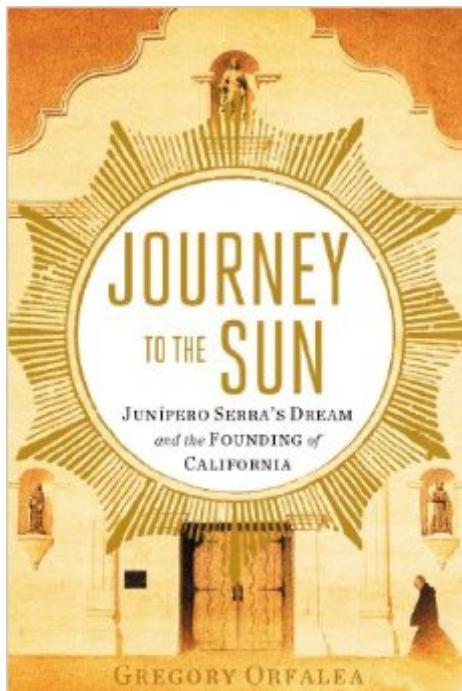


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# Journey To The Sun: Junipero Serra's Dream And The Founding Of California



## 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.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 465 pages

Publisher: Scribner; First edition. Full number line. edition (January 14, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1451642725

ISBN-13: 978-1451642728

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (32 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #750,622 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #99 inÂ  Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Spain & Portugal #1198 inÂ  Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Missions & Missionary Work #1240 inÂ  Books > History > Americas > United States > Colonial Period

## Customer Reviews

This is a fabulous study of early California history in the late 18th century. You will be taken on a journey of discovery, secular quest, political struggle between Spanish administration & religious quest, and more importantly understand the end result: the suffering & Christian transformation of the aboriginal people who comprised the land we know as California. The primary character: Friar Junipero Serra was a deeply devoted aging Franciscan tasked as a missionary to bring the pagan natives into the fold of the Church and develop into loyal subjects of the Spanish empire. King Charles the III, recently diminished the power of the Jesuits (who typically were the missionaries), and looked to the Franciscan's to seek out and grow the Church & Empire. The North American west course was vital to Spain's growth to build trade with the Philippines. Serra a self-flagellating pious Friar in his mid- 50's was assigned to lead the Franciscan effort to grow the Catholic religion and establish the Church in this new land. In spite of the local Spanish government and military disruptions - Serra was able to establish nine missions, and baptized 6000 people. He also converted the natives from nomads into herders & farmers. The new communities thrive with the new existence, but later many died from European disease with venereal disease being the leading cause of death. The Friars of course acted upon extreme measures to control the spread - locking up young women at night and flogging those in relationships. Serra worked himself to death eventually, but thought iron willed devotion planted the seeds of Cathoism which remains strong to this day in modern California. The author did a great job developing this time into a very readable

format that describes the tough character and will of Serra, and his very strong influence on American history.

Every kid who grows up in the Bay Area has probably seen the statue of Junipero Serra along 280, as well as had the assignment of building a mission of one's choice out of sugar cubes. (My sister and I joked about starting a black market site when her kids hit the age: "I'll trade you a Mission Santa Barbara for a San Juan Capistrano.") But that was the extent of my knowledge. Now that I live in WA State, when I heard about this book, I was hit with a wave of nostalgia and quickly put it on my to-read list. I'm glad I did! Author Gregory Orfolea has written a lyrical, sympathetic, and fascinating portrait of a brave and compassionate visionary who lived in exciting times. (The book reminded me several times of another favorite, Willa Cather's *DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP*.) Can I say how glad I am that we're past the stage we were in when I was in grad school, where Colonialists = Vicious Murderers Who Did Everything Wrong and Natives = Utopian Residents in a State of Nature? Orfolea did an even-handed job representing the cultural factors at play on each side. Having only seen Mission San Jose in Fremont, Serra's story made me want to schedule a road trip this summer to check out some of the other Serra-founded ones within reach, not to mention putting Mexico City on the bucket list. Who knew that he only began his "Alta California" work when he was 56? (Take that, early retirement!) That he suffered for the rest of his life from a spider bite received when he landed in Veracruz, Mexico, upon reaching the New World? That male California Indians went around buck naked, and only added breechcloths after encounters with the Spanish? That explorer DeAnza was the one who noticed and marked "El Palo Alto," which I drove past every stinking day for years? Lots of goodies in here. If you like CA history, the Spanish Conquest, and sympathetic Catholic history, give this book a try.

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 ourselves 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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