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Colonization by *Congregación*: Health Disparities between Natives and Settlers in Colonial California, 1770–1830

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Spain's colonial policy of congregating Native American populations into settlements shortened the lives of countless Indigenous people. Though *congregación* was instituted differently across various regions, the number of Indigenous people whose lives were altered and curtailed through this policy is staggering, and their related experiences create a common tragic history for the Americas. So, too, does a story that has attracted less attention: the population explosion among colonists who settled these regions at the same time that *congregación* was decimating Native populations. This article uses new data and the method of Family Reconstitution to reveal as never before the similarities and differences of mortality, fertility, and life expectancy among nearly 90,000 Natives and 20,000 settlers across colonial California. Doing so reveals the enormous health gap between Indigenous peoples and their colonizers and situates the demographic histories of California Natives and settlers within Vast Early America. The divergent health and population histories of Native Americans and settlers in California are not separate developments but are interrelated. Not only were they reinforcing phenomena, but one cannot understand the internal mechanisms or the magnitude of the population decline of California's Native people without examining the population increase of settlers. The origin of the Natives' population decline in California can be found in their experiences of having been congregated in the missions, where Native infants, children, and women succumbed to frightful mortality rates, while settler families enjoyed unparalleled health on appropriated Native lands. Colonial California may be a distant corner of early America, but the processes that unfolded there shed light on other colonized provinces, such as New France, the Spanish Southwest, and Florida, as well as other regions where Native persons were congregated into unhealthy missions while settlers and their families established settlements and seized and monopolized Native lands.