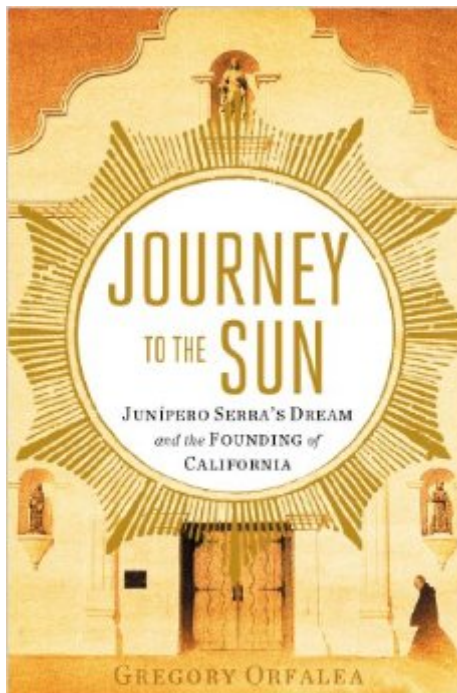


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Journey To The Sun: Junipero Serra's Dream And The Founding Of California



Synopsis

The fascinating narrative of the remarkable life of Junípero Serra, the intrepid priest who led Spain and the Catholic Church into California in the 1700s and became a key figure in the making of the American West. In the year 1749, at the age of thirty-six, Junípero Serra left his position as a highly regarded priest in Spain for the turbulent and dangerous New World, knowing he would never return. The Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church both sought expansion in Mexico—the former in search of gold, the latter seeking souls—as well as entry into the mysterious land to the north called “California.” Serra’s mission: to spread Christianity in this unknown world by building churches wherever possible and by converting the native peoples to the Word of God. It was an undertaking that seemed impossible, given the vast distances, the challenges of the unforgiving landscape, and the danger posed by resistant native tribes. Such a journey would require bottomless physical stamina, indomitable psychic strength, and, above all, the deepest faith. Serra, a diminutive man with a stout heart, possessed all of these attributes, as well as an innate humility that allowed him to see the humanity in native people whom the West viewed as savages. By his death at age seventy-one, Serra had traveled more than 14,000 miles on land and sea through the New World—much of that distance on a chronically infected and painful foot—baptized and confirmed 6,000 Indians, and founded nine of California’s twenty-one missions, with his followers establishing the rest. The names of these missions ring through the history of California—San Diego, San Jose, San Juan Capistrano, Santa Clara, and San Francisco—and served as the epicenters of the arrival of Western civilization, where millions more would follow, creating the California we know today. An impoverished son, an inspired priest, and a potent political force, Serra was a complex man who stood at the historic crossroads between Native Americans, the often brutal Spanish soldiers, and the dictates of the Catholic Church, which still practiced punishment by flogging. In this uncertain, violent atmosphere, Serra sought to protect the indigenous peoples from abuse and to bring them the rituals and spiritual comfort of the Church even as the microbes carried by Europeans threatened their existence. Beginning with Serra’s boyhood on the isolated island of Mallorca, venturing into the final days of the Spanish Inquisition, revealing the thriving grandeur of Mexico City, and finally journeying up the untouched California coast, Gregory Orfalea’s magisterial biography is a rich epic that cuts new ground in our understanding of the origins of the United States. Combining biography, European history, knowledge of Catholic doctrine, and anthropology, > brings original research and perspective to America’s creation story. Orfalea’s poetic and incisive recounting of Serra’s life shows how one man changed the future of California and in so doing affected the future of our nation.

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Customer Reviews

One merely has to look at the place names in modern California to confirm the enduring legacy of the Spanish colonization of the area. To a great extent, the initial success of that effort to âœcivilizeâ • California was due to the labors in the eighteenth century of the Franciscan priest Junipero Serra. Driven by intense religious devotion and a restless, adventurous spirit, Serra abandoned a promising and secure teaching position in Spain in 1749 to sail to the New World. After 15 years as an administrator and preacher in Mexico City, he began the work of founding a series of missions in Alta (upper) California. Here Orfalea reveals the sheer toughness, courage, and even fanaticism of his subject, as Serra founds a series of missions, often traveling in solitude while plagued by a severely ulcerated leg. As Orfalea acknowledges, the results for the Indians who were attached to the missions were mixed and certainly did not prevent the demographic collapse of the Indian population. Still, this admiring and admirable biography pays tribute to an essential figure in the early development of California. --Jay Freeman

"A popular, highly readable history of an important figure...Orfalea's book is polished and professional." (LA Times)"A California story becomes an American story...[a] passionate resurrection of the largely forgotten Spanish Franciscan priest who founded the early missions along the California coast...this sympathetic portrait of the well-meaning though flawed priest...sifts carefully through the record...A doggedly researched and fulsomely argued biography."

(Kirkus)â œOne merely has to look at the place names in modern California to confirm the enduring legacy of the Spanish colonization of the area. To a great extent, the initial success of that effort was due to the labors of the Franciscan priest Junipero Serra. This admiring and admirable biography pays tribute to an essential figure in the early development of California.â •

(Booklist)â œJourney to the Sun is a highly readable, interpretive account of Junipero Serra's life. Gregory Orfalea brings his vast breadth of knowledge to fleshing out a humanistic narrative of a man whose history is often distorted and confounding. A brilliant biography about a key Hispanic figure in the launching of American history.â • (Daniel E. Krieger, Professor of History, Emeritus, California Polyte)â œOrfalea's riveting narrative significantly enriches our grasp of the illusive and controverted Junipero Serra with delightful episodes from his life in Spain and Mexico based on the author's painstaking research never before reported. Arguably, Serra comes alive in this volume as in no other. Great story-telling and fast-moving action together with a stupendous familiarity with the bibliography on Serra make this an original and substantive addition to the field. Scholars and the general public will find this volume enlightening and a good read.â • (Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ, Casassa Chair and Professor of Theological Studies, Loyola Marymount University)â œOrfalea's lively and engaging narrative not only humanizes Junipero Serra, but just as important takes into consideration the cultural perspectives of California Indians as they engaged the Spanish colonial world.â • (John R. Johnson, Ph.D., Curator of Anthropology, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History)

The author, in a press interview, said that he had begun the book with a negative impression of Serra and was surprised to find that he came to admire and appreciate him and his work. The book shows this, and so it must be read as a positive interpretation, as contrasted to some other current biographies that emphasize the current, fashionable negative treatment based on the devastation of the Indian culture that came after Serra. If one focuses on Serra, his intentions, and the understanding that the Indian culture would not have survived any European settlement, and that European settlement was inevitable -- then Serra's compassionate approach stands out as a beacon of humanity, though from a modern perspective it was paternalistic. The author interjects a lot of his own opinions and comments in the current fashion of writing, and the book is diminished by these.

Professor Orfalea has transfigured Serra from a faded caricature on an old mission calendar to the living body and spirit of both doubt and will that the Padre has now become for this reader. As we

learn of his struggle, we ride beside this central figure of California's troubled but not distant past on mule back from the poverty of Mallorca, through the populous and remote reaches of Mexico, to the north among the Esselen, from Mission Antonio de Padua over the oak hills and rocky valleys of the Salinas River to the salt air of Carmel and all within the sight of his ladder to the sun. We feel the rough wood saddle and parched air of the trail. We are infused both by the new and unique sights of Alta California and by the sources of Serra's faith, the power and beauty that play out in his driven heart, as the struggle to peacefully invade the last corner of the West is contested between the locals and the newcomers themselves. The overlay of the spiritual and military forces sent by Carlos of Spain to increase power for his European throne still washes today over many distant shores. We live in the lingering culture and political shapes created by a kinder gentler version of bloody conquest, Manifest Destiny, that once seemed removed but remains in fact. The fine articulation of personality and motive in Orfalea's story derived from source material in each of the figures is an amazing achievement. The culture of politics and faith in Serra's day dictated events, and the people who in response conducted themselves well, and not, have shaped the California culture of today. History not only lives, it hurts, it smells, it rides the bus, and when so closely examined it continually tests our ability to travel back and to see events clearly minus the pressing baggage of present cultural judgment. We hunger now for justice for a past time of great harm, but from a far later perspective that cannot easily know the real limits of human understanding as it was. Orfalea's achievement is not to excuse, but to portray in intimate terms what the written word of historic time itself can tell us of ourselves. We see ourselves more in focus in contrast to the action and times of those past. Serra was after all like us, part ideal, part cause, of our own lives and times. His struggle occurred at the specific moment in history when the fulcrum of civilization shifted in California.

With the pending canonization of Fra Junipero Serra in September, it is important to know the breadth and depth of his life, vision and commitment. With mounting controversy over his being made a saint, this focus needs to be a vehicle to enter a deeper dialog about European contact and colonization in the Americas. The past cannot be healed unless it is first recovered. "Journey to the Sun" is one of those tools to make this possible. The Rev. Jerry Drino, historian, Trinity Cathedral, San Jose

Very rich in details, maps, graphics. We bought one for a friend who cruises his boat in the Sea of Cortez and loves local history, and says he loves it. We bought one for ourselves, and are enjoying it in small bites. It's obviously excellently researched, great as a resource, not light reading.

I grew up in California and went East to college. Our home was in the Sacramento Valley, near the Mother Lode, and my great grandparents on both sides settled in Santa Barbara in the 1800s. In New England it is taken for granted that America's early history was all home-grown and a local phenomenon. California, they assumed, had the Beach Boys and that was about it. But I've cared about Junipero Serra since I was a little kid, visiting relatives near the Santa Barbara Mission. Too many years later, my wife and I have loved to travel. Often, although I'm not very religious, we find ourself walking in Father Serra's footsteps. We've been to his birthplace in Petra, Mallorca, to Baja California churches such as the one in Loreto, and of course to most of the California missions. My most recent birthday was spent on an over-night at Hearst's Hacienda at Camp Hunter Liggett, in the shadow of Serra's third mission. A month ago we enjoyed every station of the Huntington Library's Father Serra exhibit. Of course I purchased Professor Hackel's history ("Junipero Serra") and quickly consumed it. "Journey to the Sun" explores Junipero Serra's life and what it meant to California. I could feel the Franciscan's pain on the rough and risky trails he chose, and Author Orfalea makes very clear the devotion that drove Serra forward. He paints a vivid picture of what California was like at the very time New England was holding it's American Revolution. One chapter is devoted almost entirely to describing how the native people lived BEFORE the arrival of these Spanish holy men and soldiers. This is not a "revisionist history". The missionaries meant not to subjugate the Indians, but to save their souls. They were also frail human beings who failed in some important ways. Junipero Serra struggled against unimaginable hurdles and hardships. Professor Orfalea brings it all to life.

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