

**TABLE 3.1**  
*Hispanic Murderers by Victim's Race, 1850–1900*

Race	Number	Percentage
White	48	27.5
Hispanic	103	58.9
Indian	17	9.7
Chinese	5	2.8
Black	2	1.1
Totals	175	100.0

*Sources:* Coroners' Inquests, Calaveras, Tuolumne, Sacramento, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and San Diego Counties, 1850–1900.

Hispanics had the second-highest (behind Indians) interracial homicide rate, with 40 percent of their victims being non-Hispanic. The social mixing of Hispanics and whites, and to a lesser extent Indians, in saloons and brothels helps to explain the high rate. Such interaction created opportunities for petty squabbles, lubricated by alcohol, to turn violent. Hispanics killed forty-eight white people from 1850 to 1900 (Table 3.1). For example, on April 30, 1855, José Sabada and José M. Escobar quarreled with J. Sheldon outside a saloon on Washington Street in Sonora, Tuolumne County. The two Hispanics pulled knives and stabbed Sheldon to death. This killing especially aroused citizens of Sonora because the victim was a deaf mute. A jury found both men guilty of first-degree murder, and the judge sentenced them to death by hanging. On August 3, 1855, a crowd of "three to four thousand people—men, women and children" gathered to witness the execution.<sup>4</sup>

Hispanics also killed seventeen California Indians (Table 3.1) and were indicted in five of those cases (31 percent). Probably the most unusual case involved a Hispanic rancher in San Diego County. Because of the intrusion by Hispanic and white ranchers on their tribal land, California Indians had difficulty finding sufficient food to survive, and it was common practice to occasionally kill and butcher a steer. Sometime in late December 1850 or early January 1851, María Antonio Ortega discovered two California Indians butchering a steer on his Santa Ysabel Ranch. The justice of the peace described what happened: "I asked him [María Antonio Ortega] how he got those Indians, and he told me that he surprised them when they [were] skinning a beef cattle near St. Margarita, he took them prisoners, escorted them to his rancho tied, and shot them both."<sup>5</sup> With their hands tied behind them, Ortega shot each of them in the forehead with a pistol. Although legal authorities investigated these killings, they refused to prosecute.<sup>6</sup>