



BORDERLANDS >

LOST L.A. SEASON 2 > EPISODE 1 > TREATMENT BY ELIA URQUIZA



SYNOPSIS

American history used to be told as the story of a triumphant march westward from the Atlantic coast. This half-hour documentary recenters that history, focusing instead on Southern California's long legacy as a Spanish borderland.

Our story begins with an act of conquest, Spain's colonization of Alta California in the 1760s-90s, and considers the erasure of indigenous culture that followed.

We first meet an indigenous rebel leader, Toypurina, and the Spanish soldier, José María Pico, who in 1785 foils her plot to overthrow the invaders' system of forced labor.

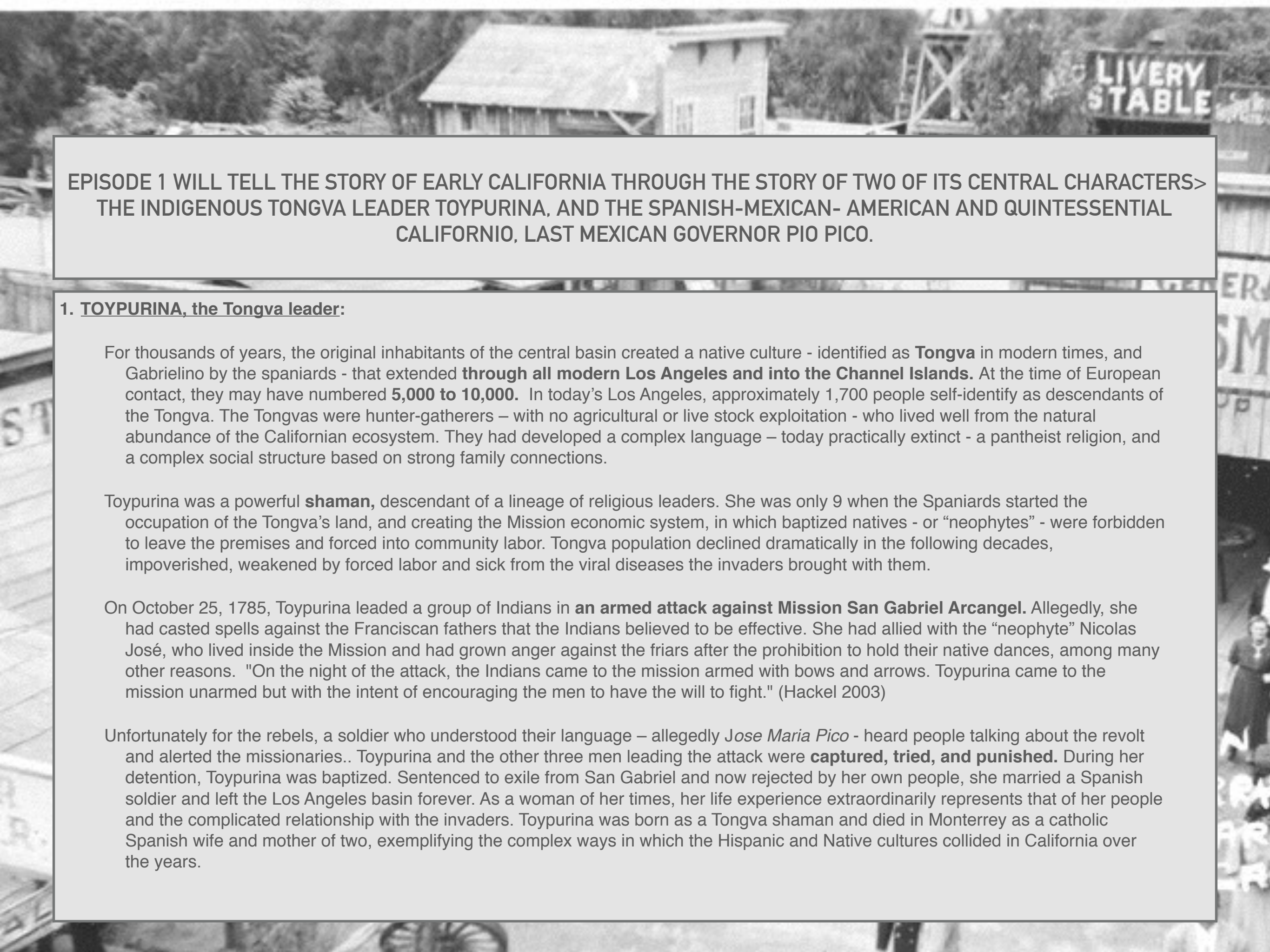
Six decades later, we meet the soldier's son, Pío de Jesús Pico, a savvy political leader who benefited from the secularization of the old missions to become a land baron, profiting from the indigenous labor.

Now governor of what has become Mexican California, Pico leads the resistance against a new conquest – that of the Americans. He loses, flees to Mexico, and returns after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to a changed country. Pico adapts to the capitalist order ushered in by the American invaders and opens Southern California's first luxury hotel, but he eventually falls into bankruptcy.

Late in life, he reels against a new, more subtle form of cultural erasure: the ascendant Anglo population's invention of a Spanish fantasy past. When regional boosters invite Pico to represent California in the Chicago World's Fair as the "last of the old Dons," offering him a large sum of money, a penniless but proud Pico refuses the invitation.



MRS. JAMES ROSEMEYRE (NÉE NARCISA HIGUERA), PHOTOGRAPHED HERE IN 1905, WAS ONE OF THE LAST FLUENT TONGVA SPEAKERS. AN INFORMANT FOR THE ETHNOGRAPHER C. HART MERRIAM, SHE WAS THE SOURCE OF THE WIDELY USED ENDONYM TONGVA.



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1. TOYPURINA, the Tongva leader:

For thousands of years, the original inhabitants of the central basin created a native culture - identified as **Tongva** in modern times, and Gabrielino by the spaniards - that extended **through all modern Los Angeles and into the Channel Islands**. At the time of European contact, they may have numbered **5,000 to 10,000**. In today's Los Angeles, approximately 1,700 people self-identify as descendants of the Tongva. The Tongvas were hunter-gatherers – with no agricultural or live stock exploitation - who lived well from the natural abundance of the Californian ecosystem. They had developed a complex language – today practically extinct - a pantheist religion, and a complex social structure based on strong family connections.

Toypurina was a powerful **shaman**, descendant of a lineage of religious leaders. She was only 9 when the Spaniards started the occupation of the Tongva's land, and creating the Mission economic system, in which baptized natives - or "neophytes" - were forbidden to leave the premises and forced into community labor. Tongva population declined dramatically in the following decades, impoverished, weakened by forced labor and sick from the viral diseases the invaders brought with them.

On October 25, 1785, Toypurina led a group of Indians in **an armed attack against Mission San Gabriel Arcangel**. Allegedly, she had casted spells against the Franciscan fathers that the Indians believed to be effective. She had allied with the "neophyte" Nicolas José, who lived inside the Mission and had grown anger against the friars after the prohibition to hold their native dances, among many other reasons. "On the night of the attack, the Indians came to the mission armed with bows and arrows. Toypurina came to the mission unarmed but with the intent of encouraging the men to have the will to fight." (Hackel 2003)

Unfortunately for the rebels, a soldier who understood their language – allegedly *Jose Maria Pico* - heard people talking about the revolt and alerted the missionaries.. Toypurina and the other three men leading the attack were **captured, tried, and punished**. During her detention, Toypurina was baptized. Sentenced to exile from San Gabriel and now rejected by her own people, she married a Spanish soldier and left the Los Angeles basin forever. As a woman of her times, her life experience extraordinarily represents that of her people and the complicated relationship with the invaders. Toypurina was born as a Tongva shaman and died in Monterrey as a catholic Spanish wife and mother of two, exemplifying the complex ways in which the Hispanic and Native cultures collided in California over the years.

THE “WITCH”

“

I hate the fathers
and all of you, for
living here *on my
native soil*, for
trespassing upon the
land of my
forefathers and
despoiling our tribal
domains.”

TOYPURINA

TALKING AT HER OWN TRIAL IN 1786,
AS CREATIVELY RE-TOLD BY THOMAS W.
TEMPLE.







THE “SAINT”

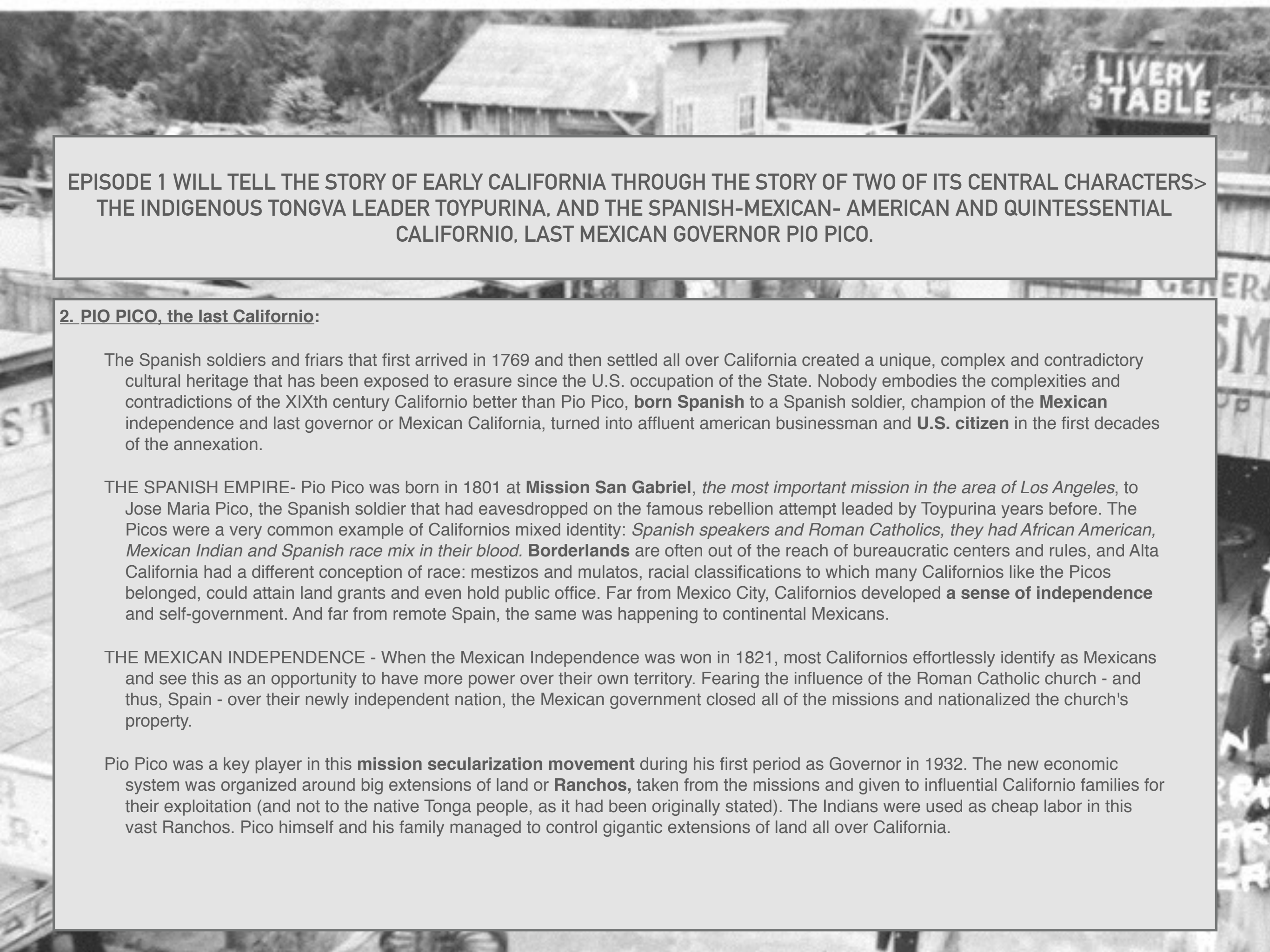
“

That spiritual fathers should punish *their sons, the Indians,* with blows appears to be as old as the conquest of the Americas; so general in fact that the saints do not seem to be any exception to the rule.”

JUNÍPERO

SERRA

FOUNDER OF THE CALIFORNIA MISSION SYSTEM



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2. PIO PICO, the last Californio:

The Spanish soldiers and friars that first arrived in 1769 and then settled all over California created a unique, complex and contradictory cultural heritage that has been exposed to erasure since the U.S. occupation of the State. Nobody embodies the complexities and contradictions of the XIXth century Californio better than Pio Pico, **born Spanish** to a Spanish soldier, champion of the **Mexican** independence and last governor of Mexican California, turned into affluent american businessman and **U.S. citizen** in the first decades of the annexation.

THE SPANISH EMPIRE- Pio Pico was born in 1801 at **Mission San Gabriel**, *the most important mission in the area of Los Angeles*, to Jose Maria Pico, the Spanish soldier that had eavesdropped on the famous rebellion attempt leaded by Toypurina years before. The Picos were a very common example of Californios mixed identity: *Spanish speakers and Roman Catholics, they had African American, Mexican Indian and Spanish race mix in their blood.* **Borderlands** are often out of the reach of bureaucratic centers and rules, and Alta California had a different conception of race: mestizos and mulatos, racial classifications to which many Californios like the Picos belonged, could attain land grants and even hold public office. Far from Mexico City, Californios developed **a sense of independence** and self-government. And far from remote Spain, the same was happening to continental Mexicans.

THE MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE - When the Mexican Independence was won in 1821, most Californios effortlessly identify as Mexicans and see this as an opportunity to have more power over their own territory. Fearing the influence of the Roman Catholic church - and thus, Spain - over their newly independent nation, the Mexican government closed all of the missions and nationalized the church's property.

Pio Pico was a key player in this **mission secularization movement** during his first period as Governor in 1832. The new economic system was organized around big extensions of land or **Ranchos**, taken from the missions and given to influential Californio families for their exploitation (and not to the native Tongva people, as it had been originally stated). The Indians were used as cheap labor in this vast Ranchos. Pico himself and his family managed to control gigantic extensions of land all over California.



The Californio era, from the first Spanish presence established by the Portolá expedition in 1769 until the region's cession to the United States of America in 1848, gave birth to several illustrious families that today are only remembered in the names of their ranchos or obscure Los Angeles avenues: the Pico 's, the Alvarado 's, or the Vallejos were part of a complex society that economically was organized around big Ranchos or land exploitations. Pico, among others, warned against the immigrants from the East, who he claimed had "laws, religion , language and customs totally opposed to ours" and should be contained by all necessary means.