Definition: **gold rush** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Rapid influx of population in response to reports of the discovery of gold. The largest gold rush brought c.100,000 prospectors to California (1849-50). Some of the miners, known as Forty-Niners, went on to Australia (1851-53). There were also gold rushes to Witwatersrand, South Africa (1886), Klondike in the Yukon, Canada (1896), and Alaska (1898).

Summary Article: **California gold rush** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

In US history, the influx of prospectors to the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California, following the discovery of gold in the American River by US surveyor James Marshall in January 1848. Within two years over 100,000 people had flooded into California in the hopes of making their fortunes. San Francisco was transformed from a coastal village to the largest city in the West. The miners of 1849, known as the '49ers, forged pioneering wagon trails over the Great Plains and through the Rocky Mountains. Although the rush was over by 1856, the event had opened up the American West.

**Mining community** Following Marshall's discovery in 1848 a gradual flow of miners entered California, both from the rest of the USA as well as from other nations such as China and Mexico. Families were left behind and jobs forgotten. Many of the prospectors endured difficult and often dangerous journeys, either by the long overland route across America or the hazardous sea voyage around Cape Horn, South America and up the Pacific coast. The vast majority were young men, and this had a profound impact on the nature of the towns that were set up for the miners. By the time the main flow of American miners arrived in the late summer of 1849, the towns were already places of crime and all imaginable vice. The towns were given names such as Cool and You Bet.

A number of entrepreneurs took advantage of the gold rush to make enormous profits. One of the most significant was the young Mormon leader Samuel Brennan, who had set up a Mormon community at the small outpost of Yerba Buena (the original name of San Francisco) in 1846, doubling its population and laying the foundation for the future boomtown. Brannan was one of the first to learn of the gold found in the American River, and reported it in his newspaper, the *California Star*, in March 1848. However, the community was slow to believe the news until May, when he waved a bottle of gold dust in town, shouting that it had come from the American River. Gold fever struck, and within a matter of days, the population of his community, and other coastal cities, dropped as thousands rushed to the Sierra foothills. Brannon became California's first millionaire, supplying groceries, hardware, land, and alcohol to the hopeful prospectors and accompanying settlers.

**Lasting legacies** The impact of the gold rush was long lasting, both for the USA and California. The city of San Francisco was created by the rush. At the start of 1848 it was a small village of a few hundred people on the edge of San Francisco Bay; by the end of 1849 it had a population of tens of thousands and was the largest city in the western USA. Many small mining towns lived on after the first rush was over, creating a permanent population. Railroads were built connecting the towns and the mining regions. The money made by the prospectors helped to fuel the local economy and that of the rest of the USA.
The harshest legacy of the gold rush was its impact on California's American Indian population. The Indians were enslaved and murdered by the miners, with the direct support and collusion of the Californian state government, and their numbers were reduced by 90%.

**Impact of the '49ers** For the USA the main legacy of the gold rush resulted from the flow of miners from the East in 1849, who called themselves the '49ers. Although the vast majority never made significant fortunes, their journeys proved to be crucial to the future settlement of the West. They were the first white Americans to cross the Great Plains in a massed group, proving it possible for ordinary Americans to travel from the settled East to the new lands of the West. The '49ers travelled in large groups or wagon trains, and often hired former mountain men (fur trappers) as their guides. They laid out the wagon trails across the Plains that would be used by the families of settlers moving west to farm the lands of Oregon and California offered under the Pre-Emption Act (1841); the act allowed settlers to buy 65 ha/160 acres of land for a minimum fee after 14 months’ residence. The '49ers made use of the South Pass through the Rocky Mountains, and news of their successful journeys spread back to the eastern USA. The California gold rush lasted until the beginning of the American Civil War, and strengthened the bonds between east and west in the USA, as the bonds between the north and south began to fall apart.

**essays**

Law-and-order in American West

**APA**

**Chicago**

**Harvard**

**MLA**


© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA