
California Indians- New Spain and the Mission System

The effect of Spanish colonization on California Native groups

Spanish colonization created a catastrophe of huge proportions for the Native peoples of California. In 1769 the Spanish built their first mission (a small, local church) in the area in the Native village of Cosoy, later called San Diego by the Spanish. With the mission the Spanish planned not only to convert Indians to Christianity, but also to reduce the many free and independent Native societies into a mass of slave laborers. They established a chain of 21 missions in California that resembled Caribbean plantations more than churches.

By decree of Spanish law, Indians were baptized. After baptism they were called neophytes (pronounced NEE-oh-fites; new members) and removed from their villages into areas near the missions. Then they were put to work. Between 1769 and 1836, about 80,000 California Indians were baptized and turned into laborers for the Spanish empire.

At the missions, the Indians were closely controlled. Neophyte children were removed from their families at the age of five or six. They were locked in barracks and watched by colonists who wanted to teach the children without interference from their parents. Indian girls were locked up when they weren't working or attending church. They were freed upon marriage, but if their husbands died they were once again locked up in the barracks.

Adults were made to work without pay. Soldiers and padres (or priests) whipped, jailed, and punished with additional work any Natives who did not seem to accept Spanish authority. Women and children were not excused from this harsh treatment. One Costanoan Indian neophyte named Lorenzo Asisara reported, "We were always trembling with fear of the lash."

Natives resist

The missions were only supposed to last for ten years, which the Spanish crown felt was long enough to convert the Indians into Christian slaves. In fact, they lasted about 65 years. Many "converts" resisted Spanish rule.

The Natives used three types of resistance to the Spanish tyranny. The most common form was passive resistance. Many refused to learn Spanish, or pretended they could not understand commands given in Spanish. Or they would do their work slowly and poorly--a fact that can be seen today in the construction of the old missions. Native laborers secretly drew traditional Indian symbols on floor tiles and other surfaces throughout the missions.

Some Native American women who were sexually assaulted and impregnated by Spanish soldiers practiced abortion or infanticide (killing the newborn baby). They did not want to give birth to children of the enemy, thereby providing a new generation of slave labor for the colonists. From time to time, secret religious activities arose. These were sometimes used to reverse baptisms. Running away was another alternative.

However, Spanish law allowed the Franciscans to pursue runaways. The padres kept detailed records of baptized Indians at each village, and squads of soldiers were stationed at each mission to patrol the area. Escape was made more difficult because Native tradition forbade anyone who didn't belong to a village from seeking refuge there. Worse yet, if any villager took in a runaway, they risked being assaulted or being taken hostage by the Spanish. Villagers also feared catching deadly diseases that the runaway might bring from the mission. Disastrous epidemic diseases swept through the population of mission Indians, killing many and weakening others. Thousands of Native people fled, in spite of the difficulty. But only about 10 percent (or

8,000) actually escaped.

Fighting--the ultimate resistance

Fighting Spanish control was a third form of resistance. Guerilla warfare, or sneak attacks, took place as ex-neophytes like Pomponio of the Coast Miwok and Estanislao of the Yokut organized raids. These raids were directed against the mission, presidio (military posts), and even the civilian herds of cattle, horses, and sheep. Mission Indians sometimes killed the padres; the poisoning deaths of two have been recorded. In 1882, the Indians at Mission Santa Cruz smothered and castrated a padre there who had announced that on the following Sunday he would make use of a terrifying new torture instrument of his own invention. In 1836, Cahuilla Indians kidnapped the padre at Mission San Gabriel and horsewhipped him--just as so many of them had been whipped.

Uprisings by mission Indians were spectacular, and several occurred. The earliest occurred at Mission San Diego in 1775 when 1,000 Kumeyaay warriors sacked and burned the mission and killed the padre. In 1781, the Quechan Indians destroyed two missions built in their territory the previous year. In that rebellion, they killed 55 colonists, including four padres, 31 soldiers, and 20 civilians.

The last large-scale revolt by mission Indians occurred in 1824. After 30 years of oppression, neophytes from three missions arose to protect their lives and regain their lost freedom. After taking over one mission for more than a month, most were persuaded to surrender after a cannon assault by Spanish troops. However, a number refused to return to the missions. They issued this defiant message to authorities who demanded their return: "We shall maintain ourselves with what God will provide for us in the open country. Moreover, we are soldiers, stone-masons, carpenters, etc., and we will provide for ourselves by our work."

Devastating epidemics were responsible for destroying the majority of Native California peoples in contact with the Spanish colonists. A series of deadly diseases swept through the mission Indian population from 1777 to 1833. When the missions finally collapsed in 1836, about 100,000 Indians had died.

After the missions

After the Mexican Republic was created in 1820, the padres were no longer able to force Indians into labor. As Indians left the missions they found a greatly changed land. Many tribesmen were deprived of their lands and were forced into debt. Many escaped to their former lands in the interior, but found that the landscape had changed greatly. The horses, mules, sheep, pigs, and goats introduced onto the land had ravaged the delicate grasses. The animals continued to multiply in alarming numbers. Mission farming squeezed out native plants. California Indians were not able to live off the land in the way they had before the Spanish came.

Some tribes and villages had virtually disappeared from the face of the earth. So much had been lost that previous forms of leadership no longer existed. New leaders arose, taking much more power and authority for themselves than had been allowed before in any California Native society. Some of these leaders adapted by leading hunts in which half-wild horses and mules were captured. Stock raiding became widespread as well. One spectacular raid in 1840 involved the theft of more than 3,000 horses from California ranches.

New Spain and the Mission System- Reading Questions

Directions:

- Use the article **New Spain and the Mission System** to answer the following questions
 - Make sure to answer the **entire question**- it is important to finish what we start!
 - This assignment is due on January 25, 2012
1. According to the article, what did the Spanish plan to do to the Native Americans once they established settlements?
 2. What was life like for a child living on a Spanish Mission? Explain what their day was like?
 3. What was life like for adults living on a Spanish Mission? Explain what their day was like?
 4. What are some of the tactics used by the Native Americans to resist Spanish influence?
 5. Of the tactics listed above, which do you believe was the most effective? Explain.
 6. What was the most interesting thing you learned in this article? Explain your answer.
 7. If you read about something similar to Spanish Missions today, what would you do to fix it? Explain your answer.