

Junipero Serra: Controversial Saint and Historical Figure

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Introduction

An important figure in American politics, and as a spiritual guide for Catholics, Junipero Serra has arisen as a hotly controversial figure in America's current climate. While many Catholics see his example of fortitude as one to emulate, many secular figures have gone to a polar opposite extreme intending to tarnish any notion of good people claim this man to have done. How can a man who is seen as one of California's founding fathers, while also being a canonized saint for Roman Catholics, be viewed as controversial? This paper will address the contested nature of Junipero Serra by looking at how Junipero Serra's mission in California gave the native people mixed feelings about his actions and the Spanish mission as a whole, was strongly supported by Spanish Catholics during his time while struggling with other Spanish settlers in the Spanish military due to differing goals, why he has been very appreciated by Catholics today, and is seen as a controversial political figure by many secular people in America today.

Junipero Serra Background

Before doing an examination of what different groups of people thought about Junipero Serra, his claim to fame must be mentioned first. Father Junipero Serra was a Spanish Franciscan Monk who led the Californian Catholic missions in the 18th century. A succinct summary of who Serra is would be, "in 1749 he gave up a successful career as a priest and university professor in his homeland and sailed to Mexico to begin his life there as a missionary to Indians. Twenty years later, Serra played a key role in the settlement of Upper California."¹ Essentially, Junipero

¹ Steven W. Hackel, *Junipero Serra: California's Founding Father*. (New York: Random House), 2002. xiii.

Serra accomplished two things that have ingrained his legacy into history: he helped to colonize California, and he led the spiritual campaign of evangelizing to native Californians.

Serra's role in settling California has been recognized by the citizens of the United States as a secular accomplishment by a political figure rather than as a spiritual feat by a religious leader. "His statue was unveiled in 1931 in the U.S. Capitol, and a poll done in 1984 revealed two-thirds of Californians believe Junipero Serra to be the most important individual in the state's history."² The land and people to whom Serra served in California was not simply politicized and tamed by government though as the Franciscans of the California Missions were not allowed to take part in the governmental affairs. The Spanish Empire had every intention to use the California Missions to "extend its borders and consolidate its colonial territories"³ Serra did not have any intention of extending the Spanish Empire's grasp on other regions though. Rather, his secular legacy comes in the form of teaching and helping the natives to be able to grow crops, and in return, the natural course was for people to settle in areas where they were able to materialize resources.

Before the Franciscans, the land of California was viewed as a wasteland. Upon being granted the ability to evangelize the area, it is noted the Franciscans "accepted the charge with reluctance because of the reputed barrenness of the region and the low type of resident Indians."⁴ Thus, one sees, that Serra's secular legacy is still remembered in America as one in which he took a seemingly useless land and created something out of what appeared to the naked eye as nothing. The land was deemed useless and the native people that inhabited the useless land were just as much unwanted by any outsiders. Led by Serra, the Franciscans were able to

² Ibid.

³ Elizabeth L. Hogan, *The California Missions*. (Menlo Park, California: Sunset Books), 1979, 53.

⁴ John A Berger, *The Franciscan Missions of California*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), 1941, 26.

transform this land deemed as a vastly useless area void of fruitful life, into a flourishing community whose prosperity is still prevalent to this day.

Spiritually, Father Junipero Serra is viewed as a man of faithful endurance who brought new life in Jesus Christ to many California Native Americans and rid himself of a comfortable and successful life in the eyes of many for greatness in the eyes of God through evangelization. Serra was destined for greatness, he was intelligent, a great speaker, and an inspirational teacher to those he knew in his homeland before he set out for mission.⁵ Well noted though is the fact that, “fame and wealth meant nothing to Junipero. He would have been showered with honours had he remained in Spain, but his one thought was to help others.”⁶ He is well noted for his powerful preaching style that moved many to change their selfish ways because of its extremeness as the following example shows:

“Always aware of the importance of dramatic impact upon his audiences, Serra used various methods of moving them to tears of repentance. Upon several occasions he hid a large stone in the pulpit and after delivering his sermon calling for repentance of sin, he would take the stone and as an act of contrition beat his breast with such force the audience was afraid he would injure or kill himself before them.”⁷

Despite this greatness people saw in Father Serra, he saw himself as a successful man by worldly standards, but the world’s success was not Father Serra’s goal.

⁵ Kenneth M. King, *Mission to Paradise: The Story of Junipero Serra and the Mission of California*. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press), 1975. 7.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Katherine Ainsworth and Edward M. Ainsworth. *In the Shade of the Juniper Tree: A Life of Fray Junipero Serra*. (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 59.

Serra left behind his comfortable life in his old country and traveled to a new one to serve the people there. Additionally, he was plagued by many illnesses and other physical complications during his time serving the new world. These ailments included suffering from asthma along with severe reactions to insect bites which caused him unable to walk at times and also led to ulcers.⁸ Despite physical ailments, Serra is most known for ignoring such problems and rising above them to serve what he felt was a greater purpose. His goal upon coming to California was to baptize the natives in the area, not to allow himself to be stopped by health problems. Thus, one can see how he endured physical problems and is an example of spiritual and physical endurance for many people who look up to his example today. This spiritual endurance is an example of fortitude that led to his canonization in 2015.⁹

These two points of Serra's greatness under the secular and spiritual realm paint an image of an undoubtedly great man, so the question arises of why is he such a controversial figure today? The answer to this question will be revealed throughout the paper. However, in short, Serra's methods of evangelization have been ridiculed both by Catholics and non-Catholics. Who is the true Serra then? With Junipero Serra's background in mind, the depiction of the truth behind this man can now be investigated by looking at differing opinions of different groups of people including; the native people of California he tended to, Catholics during his time, Catholic figures today, and secular figures in the United States of America.

Father Junipero Serra's Perception Through the Eyes of his Peers

Being a leader of a large area of mission in California, it is evident that Junipero Serra would have been viewed very positively by his Franciscan brothers and likely by many other

⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Saint Junipero Serra." USCCB. 2018. Accessed November 12, 2018. <http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/francis/papal-visit-2015/junipero-serra-biography.cfm>.

⁹ Eddie O'Neill, "Father of the California Missions", "Catholic Answers". January 1, 2016. 23.

strongly practicing Catholics during his time. Leading the Franciscans in California practically and spiritually in their endeavors makes it obvious that the Franciscans around him thought highly of him. It has already been mentioned how much he was treasured as a Catholic man even before he gave up his priestly and teaching duties in his homeland. Many of those in the Franciscan Order around him noted his religious fervor, and constant act of prayer despite not having enough sleep or food.¹⁰ He was also an example of obedience for his fellow Franciscan brethren as he says to his superior, “Whether I am asked to move on or to stay here, to found new missions or to go back to the old ones, or even if I should be recalled to the College, it is with joy and submission that I shall carry out your instructions.”¹¹ This kind of obedience and extremeness for following God’s will made such an impression on those around him as one of his acquaintances describes Serra’s efforts concisely when he says,

“And in the truth of such holy ardor were the desires of this seraphic and Apostolic Junipero that neither the serious and constant illness which befell him, nor the distress of his continuous and lengthy journeys, nor the hardships and roughness of the roads, nor the lack of necessary food, nor the savagery of the untamed and fierce inhabitants were able to detain the course of his Apostolic efforts.”¹²

This clearly shows that his Franciscan brethren thought highly of him. However, his Franciscan brothers were not the only Spanish Catholics that were involved with Serra in California.

¹⁰ Katherine Ainsworth and Edward M. Ainsworth. *In the Shade of the Juniper Tree: A Life of Fray Junipero Serra*. (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 58.

¹¹ Omer Englebert, *The Last of the Conquistadors: Junipero Serra*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1956), 97.

¹² Francisco Palou, *Historical Account of the Life of the Venerable Fr. Junipero Serra and of the Missions which he founded in Northern California and the New Establishments of Monterey*. trans by C. Scott Williams. (Mexico: Office of Don Felipe de Zuniga y Ontiveros), 1787. xii. Found in americanjourneys.org.

The question that is raised then is of whether or not the depiction of Father Junipero Serra as a happy man serving others despite his physical ailments is representative of other Spaniards in California during this time. California was not just simply inhabited by Spanish clergy and Native Americans, but there were also other Spanish people there since it was Spain's intent to expand their power to this new territory. In fact, much of the issues that Father Junipero Serra dealt with in California comes from his tensions with the Spanish military who were ever-present in every dealing that Serra had.

Particularly, Junipero Serra struggled with other Spanish leaders in the California area such as military leaders. This tension that Serra had with the Spanish military would make Serra's evangelization efforts difficult, but it is also an important factor in noting his complete connection with the Spanish Government's affiliation with the settling of California. There were some that were not supporters of Junipero Serra and his mission such as Governor Pedro Fages.¹³ Fages was an important military figure for the founding of the California for Spain, and although one of his duties was to, "prepare the Indians for establishment of a mission under Father Serra,"¹⁴ Fages, along with his right-hand man Don Miguel Costanso, main purpose was to settle California and take advantage of its land since the native people there were not capable.¹⁵ Serra's intention was obviously to evangelize the indigenous people of California, and in order to do so he must be accompanied by military personnel since that was the way of the time. Thus the tensions between Fages, whose orders are to settle the land, and Serra, whose intention is to

¹³ James A. Sandos, "Junipero Serra's Canonization and the Historical Record" in "American Historical Review". December 1988. 1255.

¹⁴ Iris Wilson Engstrand, "PEDRO FAGES AND MIGUEL COSTANSÓ TWO EARLY LETTERS FROM SAN DIEGO IN 1769" in "The Journal of San Diego History San Diego Historical Society Quarterly" Spring 1975 Vol21 Number 2. 2018.

¹⁵ Don Miguel Costanso, "Letter written from the Port of San Diego for Jose de Galvez" in Iris Wilson Engstrand, "PEDRO FAGES AND MIGUEL COSTANSÓ TWO EARLY LETTERS FROM SAN DIEGO IN 1769" in "The Journal of San Diego History San Diego Historical Society Quarterly" Spring 1975 Vol21 Number 2. 2018.

evangelize the people, arise. Spain as a government had the intention of settling the land higher on its checklist than evangelizing.

“commands from the civil authority took precedence and in reality the missionaries could only depend on assistance from the soldiers when the civil authority had no need of them. This was extremely annoying to Father Serra and made a great many difficulties for him. He finally took the position of claiming authority for himself over all of the missions and mission activities. This eventually led to further disagreements with Lieutenant Fages.”¹⁶

Therefore, it is evident that the differing purposes between the state and the church manifest themselves. In Serra’s opinion, for him to effectively do what he intends to do in California, he saw it as necessary to free the evangelization attempts from the government's grasp by loosening the military in California’s control on this religious sphere. This was simply due to the fact that Serra and Fages could not cooperate well together and after an altercation in which Fages refused to help Serra in the founding of San Buenaventura “Father Serra demanded the removal of Lieutenant Fages” only for Fages to be replaced by a different military commander in Don Fernando Rivera y Moncada whom Serra had even more difficulty in working with.¹⁷ Despite the butting of heads that Serra experienced with the Spanish military, the following quote shows Serra’s true character.

In Father Serra’s letters every paragraph portrays the fervor of the man. In the first days after the founding of the Mission at San Diego, Captain Portolá would have given up and forsaken the colonization of Alta California. Faced as they were with starvation, abandonment of the project seemed logical. Yet in the midst of a seemingly impossible situation, Father Serra alone chose to remain among the heathen rather than abandon the harvest of souls that he had come so far to reach. His letters paint

¹⁶ James R. Moriarty, “Father Serra and the Soldiers” in “The Journal of San Diego History San Diego Historical Society Quarterly” July 1967 Volume 13 Number 3. 2018.

¹⁷ Ibid.

a revealing self-portrait. They reflect the “celo ardiente” the (ardent zeal) of the founder of the California Missions, the civilizer of the Indians, and the shepherd of the good harvest.¹⁸

Therefore it is evident that while Father Junipero Serra may have been at odds with other Spaniards during his time that were not religious, Father Serra’s character was not the issue that led to relational conflicts. Rather, the conflict between Serra and the Spanish military was due to different intentions that each had in the settling of California.

The Native American Perception of Junipero Serra

Something highly important in order to understand the life of Junipero Serra is to understand what his actual relationship with the Native Americans he serviced was like. Here is where it becomes tricky to understand Serra for two reasons. The first of the two reasons that lead to difficulty in understanding Serra is the fact that there was a paternal relationship between Serra and the Indians. The second reason that the case with Serra presents is that there are not really any writings from the Native Americans in contact with Father Serra.

The first reason that leads to ambiguity on the Franciscan Serra’s relationship with the native peoples is that he saw himself as having a paternal relationship with the native Californians which led to some practices that have upset many people. Serra himself describes his relationship when he writes:

“That spiritual fathers should punish their own sons, the Indians, with blows appear to be as old as the conquest of these kingdoms [Americas]: so general in fact that saints do not seem to be any exception to the rule...In the life of Saint Francis Solano...we read that, while he had a special gift from God to soften the ferocity of the most barbarous by the sweetness of his presence and his words, nevertheless, in the running of his mission in the Province of

¹⁸ Ibid.

Tucuman in Peru...when they failed to carry out his orders, he gave directions for his Indians to be whipped.”¹⁹

Here it is illustrated that the way Serra conceived of his relationship to those he was serving in a manner of a father, for him, a spiritual father. He very much understood that while his role was to love those he was serving, it was also a necessity that at times he was required to be stern with them as well. It was commonly known, as was admitted by Serra himself that punishments persisted and at times got out of hand, they even persisted for years in the California Missions after his death.²⁰ With Father Junipero being represented as a stern father it should be mentioned that he was most likely not the one that would deal the punishments first hand, and would sometimes try to prevent extreme situations.²¹ It should be noted additionally that the conception of paternalism, and the corporal punishments that would be dealt was common practice during this time.²² Nonetheless, his methods surely could not have been a cause that would have created a positive morale between him and the natives.

The second reason dealing with the fact that those he baptized and administered to could not write does make it difficult to see the entire impact Serra had on the Californians. Despite this fragility in the case for Serra having a positive relationship with the Native Americans, one can still go off the writings of those around him as holding some validity. It is noted that Serra learned the language of the people which allowed him to instruct the natives more easily about the mysteries of the Catholic faith while additionally being more personal with them. An

¹⁹ Father Junipero Serra to Governor Felipe de Neve, January 7, 1780, in *Writings of Junipero Serra*, Antoine Tibesar (Washington D.C.: 1955-1956), 407-418. In James A. Sandos, “Junipero Serra’s Canonization and the Historical Record” in “American Historical Review”. December 1988.

²⁰ James A. Sandos, “Junipero Serra’s Canonization and the Historical Record” in “American Historical Review”. December 1988. 1254.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid. 1254-1255.

example showing this ability to instruct and at the same time gain their acceptance is when Father Junipero says the nativity mass for a group of native peoples:

“Some of the Indian children took part, whom the zealous Father had instructed, a part of them to recite in Spanish and another part in Pame, so reproducing that great Mystery with great vividness. In this way he was able to instruct them and win their affection.”²³

This passage clearly shows that the natives he is serving are accepting to Father Serra.

The Modern Catholic’s Perception of Junipero Serra

It took 150 years from the time of Junipero Serra’s death until his canonization in 2015 for the representation of Father Junipero Serra as a spiritually important person for Catholics to be reborn. As is mentioned earlier in the paper, Serra has been widely known to be influential in the founding of California politically, but recently he has been remembered for his model of virtues and self-discipline as well. He was well known for self-discipline in bodily things and constantly kept himself in check by subjecting his soul to self-mortifications to align his will with the Divine’s.²⁴ Upon his beatification in 1988 Pope John Paul II said of Serra, “In Fray Junipero Serra we find a shining example of Christian virtue and the missionary spirit.”²⁵ The mere fact that Serra is a canonized saint, especially one that has been canonized in recent history, holds sway to how Catholics today would view him. In addition to this though, the words that recent popes have said about the Spanish missionary bolster Serra’s case even more that he is an example for Catholics to form themselves to be like. Pope Francis upon canonizing St. Junipero

²³ Francisco Palou, *Historical Account of the Life of the Venerable Fr. Junipero Serra and of the Missions which he founded in Northern California and the New Establishments of Monterey*. trans by C. Scott Williams.

²⁴ Katherine Ainsworth and Edward M. Ainsworth. *In the Shade of the Juniper Tree: A Life of Fray Junipero Serra*. (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 58.

²⁵ Pope John Paul II in Eddie O’Neill, “Father of the California Missions” in “Catholic Answer”. January 1, 2016. 23.

Serra said the following words about what Junipero Serra embodied during Father Serra's time in this world saying:

“He was the embodiment of ‘a Church which goes forth,’ a Church which sets out to bring everywhere the reconciling tenderness of God. Junípero Serra left his native land and its way of life. He was excited about blazing trails, going forth to meet many people, learning and valuing their particular customs and ways of life. He learned how to bring to birth, and nurture, God’s life in the faces of everyone he met; he made them his brothers and sisters. Junípero sought to defend the dignity of the native community, to protect it from those who had mistreated and abused it.”²⁶

These strong words coming during a crucial time in Catholic history in which the laity have been called upon to a great call once again to spread the news of Jesus Christ in an ever so changing and secularizing world. Serra for many modern Catholics gives an example of how selfless love and devotion to another is the Christian way of life, and his example of spiritual endurance and a missionaries mindset, is what many practicing Catholics today are called to in contemporary America.

Secular Perceptions of Junipero Serra

As alluded to before, the saintly image of Junipero Serra is not one that is agreed upon by all people, because the dynamic of people that do not view Serra positively tend to be those who sympathize with the maltreatment of Native Americans by white settlers. In other words, Junipero Serra has been generalized into a broader category of a period of colonization in which Spanish Imperialism maltreated many native people of the California region. This negativity, and stated hatred of Junipero Serra, has been displayed through manifestations of destroying

²⁶ Pope Francis, “homily at the canonization of Junipero Serra” in Eddie O’Neill, “Father of the California Missions” in “Catholic Answer”. January 1, 2016. 21.

statues of Serra in public areas. On the exact same day of Serra's canonization, black spray paint was sprayed on a statue of him outside of Carmel which is near the mission church where Serra is buried.²⁷ One instance can be seen as merely coincidental especially when simple black spray paint could be the hijinks of a rebellious teenager, but when multiple instances occur the prospect of a coincidence is difficult to entertain. On August 20, 2017 another statue of Saint Junipero Serra was vandalized, this one had red paint coating the hands with the words murderer written across the statue.²⁸ Yet again in September of 2017 another statue of Serra was desecrated with red paint, but to add flavor to the situation this statue was beheaded.²⁹ These events of desecrating Father Junipero Serra's statues shows the disdain that many have for what they believe Serra to represent in Spanish Imperialism and forced proselytization.

It is fair to note that this belief does stem from a topic mentioned earlier in the fact that he would permit whippings. Additionally, what many attribute to the California Missions is that they were a place where conversion was forced upon people.

“Oral historians of various coastal tribes to the effect that the Indians were unwilling converts; when they ran away from the missions, they were pursued by militias, captured, put in stocks, or flogged. Indians were forced to plant and to harvest, to build, to butcher, and to cook. Many died of disease and broken hearts. You can see the placards marking mass graves of the Indians at many of the missions.”³⁰

²⁷ Richard Rodriguez, “Padre Mestizo” in “First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life.”, January 2018.” 21.

²⁸ Ruben Vives, “St. Junipero Serra statue vandalized in Mission Hills” in “Los Angeles Times”. August 20, 2017.

²⁹ Veronica Rocha, “Decapitated and doused with red paint: Vandals target St. Junipero Serra statue at Santa Barbara mission” in “Los Angeles Times”. September 14, 2017.

³⁰ Richard Rodriguez, “Padre Mestizo” in “First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life.”, 23.

This is much of what is associated with what the Spanish missions entailed. The fact of the matter is that while Serra's heart may have been set on true pure conversion, what does not help his case is twofold in that the Spanish Empire used this land in California to spread their area of influence and the evangelization methods of the time are seen as heinous actions in the present age.

To bolster the case against Serra, many later generations of Indigenous ancestors in the region are bitter toward Serra and the Spanish mission process as whole. Their response to those who support Junipero's actions can be illustrated in following quote saying, "Historians have pointed to instances in which Serra protected Native peoples from the violence of the Spanish military. However, indigenous people argue that Serra played a role in founding the colonial system and that without the presence of Spanish imperial forces their ancestors would not have needed protection in the first place."³¹ Essentially, the common cause for concern among Indigenous Californian offspring is that Serra himself, whether good or bad, would not have needed to "protect" the native people of the land in the first place if European settlers did not arrive in California and Mexico. Serra himself, as has been proven earlier, was a key player in wanting to settle since the "plans for religious conversion encouraged by the new president of the California missions, Franciscan Father Junipero Serra, provided the driving force behind the proposal for settlement."³² With this thought then, many associate Serra with the idea that if he and his Spanish colleagues had not come to the New World and settle like they did, then the ills and tortures that the native people were subjected to do not happen. Bergengruen quotes a voice for Native Americans in the Chicago Tribune, "It is incomprehensible for us to think that you

³¹ Joanna Shenk, "Churches indigenous groups protest canonization of missionary priest" in "Christian Century", October 28, 2015. 15-16.

³² Iris Wilson Engstrand, "PEDRO FAGES AND MIGUEL COSTANSÓ TWO EARLY LETTERS FROM SAN DIEGO IN 1769"

would canonize a person who is ultimately responsible for the death of approximately 100,000 California Indians and the complete extermination of many native tribes, cultures and languages,' Valentin Lopez, chairman of the Amah Mutsun tribal band, wrote in a letter to Pope Francis asking him to halt the canonization."³³ Thus it is clear that while some may empathize with Serra, many Indigenous are ready to show their victimization from what he had done to their ancestors.

Such disapproval by many groups of people in regards to Junipero Serra has affected not just societal conversations throughout America, but repercussions have also been manifested institutionally, particularly in the University system. Within the past year, Stanford has decided it is in its best interest to get rid of on campus buildings named after Father Junipero Serra. The committee at Stanford in charge of such decisions says the following upon making the decision to change the name:

*"Serra's establishment of the mission system is a central part of California history, and his life's work led to his canonization by the Roman Catholic Church in 2015. At the same time, the historical record confirms that the mission system inflicted great harm and violence on Native Americans, and Stanford has several features named for Serra even though he played no direct role in the university's history....At the same time, the committee said, 'Whatever the underlying motivations, the mission system subjected Native Americans to great violence and, together with other colonial activities, had devastating effects on California's Native American tribes and communities. It contributed to the destruction of the cultural, economic and religious practices of indigenous communities and left many tribal communities decimated, scattered, landless and vulnerable to subsequent colonization.'"*³⁴

³³ Vera Bergengruen, "Serra's Canonization Outrages Native Americans" in "The Chicago Tribune" September 22, 2015.

³⁴ Stanford News, "Stanford will seek to rename Serra Mall in honor of Jane Stanford" in "Stanford News" (Stanford University Communications) September 13, 2018.

This quotation shows that whether or not Serra is in the right does not matter for many people as what seems to be of importance is the fact that he was associated with a poorly enacted missionary system. This is another example of how the anger, or at the very least, disagreements many have with Father Junipero Serra's work of evangelization does not stop at a mere dialogue. The disagreements with Spanish Imperialism have manifested themselves in physical ways as well, as is shown with the example of Stanford University slowly stripping its association with Junipero Serra in its personal institutional history.

Not all non-Catholics are opposed to Serra though, and many of those secular figures that side with the situation of the saint are historians. Historians that side with Junipero note that he did stand mostly to help the Native Californians, despite at times falling short in his humanity. In addition to the historical misconceptions, historians are also upset about the vandalizing of historical statues. Many feel that people are trying to erase the past when they do not like what took place in a foreign time, while historians see the good of the past, whether those events or people in the past are right or wrong objectively or subjectively, and want to preserve the past as what it is. The claim by many in short is that, "Our cultural heritage is literally under assault with vandals tearing down and destroying statues and monuments throughout the country."³⁵ It should be noted too that the backlash of many conservative voices is not merely due to the Serra statue scandals but is a part of a larger picture in which many historical icons are being destroyed that represent something that some people are not favorable towards. Other examples being the desecration of Confederate statues and statues of Christopher Columbus.³⁶ Outraged by the

³⁵ Andrea Seastrand, "Is decapitation of Father Serra statue just the beginning?" in "The Tribune" September 16, 2017.

³⁶ Ibid.

generalizations of Serra participating in Spanish Imperialism, and the vandalism of historical statues, many historians disagree with such extreme events and beliefs of those who oppose Serra as a prominent figure.

Other Historians and secular figures in the current American context seek to point out what Serra shows our modern secular American culture and the problems of misunderstanding its own heritage. Hackel writes, “But debates about Serra’s Indian policy miss a fundamental message that the Pope intends to deliver through Serra’s canonization: our nation’s current wave of anti-immigration rhetoric flies in the face of America’s deep Hispanic and Catholic roots, and sadly it draws on a rich vein of anti-Catholicism in American history.”³⁷ This statement points out nothing about Serra himself, but it does point out the belief that America itself has had an issue with understanding its own past, and has always had a problem in accepting outsiders. Serra, who serviced and protected many native Californians did what later English settlers would not do. Additionally, Hackel is trying to raise the point that an anti-Catholic culture has been around American dialogue since the early years. Essentially, Hackel is pointing out that this is nothing new to see Serra misrepresented since Catholics have been misrepresented throughout American history. This argument may not shed light on the figure of Junipero Serra himself, but it is a fair conversation point being raised in an increasingly secularizing American dialogue today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has addressed the contested nature of Junipero Serra by looking at how Junipero Serra’s mission in California gave the native people mixed feelings about what he was doing, was strongly supported by Spanish Catholics during his time, has been very

³⁷ Steven W. Hackel, “On the Canonization of Junipero Serra” in *Process History.org*.

appreciated by Catholics today, and is seen as a controversial political figure by many secular figures in America today. This has been done by giving a background of the California Missions, and then representing Spanish Catholics who were proponents for and opposed Junipero Serra. The perception of the Native Americans who inhabited California was also given to shed light on what it was that Serra did for the indigenous in California. Fast forwarding to modern times, both the Catholic understanding and the secular understanding of Junipero Serra was given. The Catholic perspective of contemporary times is that Serra was a man of selfless love, spiritual endurance, and a model for evangelization. Secular understandings come in two forms; those who despise Father Serra and those who sympathize with Father Serra. Those who do not agree that Serra is a man worthy of honor tend to generalize or misunderstand the time in which Junipero Serra lived. Those who sympathize with Serra tend to be upset at the desecration of his statues and understand the more wholistic picture of the historical situation that the Franciscan missionary was present in. These four perspectives shed light on exactly why it is that Saint Junipero Serra, the Founding Father of California, is such a controversial figure today.

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