

African Californios: Uncovering the African past of Spanish and Mexican California using Data Science

Cameron D. Jones, Evan Witulski and Foaad Khosmood
California Polytechnic State University

Introduction

This project reconstructs the African and Afro-descendant presence in Spanish and Mexican California (1768-1850) using data science and user-friendly visualizations such as maps and family trees. In this way we will explore the familial and social connections between Afro-descendants in California. Findings are incorporated into our website, AfricanCalifornios.org. The site also incorporates the histories of many Californio Africans and their descendants.



Pío Pico, Mexican governor of California, his wife, María Ignacia Alvarado, and two nieces

Provincia de California. Jurisdicción de San Diego. Estado que manifiesta el número de Indios y Gente de esta Jurisdicción según el Padrón de San Diego de este año de 1798 con el género Muchachos y Muchachas.

	Indios.			
	Muchachos	Muchachas	Muchachos	Muchachas
San Diego	281	644	158	103
San Felipe	245	453	357	211
San Juan Capistrano	239	422	115	24
San Felipe	64	87	26	38
San Luis Rey	58	59	16	27
Total	1529	1647	526	323

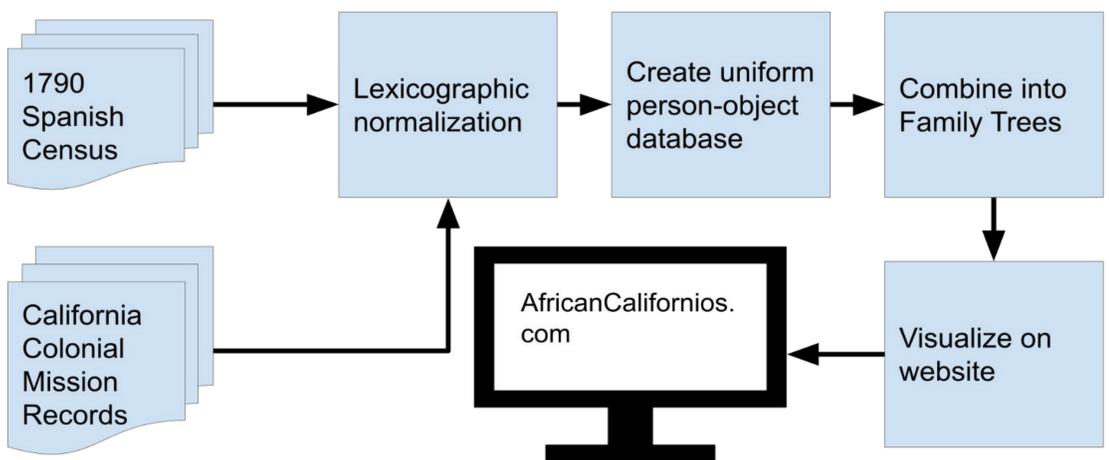
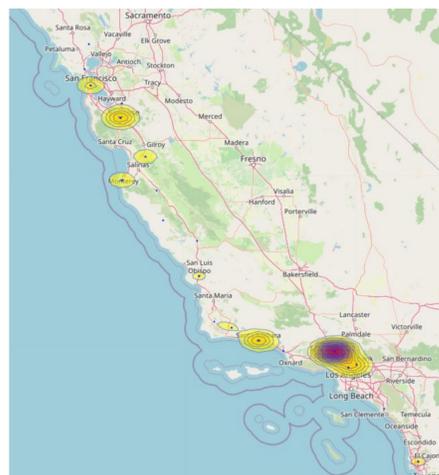
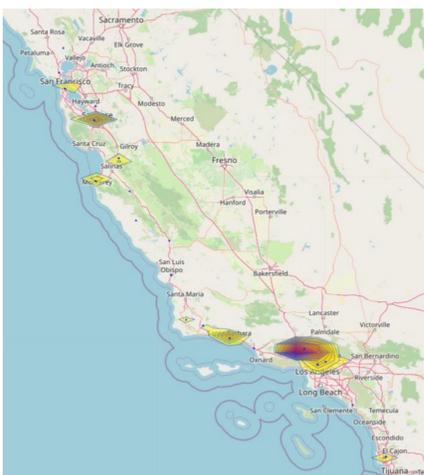
San Diego 31. Diciembre 1798
Manuel...



Left: 1798 San Diego Census. Right: Californio Soldier, Leather Jacket Company

Methodology

We have combined the most comprehensive data sets on the demographics of Spanish and Mexican California to create a large database of African descendants in California from 1768 to 1850. With this aggregate dataset, we created family trees which connected families of African descent together both between and within generations to discover familial and social connections. Furthermore, we mapped the location of African descendant families to understand the geographic location of viable communities.



Results

We have been able to recreate family trees of several Afro-descendant families, though we are still sorting through the data to understand the significance of these connections. The most significant outcome of the project currently is in understanding the geographic location of African descendants. As shown in the two maps above, most people of African descent were concentrated around Los Angeles. These geographic findings confirm qualitative data that until now inconclusively suggested that southern California had a significant Afro-descendant populations before 1850. Understanding the demographic locations of these populations helps historians to understand the interactions between populations in northern and southern California and the Mexican government during this period.