



San Antonio Missions: Spanish Influence in Texas



(Photo by Beth Boland)

Most Americans know the clarion call "Remember the Alamo!" and have a hazy recollection that the "fort" originally had been built as a Spanish mission. What is less well known outside the Southwest is that the Mission San Antonio de Valero--the Alamo--was only one of a chain of missions strung along the San Antonio River. Established between 1718 and 1731, these missions were built not only to spread the faith of the conquistadors, but also to serve multiple foreign policy objectives for the Spanish government.

The famous Alamo is now a state historic site under the stewardship of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and serves primarily as a reminder of the Texas Revolution of 1835-36. The other San Antonio River missions--Concepcion, San José, San Juan, and Espada--with some surrounding lands, constitute San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. By cooperative agreement with the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the mission churches remain active places of worship. Their importance, however, reaches far beyond their religious significance.



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Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Time Period: Early 18th Century

Topics: This lesson can be used in teaching units on Spanish conquests in the Americas or the early colonization of the United States.

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following [National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools](#):

US History Era 1

- **Standard 1D:** The student understands the differences and similarities among Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans who converged in the western hemisphere after 1492.
- **Standard 2A:** The student understands the stages of European oceanic and overland exploration, amid international rivalries, from the 9th to 17th centuries.
- **Standard 2B:** The student understands the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the Americas.

US History Era 2

- **Standard 1A:** The student understands how diverse immigrants affected the formation of European colonies.
- **Standard 1B:** The student understands the European struggle for control of North America.
- **Standard 2B:** The student understands religious diversity in the colonies and how ideas about religious freedom evolved.
- **Standard 3A:** The student understands colonial economic life and labor systems in the Americas.

US History Era 4

- **Standard 2E:** The student understands the settlement of the West.
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Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:

Theme I: Culture

- Standard C: The student explains and gives examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.

Theme III: People, Places and Environments

- Standard G: The student describes how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers, and the like.
- Standard H: The student examines, interprets, and analyzes physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes.
- Standard I: The student describes ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings.

Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity

- Standard E - Government policies and laws.

Theme VI: Power, Authority and Governance

- Standard H - The student explains and applies concepts such as power, role, status, justice, and influence to the examination of persistent issues and social problems.
- Standard I: The student gives examples and explains how governments attempt to achieve their stated ideals at home and abroad.

Relevant Common Core Standards

This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle school and high school students:

Keys Ideas and Details

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- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10



About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file "[San Antonio Missions National Historical Park](http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/78003147.pdf)" <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/78003147.pdf> (with [photographs](http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Photos/78003147.pdf) <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Photos/78003147.pdf>) and materials prepared by the park and the Missions Education Committee.

This lesson plan was published in the early 1990s and written by Fay Metcalf, education consultant. It was edited by Teaching with Historic Places staff. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into classrooms across the country.

Objectives

1. To explain the significant role that Spanish missions played in the early history of Texas and the Southwest;
2. To describe the psychological and cultural factors that led the Coahuiltecan (Kwa-weel-tekens) Indians to accept mission life;
3. To explain the role irrigation systems, such as *acequias* (ah-SAY-key-ahs), played in the development of Texas farmland and other arid areas;
4. To investigate the early religious history of their own community.

Materials for students

The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1. Two maps of the mission sites;
2. Two readings about mission life on the Spanish frontier and its impact on American Indian culture; and;
3. Five photographs and one drawing of Mission San José and a mission irrigation system

Visiting the site

The missions of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park are located along Mission Road, south of San Antonio, Texas; signs help guide motorists along the route. The missions are open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Daylight Savings Time), except for New Year's Day and Christmas. For additional information, write to the Superintendent, San Antonio Missions

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National Historical Park, 2202 Roosevelt Avenue, San Antonio, Texas 78210 or [visit the park web pages](http://www.nps.gov/saan) at <http://www.nps.gov/saan>.



Getting Started



What style of architecture is this? What purpose do you think this building serves?

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Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1:

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

Step 2:

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, and activities--do you notice?

Step 3:

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

Step 4:

How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

Step 5:

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?

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Setting the Stage

Missions were a major part of Spain's plan to establish and manage a colonial frontier in what is now the American Southwest. Settlement of this frontier has had significant and far-reaching effects on the development of the United States, both politically and culturally, effects that continue to be felt today. The missions were directly involved in the military, religious, and cultural development of the Texas frontier, and they influenced policymaking across the entire Southwest. The contribution of the missions to agriculture and commerce—they strongly influenced the development of the cattle industry—was of critical importance to the growth of the state of Texas and the San Antonio region. The mission buildings constitute a unique record of the architecture, art, and sculpture of the Spanish colonial period in Texas.



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Locating the Site

Map 1: Mission sites and rivers in Texas



(Adapted from Missions Education Committee, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park: A Guidebook, San Antonio Junior League of San Antonio, 1986)

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Questions for Map 1

1) Examine the location of the missions. What do their locations have in common? Why do you think that this was important?

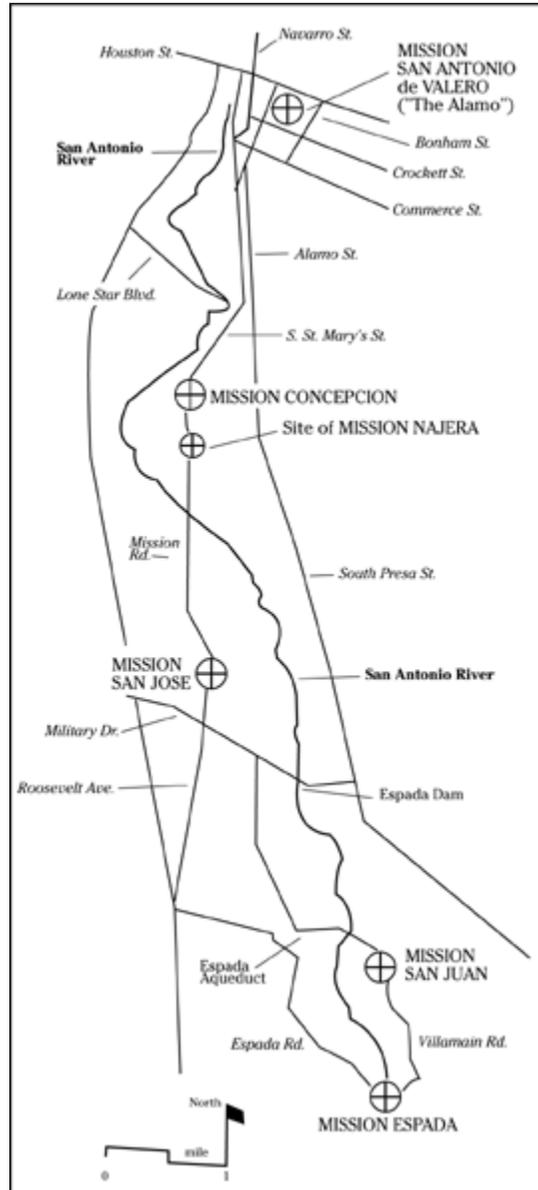
2) Compare the dates of the first established mission, presidio (military town or encampment), and village with the dates of the first mission in the San Antonio River area. Why do you think the later missions were built in a more central part of Texas?



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Locating the Site

Map 2: Mission Trail



(Adapted from Missions Education Committee, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park: A Guidebook, San Antonio: Junior League of San Antonio, 1986)

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Questions for Map 2

1) Measure the distances between the missions. Why do you think they were located so closely together? (Additional information is provided in Reading 1.)

2) Map 2 is a recent view of the area around the missions. How do the street names reflect the history of San Antonio, Texas, and the United States?



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Determining the Facts

Reading 1: The San Antonio Missions and the Spanish Frontier

Spain's expulsion of the Moors and its decision to support Columbus's voyage of discovery, both of which took place the same year, opened a new world of possibilities. In the Americas, Spain soon began to use its soldiers to extend its domain, find wealth, and spread the Catholic faith.

After Cortes's conquest of Mexico in 1519, the Spanish moved north in search of further riches and potential converts. Though they failed to find gold and silver as they had farther south, in present-day Arizona and New Mexico they established missions to work with peaceable American Indians and presidios (forts) to control hostile ones.

In the late 1600s the French, already in Canada, explored the Mississippi River to the point where it emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. This expansion posed a threat to Spain's territory and Spain responded by extending its settlements into what is now Texas, thereby creating a buffer between the wealth of Mexico and French Louisiana.

The Spanish established themselves in Texas by using the same system they had established in Arizona and New Mexico. Through missions, presidios, and an adjoining civilian community (a villa), missionaries and soldiers Christianized and Hispanicized the native population. The Spanish hoped that with the help of these now-loyal Indians a relatively small number of men would be needed to defend the empire's frontier. Though created to observe and control French colonies in the Mississippi Valley and central Gulf coast, these operations later opposed other rivals. Between 1763 and 1776, the main challenge came from the English and their Indian allies; after 1776, from the United States and the Comanches.

One base for Spanish missionary and military operations in Texas developed around San Antonio. Two missions and a presidio were established in the San Antonio River valley between 1718 and 1720, and the Spanish added three new missions in the valley in 1731. A single presidio protected the five missions, which were closely grouped for two important reasons. First, the fields required irrigation and a system could only be set up along the valley's upper ten miles. Second, the threat of attack from northern Indians was constant, and the missions needed to be near the presidio and each other for mutual protection.

The missions were important to agricultural production. Each had a ranch for raising the sheep, goats, and cattle that supplied necessities like meat, wool, milk, cheese, and leather. The entire cattle industry, from ranching to the driving of cattle across long distances to markets, was developed in Mexico during the two centuries prior to the establishment of San Antonio. Spanish ranching as it was practiced in Texas formed the basis for the American cattle industry, which drew many of its original cattle from the mission herds. The Spanish also brought to the San Antonio valley a specialized method of farming that used irrigation. This system, which was

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extended by later settlers, was the foundation of the San Antonio economy for more than a century; portions of mission-built irrigation systems are still in use today in San Antonio and other parts of Texas.

The mission contributed to the economy in other ways. It established necessary industries such as weaving, iron working, and carpentry; these were important to the maintenance of the entire military and political structure of the eastern portion of the Spanish American frontier. Mission-trained artisans and workers provided a principal source of labor and finished goods in a region at the far end of a long and expensive supply line reaching up from the south.

Today the San Antonio missions are among the few relatively intact examples of the colonial missions in the Southwest. They contribute to the general architectural record of this era as well as offer examples of building styles from every period of the missions' history. A wide range of sculptural and painted decoration survives, illustrating how these arts developed on the frontier.



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Questions for Reading 1

- 1) Why did the Spanish establish missions in Texas?

- 2) Why were the missions located so closely together? (Refer to Map 2 and compare your earlier suggestions with the reasons given in the reading.)

- 3) What agricultural system did the Spanish bring to the San Antonio valley? What other products came from the missions?

- 4) Why would the architectural design of the missions change over time?



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Determining the Facts

Reading 2: The Spaniards and the Indians

A mission brought together two distinct groups of people. The missionaries came from Spain via training schools in Mexico and were Franciscans, an order of priests who had taken a vow of poverty in order to devote themselves to learning, brotherhood with all living creatures, and spreading the word of God.

In Texas the Franciscans mainly encountered bands of hunter-gatherers called *Coahuiltecos* or Coahuiltecans (kwa-weel-tekens). These bands ranged through what is now the Mexican state of Coahuila into South Texas. They moved from one traditional campsite to another, following the seasons and herds of migrating animals. Since the environment in which they lived was often difficult, mainly because of a lack of rainfall, the Coahuiltecans lived precariously because they rarely had a sure food supply. Though they sometimes warred against one another, all faced threats from more formidable adversaries such as the Apache and, later, the Comanche. These tribes had become mobile raiders by taking advantage of the herds of wild horses that had developed from runaways from Spanish settlements.

The Coahuiltecans were tattooed and wore a breechcloth or hide skirt, fiber sandals, and, in bad weather, a cloak of animal hide. Animal teeth, bones, feathers, stones, and seeds were worn as jewelry and sometimes woven into their intricately braided hair. Shelter consisted of small temporary huts of brush or grass, sensible structures given their way of life and the climate of the area over which they ranged.

These hunter-gatherers were willing to become part of the mission system for a number of reasons. The irrigation system promised a more stable supply of food than they normally enjoyed. Diseases brought by Europeans had depleted their numbers, making the Coahuiltecans even more vulnerable to their now-mobile enemies. The presidio, however, offered much greater protection.

Though routines did vary, the missions shared a number of practices. The missionaries, along with lay helpers and usually no more than two soldiers and their families, instructed the natives in the Catholic faith and in the elements of Spanish peasant society. The Indians learned various trades, including carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, and weaving; they also did a great deal of agricultural work.

Since mission society lasted more than 100 years, no single description can cover the entire experience. It is possible, though, to depict some of its most important elements. Religion was the most important factor in shaping the day. At dawn the church bells rang, calling the people to morning prayer, which was followed by religious instruction. At noontime the bells tolled again to assemble everyone for more prayer, and in the evening there was another service and more instruction.

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What happened the rest of the day varied from person to person. Many of the men were led to the fields or to military drills by a missionary or a soldier, while others remained in the compound to work in one of the shops weaving, candle making, woodworking, or engaging in other crafts. Women and older girls often made pottery or baskets, though others prepared food or caught fish in the nearby river. Children spent their days in a number of ways: helping the adults, gathering under a tree for Spanish lessons, playing games with each other. At noontime, everyone came together to eat the day's largest meal, which was followed by the rest period known as a siesta. They remained inside for the hottest part of the day, then returned to their duties until early evening. They would have a light meal before the last service of the day, then enjoy some relaxation. Some would spend the evening dancing and singing, while others played games.

The native population reacted to the mission system in a number of ways. Some of them participated fully, mixing their traditions with those of Spain to create a new Hispanicized and Christianized culture. The Spanish then called them *gente de razón*, or rational, reasonable people, like the Spaniards themselves. Other Indians moved in and out of the missions, choosing to return to more familiar surroundings during a season when the natural environment was rich with food. Some Indians refused to join at all, continuing to live in their traditional ways.

In the 1790s, the missions began to change. At that time secularization--turning the settlements into civil rather than religious communities--began. The Spanish government withdrew its financial support and ordered mission lands and livestock to be divided among the mission Indians who had been converted to Christianity. Only one of the San Antonio missions, Mission San Antonio de Valero (now known as the Alamo) was fully secularized. The other four, which are now part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, were only partially secularized. Here the populations elected their community officials, but missionaries remained to act as parish priests. In 1824, after Mexico achieved independence from Spain, the remaining missions were fully secularized and all missionaries left the area. Though the buildings then fell into decline, in the 1930s restoration began. Today the four missions within the park serve as parish churches, and all five San Antonio missions are open to the public.

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Questions for Reading 2

- 1) What features of the Coahuiltecans' way of life made them interested in participating in mission life?

- 2) What is a gente de razón? What does that phrase say about how the Spanish viewed the native population?

- 3) How would someone of your age spend a typical day at a San Antonio mission?

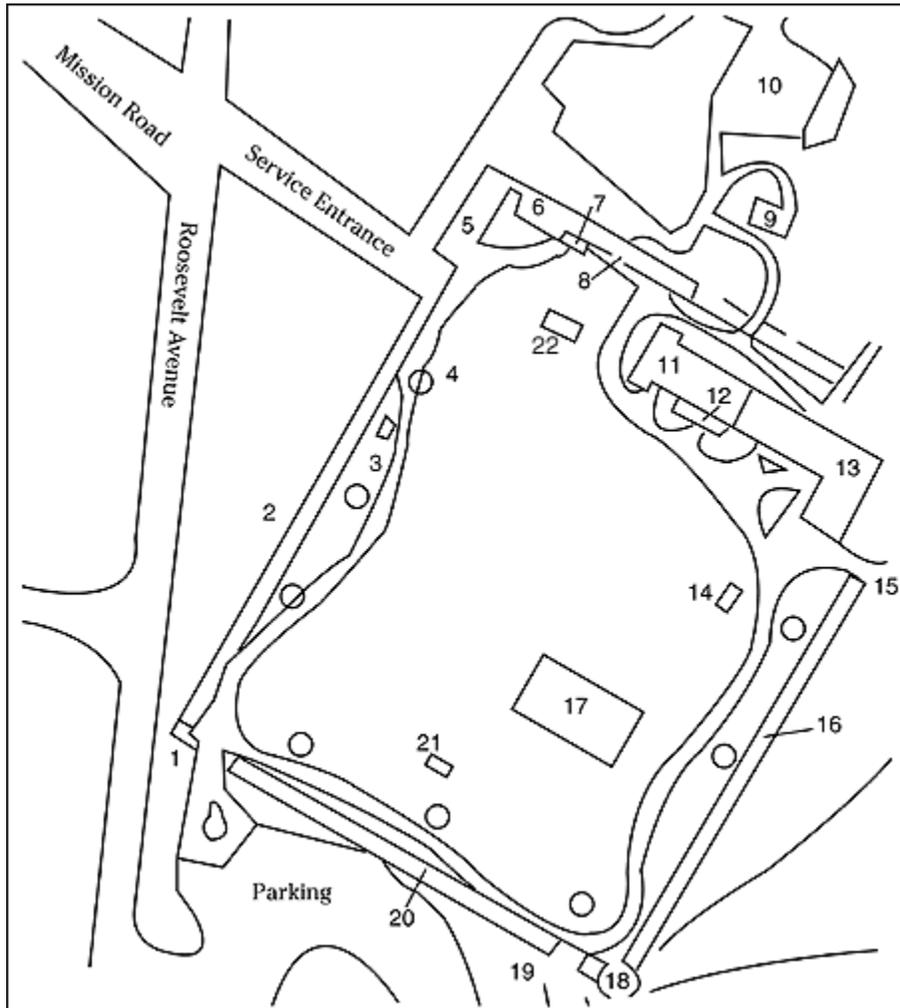
- 4) Do you believe mission Indians retained much of their original culture? Why or why not? How could you find out?



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Visual Evidence

Drawing 1: Plan of Mission San José.



(Adapted from Missions Education Committee, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park: A Guidebook, San Antonio: Junior League of San Antonio, 1986)

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Key for Drawing 1

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Entrance Station | 12. Sacristy |
| 2. Indian Quarters (west wall) | 13. Convento and Portería |
| 3. West Well | 14. East Well |
| 4. Oven | 15. East Gate |
| 5. Granary | 16. Indian Quarters |
| 6. Spanish Residence/Casa Real | 17. Ruins (east wall) |
| 7. Grape Arbor | 18. Bastion (southeast) |
| 8. Archway | 19. Southeast Gate |
| 9. Flour Mill | 20. Indian Quarters |
| 10. Amphitheater | 21. South Well |
| 11. Church Front Entrance | 22. Cemetery Plot |

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Visual Evidence

Photo 1: Mission San José



(National Park Service)

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Questions for Photo 1 & Drawing 1

- 1) Locate the different structures on Map 3. Which buildings do you think were most important to the operation of the mission? Why?

- 2) Do you think that Mission San José was designed to be self-sufficient? Why or why not?

- 3) Try to match some of the structures keyed on Map 3 to the photo.

- 4) What do the remaining buildings tell us about the technology of the people who lived there? How do the buildings indicate the region's climate?



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Visual Evidence

Photo 2: Mission San José Church



(Photo by Beth Boland)



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Visual Evidence

Photo 3: Main entrance, Mission San José Church.



(San Antonio Missions National Historical Park)

The San José church is a fine example of the baroque style of architecture that was popular in Spain and other European countries at the time the Franciscans settled in what is now Texas.



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Visual Evidence

Photo 4: Convento Garden, Mission San José.



(National Park Service)

The *convento*, also called the friary, was the place where the Franciscan friars lived.

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Questions for Photo 4

1) How might the friars have used the garden and a covered walkway called a *portería* (pour-teh-REE-ah)?

2) What does the *portería* tell us about Spanish culture?



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Visual Evidence

Photo 5: Espada Aqueduct and *Acequia*



(San Antonio Missions National Historical Park)

The dry climate of southwest Texas made irrigation crucial for growing the crops that would determine the success of a new mission. Around San Antonio the Spanish used what was known as *acequias* (ah-SAY-key-ahs), a system of ditches that the Moslems had introduced to Spain. Missionaries and Indians built seven gravity-flow ditches, five dams, and an aqueduct in order to distribute water from the San Antonio River over a 15-mile network that covered 3,500 acres of land.

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Questions for Photo 5

1) Using Map 2, locate the Espada Aqueduct.

2) Why would the system have been an important part of mission life in San Antonio?

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Putting It All Together

The four missions located within the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park had many things in common: they brought within their control nearby Indians who, in return for accepting religious instruction, were taught modern technological skills and the ways of life necessary for meeting the ruling Spaniards on their own terms. They were also protected from other, more aggressive tribes in the region. The routine established at the several missions was similar. All Indians were expected to work at a variety of tasks such as farming, ranching, and carpentry. Each mission traded or sold goods to the nearby villa and presidio, sometimes making great profits on foodstuffs and cattle (some 3,000 in a typical herd), which were raised mainly for their hides. The following activities explore the impact of Spanish colonization in more depth.

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Activity 1: Comparing Spanish and English Colonial Policy

The history of the Spanish colonization of America is fundamentally different from that of the original English colonies. Have the students use a U.S. history textbook to compare Spanish and English approaches to (1) the treatment and education of native peoples, (2) ways of making a living, and (3) enforcement of religious practice. Ask them to present their findings in a chart. Then hold a classroom discussion in which the students debate the pros and cons of each country's policies.



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Activity 2: Researching the Columbian Exchange

Smallpox was only one of the diseases that took the lives of thousands of American Indians. In 1739 at Mission San José, only 49 of its 300 Indian inhabitants survived a smallpox epidemic. Europeans also contracted the disease, but because it had long been a part of their ecosystem, many were immune or suffered only mild cases. Considerable literature is now available on the "Columbian Exchange" and the "Seeds of Change." Have students choose a disease or food product that was exchanged and make a short presentation to the class that explains why the product or disease was "exchanged" and how it impacted both the native population and the Spanish settlers. A useful bibliography appears in Alfred Crosby's *The Columbian Voyages, The Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association). See also the middle-school and high-school versions of Sharryl Davis Hawke's and James E. Davis's, *Seeds of Change* (Palo Alto, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.).

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Activity 3: Researching the Community

Each community has a religious history of its own. Have the students conduct research on their own community to discover which religious groups were among the first settlers, how powerful they were, how long that religion dominated the area, which religious groups followed, which remain predominant, and which can no longer be found in the community. The students should then compare their community's experience with that of San Antonio. Finally, ask students to compare the architectural styles of the local Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant churches; synagogues and temples; Islamic mosques, etc., with each other and with the photographs in the lesson plan. Hold a classroom discussion based on the results of the student's research.

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References and Endnotes

Reading 1

Reading 1 was compiled from James E. Ivey and Marlys Bush Thurber, "San Antonio Missions National Historical Park" (Bexar County, Texas) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1983; and the National Park Service visitor's guide for San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

Reading 2

Reading 2 was compiled from Missions Education Committee, The San Antonio Missions National Historical Park: A Guidebook (San Antonio: Junior League of San Antonio, 1986); and the National Park Service visitor's guide for San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

