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## Illegal Captivity

Long before traders ventured into this region, American Indians traveled and traded along many of the paths that the trade caravans later followed. Petroglyphs show us that the mule caravans were witnessed by American Indians along the route. Indian guides had lengthy contact with Mexican and American traders.

Trade sometimes involved the illegal exchange of horses, mules, and even human beings. Some captives, including American Indians, Spaniards, and Mexicans were ransomed at the frequent trade fairs that characterized the western economy. The slave trade changed the lifeways of American Indians through depopulation and loss of traditional knowledge. Human captivity was part of the reality of the West, affecting all who lived in the region.



Ben Witrick, Palace of the Governors  
Photo Archives (NHMMOCA), 015870

## The Railroad and the End of the Trail

Beginning in the mid-1840s, new routes such as wagon roads carried troops fighting in the Mexican-American War, pioneers bound for California, miners joining the gold rush, and still more traders into the West. A few notable Americans used the trail. In 1847 and 1848, Kit Carson carried military dispatches east along the Old Spanish Trail. Military attaché George Brewerton kept a detailed account of his trip. John C. Frémont led U.S. government-sponsored exploratory survey trips to plan for the advent of railroads in the West.

By 1869, however, a rail route connected the plains of the Midwest and San Francisco Bay. Portions of the Old Spanish Trail evolved into wagon roads for local travel, but the days of cross-country mule caravans on the Old Spanish Trail had ended.