



Main Themes from *The Los Angeles Plaza – Sacred and Contested Space*

Cultural and Historical Origins

Indigenous Roots

- Gabrielino village of Yaanga provided Pobladores with geographic reference point to site pueblo and Plaza.
- Gabrielino spoken language and cultural practices, particularly indigenous medicine, gave the emerging pueblo community a unique social context with Plaza at its heart.
- Pre-Gabrielino: Millingstone Period (1500bce - 6500bce) - Manos (hand stones) and Metates (stone platforms) used to grind plants
- Total indigenous population of California 250,000 to 300,000 - Los Angeles: 5,000 people before the arrival of first Spanish speaking settlers in late 18th Century
- Gabrielino cosmological views: common creator god: Chinigchinix, and a virgin god, Chukit - Jimson Weed - ceremonial hallucinogenic plant

Early Observations

- In 1542 Captain Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo "discovered California; 1602 Captain Sebastian Vizcaino touched down at Santa Catalina Island - last European contact for 166 years
- 1765-1771: Visitador General Jose de Galvez colonized Alta California - further exploration and settlement of northern frontier of New Spain
- Lieutenant Colonel Gaspar de Portola, the newly appointed governor of California and Father Junipero Serra chosen to lead expedition to establish new missions and presidios;
- Father Juan Crespi and engineer Miguel Costanso were the principal diarists of the expedition

Colonial Grid-Plan Plaza

- The plaza actually represents the center of civic life in the New World as opposed to Spain proper
- Among the adults enumerated as original founders of the pueblo, only two settlers were listed as Spaniards; most were mixed African and Indian ancestry (mulatos)

From Missions and Presidios to Colonial Pueblos

- Presidios: most constrained and formal settlements; pueblo did not have the structural composition to "maintain either formal spatial or activity oriented structure" - later the physical layout of the pueblo and its Plaza would change several times mainly from factors such as flooding and earthquakes
- To understand the Plaza as the center of pueblo life in LA during the colonial period, it is essential to understand who original Pobladores were and the conditions that sent them north - when coming north Pobladores merged with Gabrielinos to create a sense of place that gave LA its distinct regional character.



The Early Pueblo and Its Plaza

- The Pobladores were given full ownership of their house lots and planting fields in 1786; 29 structures surrounded the Plaza - flat, one-storey adobes with thatched tule roofs.
- By the beginning of the 19th C there were prominent names listed among the inhabitants: Alvarez, Cota, Dominguez, Figueroa, Garcia, Pico, Reyes, Lugo, Sepulveda and Verdugo
- Pobladores of 1781: 8 mulatos, 2 espanol, 9 Indian, 2 Negro, 1 Mestizo

An Emerging Plaza Culture

- The overall economic success of the pueblo was largely due to the relationships that Pobladores established with Gabrielino neighbors; missionaries and Pobladores became competitors to secure Indian labor - unlike missionaries, Pobladores paid wages after 1790
- In October 1785 a young curandera (spiritual healer), named Toyipurina began traveling through vast domain of Gabrielino to proclaim injustices of her people - gained support of 4 key Rancherias and led revolt on San Gabriel - soldiers at mission led successful counterattack leading to 17 arrests including Toyipurina.
- Male Indian converts from Mission San Gabriel not allowed into pueblo without permission, however women were and therefore played a significant role in the cultural and social transformations that occurred at the pueblo.
- Through their adaptation of the Spanish language, the Gabrielino and other Indian groups from Southern California who congregated near Plaza assimilated into a mestizo society and contributed to dynamic pueblo culture.
- Knowledge and application of indigenous medicine perhaps the most valued aspect of Indian culture brought into LA
- La Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de Los Angeles between 1818-1822 at the Plaza's 3rd site was the event in the Plaza's social cultural history that symbolized conflict with missions - church came to symbolize the decline of the mission.
- The founding 44 Pobladores of LA who arrived from northwest Mexico, besides being subjects of colonial Spain, were primarily of Indian, African and European background.

The Rise and Decline of the Mexican Plaza

- 1821 - Mexico independence from Mexico - elevated the status and symbolic significance of the pueblo and Plaza of Los Angeles, which briefly served as the capital of Alta California
- Plaza was a place where secular and religious fiestas, commerce and political life were characterized by a collective significance, unifying the pueblo and rancho, reaffirming traditional loyalties and defining Mexican Los Angeles as a whole.



- The zanja (ditch water system) was rebuilt - developed immediately after the founding of the pueblo in 1781 and provided water for agricultural irrigation and domestic purposes - Zanja Madre (Mother ditch, ran through pueblo near plaza and connect to LA River.
- The wedding of Pio Pico (who was governor for the first time in 1831) to Maria Ignacia Alvarado in 1834 reflected the growing importance of Los Angeles and its Plaza - LA now was unrivaled center of Mexican society in Southern California - Plaza at its heart.

Transitional Era

- 1870s: "Americanization" of Los Angeles and its Plaza; started with transitional decades - began with statehood in 1850.
- City remained predominantly Mexican in population and Spanish the dominant language, but Anglo American political and economic influences gradually increased.
- Bridget "Biddy" Mason - luminary in the early black community: nurse, midwife, businesswoman, property owner, philanthropist, and pioneer of the African American community of Los Angeles.

Source: Estrada, W.D., (2008). *The Los Angeles Plaza – Sacred and Contested Space*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.