalanced sex ratio is part of the answer. Yet as the rate of intermarriage increased, the sexual imbalance in the San Jose population decreased. Therefore other factors must also have been significant.

Several California historians have attributed the inclination of Mexican/California women to marry outside their ethnic group to their "natural attraction" toward Anglo men. Leonard Pitt, writing in 1966, claimed that California women were "favorably disposed" toward the Yankees.⁴⁹ Another author contended that the preference of Mexican/California women for Anglo-Saxon men was so strong that it overcame the bitterness which had developed during the Mexican-American War.⁵⁰ Major Horace Bell, a nineteenth century observer, agreed that Spanish Californian girls "were sensible to strange charms . . . and found the foreigners better educated, more worldly-wise, than their own countrymen."⁵¹

Such explanations fail to account for the consequences of the transformation of San Jose's economy during the first thirty-five years of U.S. control. Increased opportunities resulting from the economic development in San Jose were open largely to Anglo men, while most Chicanos were consistently restricted to lower paying jobs and harsher working conditions which left little room for advancement. Chicanas, recognizing their own economic subordination, could not ignore such glaring differences in the occupational structure. Not surprisingly, many of their own decisions about a marriage partner were based, at least partly, on economic considerations.

Data on the occupations of husbands of Chicanas demonstrates that husbands of Latin background did significantly worse than Anglos in the battle over employment. From 1860 to 1880, Latino husbands were about twice as numerous as Anglos in low blue

Table 12
~~PERCENTAGE~~ AND OCCUPATIONS OF HUSBANDS

Occupation	<u>180</u>		<u>1872</u>		<u>1880</u>	
	% of Latinos ^a	% of Anglos ^b	% of Latinos ^a	% of Anglos ^b	% of Latinos ^a	% of Anglos ^b
Pastoral/Agricultural						
Rancher	9.5	11.1	2	2	1.0	2.8
Farmer	79.56		17.7	7.5	7.6	6.3
Professional	00		05.3		05.6	
Proprietorial	4.8	16.7	11.5	36.6	4.3	22.2
White-collar	3.2	5.6	1.8	5.3	4.3	5.6
Skilled	7.9	22.2	16.6	18.4	16.3	19.4
Semiskilled	05.6		88	18.4	20.7	13.9
Unskilled						
Laborer	60.3	33.3	33.6	5.3	32.6	16.7
Other	6.3	0	9.7	2.6	9.8	2.6
Unknown/unlisted	00		2	2	3.3	2.8
TOTAL IN POPULATION	6318		113	36	92	36

Source: Analysis of Federal manuscript census schedules.

^aLatinos refers to husbands born in Mexico, Latin America, Spain, Portugal, Italy or Spanish-surname men born in California.

^bAnglos refers to husbands without Spanish-surnames born in the United States, Canada or Europe.

collar occupations.⁵² Moreover, Anglo husbands were three to four times as likely to be in white collar jobs than Latinos throughout the period.⁵³ This gap widened with each succeeding decade.

Leonard Pitt argued that many elite California women married Anglos in order to protect their property holdings suddenly being threatened by litigation and squatters.⁵⁴ Indeed, a hotly debated issue at the California Constitutional Convention was the Mexican custom of allowing women to own property in the first place. Representative Botts of Monterey deplored Mexican practices, arguing that, "Nature did what the common law has done -- put her under the protection of man. . . . When she trusts him with her happiness, she may well trust him with her gold. . . ."⁵⁵

Though the constitution eventually recognized women's property rights, California women remained vulnerable to the onslaught of land-hungry Anglos and the discrimination of American courts.

Yet the majority of Chicanas that married Anglo men were not elite California women. Most came from middle or working class families. Between 40 and 52 percent of Chicanas married to Anglos were Mexican-born -- another indication that both groups of women in the Chicano community of San Jose felt this economic, social, and marital dilemma. In a society in which most economic opportunities became available on the basis of ethnicity, Mexican/California women were faced with difficult decisions concerning how best to improve their own lives and the lives of their children.

Chicanas probably considered the well-being of their future children when deciding whom to marry. In 1880 children of mixed marriages were almost 10 percent more likely to be attending school than children of Latino marriages. In addition, children who were often half-Chicano often found it easier to "pass" for white, giving them benefits not available to a darker-looking child.

More research is necessary to determine the effect of this high rate of intermarriage on the persistence of Mexican culture in San Jose. More than one Chicano historian has described the family as the one institution that staunchly resisted American assimilation.⁵⁶ Such an assertion remains questionable, at least in San Jose, considering that almost one in five Chicanos listed in the 1880 census was born of mixed parentage. Tracing these individuals in census materials and determining their effect on

the Chicano population as a whole remains difficult. One can speculate, however, that though intermarriage provided one of the few options available to a Chicana to improve her material condition, she may have done so often at the risk of failing to sustain her Mexican heritage.

Nor did Chicanas' new choices in terms of marriage and work outside the home necessarily bring them more freedom. Although by 1880, fewer decisions were being made for Mexican and California women in the traditional stringent fashion, the options available to them were critically restricted by the barriers imposed on all Chicanos because of their ethnicity and economic status. As long as Chicanos were limited to low paying jobs, had difficulty protecting or retaining their property, and fought significant pressures to relinquish their own culture, to speak of freedom of choice for Chicanas is surely misleading. The Chicanas of San Jose struggled into the twentieth century armed with their strong determination to survive and prosper, while their community endured the myriad onslaughts of an alien culture determined to offer them little more than second class citizenship.

ENDNOTES

¹Historical & Descriptive Review of the Industries of San Jose (Thompson & company, 1866), p. 67.

²I have used the census manuscript returns from 1860, 1870 and 1880 for San Jose township and city as a way of examining these aspects of San Jose life. Manuscript schedules for Santa Clara County in 1850 were destroyed by fire and there is no surviving census from the Mexican period in San Jose. However by combining the available census data with literary evidence I have been able to trace the transformations that occurred in San Jose from 1845 to 1880 and the responses of the Chicano residents to these changes. All statistical information in this paper, unless otherwise noted, comes from these computations.

³Oscar Osburn Winther, The Story of San Jose. 1777-1869: California's First Pueblo (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1935), p. 16.

⁴Ibid., pp. 26-28; Edith Brockway, San Jose Reflections (Campbell, Calif.: Academy Press, 1977), p. 47.

⁵Winther, pp. 32-38; Brockway, p. 47.

⁶Winther, p. 40.

⁷Helen Arbuckle, "San Jose's Women" (Unpublished paper, San Jose Historical Society, April 1980), p. 11.

⁸Antonio Berreyesa, "Relación . . ." (Transcripts of interview conducted by Bancroft, San Jose, 1877), p. 11.

⁹Robert Glass Cleland, The Cattle on a Thousand Hills: Southern California. 1850-1880 (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1951), app.

¹⁰A significant number of Chicanos became small farmers, however. The average value of the twenty-eight Chicano farmers' property fell to \$2,667, which was less than half the average for all farmers in California in 1870. Only ten years earlier, the average property value of the seven Chicano farmers had been \$4,807, nearly double the amount of all farmers in the state.; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial- Times to 1970. Bicentennial Edition, Part 2 (Washington, D.C., 1975), p. 463.

¹¹Brockway, p. 119.

¹²Winther, pp. 43-45.

¹³Hare's Guide to San Jose and Vicinity for Tourists and New Settlers (Geo. H. Hare, 1872), pp. 23-24.

¹⁴Historical, p. 36.

- ¹⁵Brockway, pp. 91-93.
- ¹⁶Francisco Valencia, "New Almadén and the Mexican" (Master's thesis, San Jose State University, 1977), p. 1.
- ¹⁷Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 54-64.
- ¹⁸Richard Griswold del Castillo has documented a similar pattern of growth and stabilization for Los Angeles during this period. A declining birthrate, decreased Mexican immigration, and out-migration are each seen as significant factors in the stabilization of the numbers of Chicanos in Los Angeles from 1860 to 1870.; Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio. 1848-1880* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 34-38.
- ¹⁹John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 34-36.
- ²⁰Ronald Dean Miller, *Shady Ladies of the West* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1964), p. 38.
- ²¹Frederic Hall, *The History of San Jose and Surroundings* (San Francisco, 1871), p. 204.
- ²²William B. Secrest, *Juanita* (Fresno: Saga-West Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 5-6; Dorothea Louise Schmitt, "History of the Santa Ciara Valley: the American period, 1846-1865" (Master's thesis, University of California at Berkeley, 1928), pp. 67-68.
- ²³Hall, p. 204.
- ²⁴Arbuckle, p. 7.
- ²⁵Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West. 1840-1880* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1979), p. 59.
- ²⁶Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, *Spanish Arcadia* (Los Angeles: Powell Publishing Co., 1929), pp. 245-246.
- ²⁷Winther, p. 32.
- ²⁸Miller, pp. 30-31.
- ²⁹Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos__in a Changing__Society.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 33-52.
- ³⁰Mary B. Carroll, *Ten Years in Paradise* (San Jose: Press of Popp & Hogan, 1903), pp. 17-18.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 14.
- ³²Brockway, p. 85.

³³Pitt, p. 265.

³⁴My analysis of the censuses reveals that in 1860, 42% of the employed Chicanas in San Jose were listed as servants and 21% as prostitutes. In 1870, 39% were listed as domestics or servants and 36% as dressmakers or seamstresses. (Prostitutes were excluded from the 1870 census.) In 1880, 32% were listed as dressmakers or seamstresses, 17% as prostitutes, and the proportion of domestics and servants had fallen to 11%.

³⁵Valencia, p. 109.

³⁶Miller, p. 41.

³⁷Arbuckle, pp. 22-23.

³⁸While the proportion of female headed households was consistently around 35% throughout the period, the number of female heads who worked doubled during the 1870s. Two factors minimize this increase, however. Five of the female heads listed as employed in 1880 were prostitutes, and since the 1870 census excluded them, much of the reported increase may not be actual growth. More important, the total numerical increase in the decade is only seven, and this figure only accounts for one-fifth of the increase in employed Chicanas.

³⁹This pattern is similar to that of other American women during this period. See Carl Dealer, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 388-391.

⁴⁰Frances L. Fox, Luis Maria Peralta and His Adobe (San Jose: Smith-McKay Printing, 1975), p. 22.

⁴¹Arbuckle, p. 3.

⁴²Sanchez, pp. 270-273.

⁴³Carroll, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁴Sanchez, p. 270.

⁴⁵The age distribution of married Mexican-born women does not provide an adequate basis to analyze the average age at marriage since women who migrated from Mexico usually were married already and older as a whole. Their average age from 1860 to 1880 is thirteen to seventeen years older than California-born Chicanas.

⁴⁶Mario T. Garcia, "La Familia: The Mexican Immigrant Family, 1900-1930," in Work, Family, Sex Roles. Language, The National Association of Chicano Studies Selected Papers 1979 (Berkeley: Tonatiuh-Quinto Sol International, 1980), p. 124.

⁴⁷Griswold del Castillo, pp. 74-76.

⁴⁸Archivo de la Familia Alviso: Documentos para la Historia de California. 1817-1850 (Documents collected by the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley), p. 112.

⁴⁹Valencia, p. 110.

⁵⁰Pitt, p. 23.

⁵¹Richard Henry Morefield, "The Mexican Adaptation in American California, 1846-1875" (Master's thesis, University of California at Berkeley, 1955), pp. 53-55.

⁵²Major Horace Bell, *On the Old West Coast. Being Further Reminiscences of a Ranger*, ed. by Lanier Bartlett (New York: William Morrow, 1930), p. 257.

⁵³Low blue-collar occupations include unskilled and semiskilled positions.

⁵⁴White-collar occupations include professional, proprietorial and white-collar positions.

⁵⁵Pitt, pp. 98-99.

⁵⁶California Constitutional Convention, 1849. Report on the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution in September and October of 1849, by J. Ross Browne (Washington, D.C., 1850), pp. 259-260.

⁵⁷Garcia, p. 128; See also Griswold del Castillo, p. 62.