

To the Editor of The Tribune

This is in response to your article by Professor Dan Krieger regarding the changing of the name of Cabrillo College. I have been an historian for fifty years, thirty-seven of that studying Spanish Colonial History in the Americas from 1492 to 1550, with twenty years as a National Park Service Historian at Cabrillo National Monument. I do not wish to malign Professor Krieger's article in any way, although there appears to have been an error of citation by the editor of the piece.

My concern regards comments by Mr. Martin Garcia, English Instructor at Cabrillo College.

We remember and respect Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo (JRC) for his discovery of the winter wind pattern and the south trending California; or Pacific Current off California. It was this discovery which was the final piece in the jigsaw puzzle which allowed trade with China; how do you get to China and then how do you get back? The discovery of the great Pacific circular current began the development of Pacific Ocean trade patterns, something which impacts the entire Pacific Ocean Basin to this day.

We do not remember Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo for his discovery of California. In 1541 Spain could not have cared less about California, his reports and maps of California were ignored and it was sixty years until the next Spanish ship arrived. The Cabrillo (1542) and Vizcaino (1602) expeditions had no effect on the native peoples. There is no cultural memory among these peoples of the visits, nor of a massive onset of disease in the Kumeyaay or Chumash oral tradition. The idea that these expeditions brought disease to the Native Americans is unfounded. The incubation period for Small Pox is seven to nineteen days during which it is asymptomatic and not contagious. Both expeditions took some six weeks to make a California landfall, and neither reports any case of Smallpox in the crews. However, no country in the world had any knowledge of Germ Theory in the 16th. Century. The real flash point between Spaniards and Native Americans came in 1769 with the arrival of Portola's seaborne colonizers, and Father Serra's overland settlers.

Let us begin by noting that conquest, and its associated consequences, are not unique to the Spanish. Since the Bronze Age it has been part of humankind's heritage on every continent, except Antarctica. Africa has the example of Shaka Zulu among many others, in Asia the never-ending cycle of dynastic wars, the Mugol invasion of India; the Mongol conquests; China invades Tibet because Tibet, had invaded China, the list goes on. Even in the Americas, Native Americans, not just the Aztecs, Maya, and Incas, were conquering and subjugating each other long before the arrival of the Spanish. It is axiomatic that when a more advanced technology encounters a lesser technology, the people of the lesser technology, no matter what their intrinsic cultural worth, will suffer.

Let us examine Mr. Garcia's charges against Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo:

Genocide This is an emotionally loaded, and indiscriminately used word. It is erroneously used without understanding the actual meaning of the word. Genocide refers to the purposeful destruction of an entire population in every aspect. The last thing the Spanish wanted to do was annihilate every Native American. The Spanish themselves were as appalled by the massive die off of the native populations as we are.

A Murderer Murder is the intentional killing of a defenseless individual. Granted, the Spanish did, on occasion, kill defenseless women and children. Every country which did, or does, exist in the world has a history of such cruelty. Virtually every society has strict regulations regarding murder, yet it happens. Its the way human beings have behaved for 5000 years and it is still going on around the world today. That doesn't make it right, but sadly, it does make it human.

There is no known instance of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo personally murdering anyone.

It has been said that history gives us the opportunity to learn of the mistakes of the past, so hopefully, in the future, we don't do it again.

A Slaver We forget that Queen Isabella I produced laws outlawing slavery in the New World, except for prisoners of war captured on the battlefield (an old tradition in many countries). Any Native American who willingly acknowledged the divinity of Jesus Christ as represented by the "Holy and Apostolic Catholic Church" could not be enslaved. We condemn slavery, but it is still a menace world-wide today. Slavery is practiced in 167 countries and affects some 46 million people of all ages, sex, and ethnicity.

Have we learned anything about slavery? Apparently not. Despite the Western World's banning of slavery for close to two centuries, the world is still plagued by it. We have the advantage of being supposedly so enlightened that we can selectively condemn the Conquistadors, but are we any better? We make such a sanctimonious condemnation of people living in an era that was not as "enlightened" as ourselves. The oldest known law code, that of Hammurabi, has provisions for establishing slavery. Even our enlightened democratic Greeks had slavery.

I know of no society in the history of the planet, except perhaps the Semang, that has not embraced slavery. In a *pre-industrial* era, slavery was the only source of mass energy, a given necessity. By the way, the slave trade to the New World was initiated by Portugal, and it is worth noting; who were the Portuguese getting their slaves from? Arab and Black slavers ransacking Africa.

A Sex-Trafficker Again, show me a society today which does not have sex trafficking at every level. The list of world wide agencies attempting to stem the tide is virtually endless. Sex trafficking is endemic to the Globalized World. It is not fair to single out Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo for perhaps being a sex trafficker, and the comments about him come from questionable sources.

I am not trying to make Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo a saint, but we are being smug and hypocritical in our condemnation of him. In the sixteenth Century sex-trafficking worldwide was not a crime, but an accepted fact of life. He was a man of his times, not ours. The source of the idea of "sex-trafficking" is found in a letter written to the king 20 November 1539 by Bishop Marroquin of Santiago de Guatemala. In this letter he states, "the alcaldes have rounded up Indian women and girls to serve the men (of the shipyard not the ships) as bed companions, cooks and laundresses." The alcaldes (mayors of local communities) operated under the orders of Pedro de Alvarado, not JRC. Spanish law forbid women aboard ship except as passengers, and any Capitan who broke that law was subject to severe penalties. On a long voyage of exploration supernumerary women would be creating a disaster waiting to happen.

I call into question Mr. Garcia's comments on the siege of Tenochtitlan. Yes, the battle was on Lake Texcoco, but the battlefield was the city itself. It was comparable to the siege of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, or the taking of Corregidor in 1942. Yes, JRC helped with the construction of the assault craft used at Tenochtitlan, but his contribution was limited to no more than to direct the operation to obtain pine pitch to caulk the boats.

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was indeed granted several *encomiendas*. However, an *encomienda* was a right to work a certain piece of land and the work service of that land by the occupants. In return he was to protect them, educate them and bring them into the blessing of Jesus Christ. An *encomienda*

was NOT a land grant, the crown could reclaim it at will, and the Native Americans were not slaves, they had certain rights. A form of *encomienda* is found in many societies. Again, the *encomienda* system is not unique to Spain. Admittedly, the New Laws of 1542 (championed, by that great protector of the Indians, Bartolome de las Casas) allowed the bureaucrats to "enslave" the Native Americans by making them peons. Administering a continent an ocean away with a communication lag time of over a year was a breeding ground for bending or ignoring the rules. The more we study history, the more apparent is that human nature remains the same.

Regarding JRC's Indian wife, she was not a concubine, kept woman, or slave. She was a native woman who, by her choice or her father's choice, was allowed to enter into what was known as a *Barragania*. We would call it a Common Law marriage, except it was a formal, written agreement by the man and the woman to live in all elements of a married state with full legal rights. This was an Indian tradition as well as Spanish. Both man and woman signed, and had notarized before witnesses, this legal contract in Spanish civil law. The woman and her children had legal rights including the right to own property in her own name, and the right to terminate the contract at any time. Cabrillo regarded his Indian wife as legitimate in all things, except the eyes of Holy Mother Church. In all likelihood, Cabrillo's first wife was probably the daughter of one of his Tlaxcalan Indian comrades in arms. Marriage between former enemies is a common practice found world-wide. Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo went to Spain to marry Beatriz de Ortega in 1532 as the Crown had decided that the right to an *encomienda* was granted only to a man of pure Spanish blood married to a woman of pure Spanish blood. A Spanish blood marriage, sanctified by the sacraments of the Catholic Church, did not in any way set aside the *Barragania* contract wife. By the way, JRC did not marry into Spanish nobility, his father-in-law, Alonso Sanchez de Ortega, was the richest banker in Seville.

The 21st Century tends to ignore the fact that the Aztecs had so brutalized the 28 other city-states of the Valle de Mexico, especially the Tlaxcalans; these tribute peoples were more than happy to help Cortez destroy Tenochtitlan and the Aztecs. Until the New Laws from Spain went into effect, the Indian allies were regarded as proven fellow warriors, their rights were respected, and their *Caciques* (Lords and Officers) were honored as "Men of Authority." In addition, there were *Caciqas* (female "Women of property and/or authority"),

Pedro de Alvarado's father was an impoverished noble of lesser birth, but he had worked his way up to being the *Adelantado* (Governor) of the province of Guatemala. Pedro de Alvarado was Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo's superior officer since 1523 and was governor of Guatemala which made Alvarado's business offers impossible to decline. Alvarado illegally took two of Cabrillo's new ships to Peru and brought them back as virtual junk. Alvarado paid Cabrillo for one tenth the value of what had been new ships. In addition, Alvarado never paid Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo for the two ships Cabrillo built for the expedition to China. When Alvarado was killed by a horse rolling on him, he died owing Cabrillo a quarter million *Maravedis* (the currency used in the New World). Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was only one of a dozen creditors looking to be reimbursed out of Alvarado's bankrupt estate. Which is how Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo got appointed to command the mapping voyage to open trade with China. Trade with the Chinese was a chance for Cabrillo to replace the 250,000 *Maravedis* Pedro de Alvarado owed him.

Incidentally, from the very first appearance of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in legal documents, he always listed his occupation as *Mercedor* (Merchant). Cabrillo never listed himself as an *Hidalgo* (lowest rank of the nobility), soldier, or conquistador. Only once did he list himself as an *Escudero* (literally "shield bearer", often confused with an English type Squire. It actually meant a man entrusted to legally stand in for an absent conquistador, and/or underage children and maiden ladies and protect them during

travel), This is probably the source of the myth that he was an *Hidalgo* with the title of *Don*. Cabrillo's family never considered him to be of the lower nobility, and he was never granted a coat-of-arms.

Significance Regarding Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo and California, it should be remembered that his Commission from Antonio (not Pedro) de Mendoza, the *Viceroy* (agent of the King) in Mexico City, had three elements:

- 1 Map the coast to the north to chart a course to China.
- 2 Locate the Straits of Anian, if it exists, (a route from Europe above Canada to the Pacific.)
- 3 Reach China and establish trade relations.

Further, *Viceroy* Mendoza had stipulated that the Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo expedition would not harm any of the local natives he encountered, except in self defense. Cabrillo himself would want to maintain peaceful relations as he needed places to gain fresh water and provisions for his return voyage as well as other voyages in the future as trade with China developed.

On only two occasions was there armed conflict:

1. When the expedition arrived at what is now San Diego, they encountered a few Indians on the beach. All but three fled. These three were given trade goods and allowed to leave. Conflict came when, that evening, the Kumeyaay ambushed and wounded three Spanish sailors while they were fishing. Cabrillo ordered his men not to retaliate. Within a day, peaceful and amicable relations were established between the Spaniards and the Kumeyaay which were maintained for the next five days when Cabrillo's ships departed.

2. When some of Cabrillo's men went ashore on San Miguel Island in the Channel Islands for fresh water and to hopefully find food, they were ambushed by the Chumash people. The Chumash had achieved a very delicate balance between themselves and the natural carrying capacity of the island. They couldn't afford to trade with the Spanish for food. It was this attempt to aid his ambushed landing party that JRC received his fatal injury, probably a compound fracture in the lower leg.

To put Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in context, we must remember that in 1492, Spain had just finished some 700 years of conquest and occupation with the final surrender of Granada. The kingdom of Granada was the last Islamic city state on the Iberian Peninsula. Cabrillo was about six or seven years old when Granada surrendered, which means his formative years were in a society involved in an intense religious war and seeing returning veterans of that war. Now Spain was faced with the problem of what do you do with some 30,000 of the best trained, best equipped, most experienced soldiers in all of Europe?

The end of the *Reconquista* (driving the moors out of Spain) had been the fulfillment of God's mandate to free Iberia of the Moslems. In the very year Granada surrendered, Columbus discovered the New World. Very quickly it became apparent that, whatever Columbus had found, it had people who worshiped idols, committed human sacrifice, and practiced ritual cannibalism, which meant they had to be minions of the Devil. God had revealed Spain's next great Holy Mandate; to bring the light of Christianity to a land suffering in Satan's power across the sea. In our modern secular age, we find the idea of a mission from God rather quaint. 21st Century people have a difficult time understanding this concept and its intensity. It was an idea the Spaniard believed with all his soul.

The New World also held out the possibility of obtaining land. This was a crucial factor in motivation. The Spanish soldier, although raised with a Bardic dedication to honor, was also a hard-bitten realist.

The best-case end for a soldier was dead on the battlefield. The worst-case scenario was to be disabled and end his days begging on a street corner. By the end of the Aztec War the attitude of the conquistador was: "I came here to fight for God and save the heathens. Earn honor in the king's service, and to obtain gold." The saying "*God, Glory and Gold*" had led to the realization that God was not always on your part of the battlefield, the king was never on the battlefield, and "gold disappears like smoke."

What the New World did have was land. All land in Spain was already owned by the King, the nobility or the Church. In the new world, instead of pay, the soldier was rewarded for his service with a *Peonia* of land (the size of a modest farm, with water). If a soldier could win a Peonia, he could build a house, raise cattle and crops, marry and raise children. In other words, land held out the hope of having a secure life for his family, and a support system for his old age when he could no longer fight or work. It was the availability of land which ultimately led to colonization. The New World, vastly larger than Spain, had only one fourth the population of Spain. The Spaniards came from an area where population densities averaged over 250 per square mile. In the New World population densities averaged no more than about 20 per square mile. To Spanish eyes this land was empty, and free for the taking.

Let us also remember some facts relating to how the Spanish conquistadors conquered the New World. Sea travel was inherently fatal. The trade year from Spain to Mexico and back to Spain took ten months and a 12% death rate in the crews was considered an acceptable operational reality. Of all the ships sent by Spain to the New World, only half ever came back to Spain. It was said if a man made twelve round trips he was living on God's time; he had beaten the odds. This was one reason why sailors, just like soldiers, wanted to settle down on land in the New World. Of the 22 ships which sailed in the first five expeditions to explore the Pacific, only five ever made it back, and two of them were so badly damaged they had to be scrapped.

Of the 1400 men who made up Cortez' army in the Aztec War, by the time Tenochtitlan surrendered 80% were dead and all the rest had been wounded at least once (*Bernal Diaz del Castillo* was wounded thirteen times). Pedro de Alvarado conquered Guatemala with only 270 Spanish soldiers, and some 7000 Tlaxcalan warriors serving under their own *Caciques* (Captains) as allies.

Perhaps a Nahuatl (Aztec/Mexica) Indian colleague of mine put things in perspective rather well; "Do you seriously think if my ancestors had seagoing ships, they would have hesitated one minute to invade Europe?"

If a man of the 16th Century were held to the politically correct, cancel-culture standards being imposed today, it would be impossible for him to accomplish any of the recognized achievements of exploration we still celebrate. Such was the nature of life in the 16th Century. That difference demonstrates the absurdity of imposing another value system on anyone from another time or culture. We cannot judge the people of a different time and place by the standards and values of the 21st Century. Such were the differences between JRC's time and ours. Their mindset and ours. We can learn from their mistakes, to not repeat them. They were operating under a set of values as valid to them, as our standards today are valid to us. If we learn from faulty or biased data, we learn nothing.

I might suggest that if a name change is desirable, I don't think "Aptos College" would offend anybody.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert W. Munson

SOURCES

Obviously, the bulk of my sources are in Spanish, or the result of my research over the past 25 years in various journals and archives.

A series of short articles written by me for Cabrillo National Monument are available at the Cabrillo National Monument website specifically the E-binder. These synthesize a wide range of my research in relatively unavailable sources.

However, I do suggest the following books as an introduction to the world of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo (Listed in order of relevance)

Harry Kelsey Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo Huntington Library Press 1986 ISBN-87328-176-4
Although some of the information in the first four chapters is no longer applicable in light of recent research by Dr. Wendy Kramer PhD, University of Toronto this book remains the definitive work on Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo.

Wendy Kramer Encomienda *Politics in Early Colonial Guatemala, 1524-1544*
West View Press, Dellplain Latin American Studies, No.31 Syracuse University 1994

Bernal Diaz del Castillo *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva Espana* Written by a man who was with Cortez from the very beginning in 1519.
There have been a number of translations of *The True History of the Conquest of New España* Only the Haklyut Society translation 1908-10 is complete but is relatively hard to obtain. All others suffer from the editorial deletions of the translators. The translation suffering the least, by far, is that of James Cohen. This translation has been reprinted many times and is readily available even in paperback.

Bartolome de las Casas *In Defense of the Indians*. Available in a number of translations. I use that of Stafford Poole, De Kalb, Northern Illinois Press 1992

Pablo E. Perez-Maillinia Carla Rahn Phillips translator. *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century* John's Hopkins University 1998 Digitized 2008.
An incredibly well researched study of the men who crewed Spain's ships.

C. Harvey Gardiner *Naval Power in the Conquest of Mexico* University of Texas reprint 2012
One of the most meticulous pieces of research and analysis I have ever encountered.
Tremendous insight on the nature of the Spanish/Aztec conflict.

Adrian C. Van Oss *Catholic Colonialism; A Parish History of Guatemala, 1524-1821*
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986.

Angus Konstam *Sovereigns of the Sea: The Quest to Build the Perfect Renaissance Battle ship*
John Wiley and Sons, Inc. ISBN 978-0-11667-8

Oakah L. Jones Jr. *Guatemala in the Spanish Colonial Period* University of Oklahoma Press 1994

Charles Corn *The Scents of Eden: A Narrative of the Spice Trade* Kadansha Inc. New York 1997
Despite its overly romanticized title, this is a solid piece of history research and discusses what drove the Spanish and Portuguese in their explorations.

William Lytle Schurz *The Manila Galleon* E.P. Dutton Inc., New York 1939
While only peripheral to JRC, it is a classic, and has been reprinted a number of times. It does discuss Andres Urdanetta and the importance of JRC's discoveries about wind and currents.

Samuel Eliot Morison *The European Discovery of America Vol.2 The Southern Voyages*

Susan Migden Socolow *The Women of Colonial Latin America* Cambridge University Press 2015

Robinson A. Herrera *Natives, Europeans, and Africans in Sixteenth Century Santiago, Guatemala.*
University of Texas Press 2003

Christopher Lutz *Santiago de Guatemala 1541-1773: City, Caste, and the Colonial Experience*
University of Oklahoma Press 1997

Wendy Kramer *Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo A Voyage of Rediscovery* Maritime Museum of San Diego. 2019

William George Lovell *Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala: An Historical Geography of the Cuchumatán Highlands 1500-1821* McGill-Queen's Press 2005

Tamar Herzog *Defining Nations, Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America.* New Haven, Cambridge University Press. 2015