

Summary: Land Rights

Californio Lands

Most Californios raised cattle on large areas of land. Many had owned their lands since the time of Spanish rule. Others had been granted land from the Mexican government. All of them had property rights under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican–American War. But many newcomers to California wanted these lands. Some moved onto the land and became squatters. They fought the Californios with guns and knives. To settle these conflicts, the U.S. Congress passed the Land Act of 1851.

The Land Commission was set up to settle conflicts about land ownership. Californios had to prove their ownership of land. Some people had ownership papers that were so old they could not be found or were difficult to understand. The Commission looked at over 800 cases and decided on the side of Californios in more than 600 cases. But many people had paid so much money to lawyers they were forced to sell their land anyway.

Reservations

Newcomers were also in conflict with the Indians over land. They wanted to start farms or businesses on Indian lands. The U.S. government decided to solve this problem by moving Indians onto reservations. Between 1851 and 1852, some California Indian leaders signed treaties, agreeing to move their people to reservations with resources. The treaties, however, were not accepted by the U.S. Congress. The Indians were forced to move to lands with few resources. Thousands died from disease, starvation and attacks. Between 1848 and 1870, the number of Indians dropped from 150,000 to 50,000.

Some Indians fought for their land. The Modoc of Northern California were attacked by U.S. soldiers in 1872. Under their leader, Kintpuash, they fought for eight months. In the end they lost, and had to give up their land. The U.S. government put them on a reservation far from their home. Many decades later the government finally protected their rights as citizens.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

property right *noun*, a person's right to own and control land, or property

squatter *noun*, person who lives on land without the owner's permission

commission *noun*, a group of people that meet to solve a problem

reservation *noun*, land set aside for American Indians



After You Read

REVIEW What was the job of the Land Commission?

Highlight the sentence that tells the Commission's purpose.

REVIEW Why did the U.S. government move California Indians to reservations? Underline the sentences that explain the land disputes between Indians and newcomers and how the government solved them.