“Territoriality, Conflict, and the Polis in New Spain: The Creation of Colonial Communities after the Great Death”

The purpose of this multi-panel, daylong conference is to study the massive relocation of indigenous populations by the Spanish crown at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, generally known as the reducciones or congregaciones de Indios in the Americas.

This conference will bring together a multidisciplinary group of archaeologists, historians, art historians, demographers and political scientists to discuss new theoretical approaches and methodological tools that can be brought to bear on the study of one of the most significant events for the surviving indigenous population in the colonial era. Most of the discussion will geographically focus on South-Central Mexico.

Conference participants will offer papers that reflect on the themes of epidemics and demographic collapse, ethnic violence and resistance, territorial and urban reorganizations, Colonial politics and intrigue, and the ongoing relevance to the living descendents in contemporary Mexico.

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Agenda

THURSDAY, January 23, 2013
Location: UC San Diego, Institute of the Americas, Malamud Room at the Weaver Center

9:00am – 10:00am | Recap Panel: The Aftermath of the ‘Great Death’
What are the long term legacies of the environmental, epidemiological, genetic and demographic factors leading to the Great Death of the 16th century? Congregaciones have been understood not just as a Spanish urban project, but as responses to events such as the cocoliztli pandemic, large climatic shifts in the century punctuated by recurrent drought, or vast changes in land use through sheep livestocking, soil erosion and the introduction of new crops. What do we know about climatic pressures that may have shifted settlement patterns? Can we infer, from the fragmented climatic, health or demographic records something about the migration of human populations during the century?

Discussant: Alberto Díaz-Cayeros; Center for Democracy, Development and Rule of Law, Stanford University

Emerging Pathogens, Social Interconnectivity and Demographic Collapse in Baja California (1697-1830): Good intentions going bad
Rodolfo Acuña-Soto; Departamento de Microbiología y Parasitología Facultad de Medicina; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

10:00am– 12:00pm | Panel 1: Conflict
Episodes of rapid sociopolitical change are often triggered and followed by internal and external conflicts. How was Mesoamerican violence transformed in the contact and Early Colonial periods? Did native resistance play a significant role in the implementation and outcome of the colonial enterprise? Or can we speak of a Pax Hispanica? How can we move away from the often simplistic dichotomy of the ‘Indigenous vs. European’ encounter, and into a more nuanced understanding of conflicting sociopolitical agendas within and between these multiple colonial agents?

Discussant: Eric van Young; Department of History, UC San Diego
12:00pm – 1:30pm | Lunch for Conference Participants

1:30pm – 3:00pm | Panel 2: Territoriality
The reconfiguration of ‘Mesoamerica’ to ‘New Spain’ implied rapid indigenous and Europeans adaptations to the new demographic and geopolitical realities, while attempting to uphold functional traditional structures. In what ways were these hybrid physical and conceptual manifestations of territoriality articulated through urban design, settlement patterns, political jurisdictions, pictorial and alphabetic documents, and other cultural expressions? What heuristic tools can we use to trace back the patterns observed in contemporary territorial configurations?

Discussant: Kevin Terraciano; Department of History, UCLA

The Reconfiguration of Sacred Space in Yanhuitlan
Alessia Frassani; Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University

The Geometry of Gender in Early Mexico: “Earthly Names,” Pre-teen Marriage, and Female Places in the Household
Robert McCaa; University of Minnesota, Department of History; IPUMS

Narratives of Community, Historical Memory, and Place-Making in Colonial Tehuantepec
Judith Zeitlin; Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts Boston

3:00pm – 3:15pm | Coffee Break

3:15pm – 4:45pm | Panel 3: Polis
Peter Gerhard has suggested that most of the human settlements of South and Central Mexico are in essence the pueblos formed between 1550 and 1564 (and perhaps a second wave of congregaciones at the beginning of the next century). To what extent was the acceptance by indigenous communities of Spanish political institutions (community chests, hospitals, rotating cabildos, cofradías) a voluntary process? Should the attempt to bring the indigenous people to “vivir en policia” be understood as a process of coercive subjugation, or a virtuous form of living within political community?

Discussant: Judith Zeitlin; Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts Boston

Indios as Vecinos in New Spain’s Urban Centers, Zacatecas
Dana Velasco Murillo; Department of History, UC San Diego

“...tienen de juntarse a vivir en policia y hacer sus casas”: Mobility Patterns and Selective Resistance in South Oaxaca
Danny Zborover; Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UC San Diego

4:45pm – 5:00pm | Closing Remarks
Conference Overview

The purpose of this conference is to study the massive relocation of indigenous populations by the Spanish crown at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, generally known as the reducciones or congregaciones de indios in the Americas. This conference will bring together a multidisciplinary group of archaeologists, historians, art historians, demographers, and political scientists to discuss new theoretical approaches and methodological tools that can be brought to bear on the study of one of the most significant events for the surviving indigenous population in the colonial era. In order to narrow the territorial scope of the enterprise we will geographically circumscribe most of the discussion to South-Central Mexico.

The title of the workshop brings together three elements that are often studied in isolation, the first related to the construction of territorial landscapes for human settlement; the second related to violence in both the resistance by indigenous groups to ‘top-down’ relocation efforts by the Crown and the new conflicts emerging from the reconfiguration of political authority and jurisdiction; and the third related to the colonial pretense of engineering a governance for Indian republics that would live in police (vivir en policia), meaning the creation of well-ordered political communities (polis). How did resistance, conflict, and the ‘policía’ intersect and transform the congregaciones? What were the implications of these colonial urban reorganizations for inter-community, inter-ethnic, and inter-polity territorial conflicts? How did conflicting European and indigenous spatial perceptions shape the colonial landscape?

The relevance of the conference goes beyond historical curiosity. The process of reducciones and congregaciones that generated the Pueblos de Indios is the largest social experiment ever performed in history. Soviet collectivization or Ujaama in Tanzania pale in comparison to the scope and ambition of the quest by the Spanish crown to plan and engineer well-ordered communities in its colonial possessions. The legacy of this social experiment lives to this day in the traditional systems of authority and decision-making that persist in indigenous communities not just in Mexico, but throughout Latin America. Contemporary migratory movements of indigenous communities in Southern Mexico are usually studied without incorporating the massive mobility that characterized these regions in the distant past. And the political instability and violence that has often accompanied indigenous conflicts over land and territorial disputes are often dissociated from the historical process that led to the settlement patterns observed in indigenous communities today.

In June 2009 the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies sponsored a multidisciplinary workshop on the demographic catastrophe that followed the contact of Spanish and original peoples in the territory of what is today Mexico. In “The Great Death” workshop we incorporated advances in the study of disease, environment, genetics, and art history, among other disciplines, to enrich the historical demography debates. This workshop will bring some of the participants from that workshop back to UCSD, together with other scholars whose research focuses on the current theme of territoriality, conflict, and the polis.
Emerging Pathogens, Social Interconnectivity and Demographic Collapse in Baja California (1697-1830): Good intentions going bad

Rodolfo Acuña-Soto; Departamento de Microbiología y Parasitología Facultad de Medicina; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

ABSTRACT: For thousands of years, and as a consequence of a dry climate and rough geography, the population of the Peninsula of Baja California was organized in small and nomadic groups. They were isolated from each other and from the main cultures of Mexico. The absence of large communities in the peninsula of Baja California in prehispanic times can be explained by water scarcity. Water is restricted to a few wells and springs at the sides of the large mountain ranges. In the entire peninsular territory, no vegetable community is sufficient to sustain a human population throughout the year. The sea is not an option because most of water apt for human consumption is found far from the coasts. For these and other reasons, the population of Baja California was organized in small and isolated nomadic groups. They moved in annual itineraries following the productivity of the scarce flora and fauna of more or less defined regions. Fighting for resources among the different groups was constant; this way of life persisted for thousands of years. This isolation protected them from the numerous epidemics of measles and smallpox that occurred in Mexico after smallpox was introduced in 1520 and measles in 1530. For 176 years both diseases circulated widely in Mexico and North America but not in the Baja California Peninsula.

Fray María De Salvatierra founded the first Mission in the peninsula of Baja California on October 25, 1697. At that time, the area had a robust population of approximately 50,000 – 60,000 inhabitants. This relatively high population level contrasts with that of central Mexico that had been decimated as a consequence of 39 epidemics, four famines and the conquest war and was only 10% of the original population.

The great mortality rate that struck the country during the XVI and XVII centuries reached the coasts of Sonora and Sinaloa, just across the Gulf of Cortez. As an example, we have the terrible epidemic of unknown origin, which in 1641 affected the region of Rio Chico, Sinaloa, between the Yaqui and Mayo rivers. In 1644 another epidemic was recorded, also of unknown origin, among the Acaxees and Xiximies of Sinaloa. In 1646 another one devastated the populations of Opatas and Pimas Bajos of the coast of Sonora. This resulted in the disappearance of half the population from the coasts and mountains of Sonora between 1679 and 1720 (2000 to 1000 families). In Sinaloa, the situation was not better. The indigenous population of the area around Culiacan, which in 1644 was calculated to be 50,000, by 1678 was reduced to 2548. This suggests that the devastating epidemics of the XVI century, like those from 1545 to 1548, from 1576 to 1581 and those of 1616, did not reach the Baja Californian territory. Alternatively, if epidemics entered, their consequences were minimal.

Why was Baja California spared by the great epidemics of the XVI and XVII centuries? It has been suggested that epidemic diseases did not occur in Baja California simply because of a lack of human transit between the continent and the peninsula. However, in those days many missionaries, legal and illegal pearl merchants, explorers, pirates and soldiers visited the peninsula frequently, weakening this argument. Moreover, considering that of the incubation period of measles and smallpox is about 10-12 days, it is highly probable that someone already in incubation period crossed from Sinaloa or Sonora to the peninsula, bringing the disease to the Baja. The question becomes then: if epidemic illnesses arrived before 1697 to Baja California, why did they not thrive? The answer resides in the permanent isolation of the native groups in the interior of the peninsula.

Beginning in 1697, when the Jesuits introduced a system of Missions throughout the Peninsula where they concentrated all the previously disperse native populations. Missions, people, horses and roads, favored the introduction and dispersion of smallpox and measles. These diseases eventually annihilated the whole native population. The Mission system introduced the fundamental elements that favored the transmission of measles and smallpox in the peninsula. The gathering of the dispersed indigenous peoples into communities and the inter-missionary transit established the epidemiological connectivity of the entire peninsula. The changes were irreversible. By 1829, only 495 indigenous inhabitants remained in the area and by 1860, only 64 of them were left. Years later the old Missions were abandoned or repopulated by mestizos, with the few native survivors being incorporated into the general population.

The events that resulted in a demographic catastrophe in Baja California are increasingly present in some regions of the world today. Particularly, the coexistence of increased human connectivity (massive travel and commerce) associated to the emergence of new infectious agents is notorious. Historically, such combination of factors proved to be enormously destructive.
“Discourse and perception, text politics during the great reorganization of the Mixteca (16th century)”

Sebastián van Doesburg; Coordinación de Humanidades, UNAM; Biblioteca de Investigación Juan de Córdova, FAHOO

ABSTRACT: After the disastrous epidemic of 1545-48, the Mixtec town of Teposcolula was moved to a nearby location around 1552. Four years later, a similar reorganization was carried out in Coixtlahuaca. Both policies were among the most populous and important political centers in the Mixteca. These events were accompanied by extensive urban and architectural programs, the creation and definition of precise borders and the introduction of new forms of government. However, to perceive of this congregation program in the Mixteca as a top-down Spanish-crown initiative is to underestimate the complex dynamics within the indigenous policies at the time. It would be better to see this phase as a circumstantial coincidence between the needs and interests of both Spanish officials and indigenous elites. In this contribution, I reflect upon the changes that this situation may have produced in the internal and external discourse of Mixtec elites as represented in the surviving documentation.

“The Reconfiguration of Sacred Space in Yanhuitlan”

Alessia Frassani; Postdoctoral researcher; Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University

ABSTRACT: During the second half of the 16th century, the town of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlan, known in Mixtec as Yodzocahi, was the site of a massive economic, religious, and artistic enterprise: the construction of the Dominican mission (church and adjoining convento) on top of an ancient pyramid. How did the construction process affect the outlook of the village that can still be appreciated today? How did the newly-constructed complex interact with the surrounding landscape and its pre-existing symbolic forms? This case study will challenge the idea of congregations as a unilateral process and argue instead for a complex dynamic (overt or “subconscious”) of official regulations, daily life and routine habits, liturgy and Mixtec cosmological thinking.

Robert McCaa; University of Minnesota, Department of History; IPUMS

ABSTRACT: The debate over the condition of women in Nahua (Aztec) and Colonial communities has quickened in recent years, spurred by the interest in the history of gender on the one hand and on the other by the recovery of a rapidly expanding corpus of diverse sources, many in the original Nahuatl written using the Roman alphabet. Classic texts offer idealized images regarding elite religion, philosophy and civic culture. Less conjectural interpretations about ordinary people are deduced from more mundane sources. A generation of “Nahuatlato"s have enormously enriched the repertoire by transcribing, translating, and decoding a great corpus of codices, histories, testaments, land disputes, genealogies, and rare household listings (tribute books) dating from as early as the 1530s and 1540s. This paper analyzes two sets of lists from the Cuernavaca region to examine cultural expressions of gender in the lives of ordinary people. Tribute books reveal dimensions of social relations that are often considered unknowable for this early era: household headship, residence of young couples, rules for structuring household relationships, the position of older women, the place of the surprisingly large fraction of widows in the population, and, most importantly, the names of ordinary people. In one set of books, there is little evidence of cultural transformation—almost 90% of the population is known solely by “earthly names” and customary marriage. In the other, barely a decade later, almost everyone carries Christian names and the expectation of Christian marriage is nearly universal.

“Indios as Vecinos in New Spain’s Urban Centers, Zacatecas”

Dana Velasco Murillo; Assistant Professor; Department of History; UC San Diego

ABSTRACT: In the sixteenth century large numbers of indigenous peoples left their communities in central Mexico and relocated to the newly formed northern silver mining town of Zacatecas. The city’s urgent need for laborers, in the absence of a large local sedentary population, forced Spaniards to offer incentives, such as wages and freedom from tribute and labor drafts, to encourage indigenous immigration to the city. Overtime these indigenous immigrants became the city’s largest resident population, taking great pride in their civic institutions, and in identifying themselves as “vecinos” of Zacatecas or one of the four Indian towns that had developed alongside the city. This paper complicates traditional paradigms about urban indigenous society, by considering how Zacatecas’ native population continued to develop indigenous identities, practices, and associations, even as they embraced Spanish-style civic identities.

“Identity and Conflict in the Transformation of Oaxacan Cacicazgos ”

John M.D. Pohl; Department of Art History; UCLA

ABSTRACT: At the time the Spaniards were making their first entradas into the region in 1521, two kingdoms named Cuilapan and Zaachila were competing over the domination of the Valley of Oaxaca. Later cast in the historical period as ethnic conflict between Mixtec and Zapotec populations, both Pre-Columbian and Colonial sources reveal that the actual nature of this rivalry was between competing corridor alliances composed of multi-ethnic elites with roots extending as far back as the 12th century. The settlement of this conflict had profound implications for the reorganization of kingdoms into cacicazgos in Colonial Oaxaca, the effects of which continue through the present day.
“Don Domingo of Yanhuitlan and the Encomendero”

Ethelia Ruiz Medrano; Full Professor; Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

ABSTRACT: I will argue in this paper that most of the indigenous towns in the Mixteca Alta of Oaxaca where never congregated during the harshest Colonial Congregation Program, which began at the end of the sixteenth century and lasted through the first half of the seventeenth century. My aim is to examine the different forms and strategies of negotiation employed by local traditional Mixtec rulers (yya), through their achievements in improving their local economies as one way to gain political autonomy. I will exemplify this notion in the particular power relationships between the encomendero of Yanhuitlan, Don Domingo de Las Casas, and the local yya Don Domingo during the first half of the sixteenth century.

Conflict in the Courts of New Spain: The Case of “La Casa de la Cacica”

Kevin Terraciano, Department of History, UCLA

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the contested legal claims and counterclaims presented by Spanish procuradores in the case of don Felipe de Austria vs. doña Catalina de Peralta and her spouse, don Diego de Mendoza, over possession of the cacicazgo of Teposcolula, in the Mixteca Alta region of Oaxaca. The case dragged on for three years until 1569, when the oidores of the Real Audiencia rendered their final judgment; a lengthy record of the case is now preserved in the Archivo General de la Nación. The contradictory legal arguments advanced by Spanish lawyers on behalf of their Mixtec clients represent calculated interpretations of “ancient custom” that in many ways conformed more to Spanish custom and colonial policies than to indigenous practices, as we understand them. The landmark decision in this case illustrates how the Spanish American legal system brought about subtle but profound changes to indigenous communities of New Spain in the sixteenth century and beyond.

“...tienen de juntarse a vivir en policía y hacer sus casas”: Mobility Patterns and Selective Resistance in Southern Oaxaca

Danny Zborover; Research Associate; Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UC San Diego

ABSTRACT: In the eyes of the Spanish corregidores and priests, as well as their indigenous neighbors, the Chontal people of Oaxaca were perceived as scattered brutes who roamed hidden canyons and resided in deep caves. On the flip side, local autochthonous documents highlight a multi-tiered settlement pattern and a complex social organization before and after the Spanish conquest. This talk will focus on the community of Santa María Zapotitlán, where recent archaeological and documentary investigations clearly debunks the Colonialist myths, but at the same time show how micro- and macro-scale mobility patterns adapted to accommodate both Spanish and indigenous relocation needs. I will argue that the roots behind these contrasting viewpoints lie in a nuanced indigenous resistance to symbols of foreign influence, and a selective control over the rules of engagement with competing European and indigenous hegemonic domination.
“Narratives of community, historical memory, and place-making in colonial Tehuantepec”

Judith Zeitlin; Professor; Department of Anthropology; University of Massachusetts Boston

ABSTRACT: The southern Isthmus of Tehuantepec, like so many regions of New Spain, witnessed a dramatic population loss following the Spanish Conquest due to repeated epidemics of introduced Old World diseases, with just 10% of its estimated pre-Columbian total remaining 100 years later. Congregaciones implemented toward the close of the sixteenth century aggregated small hamlets into larger villages and combined scattered barrios in new locations close to Tehuantepec’s urban center. Late sixteenth-century community configurations proved remarkably stable, with the vast majority of pueblos identified on the Relación Geográfica surviving to this day. Yet the Spanish appropriation of community lands rendered vacant by policies of congregación continued to be a source of resentment and contestation throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as evidenced in formal legal disputes and reports of violent attacks on landowners and their properties. This paper will examine two Isthmus land disputes from the later colonial period to explore the means by which social memory preserved concepts of place at odds with Spanish property law and the changing terrain of colonial landscapes.