

Summary: Mexico and California

Change in Alta California

When Mexico gained its independence from Spain, Alta California accepted Mexican rule. They became Mexican citizens. All citizens, whether of Indian or Spanish descent, were to be treated equally under Mexican law. Still, California Indians continued to be treated unfairly.

Mexico appointed Luís Antonio Argüello as the governor of Alta California. Argüello was the first governor born there. He set up a diputación to make laws. But the diputación had little power. Leaders in Mexico had to approve any laws that were made.

The End of the Missions

Under Spain's rule, the missions had owned most of the land that was best for raising cattle. Many Californios called for the missions to be closed. Some of them hoped to free the Indians living there. Others wanted the land.

Mexico wanted people to use the land for farming and ranching, to make the economy stronger. The Mexican government began a process of secularization. They took the church lands and property and gave them away. The missions lost most of their power and wealth.

Between 1834 and 1846, officials made about 700 land grants. More than eight million acres of land were given away. Half the lands were supposed to be given to California Indians. But the government did not divide the land fairly between the Indians and Californios. Most of the land grants went to rich Californios and new settlers. Some wealthy Californios bought land from the Indians. Others cheated to get the land. California Indians ended up with very little of their own land. Much of the land was turned into large ranchos. Many California Indians stayed to work on the ranchos. Some tried to return to their old ways of life.

Mexico allowed ranchos to trade with people from other countries. Exports of cow hides and tallow made the economy of Alta California stronger.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

secularization *noun*, process by which the government takes control of church property

land grant *noun*, a piece of land given away by the government

ranch *noun* (Spanish), a cattle ranch



After You Read

REVIEW What part of California's government changed under Mexican rule? Draw a box around the paragraph that describes a change in the government.

REVIEW What steps did Mexico take to change California's economy?

Highlight the sentences that explain how land ownership was changed to strengthen the economy.