

# The California Gold Rush

## One American's Story

Luzena Wilson said of the year 1849, "The gold excitement spread like wildfire." That year, **James Marshall** had discovered gold in California. Luzena's husband became a **forty-niner**—someone who went to California to find gold, starting in 1849. Luzena went to California with her husband. She found that women were rare in California. Shortly after she arrived, a miner offered her five dollars for her baked biscuits. Shocked, she just stared at him. He quickly doubled his offer and paid in gold. Finding she could make money by taking care of miners, Luzena opened a hotel. The gold rush boosted California's economy and changed the nation's history.

## A Discovery Changes California

**KEY QUESTION** What led to the rapid settlement in California?

Before the forty-niners came, California was populated by as many as 150,000 Native Americans and 6,000 **Californios**—settlers of Spanish or Mexican descent. Many *Californios* lived on huge cattle ranches.

**The Rush for Gold** On January 24, 1848, just one month before Mexico lost California to the United States, a carpenter named James Marshall made an important discovery. While building a sawmill in northern California, he saw a shiny stone in the nearby American River. He later said, "My eye was caught by a glimpse of something shining. . . . It made my heart thump for I felt certain it was gold." It was indeed. Marshall's discovery led to one of the greatest **migrations**—movements of persons from one country or locality to another—in American history, as thousands from all over the world poured into California to make their fortunes.

In 1849, people from all over California and the United States raced to the American River—starting the **California gold rush**. A gold rush occurs when large numbers of people move to a site where gold has been found.



These prospectors were residents of a mining camp in Auburn Ravine, California, in the mid-1800s.



Mariano Vallejo (*inset*), a *Californio*, was the proud owner of a large California estate (*top*).  
What major migration changed the *Californio* way of life?

Miners soon found gold in other streams flowing out of the Sierra Nevada. The military governor of California estimated that the region held enough gold to “pay the cost of the present war with Mexico a hundred times over.” He sent this news to Washington with a box of gold dust as proof.

The following year thousands of gold seekers set out to make their fortunes. A forty-niner who wished to reach California from the East had a choice of three routes, all of them dangerous. 1) Sail 18,000 miles around South America and up the Pacific coast—enduring storms, seasickness, and spoiled food. 2) Sail to the narrow Isthmus of Panama, cross overland (and risk catching a deadly tropical disease), and then sail to California. 3) Travel the trails across North America—braving rivers, prairies, mountains, and all the hardships of the trail. Because the venture was so hard, most gold seekers were young men.

**Changes for *Californios*** James Marshall’s discovery of gold in 1848 did little to improve the lot of the *Californios*. Before the gold rush, many *Californio* families had prospered when the Mexican government took away the land that once belonged to the Spanish missions in California.

One important *Californio* was **Mariano Vallejo**. He was a member of one of the oldest Spanish families in America, and owned 250,000 acres of land. Vallejo’s nephew proudly described the heritage of the *Californios* as “the pioneers of the Pacific coast.” The gold rush found *Californios* challenged by a new wave of pioneers.

**The Gold Seekers** About two-thirds of the forty-niners were Americans. Most of these were white men. However, Native Americans, free blacks, and enslaved African Americans also worked the mines.

Thousands of experienced miners came from Sonora in Mexico. Other foreign miners came from Europe, South America, Australia, and China. Most of the Chinese miners were peasant farmers who fled hardships in China. By the end of 1851, one of every ten immigrants was Chinese.

The Chinese would often take over sites that American miners had left because the easy gold was gone. Through steady, hard work, the Chinese made these “played-out” sites yield profits. Some Americans envied the success of the Chinese and made fun of their different customs. As the numbers of Chinese miners grew, American resentment toward them also increased.

The mining camps began as rows of tents along the streams flowing out of the Sierra Nevada. Gradually the tents gave way to rough wooden buildings that housed stores and saloons. Camp gossip told of miners who got rich overnight by finding eight-pound nuggets, but in reality, few miners got rich. Exhaustion, poor food, and disease all damaged the miners’ health. Not only was acquiring gold brutally difficult, but the miners had to pay very high prices for basic supplies.

**EVALUATE** Explain the events that led to fast settlement in California.

## Final Impact of the Gold Rush

**KEY QUESTION** What was the final impact of the gold rush on California?

The gold rush peaked in 1852. While it lasted, about 250,000 people flooded into California. This huge migration caused economic growth that changed California permanently.

**Opportunities and Turmoil** By 1849, California had enough people to apply for statehood. It was admitted as a free state in 1850. Its constitution banned slavery, but it did not grant African Americans the right to vote.

For some people, California's statehood proved to be the opportunity of a lifetime. An enslaved woman, Nancy Gooch, gained her freedom because of the law against slavery. Then she worked to buy the freedom of her children in Missouri. Eventually, the Gooch family became so prosperous that they bought Sutter's sawmill, where James Marshall first found the gold that started California's gold rush.

The population explosion ruined many *Californios*. The newcomers did not respect *Californios* or their legal rights. In many cases, Americans seized their property. Mariano Vallejo lost all but 300 acres of his huge estate. Yet the Spanish heritage plays a prominent role in California culture today.

### CONNECT To Today

#### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The discovery of gold brought tens of thousands of settlers west to find prosperity. Many newcomers chose to open businesses to meet the demands of what became a booming region.

Today, economic opportunity doesn't necessarily require people to move to another state, region, or country. Instead, many companies use the Internet to communicate with employees and customers at home and overseas. This practice is known as offshoring or outsourcing.

A number of large corporations outsource some or most of their work. Consequently, many overseas economies have ballooned since going into the offshore business. Huge western investments in outsourcing are bringing new prosperity to many developing nations. India is one example of successful offshoring. (right) Indian office workers work in a time zone 10.5 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. This means more time to conduct business.

#### CRITICAL THINKING

1. **Make Inferences** Why might a company hire workers in a different country and/or a different time zone?
2. **Evaluate** How might outsourced programs affect American education and the American workplace?

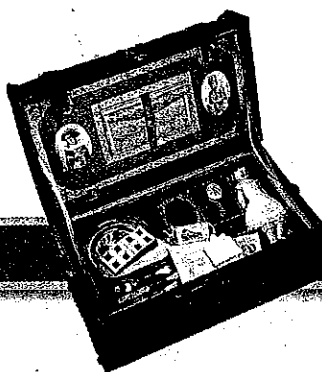


**Native Americans and Foreigners** Thousands of Native Americans died from diseases brought by the newcomers. Settlers killed thousands more. The impact on the environment also affected Native Americans' use of the land. Rivers that had been their waterways and fishing sites were diverted and polluted. Hunting grounds were taken over by settlers. By 1870, California's Native American population had fallen from 150,000 to about 58,000.

Once the easy-to-find gold was gone, American miners began to force Native Americans and miners such as Mexicans and Chinese out of the gold fields to reduce competition. This practice increased after California became a state in 1850.

**Foreign Miners Tax** One of the first acts of the California state legislature was to pass the Foreign Miners Tax, which imposed a tax of \$20 a month on miners from other countries. That was more than most could afford to pay. As the tax collectors arrived in the camps, most foreigners left.

Driven from the mines, the Chinese opened shops, restaurants, and laundries. So many Chinese owned businesses in San Francisco that their neighborhood became known as Chinatown, as it still is today.



**CONNECT** *to the Essential Question*



**How did westward expansion transform the nation?**

EVENTS		EFFECTS
1820	Westward trails move thousands to new territories	Native Americans are displaced
1840	Austin and others colonize Texas Texans revolt against Mexico	
1841	Texas annexed as a slave state	War with Mexico
1848	Mexican cession	
1849	California Gold Rush	California enters Union as a free state
1853	U.S. transcontinental railroad planned	Gadsden Purchase completes expansion of the United States

**CRITICAL THINKING** Clarify Which event fulfilled the nation's "manifest destiny"?

**Economic Effects of Statehood** The port city of San Francisco grew to become a center of banking, manufacturing, shipping, and trade. Its population exploded from around 400 in 1845 to 35,000 in 1850. And, in response to increasing demand for food, Sacramento became the center of a rich farming region.

The population explosion also created a huge demand for water. California's complicated water system is a legacy of the inventiveness and skill of the forty-niners. The miners needed lots of water to pan for gold. (See chart at right.)

On a national level, California's application for statehood created turmoil. Before 1850, there were an equal number of free states and slave states. Southerners feared that because the statehood of California made free states outnumber slave states, Northerners might use their majority to abolish slavery. Conflict over this issue would threaten the very survival of the Union.

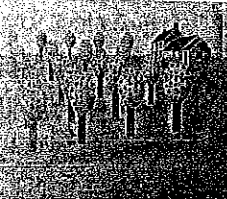
**CAUSES AND EFFECTS** Describe the events that led to California statehood.

## CALIFORNIA WATER RIGHTS

The forty-niners cleverly diverted water for their needs—laying the groundwork for the complex system of dams and canals serving California today. There are three basic categories of water rights in California: Riparian, Appropriative, and Public Trust uses.

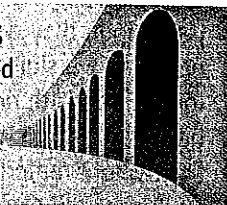
### RIPARIAN RIGHTS

allows a landowner to use the water flowing past his or her property; takes priority over other claims



### APPROPRIATIVE RIGHTS

allows use of water channelled well away from its original source; based on forty-niners' "finders keepers" law



### PUBLIC TRUST DOMAIN

protects fish and wildlife; public recreation areas—such as parks, streams and lakes



## Section Assessment

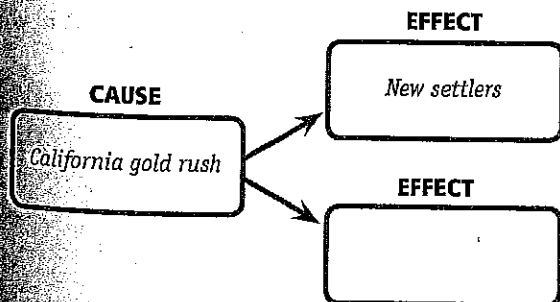
### TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of

- forty-niner
- *California*
- Mariano Vallejo
- James Marshall
- California Gold Rush

### USING YOUR READING NOTES

2. **Causes and Effects** Complete the diagram you started at the beginning of this section.



### ONLINE QUIZ

For test practice, go to  
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### KEY IDEAS

3. Why did the gold rush come to an end?
4. Why was California poised to upset the balance of the United States?

### CRITICAL THINKING

5. **Summarize** What were some of the cultural conflicts caused by the influx of new settlers into California?
6. **Evaluate** What impact did the gold rush have on the people who lived in California before 1849?
7. **Recognize Effects** What effect did the gold rush have on the growth of California?
8. **Writing Report** Use the Internet to research women or foreign immigrants during the California gold rush. Write a brief report explaining how they created opportunities and shaped their new communities.