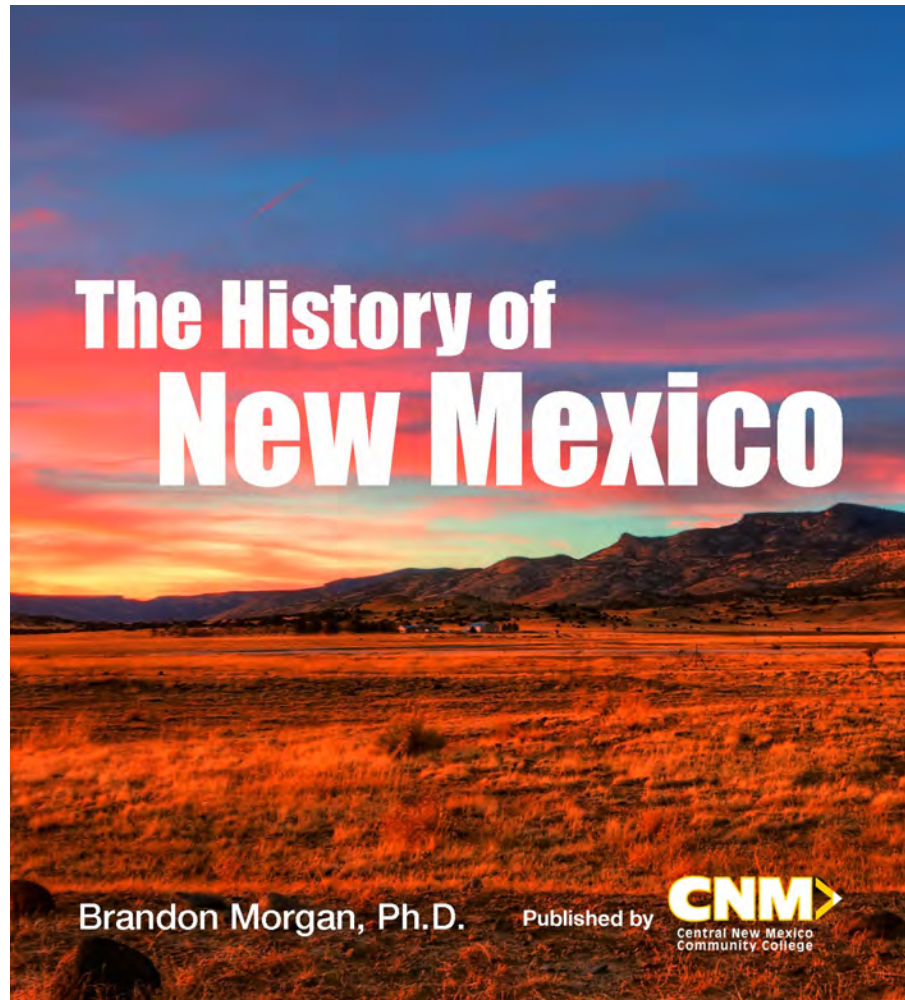


The History of New Mexico



Written by Brandon Morgan, Ph.D.

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Why New Mexico History?



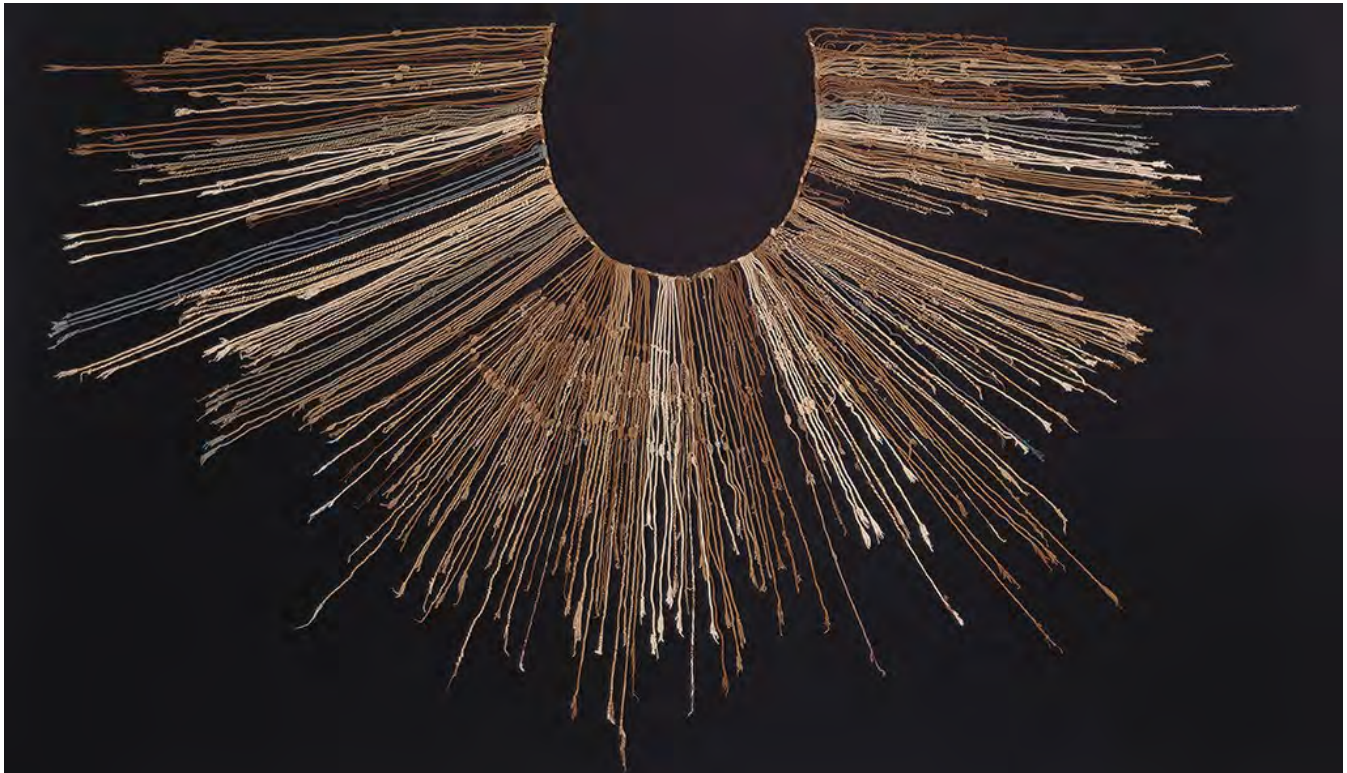
How would you define history? Where would you go to find a historian? What do historians do, and why is their work important? The answers to these questions will help prepare you for the study of New Mexico History. And, as you'll find, the study of history often generates more new questions than answers.

Welcome to New Mexico History



At its simplest, history is the study of past events and, on its face, inquiry into the past seems to be a clear-cut proposition. Since we cannot travel to the time and place that we want to learn about, we must rely on other types of information that have survived since that time. One must gather the sources that explain a certain past event or time period, and then use those sources as evidence to create a narrative, or tell the story, of that past moment.

Traditionally, historians have favored the written word in their pursuit of the past. The term “prehistory” refers to people, societies, and/or civilizations that operated without the use of written language. Yet sophisticated societies, such as the Inca Empire in South America, thrived through oral tradition and the aid of other tools, like [quipus](#), in order to keep administrative records. The existence of such non-literate societies poses problems when historians stick to written documentation. If history is the study of past events, the Inca people certainly experienced a rich past that merits examination. But, how do we study their history? The study of the past is not as straightforward as it seems at first glance.



The [quipu](#) (also spelled khipu) was an Inca means of recording information. The combination of cords, direction of twist, and quantity of knots functioned as a writing and mathematical system, comparable to Braille in certain ways and to an abacus in others.

Used with permission—Museo Larco, Lima—Perú

In order to address such issues, historians incorporate a wide variety of source types into their repertoire. Oral traditions, archeological artifacts, artwork, photographs, films, and literature can help tell the story of past peoples. Yet, these types of sources, as well as written sources, all present certain problems. None of them provide a complete view of the past on their own. They are like pieces of a puzzle that need to be placed together in order to see the whole picture clearly. Also, they are subject to interpretation—they cannot speak for themselves. In order to piece together any historical puzzle, then, historians must ask analytical questions. How can we make sense of artifacts? In what ways have oral traditions changed as they have been told and retold over time? What distinct perspectives and biases are presented by the author of a letter or diary? What type of picture of a given moment in time did the author of a novel wish to portray? How can we make sense of “the truth,” without leaving out important perspectives or ideas? Is it even possible to achieve objective historical truth?

Before addressing the question of historical truth, let's consider who historians are. Hopefully you think of your history teachers as historians, but the definition is much more extensive than that. In broadest terms, historians are people who work to learn about, teach, write, and otherwise explain the past. In a sense, we are all historians because most of us, at the very least, have tried to find out the details of our own family histories. Others of us study major events of general interest, such as the U.S. Civil War, the American Revolution, the [Mexican Revolution](#), or the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, just to name a few. Professional historians include people in a wide variety of jobs, including college professors, editors, curators, archivists, researchers, diplomats, and politicians, among others. What they share in common is academic training in the process of historical thinking. Historical thinking is the reading, analysis, and writing (or other types of production) necessary to tell complete stories about a given event in the past. Whether or not you consider yourself to be a professional or academic historian, the process of historical thinking is crucial to understanding the past.

To do history, then, one must locate, read or view, and critically evaluate a range of different sources on a given event. It is never possible to gain a full picture of the past from a single source, and historians often find conflicting viewpoints within the various sources they examine. In other words, the pieces of the puzzle often tell contradictory stories, and each piece always presents a unique perspective. As we will see in Chapter 4, the [Pueblo Revolt](#) is one of the most contentious events in New Mexico History. Primary sources of the revolt are limited, and researchers have presented several competing interpretations based on essentially the same evidence. Among the factors that cause different historians to reach distinct and even conflicting conclusions from the same sources are their personal worldviews, their methods of reading and questioning sources, their rejection or acceptance of certain sources (such as oral histories), and their attempts to portray certain historical perspectives. In the case of the Pueblo Revolt, the narrative has been dominated by the voices of Spanish missionaries, governors, and settlers because their viewpoints have been preserved in existing documentation. The perspective of Pueblo peoples, however, has been long neglected due to the fact that they did not write their

ideas on paper.

Historical Thinking

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



These various issues complicate our ability to reach the objective historical “truth” of any given event. For much of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, academically trained historians aspired to the “noble dream” of objectivity. Their belief was that through careful study and research, investigators could transcend their own belief systems and their social and political worldviews. In other words, early twentieth century historians generally thought that they could step outside of the types of issues discussed above. In recent years, however, expectations have shifted. Many researchers now realize that it is impossible to escape subjectivity, that their own place and time in the world creates a certain lens through which they view the past.

As Matthew Restall, a historian of early Latin American history, has pointed out, our powerlessness to escape our own subjectivity has largely discredited truth “as a concept relevant to historical investigation.” The thought that

absolute or objective truth may be completely beyond reach can be quite disheartening. But, as Restall suggests, “In the realm of subjectivity things can get really interesting.” We need not throw our hands up in the air and declare that the study of history is invalid. On the contrary, through the comparison of different ideas and perspectives provided across a wide variety of sources we can reach new insights and clearer understandings of past events. The best histories are those that recognize their own limitations, draw on evidence from critical readings of historical sources, and are well-reasoned and argued. Because history is like piecing together a puzzle, it is always based in argument. History is never simply the listing of names, dates, or ideas. Reliance on argument and perspective makes the study of history particularly powerful because it requires us to rethink our own assumptions and step into the shoes of others. And, as Restall concludes, “There are always multiple narratives of any historical moment, but that does not mean that as interpretations they cannot tell us something true.”¹

“The past is a foreign country.”

Drawing on a line from L. P. Hartley’s *The Go Between*, David Lowenthal famously argued, “the past is a foreign country.”² Even if we focus on the history of our own hometown or region, our forebears that lived there a century or two ago had different ways of viewing the world around them. Attitudes and actions that were socially acceptable to them may no longer be acceptable to us. We must take such differences into account when we study history. It would be a “mistake to make the past a place where people just like us think about things as we think about them now and do things just as we do them now.” Richard White, historian of the American West, has also emphasized that historians themselves are “historically situated; they write from their own time and place, and this influences what they write.”³ In the introduction to his study of transcontinental railroad corporations, White described his own relationship to

his topic. He lived in Palo Alto, California, during the internet boom of the 1990s, and that experience caused him to consider similarities between that moment in time and the rise of transcontinental railroad companies a century earlier. By reading historical sources, whether primary or secondary, for the author's own relationship to the subject, we will be better able to understand the strengths and limitations of the interpretations he or she presents.

New Mexico's Historians

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Finally, as we study history we should consider the reasons why it is always being rewritten. New history books constantly hit the shelves (or app stores). Part of the reason for this is that we still do not have very clear pictures of many historical events. Historians are constantly working to fit more pieces of the puzzle together. Researchers sometimes find previously unknown information that provides new insights or that even leads to the total reevaluation of what we know about the past. Most often, however, new histories are published as historians continue to debate the interpretations and conclusions that we can reach based on the information that we have. As with other fields in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences, these debates are the process by which we achieve a fuller understanding of past events.

Historians' ideas about historical revision can be grouped into three general schools of thought. The first maintains that rewriting history helps us to create stronger accounts of the past that move increasingly closer to the objective truth. These historians have not lost their faith in the idea that



A sign from the Lonestar Restaurant Association prohibiting the entrance of dogs, negroes, and Mexicans.

Courtesy of Adam Jones, Ph.D.

objective truth exists, even if we cannot ever quite reach it. On the opposite side of the issue are those that believe each new generation or each cultural group will necessarily rewrite the past because each sees their past in different terms. These scholars hold to the importance of evidence as the basis of historical writing, but they believe that “different truths exist for different groups.” A third group of historians takes cues from both of these perspectives. These scholars accept the idea that different sets of people view the past differently, but they believe that a close study of varied viewpoints will help us to fashion a clearer picture of the past.⁴

“History is always a negotiation between past and present.”

As you may have guessed, I fit into this third group. I come to the study of New Mexico’s history as a fellow resident of the American West, but as an outsider. My family roots do not go

back to the region's indigenous peoples nor to the early Spanish conquistadores. I spent some time in the Albuquerque and Santa Fe areas in the early 2000s, however, working with immigrant Spanish-speaking populations. That experience drove me to study the history of Latin America and the American West from the

perspective of the groups of people that have historically inhabited and shaped the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Since my days in graduate school, I have taught New Mexico History numerous times. It is one of my favorite courses to teach because I've lived in the Albuquerque area now for about a decade, and New Mexico is a crossroads where my research interests—the histories of indigenous peoples, Latin America, and the United States—all meet. Hopefully that brief description will help you to understand where I am coming from as an author. In the chapters that follow, I've attempted to incorporate as many different perspectives as possible into the historical narrative. I firmly believe that there is no such thing as New Mexico History in the singular; instead, I try to capture New Mexico's histories. I also attempt to outline the major historical debates that continue to rage about the state's past. As you study the "Land of Enchantment," think about the ways in which you relate to and think about its past and its peoples. What sides do you take in these historical debates, and why? In what ways do New Mexico's histories inform your experience in the present? As Richard White noted, "History is always a negotiation between past and present." Or, in the words of William Faulkner, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."



The ceremony for the driving of the golden spike at Promontory Summit, Utah, on May 10, 1869, marking the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad.

Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration

The New Mexico Difference



Among the first records of people in the Americas are ancient cave paintings made with natural pigments, such as ochre (red) and charcoal (black).

Courtesy of Vitor 1234

During much of the early twentieth century, scholars considered state histories (like California History or New Mexico History) to be parochial or provincial. Both terms connoted narrow minded concern for local conditions at the expense of more important, national or big-picture narratives. In other words, many academic historians considered state histories to be marginal and

unimportant. The prevailing idea was that courses and studies focused on Western Civilization or U.S. History provided complete stories that mattered to the widest number of people. State histories, on the other hand, mattered only to some. For these reasons, proponents of state or regional histories often found themselves on the defensive, at least in academic circles. With the acceleration of research in fields like ethnic studies, gender studies, and borderlands history, however, these attitudes have largely changed.

Many different people over the years have asked the question “why New Mexico History?” In certain respects New Mexico has long been isolated from the outside world. It is distant from Madrid, Mexico City, and Washington D.C., capital cities of the empires and nations to which it has belonged. The region was also far from important trade centers. Its rivers did not provide channels of commerce or transportation, as did rivers in the eastern section of North America. New Mexico’s people have dealt with such isolation over time in a variety of different ways. They have also had to confront an arid and harsh climate.

Yet, from another perspective, New Mexico has never been that isolated from the outside world. Instead, it has formed part of a larger frontier region. Scholars of American Western history have engaged in lengthy debates about the significance of the frontier as a concept. For our purposes, “frontier” refers to the places and processes in which people of different cultures and backgrounds meet and make accommodations to one another. The history of this region is indeed a story of intercultural contact. By the 1200s [CE](#), the [Athabaskan](#) ancestors of later Apache and Navajo peoples came into contact with [Ancestral Puebloan](#) peoples. After 1530, Spanish conquistadores made inroads into the Pueblo world of the upper Rio Grande. In 1848 the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) transferred New Mexico and its people to U.S. jurisdiction. In all cases, conflicts and complex compromises accompanied conquest. Each time a different society emerged.

In focusing on the national at the expense of the regional or local, historians neglect the histories that do not easily fit into the larger story. New Mexico is

part of a frontier region with histories all its own. The stories of the people in this area provide scholars with new perspectives and insights on American or Mexican history. Its periodization differs from that of U.S. History. The history of New Mexico's indigenous peoples stretches back to about 11,000 [BCE](#) when their first ancestors arrived in the area. Its colonial history began in the 1530s with the arrival of the Coronado expedition. New Mexico was a Spanish colony between 1598 and 1821, after which it was part of the Mexican republic. Its place in U.S. History is relatively recent compared to other areas in the nation.



One of the first maps of North America. Created by Chez l'Auteur et chez Pierre Mariette (1650) in "Cartes générales de toutes les parties du monde."

Courtesy of Library of Congress

The political geography of the state of New Mexico is also a fairly recent development. As early as the 1520s officials and potential explorers in Mexico City imagined a Nuevo México far to the north that held riches and cultures comparable to those of the Aztec Empire. Its very name was based on the dreams of Spanish colonizers; they hoped to find a second Mexico when they

traveled beyond the confines of the northern-most reaches of New Spain. Their dreams had no specific geographic limitations. Their imagined Nuevo México would be wherever they found it. As the colony took shape in the seventeenth century, its boundaries were thus quite fluid. Any native peoples subject to the Spanish Crown north of the point on the Rio Grande dubbed [El Paso del Norte](#) were considered part of New Mexico. There was no “boot heel” or neat geographic shape to set it off from surrounding areas. Because it was not confined to its present-day state boundaries until well into its U.S. period, I include the broader history of what became the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in the story of New Mexico.

The twin issues of scale and perspective are central to an understanding of New Mexico’s history and cultures. Due to the great distances between Santa Fe and Mexico City, local conditions and relations with Pueblo peoples played major roles in shaping its colonial administrative systems. New Mexico’s Spanish colonial story can be considered at local, regional, viceregal, and imperial scales. The concerns of the Spanish Crown did not always match those of the governors stationed in Santa Fe, nor those of the heads of Pueblo villages. An examination of New Mexico’s past at all of these various levels yields unique, and equally important, pieces of its historical puzzle.

EXPLORE: PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES

Currently, New Mexico is considered as part of a region called the “Southwest.” If we pause to think about that terminology, however, we realize that designation is relative to its place in the United States. There are also other ways of perceiving New Mexico’s geographic place. Puebloan peoples have long considered it to be the center of their world. For Spanish colonizers, it was the far northern frontier. To American participants in the Santa Fe Trade, it was the gateway to Mexico. Such issues of perspective matter because viewing New Mexico’s history from only one angle tends to minimize the stories that were, and are, important from other perspectives. As you study New Mexico’s past, reflect on the particular lens(es) through which you tend to think about the

region's history. What perspectives do you privilege? Which do you leave out? What can be gained by switching your scale of analysis or your perspective?



Created by Filippo Costaggini, the Frieze of American History at the United States Capitol depicts General [Winfield Scott](#) during the Mexican War entering Mexico City. Peace came in 1848 with the Rio Grande as a border marker under the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#).

Courtesy of Architect of the Capitol

Europeans' notions of America's indigenous peoples provide an important illustration of why scale and perspective matter. When Christopher Columbus happened upon the Americas, he found places and peoples that were previously unknown to Europeans. He had been attempting to locate a western passage to India. In his excitement to report a successful journey to the Spanish Crown, he called the indigenous peoples of the Americas "Indians"—a misnomer that has remained in place to the present day. Within only a few years, however, European explorers realized that they had encountered what was, to them, a "new world." In order to explain the existence of America's natives, they turned to what they knew, including the Bible and Classical Greek and Roman texts. Some hypothesized that "Indians" were the descendants of a lost branch of the house of Israel. Others thought they had found something akin to Plato's lost Atlantis.

Indeed, some historians of Latin American History have used the analogy of locating life on another planet to help us understand the level of bewilderment that accompanied the first contacts between Europeans and indigenous Americans. Native peoples were equally surprised by the Europeans' arrival in

their homelands. They also turned to their current belief systems and worldviews to explain the existence of the colonizers.



History can be preserved in many ways. Pueblo people preserved historic and geographic information in songs, the designs of pots and rugs, and paintings. Mosquito man is a kiva painting, published in “The Kiva Art of the Anasazi Pottery Mound” (1975) by Dr. Frank Hibben.

Courtesy of KC Publications

Most indigenous groups, however, did not use written language to keep records or communicate when the Europeans first arrived. As Europeans turned to their own history as a means of explaining indigenous peoples, they used rubrics for civilization that had been outlined by Greeks and Romans. In early Greece, for example, “civilized” people spoke Greek, adhered to Greek beliefs

and customs, and participated in recognized political systems. Other people were considered “barbarians,” a term that originally meant that they spoke a language other than Greek. Following a similar pattern, Europeans deemed non-literate indigenous societies as less than civilized. They often referred to them as “savages” or “barbarians.” By the late Spanish colonial period, nomadic peoples such as Comanches and Apaches were still called *indios bárbaros*. In 1537, forty-five years after Columbus’ initial contact, Pope Paul III issued a declaration of indigenous peoples’ humanity in order to resolve contentious debates over the issue. In the early sixteenth century, the idea that natives were human essentially meant that they were capable of conversion to Catholicism—not that they were the equals of their European counterparts.



John Guy and his men meet the Beothuck Indians in Newfoundland (1628).

Courtesy of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University Libraries

In this context, Europeans considered indigenous Americans to be “people without history.”⁵ By their estimation, native peoples’ lives were static until

they arrived and set them into motion. Only when their history was recorded in written format could it begin to exist. Such attitudes furthered the missionary impulse. Because Europeans believed that indigenous peoples needed salvation through conversion to the one true faith, anything they had done previous to that conversion did not have much value. This imperialistic viewpoint served to erase the stories of native peoples who, contrary to prevailing European beliefs, had a rich and vibrant history prior to 1492.

Colonizers

https://mind.cnm.edu/miles/nmh/nmh_export/OPS/assets/widgets/slideshow/index_81458deda1be47b7b455c62a68f53731.html?configFile=https%3A%2F%2Fmind.cnm.edu%2Fmiles%2Fnmh%2Fnmh_export%2FOPS%2Fassets%2Fwidget_data%2Fconfig%2F81458deda1be47b7b455c62a68f53731.json

The unfortunate result of these attitudes was that native stories were not included in the histories of colonizers, even though they informed the creation and growth of colonial societies throughout the Americas. Even as recently as the early twentieth century native stories were omitted from academic histories. By the standards of Western scholarship, oral traditions were considered flimsy at best. Their living nature subjected them to scholarly criticisms of their accuracy, and their reliance on supernatural explanations further alienated them from scholars. Recently, however, academically trained historians have recognized the importance of adding such sources to the historical record. When the perspectives of native peoples are considered on their own terms, they can help us to recover important perspectives that have been erased. As we bring together all types of sources, whether written, oral, cultural, or artistic, and examine them critically, we are able to add new layers to New Mexico's histories.

Geography & Change Over Time



Painted by Charles R. Knight, this mastodon is part of a collection of paintings which make up some of the first dinosaur and megafauna reconstructions. Knight's paintings use an impressionistic style with Japanese artists' influence.

Artwork by Charles R. Knight

An understanding of New Mexico's environment and climate is also vital to a full comprehension of its histories. Climate and topography help to explain the reasons for the area's relative isolation. When the first people arrived in the present-day U.S.-Mexico border region about 11,000 [BCE](#), it looked quite different. [Megafauna](#), including mammoths, sloths, and other large animals, roamed the landscape which was much cooler and wetter than it is today. In more recent history, New Mexico's aridity has become its defining climatic

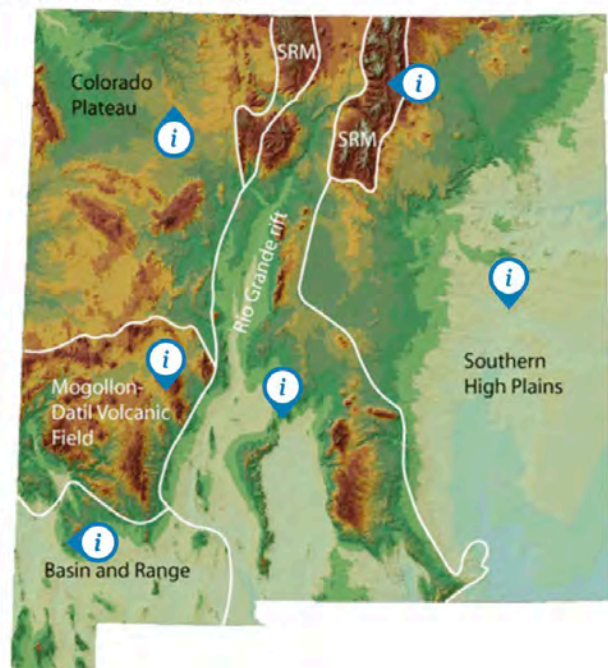
feature. Although the environment was quite different, however, it still influenced the types of decisions that the region's [First Peoples](#) made about where and how to live. Such patterns were not unique to New Mexico; the earliest civilizations of the Fertile Crescent, for example, also based their patterns of life on the resources and conditions available to them.

By about 9,500 BCE, sweeping patterns of climate change transformed New Mexico and the surrounding region. It became much drier and hotter, more like the types of conditions that are present today. Human beings were forced to make difficult decisions about how to adapt to their altered surroundings. Most responded by hunting smaller game and gathering different types of plants for food. They also sought out sources of water, principally along the Rio Grande corridor, but also along other regional rivers, such as the Canadian, Colorado, Conchos, Gila, Pecos, Salt, and San Juan. Other factors, including rainfall, landscapes, altitude, and temperature, influenced the way people lived.

Narrowing our view to the present-day boundaries of the state, New Mexico is divided into [six geologic and climatic provinces](#): Southern Rocky Mountains, Colorado Plateau, Rio Grande Rift, Basin and Range, [Mogollon-Datil](#), and High Plains.

The Southern Rocky Mountain zone includes the Sangre de Cristo, Sierra Nacimiento, and Tuzas mountain chains in the north central section of the state. The Colorado Plateau encompasses New Mexico's northwestern corner, as well as portions of northeastern Arizona, southeastern Utah, and southwestern Colorado. It is defined by sedimentary rock forms that have been shaped into mesas and buttes by water erosion over long centuries. At the point where the Colorado Plateau pulls away from

New Mexico Physiology



the High Plains is the Rio Grande Rift. Cutting through the center of the state on a north-south axis, the rift defines the course of the Rio Grande and contains vital aquifers that provide water to some of New Mexico's largest population centers. Volcanic fields define the Mogollon-Datil province in southwestern New Mexico. The Organ Mountains near Las Cruces were the oldest volcanic eruptions in the 40,000-kilometer geologic area that also includes the Gila Wilderness. The High Plains region comprises the eastern third of the state. Dubbed the *llano estacado* (staked plains) by Spanish colonists, the area is an extension of the Great Plains and it contains some of the flattest land on earth. Finally, the basin and range province, defined by mountain ranges separated by dry valleys, comprises New Mexico's "boot heel." It is part of a much larger physiographic province that characterizes much of the American west and northern Mexico. Although the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources describes the Rio Grande Rift as separate from New Mexico's Basin and Range topography, other geologists lump the two together.

New Mexico Landscapes



These varied landscapes reflect the seemingly stark choices that faced (and face) New Mexico's inhabitants. At times, the rugged land and weather have forced entire groups of people to migrate to another part of the region, or to leave altogether. New Mexico's aridity places the question of water availability at the top of the list of climatic considerations. The wettest parts of the state include the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the north, which receive about forty inches of annual precipitation. Eastern plains and western plateaus typically receive moderate rainfall levels, between twelve and seventeen inches per year. The driest parts of the state, however, including the Rio Grande Valley, receive less than ten inches of annual moisture.

Fortunately, most precipitation arrives during the June-September growing season. The rest comes during the winter months. Spring runoff from winter snowpack fills the region's rivers and streams, providing water to the valleys below. Although New Mexico's rivers provide life-giving irrigation waters, they have proven to be fickle allies. Historically, late-spring flooding of the Pecos or San Juan Rivers has spelled disaster for young crops. The Rio Grande, still known as the [Rio Bravo del Norte](#) (literally translated "wild river of the north") in Mexico and Latin America, has changed its course numerous times in New Mexico's past. The region's rivers were (and are) too shallow and unpredictable to be easily navigable; they could not serve as channels for communication and transportation. Such factors have contributed to New Mexico's isolation, and they have shaped the types and sizes of societies that have evolved in the region.

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Chapter 2: New Mexico's First Peoples

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References & Further Reading

New Mexico's First Peoples



How did the first inhabitants of the Americas arrive in the Western Hemisphere? Although this seems to be a straightforward question, there are no ready answers. Prevailing theories about human evolution and migration suggest that human life began in Africa. From there, *Homo sapiens* migrated across the earth. The answer, then, cannot be that people always inhabited the Americas.

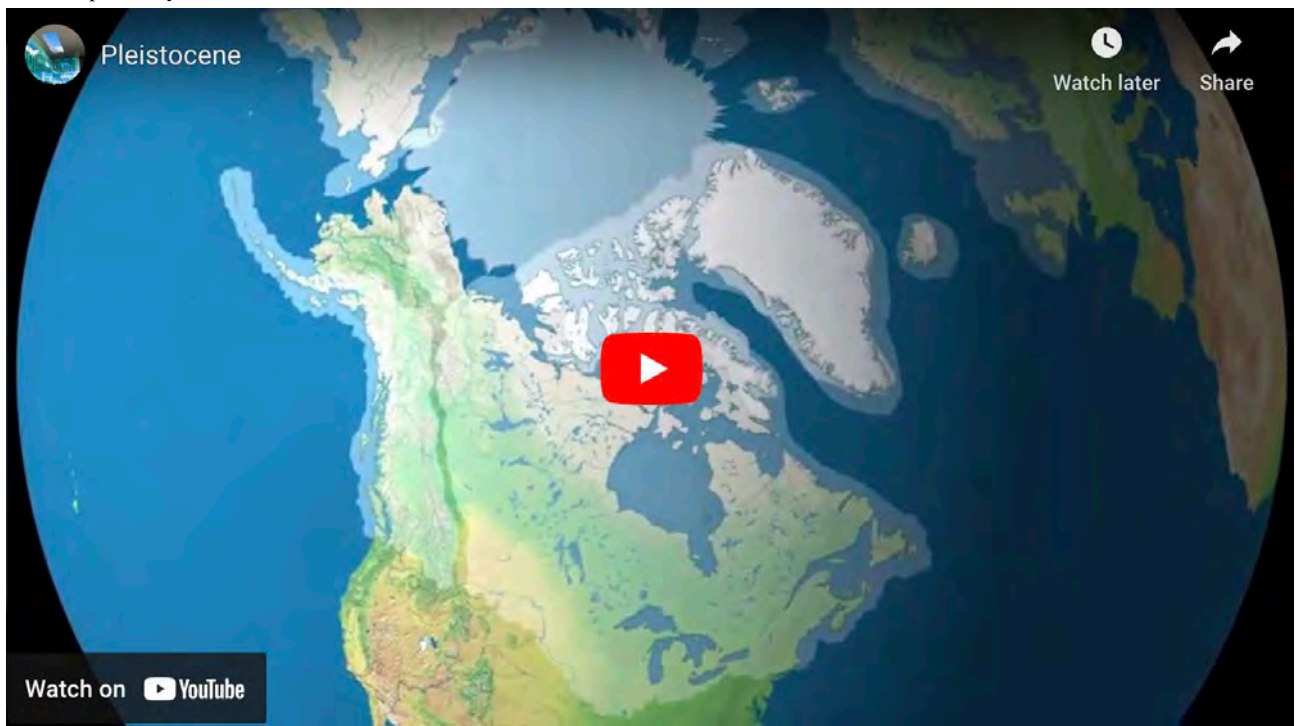


Last Ice Age

This animation shows the areas of the earth that were covered by ice during the Last Ice Age, a period that lasted from about 110,000 to 12,000 years ago depending on differing estimates.

The principal hypothesis has long been that a single wave of migration was the origin point for all indigenous Americans. The timeframe of this migration is widely debated. At some point between 75,000 and 15,000 years ago, human beings crossed Beringia, a piece of land that then formed a bridge between present-day Siberia and Alaska across the Bering Strait. Those people then fanned out across the Western Hemisphere over the centuries.

As the wide range in dates suggests, debates over the arrival of the first Americans are anything but settled. Further complicating the issue, in 1996 skeletal remains of an ancient human male were excavated near Kennewick, Washington. Dubbed Kennewick Man, the remains dated to about 9,300 years ago. Although archaeologists have yet to arrive at any definitive conclusions, they have learned a few important things from Kennewick Man. The skeleton does not necessarily conform to other remains that have been used to support the single migration theory. Instead of resembling human fossils from Siberia, Kennewick Man seems more like those of Polynesian origin. Additionally, Kennewick Man is only one of many archaeological finds that suggest many different ancient migrations, rather than just one, from Asia and the South Pacific to the Americas.



[Pleistocene](#) This animation illustrates the change in ice coverage during the Pleistocene era, which came toward the end of the Last Ice Age.



Clovis fluted points are named after the city of Clovis, New Mexico where they were first found in 1929. They are from the Paleoindian period around

Building on this more recent evidence, shifts in the scholarly debate help to qualify the window of time in which the Americas' [First Peoples](#) migrated across the Bering Strait. The “short chronology” school of thought holds that the earliest migration began between 15,000 and 17,000 years ago, followed by successive waves of movement. The “long chronology” school argues that the first use of the Bering Strait pathway occurred much earlier, between 21,000 and 40,000 years ago. These scholars posit long periods of time in between migrations, with the latest occurring closer to 15,000 years ago when the land connection was submerged.

Archaeological evidence suggests that

13,500 years ago.

Courtesy of Brian Brockman

human beings first came to inhabit the New Mexico region sometime around 11,000 [BCE](#), although some scholars of the “long chronology” school argue that human beings may have arrived in the area as early as 30,000 BCE. Analysis of human fossil remains, as well as fossilized animals, plants, tools, and weapons, allow scholars to present a picture of life for the earliest New Mexicans. These Paleoindians, as archaeologists have dubbed them, hunted [megafauna](#) including mammoths, mastodons, large sloths, and perhaps bison.

Sometime after 9,500 BCE, it appears that the megafauna became extinct. Early archaeological research suggested that Paleoindians over-hunted the existing herds, causing them to die off completely. More recently, however, other research based on [dendrochronology](#) showed that climate change placed great stress on the land’s animal, human, and plant life. As the region experienced widespread droughts and rising temperatures, the megafauna died off and smaller animals and drought-resistant plants became more prevalent. Paleoindian peoples migrated toward water sources and adapted their hunting and gathering techniques in order to survive.

How is flint shaped into stone tools?



Extend Your Learning

New research constantly reshapes our knowledge of First Peoples’ migrations to the Americas. Here are a few examples of the most recent studies on the topic:

- Heather Pringle: [“Welcome to Beringia”](#)

- Arelio Marangoni, et. al.: [“*Homo sapiens* in the Americas”](#)
- E. James Dixon: [“How and When Did People First Come to North America?”](#)

Recovering First Peoples' Humanity

How do we know what we know about New Mexico's earliest inhabitants? The above narrative provides a general outline of archaeological knowledge of the [Pleistocene](#) (or "Old Stone" Age), and the changes that shaped the transition to the [Holocene](#), also described as the Archaic Period, which lasted between 9,500 [BCE](#) and about 500 BCE. We have learned much about the lifeways of the [First Peoples](#) of the Americas based on artifacts and fossil evidence.

Indigenous Americans have also kept the stories of their earliest ancestors and passed them down from generation to generation. Although Western academic tradition has long been critical of their limitations, native oral histories often correspond with archaeological evidence in interesting ways. They also depart from archaeological evidence and reflect more recent cultural thinking about the ways in which various indigenous groups relate to their own histories and the world around them. Oral histories, perhaps, are one of the clearest manifestations of the ways in which "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The oral traditions of Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache peoples (the three main indigenous groups that continue to inhabit New Mexico) add a human dimension to the types of information that can be gleaned from cold artifacts and ancient toolkits. Their entry into academic history is also evidence of the ways in which voices that have long been silenced by colonialism are now being recovered.

As with any historical source, we should keep in mind the limitations of oral histories. Historians traditionally shied away from oral traditions because of their fluid nature. Details of stories change each time they are told, and the events may be reworked to conform to present issues or conditions. Similar

concerns exist relative to some methodologies used by archaeologists to make sense of artifacts. In the mid- to late-twentieth century, archaeologists utilized direct-historical or upstreaming methods by which they drew parallels between current cultural practices of indigenous peoples and the presumed cultural practices of their ancestors. In other words, *upstreaming* was a process of overlaying present social and cultural details onto the ancient past. Some archaeologists and historians have been critical of both upstreaming and oral histories because they ignore change over time. Still, the strengths of these sources and methods add greatly to the realm of possible understandings of New Mexico's earliest people, so long as they are used carefully and critically. Additionally, we should note that indigenous peoples' conceptions of history differ from those of the academic world. The elements of oral histories that academics take as weaknesses are perceived as strengths by many natives. The living nature of their stories is precisely what makes them most powerful.

Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache peoples base their history on the tales of their peoples' points of origin. All other traditions build on and extend out from their [origin myths](#). The term *myth* carries different meanings, depending upon the context in which it is used. In everyday usage, it often refers to something that is a falsehood. Scholars tend to apply the term to stories or traditions that cannot be factually verified but that provide groups of people with unified identity and culture. Such stories reveal important truths about how people view themselves and their relationship to others, as well as to their physical and supernatural worlds. The recent work of Native American scholars critiques this interpretation by emphasizing the reality that academic studies of indigenous peoples tend to frame their history in ways that belittle tribal intellectual traditions. In other words, academic work tends not to understand native oral traditions on their own terms. By dubbing them "myths," native understandings of their own history are diminished.

As a corrective, some indigenous scholars suggest starting with the notion that most native peoples understand history not as events that

Ceramic Storytellers

are long past, but as occurrences and ideas that are constantly in dialogue with the present. From that perspective, the significance of oral tradition is its ability to transmit values and cultural identity. Oral histories have been a means through which marginalized groups of people have maintained their own stories, cultural and religious identities, and voices despite centuries of colonialism. The prevalence of Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache oral traditions speaks volumes to their cultural resilience. Also, the stories' continued centrality to indigenous societies illustrates their conception of time. Western societies think of time in a linear fashion. Different events can be plotted as a chronological progression on a time line. Many native groups, on the other hand, consider time as cyclical. For Pueblo peoples, for example, time "eternally returned. . . . Like the life contained within a seed that sprouts, bears fruit, and dies, only to be reborn again as a seed."¹

Our study of New Mexico's earliest peoples must draw from the stories of the region's native peoples. Pueblo peoples recount their history "from the beginning," through combinations of stories, songs, and dances. Their oral



Courtesy of The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Oral tradition and stories have long formed the basis of the histories and cultural identities of indigenous peoples. Those entrusted with the preservation and perpetuation of traditions through storytelling are typically held in great regard. Extend your knowledge:

- Read about the [Cochiti Pueblo artist](#) who made the first ceramic storytellers
- Read about [storytelling in Navajo culture](#)

traditions are revered performances held sacred by each separate Pueblo. Although Pueblo origin stories contain different details and ideas, they follow a similar pattern. Most of the traditions explain that the people emerged from beneath the earth at a place of origin called Shipapu. Either by way of trees or a lake, they ascended to the surface after years of guidance and counsel from their first mothers who were either themselves supernatural, or who had direct contact with supernatural forces. From among the earliest people, the mothers appointed war chiefs and others to lead the people. They also mediated between the people and the Great Spirit who guided the First Peoples through the sometimes arduous tasks of daily life.

All of the various origin stories speak of periods of migration between Shipapu and several other points before the people were led to their permanent homelands. This portion of the tale seems to correspond with archaeological evidence of migrations to [Mogollon](#) or [Ancestral Puebloan](#) sites (such as the SU (or “Shoe”) site, Chaco Canyon, and [Mesa Verde](#)) and then the migrations that came between 1150 and 1250 [CE](#) when those sites were abruptly abandoned. Along the way, the people built towns and weathered dangers and tribulations, including floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, droughts, and famines. The Great Spirit taught the people harmony with plants and animals in their environment. As they learned, they were able to construct great dwellings and they prospered. From time to time, crises occurred and the Great Spirit led them in smaller groups in different directions. In that way, different dialects and cultural traditions came to be.

ACOMA CREATION STORY – CREATION OF TWO FEMALES

Over the long course of time, each Pueblo group received its homeland. This development likely came over the two centuries following the abandonment of Ancestral Puebloan sites. The Great Spirit taught them first to harvest plants that grew spontaneously, and then to plant various crops. They also learned prayers and dances associated with bringing rainfall, fertile soil, and plentiful harvests. Such rituals were aligned with astronomical occurrences, such as the

movement of the sun and the moon. Pueblos' focus on raising corn, in particular, shaped their religious observances. Before leaving them, the Great Spirit organized Pueblo life and society. He appointed inside chiefs and medicine men to aid the war chief, and he admonished the people to obey the laws of nature and the decisions of their leaders. Through mothers and daughters, clan association and inheritance practices were traced. Men and women were to play complementary roles in Pueblo societies.

Pueblo Pottery Traditions



When understood on their own terms, these origin stories present not only an account of the peoples' own histories, but also the guiding values and ideals that have allowed the Pueblos to adapt and survive over time since the ancient past.

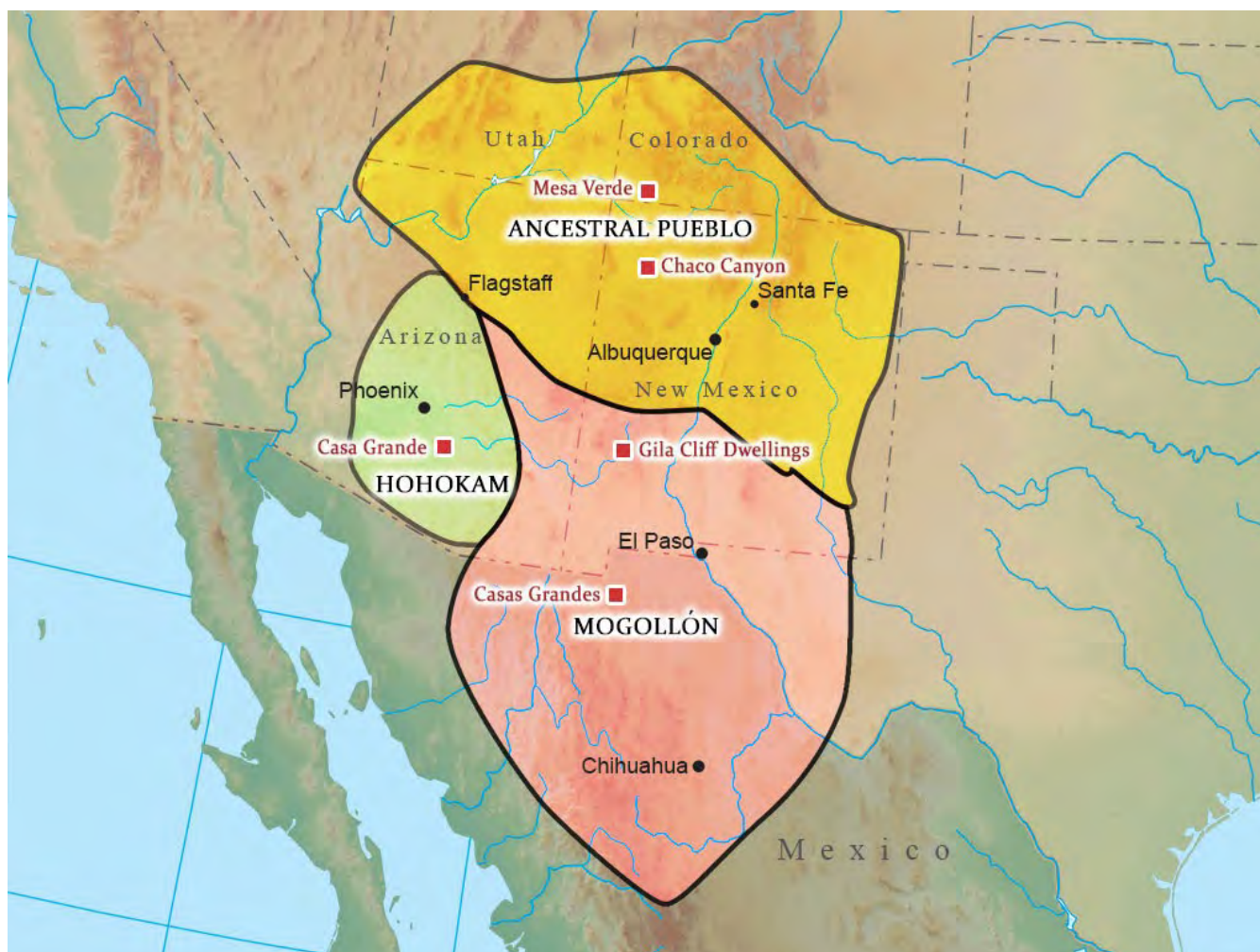
Ancient Culture Regions

As Jemez Pueblo historian [Joe S. Sando](#) has pointed out, anthropologists and historians have traced the historical geography of Pueblo peoples through their ceramics and artifacts, whereas the Pueblos themselves rely on “songs of various societies in tracing the places where their ancestors may have been.”² As other native scholars suggest, these two types of knowledge are not diametrically opposed nor mutually exclusive. Pueblo histories complement those of scholars, although the terms used by each tend to be different.

According to archaeological evidence, the Archaic Period (about 9,500 [BCE](#) to 500 BCE) was a time of creativity and adaptation to major changes in the region’s climate. During this period people continued to live as hunters and gatherers, but they hunted smaller game such as elk, deer, or rabbits. This adaptation required the use of smaller arrowheads and different types of tools. Plants were a more important part of subsistence as well. [Holocene](#) peoples gathered wild grains that were ground into flour with stone tools. Additionally, various groups of people became more locally rooted. The ranges over which they seasonally gathered plants and hunted were smaller. This change was a crucial step in the development of a sense of homeland and community, and the people recognized their place in a living world that sustained their families. In the case of the Archaic Period, archaeological evidence pinpoints dates and types of tools used. Patterns of migration, hunting and gathering are corroborated with different meaning in Pueblo oral traditions.

As early New Mexicans worked to make their lives from the land, subtle processes marked their gradual adaptation of more sedentary lifestyles based on agricultural production. By the first decades [CE](#), three distinct cultural

traditions coalesced in different parts of the region. The [Mogollon](#) cultural zone covered present-day southwestern New Mexico, southeastern Arizona, and northwestern Chihuahua. It was the southernmost of the three, and had the closest contact with the peoples of north-central Mexico. The [Hohokam](#) area centered on present-day Arizona and Sonora, and the [Ancestral Puebloan](#) culture was located in the four-corners region. As the people in each of these areas became more dependent on agricultural production for their livelihoods, they also built permanent dwellings and other structures that were used for religious observances. Their architectural remains present evidence about their geographic dispersion, as well as their cultural practices. The Hohokam were the ancestors of the Tohono O’odham peoples of the present-day Arizona-Sonora border area. The Mogollon and Ancestral Puebloan cultures were the forerunners of the various Pueblo peoples that inhabited the Rio Grande corridor by 1250-1300 CE.



Cultural Zones The Hohokam, Mogollon, and Ancestral Puebloan were the main cultural zones in ancient New Mexico.

These three different cultures reached their zenith at different points in time. Scholars highlight these particular ancient peoples because they all adopted sedentary agricultural lifestyles. Yet, other, smaller groups of people that did not depart from their nomadic lifeways inhabited in the region as well. Because the world's major literate civilizations and societies were built on the adaptation of sedentary living, most attention has traditionally been given to ancient societies that adopted such modes of life. As in our discussion of indigenous peoples' modes of thinking about their own history, it is also important for us to understand nomadic lifeways on their own terms. The factors that led early societies, whether in New Mexico or the Fertile Crescent, to adopt agriculture are varied and quite complex. The domestication of plants and animals was a long process filled with trial and error. For some peoples, the costs of such changes, as well as close adherence to their own worldviews, translated into a rejection of sedentary agriculture. [Athabaskan](#) peoples, the ancestors of Navajo and Apache groups that continue to inhabit New Mexico, are prime examples. Later, the Comanche people were also able to construct a powerful, nomadic empire on the plains of eastern New Mexico, west Texas, and the mountainous regions of northern Mexico.

It may not make sense to speak of a Neolithic "Revolution" as archaeologists and historians did in the past. In the context of world history, the Neolithic (or "New Stone Age") Revolution marked the transition to sedentary agriculture. In the Middle East, the Neolithic era spanned the period between about 10,000 BCE and 4,000 BCE. Despite the title "revolution," the transition to plant and animal domestication and sedentary lifestyles was a long, drawn-out process. Revolutions, on the other hand, tend to be shorter periods of rapid change. Even for societies that adopted sedentary life, the changes that comprised that shift took place over hundreds of years. Perhaps we could say that the period was a revolution in that it ushered in significant and lasting transformations for many human societies, but it is important to recognize the long-term nature of such adaptations.

In central Mexico, the cultivation of [maize](#), beans, and squash began



Aztec people harvesting maize, or corn, as depicted in the Florentine Codex.

From the work of Fray Bernadino de Sahagún –
Courtesy of Bilingual Press

arrival of Spaniards in the early 1500s.

As early as 2,500 BCE, farming techniques began to spread to the north and south throughout Mesoamerica. Around 1,500 BCE Mogollon peoples were the first in the New Mexico region to domesticate corn, beans, and squash due to their proximity to other groups that lived to their south in present-day Mexico. As was the case for their southern neighbors, Mogollon peoples did not adopt full-fledged agriculture or sedentary lifeways until over two millennia later. Not until about 600 CE did they inhabit villages on a year-round basis. Once they made the transition, they constructed pit homes that consisted of timber and dirt walls and roofs built on top of two-to-four foot deep holes. Clusters of pit houses made up their villages, which were typically located atop mesas.

sometime around 8,000 BCE. Squash was the earliest domesticated crop; corn and beans followed between 7,500 and 4,000 BCE. Tellingly, hunting and gathering lifeways continued for millennia in

[Mesoamerica](#) (the larger region that encompasses present-day Mexico and Central America). It was only in the second millennium BCE that village life appeared, due to the innovation of farming. Food surpluses allowed for larger groups of people to live in close proximity to one another and build social and cultural ties. During the formative period in Mesoamerica (beginning in about 1,000 BCE) Olmec peoples built cultural traditions that influenced societies along the gulf coast and Valley of Mexico until the

The development of ceramic pottery that replaced their earlier baskets was another hallmark of this period of transition.



Spread of [Maize](#) & Expansion through Trade Following the initial contact between Europeans and indigenous peoples of the Americas, new trade patterns allowed for the spread of maize beyond the Western Hemisphere. Other products and animals were also exchanged between the “Old” and “New” Worlds as well.

Mogollon peoples relied on irrigation to a lesser extent than the Hohokam or Ancestral Puebloans. They were also relatively isolated from outside intrusion due to the terrain of the Mogollon-Datil region that was (and is) comprised of volcanic mountains and mesas. Over time, their homes and villages became more complex. By the Mimbres Classic period, 950-1130 CE, they inhabited above ground, joined housing structures much like the later Pueblo peoples. Their villages also included a kiva structure used for ceremonial purposes. Their dead were buried in shallow pit-graves that were at times enclosed in adobe structures. At other times, their burial mounds were located outside of the villages near refuse heaps.

The SU, or “Shoe,” site near the northern extent of the Mogollon culture region (west-central New Mexico) was composed of forty houses. Its inhabitants, and those of the surrounding area, were the ancestors of the later Zuni, Acoma, and

Hopi peoples. Archaeologists have also spent much time studying the Mogollon along the Mimbres River near the present-day New Mexico-Chihuahua border. The largest Mogollon group was the Casas Grandes subset in present-day northwestern Chihuahua. From each of these groups, archaeologists have learned much about Mogollon cultures. Pottery, homes, and burial sites tell us much about how their people lived.

These types of evidence also allow researchers to form hypotheses about the types of social structures that existed throughout the Mogollon region. By tracing distinctive styles of pottery, archaeologists can pinpoint the extent of different culture areas as well as trade networks. For example, Mimbres black-on-white pottery featured distinctive geometric and figural designs that evolved over time. Additionally, the existence of prestige goods at burial sites allows archaeologists to trace trade items that came into each different village from outside the region. At the SU and Casas Grandes sites, for example, macaws, cages, and sea shells, among other items not native to the area, appear in burial mounds. These items not only suggest trade with peoples in coastal areas and further to the south, they also suggest hierarchical class structure. Most archaeologists support the theory that Mogollon and Ancestral Puebloan societies were built on social structures that were dominated by religious and economic elites.

Although past researchers referred to the northernmost of the three cultures as the Anasazi, the current trend is to refer to this group as Ancestral Puebloan. The term Anasazi was borrowed from the Navajo language. It may either mean “old ones,” or “enemies of our ancestors.” Due to its negative connotation and the idea that the term originated outside of Ancestral Puebloan languages themselves, the term Anasazi has generally fallen out of usage. Most Pueblo peoples object to the use of Anasazi, although there is not a general consensus about which term to use instead. Most have come to accept the more generic Ancestral Puebloan label, although a few, such as the Hopi, continue to use their own individual terms for their progenitors. English professor, rock climber, and author David Roberts, however, justifies his continued usage of Anasazi by explaining that the term “Puebloan” originated from Spanish

colonizers that were far more oppressive to the region's inhabitants than the Navajos. Because Pueblo peoples themselves object to the use of Anasazi, I use Ancestral Puebloan despite any connections it may have to the legacies of colonialism.

Ancestral Puebloan peoples were the last of the three ancient cultural groups to create unique traditions that set them apart from others and identified them as a group. Because they lived in the same general location for over 1,500 years, archaeologists have been able to learn quite a lot about them. In the first few centuries CE, they began the cultivation of corn, beans, and squash and they constructed villages of pit houses. As they adopted these new technologies and modes of living, their tool kits changed accordingly. To mill their corn, they used a flat stone called a [metate](#) and a grinding tool known as a [mano](#). From the corn meal, they made corn cakes—the staple of their diet. As with Hohokam and Mogollon peoples from whom they certainly borrowed, their pottery developed over time and was used in the cooking and storage of food.



Using a mano (Spanish for “hand”) and a large stone named a metate, corn was ground up before it was cooked.

Courtesy of Mesa Verde Museum Association



Atlatl demonstration by archaeologist Jose-Pierre A. Estrada at National Archaeology Day, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Courtesy of Melanie E Magdalena, Origins

Like other early societies, the Ancestral Puebloans' transition to fully sedentary lifeways was a long process. Researchers have divided their history into two general periods: Basketmaker and Pueblo eras. The Basketmaker period lasted from the earliest years CE through about 700 when most Ancestral Puebloan peoples began to permanently reside in the same place

Scientific Research Society

year round. During the Basketmaker period, the people were nomads who practiced hunting and gathering for their subsistence. They used a weapon called an [atlatl](#) (a [Nahua](#) term), which was a device that hurled spears. Toward the end of the era, they also began to use bows and arrows which they likely adopted through contact with people that lived to the north.

How do you hunt with an atlatl?



Between 700 and 1050, known as the Developmental Pueblo period, they built rows of houses above ground in U or L shaped configurations. At the center of each village was the kiva, a pit house constructed for religious purposes. Most kivas were round, although some were square in shape. A ladder extended through an opening in the mud-covered roof to provide access to the ceremonial chamber. Over time, kivas became increasingly more important to Ancestral Puebloan peoples, and their use was continued by their Pueblo descendants. Based on oral traditions, as well as more recent usage patterns by

Pueblos, archaeologists believe that kivas and ritual artifacts were the domain of men. Although women were excluded from kiva worship, they dominated home life and extended family relations. They constructed their houses and furnishings, and, in many cases, women oversaw planting and harvesting. There was a [matrilineal](#) culture in which inheritance passed from mother to daughter. Familial bonds were also traced through female bloodlines.



Kiva interior at Mesa Verde National Park.
Courtesy of Alex E. Proimos

The Great Pueblo period lasted from about 1050 to 1250, and it was a time of advancement in the types of masonry techniques that Ancestral Puebloans employed to construct homes and other structures. It was also a period of territorial expansion toward the south and southeast as Ancestral Puebloan culture reached its apex.

[Chaco Canyon](#) was the site of the most extensive apartment-house dwellings that were constructed during this time

Was Casa Rinconada
an intentional solstice

frame. Work on [Pueblo Bonito](#) began around 900, although final additions were not completed until 1130. It stood four or five stories tall with over 650 plastered rooms that housed as many as 1200 people. The complex also included dozens of kivas and other ceremonial artifacts. During the period between 1020 and 1120, Chaco Canyon contained sixteen different settlements that housed between 5,000 and 6,000 people. Pueblo Bonito's great house connected to other housing structures in the canyon by a line of sight that facilitated rapid communication. Various structures were also aligned with the sun and stars and marked the phases of the moon, leading archaeologists to conclude that their inhabitants possessed a complex understanding of the connections between astronomical phenomena, the cycles of the seasons, and the passing of time.

marker in Chaco Canyon?



Chaco Canyon



An extensive road network branched out from Chaco Canyon toward other Ancestral Puebloan sites in the region and beyond. Chacoan roads ranged between ten to thirty feet in width and they included stairways where necessary to provide access to the region's cliffs and mesas. Some of these roads connected to [Mesa Verde](#), located in southwestern Colorado, and [Canyon de Chelly](#), in eastern Arizona, which contained structures that were equal to Pueblo Bonito in grandeur. All of these major sites contained advanced

irrigation systems that not only tapped into local, seasonal water flows, but that also collected rainfall. Irrigation agriculture provided Ancestral Puebloan peoples with time to dedicate to religious, cultural, and social observances because it required less of their time than full-time hunting and gathering. Hunting and gathering continued to provide important supplemental nutrition and variety to their diet, however.

Exploring Mesa Verde



Clif Palace

This massive anomalous structure at Mesa Verde National Park contains 150 rooms and 23 kivas. It is but one of the 600 cliff dwellings within the park. About three-fourths of the structures at

Religious observances connected every aspect of day-to-day life. Ancestral Puebloans spent much of their time creating pottery; each group created unique shapes and designs that reflected their efforts to connect to spiritual forces all around them in the landscape and the skies. They also covered the walls of their kivas with ceremonial murals, wove clothing and

Mesa Verde are comprised of five rooms or fewer, illustrating the massive size of Cliff Palace, which was probably home to about one hundred individuals.



Courtesy of Lorax

other textiles, and fashioned turquoise jewelry. Prestige goods, such as parrots and macaws, came to the region by way of trade networks that extended to central Mexico. Spiritual concerns defined the social order. Medicine men, or shamans, played a vital role as intermediaries with supernatural powers that provided rain, fertility, protection from enemies, and other life-giving elements to the people. Due to their social importance, medicine men held great respect and authority. They controlled food and resource surpluses that proved crucial

to the continuation of Chacoan culture during times of drought and famine. They also developed a ritual calendar that marked the movements of the sun, moon, and stars. Archaeological and traditional evidence suggests that the Ancestral Puebloan society was highly stratified, with religious figures and war chiefs holding authority over others.

A central question for both the Ancestral Puebloan and Mogollon culture regions is how and why they were abandoned. Both seem to have entered a period of decline by the 1100s, but scholars posit different reasons for their abandonment. For Mogollon peoples, migration from Hohokam areas and neighboring nomadic groups began to redirect cultural practices by about 800. Drought and other climatic changes also placed pressure on Mogollon peoples' abilities to provide enough food and water for all. Although researchers formerly argued that migration negatively impacted Mogollon culture, effectively bringing it to an end by introducing new practices and rituals, more recent studies suggest that outsiders may have brought new strategies that aided Mogollon peoples as they themselves migrated to new areas in order to adapt and survive.

Sometime around 1250 Ancestral Puebloan sites at Chaco Canyon, Mesa Verde, and Canyon de Chelly were abandoned. Scholars have marveled at evidence suggesting that the abandonment occurred in “a rather orderly fashion at a point of considerable technological development.”³ If such was the case, why would these people walk away from their homes? Archaeologists initially thought that Athabaskan invaders from the north had forced the flight. Although conflict and raids may have been a contributing factor, most scholars support the theory that sustained climate change forced Ancestral Puebloans to leave. Additionally, scholars continue to debate the time of Athabaskan arrival in the region. Some argue that they did not enter the Southwest until just prior to the arrival of the Coronado expedition in 1540.



White House Ruin in Canyon de Chelly, an Ancestral Pueblo site that remains sacred to the Navajo people. Navajos sought refuge here at various points in their history: in 1805 to evade the campaign of Spanish Governor Antonio [Narbona](#), and again in 1863 to hold out against Col. [Christopher “Kit” Carson](#)’s campaign to relocate them to the [Bosque Redondo](#).

Courtesy of Cacophony

A cycle of droughts plagued the four-corners region between 1100 and 1300. The first drought arrived around 1090, causing crops in the fields to dry up.

Rain rebounded for a short time about a decade later, but a longer drought pattern set in by 1130 or so. Drought patterns continued over the next couple of centuries. In 1276, for example, a sustained twenty-three-year drought began. Certainly such conditions caused conflict and placed stress on people's ability to support themselves in the dry environment. Internal conflicts and divisions may have also complicated matters.

According to Pueblo oral traditions, the people abandoned their dwellings when the serpent, their deity of rain and fertility, unexpectedly disappeared one evening. Without the serpent, the Ancestral Puebloans felt helpless to survive. In response, they gathered their possessions and followed the trail of the serpent to a riverbank, where they began to build new homes. Other oral histories explain that the long drought of the twelfth century was a result of Mother Earth tearing apart. As a result, they began another series of migrations that eventually led them, in smaller groups, to the locations they inhabited when the Spaniards arrived. For Pueblos, the transition was part of their history told "from the beginning." Chaco Canyon and other Ancestral Pueblo sites continue to hold sacred significance for most Pueblo peoples today.

Development of Pueblo Society

Migrations away from the centers of [Mogollon](#) and [Ancestral Puebloan](#) culture led the people, in smaller groups, to the river systems that feed the Rio Grande. Because out-migrations occurred over time and in waves, latecomers found that the river zones were already inhabited. Their arrival led to overcrowding in a few cases. As the migrants formed new villages with the native inhabitants of their chosen sites of refuge, new dialects, cultures, and artistic forms began to develop. Zuni culture coalesced along the Zuni River, [Acoma Pueblo](#) was founded near the Rio San José and Rio Puerco, and dozens of other villages took shape within the Rio Grande corridor itself. In sum, the migration left New Mexico with two major population zones: one in the Rio Grande Valley and another along an east-west axis that connected Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi villages.

Examples of Southwest Pottery Traditions



Archaeologists refer to the transitional time between 1250 and 1400 as the Rio Grande Classic Period. Some have considered this an era in which Puebloan peoples moved backward rather than forward. Yet, it is more

accurately viewed as a time of adaptation. Once again, the people began to build housing structures, although they were smaller in scale than the great houses at Chaco Canyon and [Mesa Verde](#). The structures that are today preserved at [Bandelier National Monument](#) and the [Puyé Cliff Dwellings](#) are well-known examples. At these sites, towns were laid out around a central plaza and a system of streets. This type of organization was quite different than the earlier Ancestral Puebloan habitations. Another important change was that open courtyards housed each Pueblo's kiva. Some of these locations were abandoned in the early 1400s in favor of villages nearer to the Rio Grande.

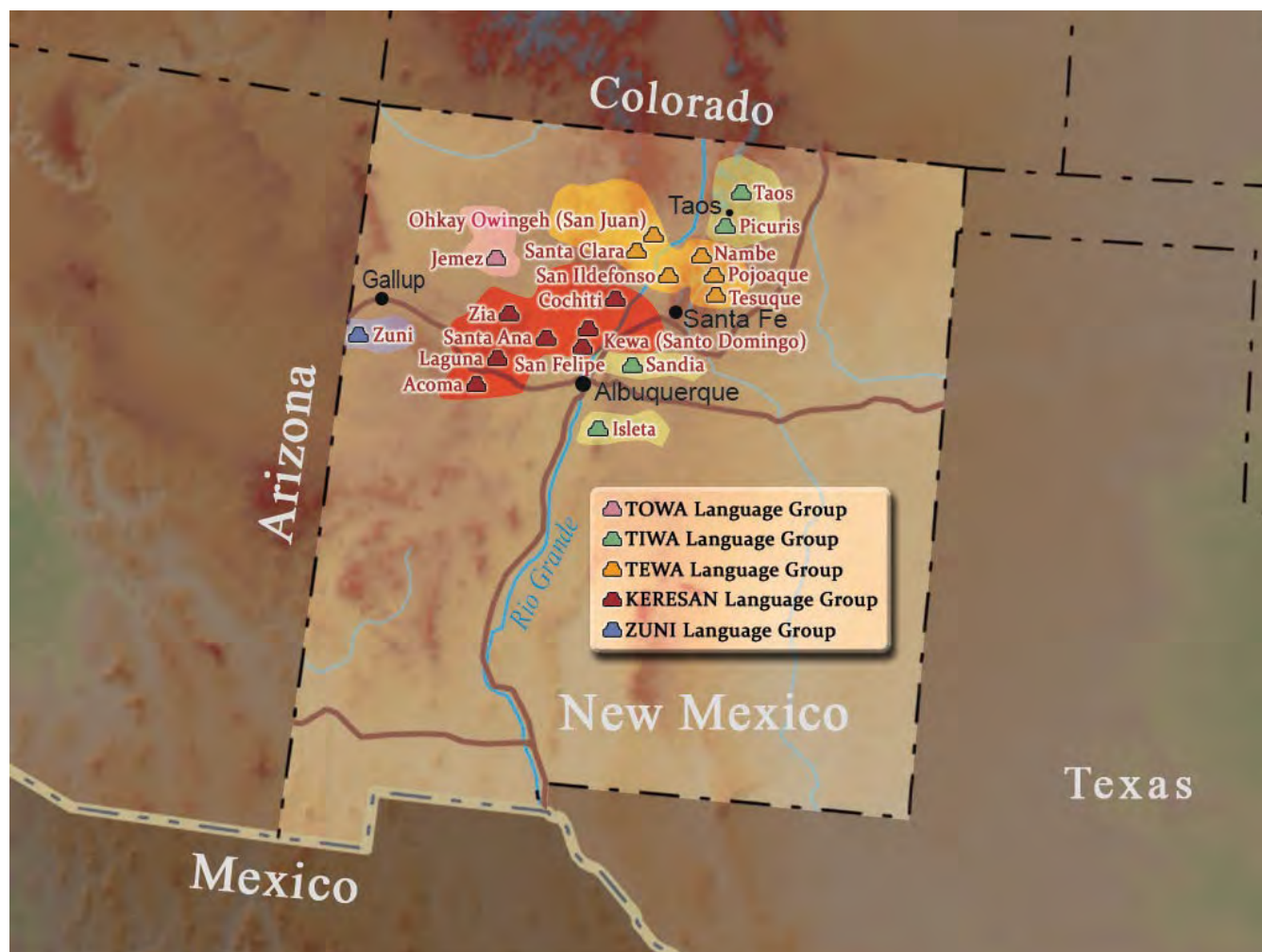


Ruins of Pueblo housing sites dating back to about 1150 [CE](#) are preserved today at Bandelier National Monument on the Pajarito Plateau. Following the abandonment of their former homesites, like Chaco Canyon, the Pajarito Plateau was among the places where the Ancestral Puebloans resettled.

Photograph by Jacob Rus

Pueblo cultures hit a peak between 1400 and 1530, a period that has been dubbed the Pueblo Golden Age. As always, we must ask the question of how we know what we know about the way in which Pueblo societies took shape during this time frame. In addition to archaeological and oral history evidence, Spanish accounts add to our knowledge of the Pueblo Golden Age. Those that accompanied the Coronado Expedition were fascinated with the people they found in New Mexico, but they were unable to accept or understand Pueblos' lifeways on their own terms. Spanish sources, then, must be read with a critical eye. Their biases and feelings of cultural superiority color the ways in which

they wrote of New Mexico's [First Peoples](#). If approached skeptically, however, Spanish accounts add texture to our understanding of early Pueblo peoples.



Pueblo Language Groups Although the Spaniards referred collectively to the peoples along the Rio Grande as “Pueblos,” the various Pueblo people held distinct identities and spoke variations of three major language groups.

When the first Europeans arrived in New Mexico, they found between seventy-five and eighty different towns that covered an area from the Piro villages of the middle Rio Grande to Taos in the north, and the Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi villages to the west and [Cicuye](#) (Pecos Pueblo) to the east. They were impressed that these people had organized themselves into towns based on agricultural production. For that reason, they referred to the people and their towns alike as Pueblos (the Spanish word for towns). The Europeans could relate to sedentary patterns of living, and settled peoples were easiest for them to subdue. Nomadic peoples, on the other hand, puzzled them and were much harder to conquer. The Pueblos, then, were in many ways a welcome sight, despite their failure to

measure up to Spanish dreams of grandeur and wealth.

Despite the single label placed upon New Mexico's indigenous peoples, they were not a unified group. The nineteen Pueblos of present-day New Mexico provide clues about the ways in which their ancestors' languages and cultures developed. Although all of the Pueblo peoples share similar ways of life, beliefs, customs, philosophies, and a common economy, they "have an independence similar to that of nations."⁴ Each Pueblo continues to project its own unique identity and distinctive features. One of the most significant differences between the Pueblos is their spoken language. The inhabitants of the nineteen remaining Pueblos speak distinct dialects that fall within three major linguistic groups. The [Zuni language](#) is unique to the people of the same name. It is considered a language isolate, meaning that it is unrelated to any other known language. [Keresan](#) (or Keres) is spoken by the Acoma, Cochiti, [Laguna](#), San Felipe, Santa Ana, Santo Domingo, and Zia peoples with little variation in dialect. The [Tanoan](#) language group includes three distinct dialects: Tiwa, Tewa, and Towa. Tiwa is spoken at Isleta, Picuris, Sandia, and Taos. Tewa is spoken at Nambe, Pojoaque, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, San Juan, and Tesuque. Towa is unique to the Jemez Pueblo.

Pueblo Languages

WITH CHRISTINE SIMS, PH.D.



Due to the diversity of languages spoken in the region, Pueblo peoples were multilingual prior to and following Spanish contact. The Hopi people were also considered to be part of the Pueblo world, although they are not typically included with New Mexico's Pueblos today. They belong to a different jurisdiction under U.S. Federal Law and their homes lay far to the west. They have traditionally followed their own unique cultural and social trajectory due to their isolation from other Pueblo peoples. Such distance, however, does not mean that Hopis remained (or remain) completely apart from the others. The group of Hopis known as the Tewas of First Pueblo were originally Tano people that fled from Galisteo and San [Cristóbal](#) following the return of the Spaniards in 1693.

The names of contemporary Pueblos reflect the extent to which we continue to view them through a Spanish lens.

In accordance with their desire to conquer and colonize New Mexico and its peoples, the Spaniards changed the names of many Pueblos, and their individual people, to

Spanish/Christian ones. Several of the Pueblos retain the names that were

placed on them by the colonizers. Part of the reason for that trend, despite the fact that Spain has not officially held sway over New Mexico since 1821, is the Pueblo peoples' adoption of their Catholic patron saints. Most continue to celebrate their saint's day each year with dances, processions, and other festivities. These feast day commemorations combine traditional rites and rituals with the honor given to Catholic saints—Pueblos do not consider the two religious systems to be mutually exclusive.

Saints of the Pueblos

Check out the [23 wooden retablo collection](#) created by [santero](#) Dr. Charles M. Carrillo of the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico and the 4 lost Pueblos.

In spite of the continuation of hybrid religious and cultural practices, several Pueblos have reinstated their traditional names for themselves in recent years. The people of San Juan officially changed the name of their Pueblo to the traditional name, Ohkay Owingeh, in 2005. In 2009, Santo Domingo Pueblo returned its name to Kewa. Others, such as San Felipe and Jemez publicly retain the names imposed upon them, although Pueblo members use the traditional names, Katishtya and Walatowa, respectively. The reassertion of their former names illustrates the peoples' long cultural and linguistic resilience over centuries of colonization and their desire for autonomy and self-determination.

Pueblo traditions provide explanations of the general trajectory of their migrations following the decline of Chaco and Mesa Verde. Tanoan peoples lived at Mesa Verde and the surrounding area before relocating along the Rio Grande Corridor. The Keresans likely arrived in the region later than the Tanoans. Keresans trace their lineage back to Chaco Canyon and the area near present-day Aztec and Bloomfield. The Bear Cult and the Corn Dance, both celebrated by a majority of Pueblo peoples today during their feast days, originated with the Keresan people. Hopi people refer to their ancestors as the Hisatsinom. They have ancestral ties to both Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon, and their rites of the Sun Clan have passed into usage by most other Pueblos. Intermarriage was the main vehicle through which the sharing of ceremonies and clans is believed to have taken place.

Come From Women

WITH MATTHEW MARTINEZ, PH.D.



The environment facilitated the growth of culture and artistic production during the Pueblo Golden Age. Rain was plentiful and climatic conditions contributed to prosperity and overall political stability. At the apex of the Golden Age, there may have been as many as 150 large Pueblos with between 150,000 and 250,000 inhabitants (estimates vary widely). Near the end of the era, during the 1520s, drought returned. Shortly thereafter, the Coronado expedition disrupted life in the region.

Some of the largest Pueblos at the time of contact were Cicuye (Pecos), [Kuaua](#) (meaning “evergreen” in Tiwa), and [Sapawe](#). Cicuye was notable because it was the site of annual trade fairs that brought people from the plains into the economic networks of Pueblo peoples. The Pueblo itself included 1,020 ground-floor masonry rooms and just over 2,000 inhabitants. Kuaua was located to the north of present-day Bernalillo. Today, it is preserved as the [Coronado State Monument](#). During the Golden Age, Kuaua was one of the largest Pueblo complexes with about 1,200 ground-floor rooms arranged in a rough L-shape and many more residents than Cicuye. Each of the several plazas contained a kiva with intricately painted walls. Sapawe was the largest of the Pueblos at the time of contact. It contained 2,500 ground-floor rooms with between 10 and 20 large kivas. Its numerous inhabitants practiced both irrigated and dry farming in connection with rituals to invite rain and mark the cycles of the seasons.

As with their progenitors, religious observances were central to Pueblo daily life. The two were (and are) so tightly integrated that Pueblo languages have no unique word that translates to “religion.” Yet, since the time of Spanish contact Pueblo ritual traditions have been referred to as religion. Their beliefs and rites

define relations to the natural world and to other humans. Various societies hold specific responsibilities for rituals that relate to weather, fertility, curing, and hunting, among other issues. The sun and the moon were manifestations of Pueblo deities, and clouds, thunder, and wind represented spirits. In order to maintain harmony with the environment and the cosmos, different ceremonies and rituals were required at different times of the year. Summer rites focused on the cultivation of crops, including ceremonies to provide rain and fertility. In the winter months, ceremonies shifted to provide for such concerns as hunting, healing, or war.

In many Pueblos masked dancers representing [kachinas](#) played a central role in ritual performances. [Kachinas](#) were (and are) regarded as the spirits of the peoples' ancestors. Scholars trace the element of [kachina](#) worship to the peoples of present-day Sonora. In the 1300s, trade and other contacts introduced the practice to the Pueblo world and it was adapted to each individual group. As spiritual beings, kachinas possessed power to control the weather. They could bring rain, fertility, good health, harmony, and general well-being. Pueblo people communicated with kachinas by means of ritual dances, many of which were held in the sacred kivas. Additionally, such ceremonies served as a link to unite Pueblo peoples across family, clan, and even linguistic groups.

Kachinas



In most Pueblos, the moiety was the most important social structure. The term moiety indicates half, or either of two fairly equal parts, that combine to make up a whole. Most Pueblos considered the world around them in terms of dualities. Unlike western conceptions of dichotomous relationships that define the two parts in opposition to one another, however, Pueblo moieties were complimentary. Although they signified difference, they represented equal parts. Without one or the other, their world, social relations, administrative system, ritual calendar, or family life, among many other types of relationships, would be incomplete.

Most Pueblos' ritual life was organized into a summer and winter moiety, each one responsible for the ceremonies that fell during its part of the year. Summer moieties directed their efforts toward planting and harvesting rituals, while their counterparts focused on hunting and, at times, warfare and healing. The two were necessary to provide a complete diet for the Pueblo at large. To aid each moiety in carrying out its specific responsibilities, every Pueblo maintained separate religious chambers for each. The summer group accessed the squash chamber and the winter moiety used the turquoise chamber where they planned ceremonies and stored important religious artifacts, such as kachina masks.

In similar fashion, political and social organization for each Pueblo was divided in two. To preside over political affairs, inside and outside chiefs shared responsibilities. The inside chief was the most influential male and he was regarded as the key religious leader. He presided over political and religious life for the



Although they have become popular tourist souvenirs, kachina figurines represent the ancestor spirits of Pueblo peoples. Each figure represents a high level of precision and artistry.

Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum

blended together to complete the whole. As in the other cases, social relations were equally natural and supernatural, there was no dividing line. Plant, animal, and human life was considered in similar terms. Just as rain came together with seeds and soil to germinate crops, men and women came together to procreate and continue the Pueblo life cycle. In all cases, both were necessary to maintain life. One did not dominate the other. When things like rain or fertility were lacking, the people believed that they had done something to displease the gods. Ritual and ceremony were vital in their efforts to restore harmony.

Women played certain roles in Pueblo social and family life. It was through the women that the Pueblos were organized into clans that were often

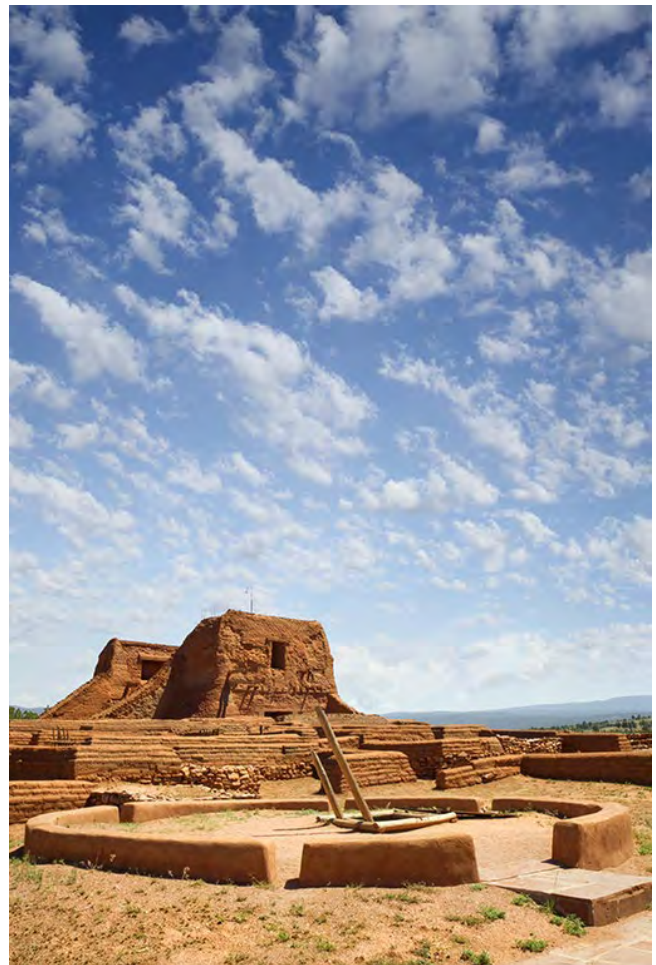
people of the Pueblo during times of peace. The outside chief oversaw relations with other peoples and was also the war leader. It was his responsibility to oversee all affairs that concerned relations with people outside the Pueblo, whether spiritual or human, peaceful or hostile.

In social affairs, the Pueblo was again composed of two equal parts that

both [matrilineal](#) and [matrilocal](#). Clan lineage was traced through the women's line. Inheritance and family identity was passed down from mother to daughter. When a couple married, the man went to live with his wife's extended family group and he became associated with her clan. Upon birth, male children's clan identity was determined by their mothers, not their fathers. Men's strongest allegiances, therefore, were to their mothers', and then wives', kinship groups. Women controlled family, home, seeds, farm tools, lands, and certain spirit fetishes, or cults. Children were also considered to belong to their mothers. [Matrilineal](#)

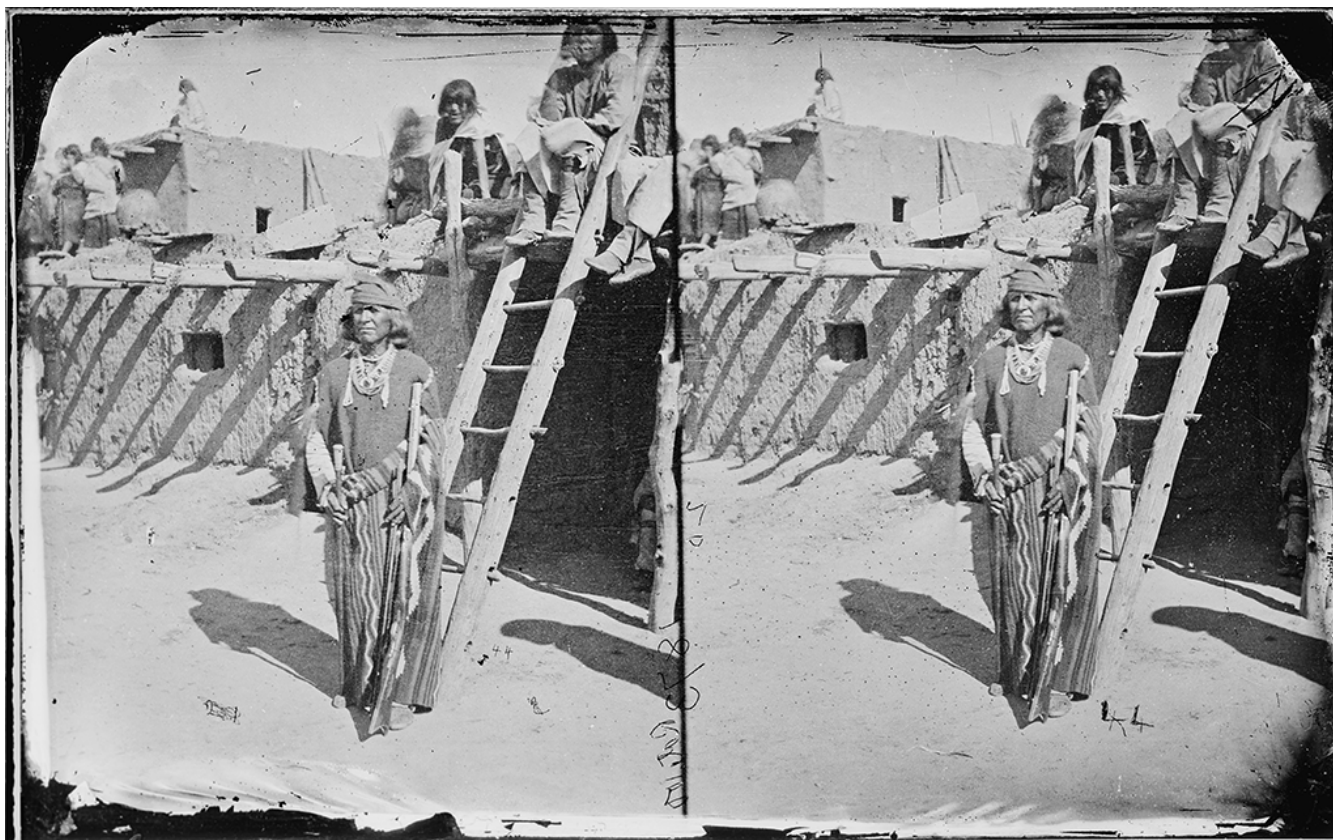
and matrilocal systems were common in western and Keres Pueblos, while eastern and Tanoan Pueblos were organized along patrilineal lines.

As noted in the cases of medicine men and chiefs, men generally controlled political and religious affairs that impacted the Pueblo across clan or kinship lines. They oversaw warfare, rites, ceremonies, dances, the ritual calendar, and resolved conflicts. Men owned the kivas, masks, and altars. Through them, the people communicated with the spirits. Despite the gendered division of responsibilities, gender relations were by-and-large equitable, something that greatly puzzled the Spanish. Men needed women for a place to live and for familial survival. Likewise, women needed men in order to bear children, help with agricultural labor, and for ritual concerns. Gender and social divisions divided according to the moiety concept, then, were highly equitable.



The Mission Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles de Porciúncula de los Pecos was founded c. 1619 as a colonial Spanish mission at Pecos Pueblo.

Courtesy of powerofforever

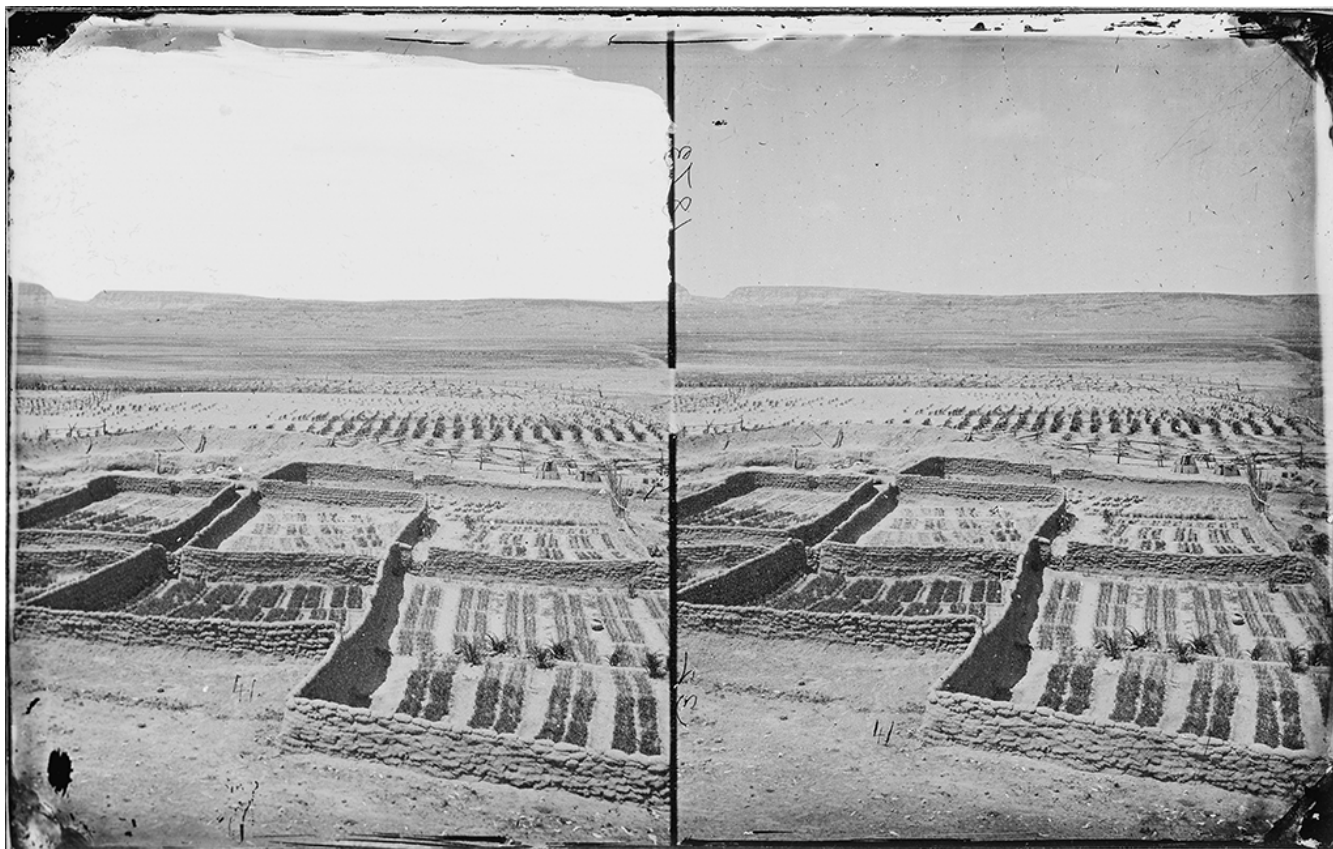


This is a photograph of a war chief among the Zuni people, taken in 1873.
Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Additionally, curing, medicine, and war societies played important roles in the organization of Pueblo ritual and social life. Such societies also reflected moiety patterns. Each specific society helped to develop and transfer cultural and religious practices from one generation to the next. They maintained and promoted blending between the supernatural and physical worlds, and they served to create bonds across clan lines and even between different villages from time to time.

Unlike the earlier, stratified social organization that existed among many Ancestral Puebloan and Mogollon peoples, Pueblo life was strongly egalitarian. There were no hereditary elites, no inherited positions, and roles of responsibility were not tied to wealth. Inside and outside chiefs were selected through various means, including messages from the gods, but typically those who had proven themselves through success in war or religious rites were chosen as leaders.

General patterns of Pueblo land use relied first and foremost on ceremonies that evoked rain from the skies. Village lands were usually composed of tracts that ran from river banks up into hills or mountains. Each village, therefore, encompassed varying microclimates that offered the means of cultivating a variety of different crops, although corn, beans, and squash remained the staples of the Pueblo diet. Flat corn cakes supplemented with beans, squash, and wild game were most frequently consumed. Pueblo peoples generally hunted more wild game, including elk, deer, and bison, than their ancestors. By the Golden Age, some also grew cotton and domesticated turkeys and dogs, and they traded meat, vegetables, pottery, and textiles with nomadic groups in the region.



This photo, taken in 1873, shows the fields under cultivation near Zuni, New Mexico.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Many Pueblos' songs and ritual dances make references to sacred places in the landscape. The Hopis pay regard to a deity on San Francisco Peak, near Flagstaff, Arizona. Similarly, Acoma people pay homage to a god on Mount Taylor, north of their Pueblo. Jemez songs [recall](#) Stone Lake in the present-day Jicarilla Apache Reservation, and the Taos people regard Blue Lake, in the

mountains above their Pueblo, as a sacred site. Pueblos lost access to much of their sacred lands as new cycles of conquest granted legal power over [land tenure](#) in the hands of Spain, Mexico, and then the United States. Recently, many Pueblos have fought to regain access to sacred sites. The Jemez people, for example, have sustained a legal battle in recent years that petitions the return of the Valles Caldera preserve to their authority. Such struggles are still unresolved.

This general sketch of Pueblo history in the years before Spanish colonialism does not directly apply to all of the varied Pueblo peoples. Although the practices and ideals of individual Pueblos may not always fit the patterns that we've explored, our discussion does outline the general lifeways and historical progression of most. In order to explore the history of each individual Pueblo in specific detail, this book would necessarily be much longer.

Athabaskan Peoples

Relations with [Athabaskan](#) migrants also shaped the course of New Mexico's histories in the years before the arrival of the Spanish. The Athabaskans were the ancestors of the modern Navajo and Apache peoples, and they fanned out across the region in smaller bands after their initial arrival. As mentioned above, scholars continue to debate the exact time frame in which they came to New Mexico. The term *Athabaskan* refers to the linguistic group from which these people descended. One school of thought maintains that the migrants left their former homes in present-day western Canada in the 1200s, arriving in the Puebloan region by mid-century. Others argue that their arrival came much later, on the eve of Spanish contact.

Whatever the case, three Athabaskan tribes remain in the state today: the Navajo, the Mescalero Apache, and the Jicarilla Apache. The Chiricahua Apache people lived in the southwestern corner of the state until they were forcibly removed from their homeland during the Apache Wars of the late nineteenth century. Headman [Geronimo](#) surrendered to combined U.S and Mexican forces in the Chihuahua sierra in 1886. He and those that accompanied him were removed to a reservation in Florida. Later, the Chiricahua people were moved to [Fort Sill](#), Oklahoma. In the early twentieth century most were able to move to the Mescalero Agency in south-central New Mexico. Never again, however, did the Chiricahua people reclaim their homeland. Despite sustained repression and historical hardships, the other Apache bands as well as the Navajo people count themselves lucky to have retained at least a piece of the lands bestowed upon them by the Creator.

Just as the Pueblos, Navajos and Apaches count their history “from the

beginning.” To the [Diné](#), the time of their arrival in their homeland is not the most important question to be answered. Instead, it is most significant that the [Dinétaah](#) (the traditional Navajo homeland) was the sacred place in which Changing Woman (Asdzáá Nádleehí) was born. Like many other indigenous origin stories, that of the Navajos is a tale of migrations. According to tradition, First Man and First Woman were placed in the Dinétaah when they arrived in this world, the Fourth World or the Glittering World. Their homeland was defined by six mountains: Blanca Peak (Sis Naajiní, white) in the east, Mount Taylor (Tsoodzil, turquoise) in the south, San Francisco Peaks (Dook’o’ooskíid, yellow) in the west, Mount Hesperus (Dibe Nitsaa, black) in the north, Huerfano Mountain (Dzil Na’oodilii) in the center, and Gobernador Knob (Ch’ool’í’í) to the east of center. The four mountains on the edges were assigned particular colors and associated with specific seasons. They also defined the edges of the Dinétaah.

After the arrival of First Man and First Woman, their world was shaped through ceremonies in which the first [hogan](#) was built, the first sweat bath taken, seasons established, day and night set apart, stars placed in the sky, and sun and moon created. Changing Woman was born atop Gobernador Knob, and she matured to puberty in just a few days. Through her the first puberty ceremony (Kinaaldá) was introduced, and she gave birth to twin boys known as Born for Water (Tóbájishchíní) and Enemy Slayer (Nayéé Neizghání). The boys received weapons from their father, the Sun Bearer, to aid them in their battles against the monsters that afflicted the people. Together, they defeated One Walking Giant (Ye’iitsoh Ła’í Neizghání). His dried blood can still be seen in the form of the lava formations near Mount Taylor. The twins also killed the Monster Bird that lived at Shiprock.



The rock formation Shiprock is known in Navajo as “Tsé Bit’a’i” meaning “rock with wings.” It plays an important role in Navajo religion, mythology, and tradition. The cultural and religious significance of the rock warns people to keep their distance because terrible things happen to anyone at the peak.

Courtesy of Transity

To help the Diné in their day-to-day lives, Changing Woman or the twins (traditions vary) introduced livestock and horses that corresponded to the four directional colors and sacred mountains. Changing Woman also instituted the [matrilineal](#) clan system. Eventually, sixty different clans came into being with nearly one-third connected to people of Puebloan lineage. At various points in time following the Spanish conquest, different Pueblo peoples fled to find refuge with the Navajos. Such was especially the case in the 1690s just after [Diego de Vargas](#)’ Reconquest. The tales of Changing Woman, Born for Water, and Enemy Slayer set the tone for Navajo history and culture. Each played an important role in establishing Diné lifeways and worldview. The twins’ various achievements set the pattern for Navajo healing and protection rites. Together, the stories of how mothers and sons related to each other set the standard for

how the Diné should behave and pattern their lives.⁵

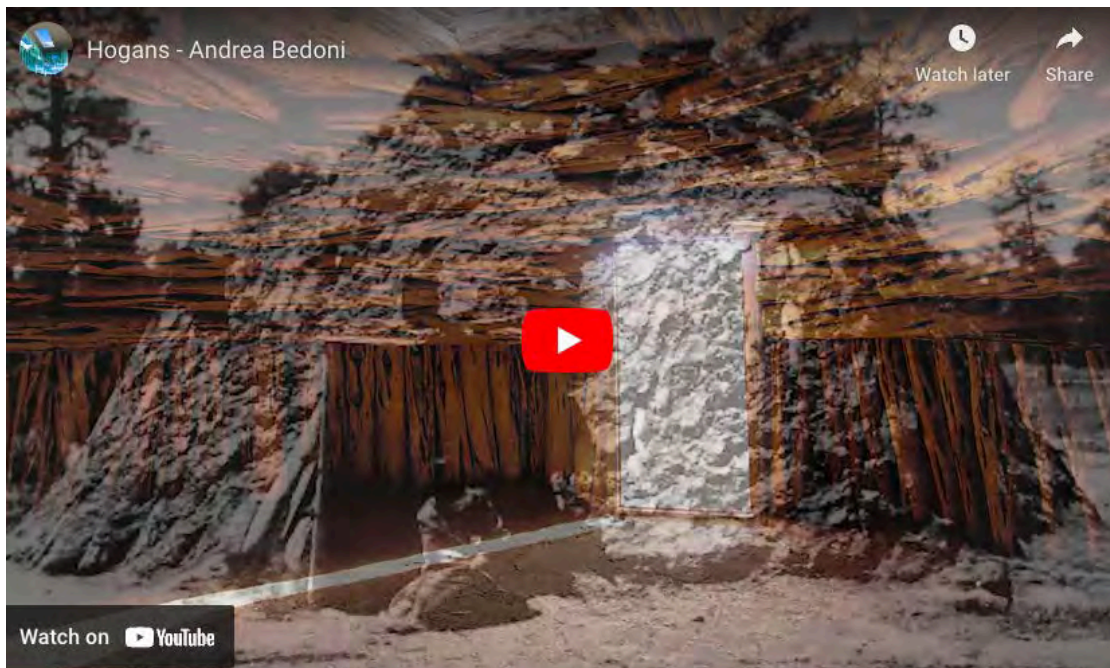
The extent to which Navajo people were “cultural borrowers” has been one of the more lively points of debate between scholars and Diné people themselves in recent years. The prevailing interpretation of Navajo history has been that they arrived in the Southwest as a group of people that shared a common tongue, but that possessed no other defining cultural traits. Their culture grew out of their interactions with other people, especially the Pueblos. Such narratives cast the Diné as “nomadic vagabonds” that sapped the energy and patience of the people that already understood how to survive in the region.

By reading Navajo traditions together with anthropological and archaeological evidence, a sharper picture of cultural sharing and adaptation comes into view. From this angle, Athabaskans were not just marauders that forced Ancestral Puebloans from their great sites. Instead, it seems most likely that they lived alongside the people in Chaco Canyon, [Mesa Verde](#), the Aztec ruins, and [Canyon de Chelly](#). Such findings lend more credence to the idea that the Athabaskans arrived in the 1200s, if not even a little sooner. Another possibility is that the peoples that abandoned the [Ancestral Puebloan](#) sites migrated toward Navajo lands, as well as toward the Rio Grande. Within the past couple of decades, officials at Chaco Canyon National Historic Park and Mesa Verde National Park have acknowledged these connections and have begun to consult the Diné along with Pueblo peoples regarding the proper handling of Ancestral Puebloan artifacts. Navajos brought their own unique culture with them to the Dinétah, and they shared their knowledge with others that joined them. Their culture morphed over time as new people arrived and other ideas incorporated. Such has been the case with all human societies over the course of history.

When the first Athabaskan migrants arrived in the New Mexico region, they practiced nomadic lifeways. Those who became Diné traded hides and jerky with Puebloans in exchange for cotton cloth and vegetables. Eventually, they adopted semi-nomadic or [pastoral](#) lifeways. They continued to migrate with their animals based on the seasons. After Spanish contact, livestock, especially sheep, further solidified Navajo reliance on this way of life. Families

constructed summer and winter hogans that facilitated their pastoralism. Their early hogans consisted of three upright posts that were the frame that held up horizontally placed logs that were then plastered with mud. Extended families constructed their hogans near one another, but Navajos did not consider such groupings to be villages because they typically did not include anyone outside of the clan.

Hogan as the Home



Diné people augmented their pastoral lifestyle with agricultural production. Through trade with Puebloans, they acquired the seeds and knowledge to cultivate corn, beans, and squash. Like the other inhabitants of the region, their principal crop was corn. Indeed, the name “Navajo” may have derived from a Tewa word that translates to “arroyo of the cultivated fields.” Pueblo-Diné relations were normally peaceful, but differences in their ways of conceptualizing territorial claims created some tension. Navajos did not adhere to the idea of prior appropriation, or the concept that the people who arrived first in an area had the strongest claim to that area’s resources. Instead, they emphasized the beneficial use of land. They never accepted Pueblo claims on

areas that they had simply visited once or twice in order to acquire items like salt or eagle feathers. Such differences in understanding created conflicts between the Diné and Pueblo groups from time to time.

Like the Pueblos, Navajos did not distinguish between the religious and the secular. Spiritual power was manifested in all aspects of daily life. They recognized the need to pray in order to maintain harmony with their environment. Prayers, ceremonies, and dances allowed them to call upon supernatural aid in their fields, while hunting, and when at war. Medicine men presided over Diné ceremonies for healing, fertility, rainfall, and warfare. Colorful sand paintings created from memory were a crucial part of healing ceremonies. Pigment for the paintings was obtained through grinding local plants and minerals, and the medicine man placed the dry pigments on the floor of the hogan of the sick person. Using the pigments and dirt, he created depictions of scenes from Diné traditions that ranged between two to twenty feet in width. The sand painting was tailored to the specific ceremony that the family had requested and it was erased before sunset of the day it was made.

Apache peoples spread out over a larger area than the Navajos, and they rigorously maintained fully nomadic lifeways. They organized themselves in a much more fluid manner than the Navajos or Pueblos. The Mescaleros were divided into five tribal bands, the Chiricahuas into three, and the Jicarillas into two. Each band was further subdivided into smaller groups of extended-family relations that ranged in size from between about forty to two-hundred people. A chief led each local group and directed their hunting, gathering, trading, and war activities. Their campsites, at times temporary, at others more permanent, were dubbed [rancherías](#) by the Spanish. They principally lived in highly mobile tipis or [wikiups](#).

Although each group calls itself by a unique name, all Apaches refer to themselves in general as [Indeh](#), meaning “the people.” They all have their own versions of a creation story that involves the creator, [Ussen](#), providing them with a homeland, counsel for living, and provisions. According to Warm Springs Chiricahua legends, for example, Ussen led them from the north to the

place that the Spaniards later called Ojo Caliente, or Warm Springs (in the present-day Gila wilderness). There, Ussen acted through White Painted Woman and Child of the Water (two other key Chiricahua deities) to hand down key lessons about creation and life. As they grew to adulthood, each Apache boy and girl learned the sacred rites, rituals, and stories that had been transmitted to their ancestors at Warm Springs; the values rooted in that place set them apart as a people and gave them their identity. As historian Kathleen P. Chamberlain has argued, it was “where they became Apaches.”⁶

Navajo Night Chants

Night chants are ceremonial prayers for restoring balance and peace.

- [Listen to a Navajo Night Chant](#)
- [Read a Night Chant](#)

Eve of the Spanish Invasion

The histories of Chacoan and [Mogollon](#) peoples provide many important signposts for the peoples that followed. They both fell victim to and adapted to New Mexico's harsh, dry environment. Their adaptations set the stage for the development of Pueblo cultures and also influenced the [Athabaskan](#) peoples that arrived as early as the 1100s. The ability to maintain an adequate water supply for agriculture, as well as the knack for negotiating relations with nomadic peoples were key for Pueblo, and later Spanish, societies. In many respects, such issues defined New Mexico's histories through the nineteenth century.



Apache and Navajo people, along with Utes and Comanches, were derisively called [indios bárbaros](#) by the Spaniards who failed to comprehend their conceptions of property and resource usage, or their adherence to nomadic lifeways. For that reason, they were able to maintain some distance from Spanish colonialism. Pueblo peoples, on the other hand, were the direct targets of Spanish ambitions. Over the course of their history of relations with Muslim peoples in the [Iberian Peninsula](#) the varied peoples who became known to history as Spaniards worked out

Dutch artist Jacob de Gheyn II produced several series of paintings and engravings that detailed the proper use of muskets. These types of muskets were used in the early Spanish conquests of New Mexico.
Painting by Jacob de Gheyn II

patterns for expansion and conquest. By the mid-1500s, New Mexico's [First Peoples](#) were forced to reconcile their own worldviews with those of European outsiders.

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Chapter 3: Patterns of Spanish Exploration & Conquest

Patterns of Spanish Exploration & Conquest

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Patterns of Spanish Exploration & Conquest



In June 1527, a group of about five hundred Spaniards under the leadership of Pánfilo de Narváez set out from the port of Cádiz, Spain, to explore an area known in their collective imagination as La Florida. After crossing the Atlantic and stopping at several points in the Spanish Caribbean, the group made landfall on the western coast of Florida.



Pánfilo de Narváez's Route from Cádiz

The Narváez expedition set out from Cádiz, crossed the Atlantic, and was shipwrecked on the western coast of Florida. Ultimately, Narváez and most of the expeditionaries lost their lives. Only Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and three others survived the ordeal.

By that time, only about two-thirds of the initial force remained. Narváez's express goal was to subdue indigenous groups in the peninsula that were rumored to possess grand cities and great wealth, much like that of the Aztec Empire in central Mexico. He and his men may have even hoped to locate the fabled Fountain of Youth, which had been one of the targets of Juan Ponce de León's earlier expedition to Florida.

The party's treasurer (*tesorero*) was an [Andalusian](#) man named [Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca](#). Although he could have had no idea when he joined the expedition, tragic turns of events would lead him far afield from La Florida. Despite low levels of supplies upon their landing, Narváez marched the force inland to locate the Apalachee tribe. Rather than finding large cities lined with gold and silver, the expedition instead became lost. After months of battling hostile peoples (none of whom possessed items deemed to be of value to the



This bust of Cabeza de Vaca is located in the International Sculpture Garden at Hermann Park in Houston, Texas. Spanish sculptor Pilar Cortella de Rubin created the bust in 1986.

Courtesy of Ealmagro

Europeans) and illness, only 242 men emerged from the Florida swampland at the shores of Apalachee Bay.

In dire straits, in September 1528 the men built five makeshift rafts from horse hides and attempted to sail across the Gulf of Mexico to New Spain. One of the crafts was captained by Cabeza de Vaca. Due to murky understanding of the region's geography, the Spaniards believed that the trip would be a quick jaunt. Instead, they were battered by the current of the Mississippi River and then caught in the throes of a hurricane. Three of the boats were lost, including Narváez's "flagship." The other two eventually washed up onto the shore of present-day Galveston Island, Texas. The forty survivors referred to the island as *Malhado* (Misfortune). Although the survivors attempted to salvage the rafts, they were carried out to sea by a large wave.

Local Cavoque and Han peoples soon captured the men and placed them in bondage. The Europeans passed as

captives from one native group to another over the next few months. Unaccustomed to drudgery and difficult living conditions, many Spaniards contracted devastating illnesses and died. Six years later, only four survivors remained: Cabeza de Vaca, Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, and a Moroccan slave named [Esteban](#) (also referred to by the diminutive “Estevanico” in some of the records). Esteban was the first known person of African descent to reach what became the continental United States. He had been sold into slavery in 1513 at a Portuguese trading port on the coast of his homeland. Although he was raised in the Muslim faith, many scholars believe that he had converted to Catholicism at some point because Muslims were not allowed to travel across the Atlantic. In 1520, Dorantes de Carranza bought him and later took him along on the harrowing Narváez expedition.



Born in Morocco, Esteban was ten years old when he was sold into slavery. After surviving the Narváez expedition, he served as guide for the reconnaissance mission of the far north led by Fray [Marcos de Niza](#). As he searched for the fabled [Seven Cities of Cibola](#), he met his death at [Hawikuh](#) at the hands of Zuni people.

Courtesy of Jose Cisneros Estate

Cabeza de Vaca and his companions had intended to come as conquerors, but they found themselves in captivity instead. They performed arduous tasks such as grubbing roots in the coastal



Title page from a 1555 print of Cabeza de Vaca's *La relación*. This edition not only recounts his experiences among native peoples in North America, but also tells the story of his subsequent experiences with indigenous peoples in the Río de la Plata region of South America. The account has been published in English as *Adventures in the Unknown Interior*.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

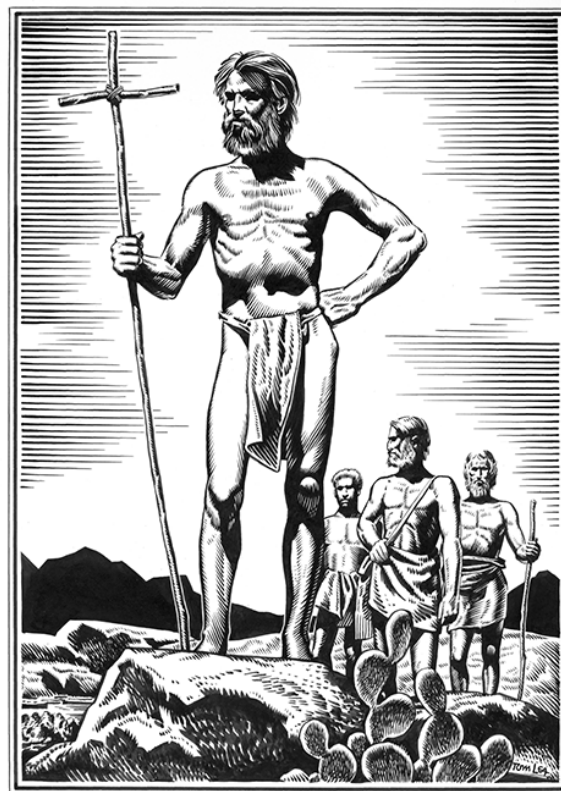
present-day Texas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Sonora.

Although Cabeza de Vaca believed that he was going to find “savages” in the Americas, he was surprised at the kindness and openness of most of the people that he encountered during the group’s wanderings. In the fall of 1534 his group decided to actively seek out Spanish settlements to the south in New Spain. Along the way, many of the native peoples they encountered aided them in their journey. Several believed the Spaniards to have supernatural powers, and it seems that Cabeza de Vaca in particular gained a reputation as an effective healer. In his journal, he reported trying to repay native peoples’ compassion in kind by teaching them about his lord Jesus Christ. At one point, a group of

water or in cane beds. Cabeza de Vaca made a detailed account of his experiences, published in 1542 under the title [*La Relación \(The Account\)*](#) and later in 1555 with the running title, [*Naufragios \(Shipwrecked\)*](#). He reported that due to his work, his fingers became so raw that if a straw even so much as touched them, they bled. After two years of servitude, the survivors fled. Wandering alone, they were able to make a name for themselves as traders and healers. Using their acquired knowledge of local roots, they amassed goods for trade and also gained renown as healers. In that way they continued on foot for two more years through

natives came to them seeking cures for their intense headaches. They assumed that “extraordinary men like [the Spaniards] embodied powers over nature.”¹ Cabeza de Vaca made the sign of the cross over each person, and they reported that they were cured. In return, they gave the explorers prickly pears and chunks of venison.

After such experiences, the group maintained an escort that, at times, included as many as six hundred indigenous allies as they made their way south toward New Spain. Cabeza de Vaca became convinced that if these people were to be converted to Christianity and Spanish ways of life, they would have to be persuaded through kindness, “the only certain way.” In early 1536, the party encountered a Spanish slaving expedition that escorted them south to [Culiacán](#). Upon seeing the other Europeans, however, Cabeza de Vaca implored his native companions to flee. He understood all too well the brutal intentions of his countrymen. In his own words, he remembered looking out over an area that had been recently looted by the slavers: “With heavy hearts we looked out over the once lavishly watered, fertile, and beautiful land, now battered and burned, and the people thin and weak, scattering and hiding in fright.”² As soon as Cabeza de Vaca had moved on, the slaving party captured and enslaved many of those that had accompanied him.



Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca

After fleeing captivity among native peoples in present-day Texas, Cabeza de Vaca’s small group gained a reputation as powerful healers. By 1534, they decided to actively seek out New Spain once again, but they did not arrive in Mexico City (formerly [Tenochtitlán](#)) until 1536.

© James D. Lea

Upon their arrival in Mexico City the four survivors received a hero’s welcome.

They had traveled 2,800 miles on foot and made contact with a variety of peoples in the far north. Although they never set foot in the territory that later became known as Nuevo México, they traded for copper bells which, as they understood, had originated at a great and lavish population center even further to the north. Such stories whetted the appetite of Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza who commissioned a reconnaissance party, led by Fray Marcos de Niza and Esteban, to investigate. Their findings led to the *entrada* (the Spanish term used to describe formal entry into new territory) headed by [Francisco Vázquez de Coronado](#) in early 1540.



Cabeza de Vaca's Route

This map provides a rough estimate of the route followed by Cabeza de Vaca and his companions after their shipwreck in Florida. Although the group never set foot in present-day New Mexico, their tales of wealth and large-scale societies to the north inspired the *entrada* headed by Francisco Vázquez de Coronado in 1540.

Cabeza de Vaca's story is not only important to New Mexico's histories because it spurred further Spanish exploration of the far north, however. His experiences provide a fleeting glimpse of an alternative pattern for Spanish-indigenous relations during the colonial period. As historian Richard White put it, "Cabeza de Vaca's journey to this extraordinary world ends up in a very ordinary world, a world of Spanish slavers and Indian victims. But in between,

in that moment, there was a vision of how something else might have happened. It never would really fully happen, but would appear in glimpses again and again as Indians and whites interacted in the continent.”³ Outnumbered and desperate, Cabeza de Vaca’s group initiated peaceful relations with natives. Rather than assuming their own physical and cultural superiority, they relied on native peoples for survival. In return, they learned to respect the peoples they encountered as human beings.

As Spanish explorers imagined a new Mexico in the far north after Cabeza de Vaca’s return, they thought in strikingly different terms. Although they faced many of the same issues, including the problem of being vastly outnumbered by indigenous peoples in an isolated land, they instead applied other patterns of Spanish exploration and conquest that had been in place since the time of the Iberian Reconquest (*La Reconquista*, circa 711-1492). Among these patterns, as outlined by historian Matthew Restall, were the “use of legalistic measures to lend a veneer of validity to the expedition,” “an appeal to higher authority” for legitimacy, focus on precious metals, large societies, the use of native allies to divide and conquer, the location of interpreters, and “the use of display violence, or the theatrical use of violence.”⁴

Río de Plata

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



La Reconquista: "Kindergarten of Colonization"

In order to comprehend the reasons that Cabeza de Vaca's pattern of contact was an exception to the general rules of Spanish expansion, we must first explore the background of the group of people that are known in the history of American conquests as Spaniards. At the time of Christopher Columbus' first voyage, no kingdom called Spain existed. Instead, the independent kingdoms of Castile, Aragón, and Navarre were loosely unified through the marriage of Fernando (Ferdinand) and Isabel (Isabella). Isabel was heir to the throne of the combined kingdom of Castilla y León, later known only as Castile. Fernando was the ruler of the northeastern third of the [Iberian Peninsula](#), including the domains of Aragón, Catalonia, and Navarre. On the western edge of the peninsula, the Kingdom of Portugal claimed roughly the same territory occupied by the nation of Portugal today.



Iberian Peninsula

Between the 400s and 1492, several different groups of people asserted control of the Iberian Peninsula. In the fifth-century [CE](#), Visigothic people took control of most of the peninsula, and they converted to Christianity. Muslims from North Africa expanded into the peninsula in 711. Although relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews were generally calm, several Christian Kings supported a “Reconquest” of the peninsula that concluded in 1492 when Granada fell to Christian forces.

The Iberian Peninsula’s rugged geography played a central role in determining the placement and growth of its societies. At the southwestern edge of Europe, Iberia is largely surrounded by water. The Pyrenees Mountains that form the present-day boundary between France and Spain are its point of connection to the rest of the continent. Yet the rugged mountains have also presented a barrier to travel and communication. The entire peninsula is relatively small. At about 225,000 square miles in area, it is roughly the same size as the states of Arizona and New Mexico together. Most of its landscape is dominated by mountains and valleys. Its various ranges separate the Iberian Peninsula into several different regions that have tended to maintain their autonomy from one another. Additionally, most of the peninsula is arid. Its inhabitants have had to learn to cope with dry conditions and isolation, similar to the types of conditions faced by New Mexico’s residents.

Although the 1469 union of Fernando and Isabel set the stage for the eventual unification of Spain under their grandson, Carlos I in 1516, Iberia was historically a place of great diversity. It was also the site of a long cycle of trade connections, conquests, and accommodations between different groups of people. Between 1100 and 800 [BCE](#) the Phoenicians found a group of people, known collectively as Iberians, along the Mediterranean coast. They established trade colonies in which they exchanged jewelry, oil, and wine for Iberian precious metals, including gold, silver, and copper. After the decline of the Phoenician trade empire, Greek sailors landed on Iberia’s shores in the 600s BCE and established colonies. In 218 BCE, Roman soldiers initiated the conquest of the peninsula, which they called Hispania. The impact of Roman language, legal systems, and architecture is still visible today.

In the fifth century CE Visigothic peoples invaded the Iberian Peninsula,

capitalizing on the sharp decline of Roman imperial power. In the process, they borrowed heavily from the people who were already there. Visigoths converted to Christianity and adopted dialects based on Latin. They took up their new faith with great zeal. Catholic Visigoth leaders [established a code](#) that persecuted Jewish people within their domains. Although their anti-Jewish measures were not consistently enforced, many Jews publicly converted to Catholicism but continued to practice their own religion privately. By the period of New Mexico's colonization in the early seventeenth century, [Sephardic Jews](#) continued to hide their true identities. Such practices made the new converts highly suspect to Christians in the peninsula, and often led to religious tensions and violence. Aside from their efforts to enforce religious homogeneity, Visigothic kingdoms were plagued by a lack of normalized means of royal succession. When one king died, wars ensued until the victor claimed his place as heir to the throne.

By the early eighth century, such internal conflicts opened the door for the Islamic conquest of Iberia. [Berber Muslims](#) of North African origins made their way across the Strait of Gibraltar and into the peninsula. By 711, most of the peninsula had fallen under the control of the expanding Islamic Empire. Over the ensuing seven-and-a-half centuries, Muslim rule shaped Iberian language, culture, religious practice, architecture, learning, and knowledge. The Basque province and Asturias in the north were the only areas that remained under the rule of Catholic kings. Their efforts to reconquer Iberia began almost immediately after the Islamic incursion and ended in 1492 when forces loyal to Fernando and Isabel emerged victorious from a ten-year effort to take control of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold.

La Reconquista continued throughout the era of Islamic domination, but the years between 711 and 1492 were not defined by constant, sustained warfare. The most active period of conflict took place between 850 and 1250, but even then peaceful coexistence characterized the state of affairs. Conflicts were also not always between Catholics and Moors (the term used to describe North African Muslims). Instead, Christian knights, nobles, and kings often battled one another with the aid of Islamic allies. The very term "reconquest" is quite

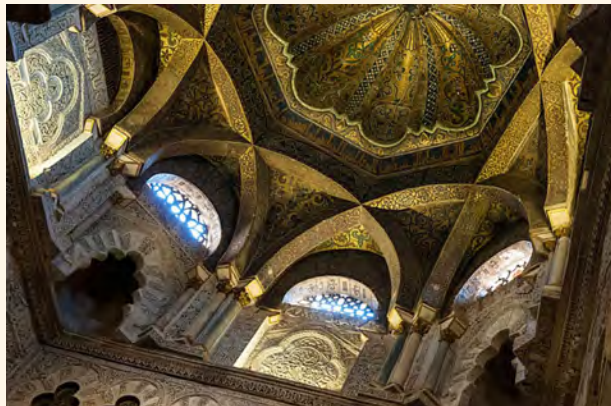
loaded. It implies that those reconquering the territory had a clear prior right to the land and resources. Yet, as the history of Iberia indicates, cycles of conquest meant that proprietary rights were anything but straightforward. Also, reconquest is a matter of perspective. To Muslims living in their stronghold in [Andalusia](#) (located in the south-central section of the peninsula), their rule was ordained by Allah. From their viewpoint, the reconquest was often a contest between competing political and religious entities, rather than a crusade by a conquered group of people to take back what was rightfully theirs. Similar issues of perspective applied to the reconquest of New Mexico in the 1690s following the [Pueblo Revolt](#).

From their capital city of Córdoba, Muslim leaders influenced Iberian culture, learning, art, and architecture. Al-Andalus (the Arab name for Muslim-ruled Iberia) was also connected to the larger Islamic Empire that stretched eastward across northern Africa to Baghdad. The [Umayyad Dynasty](#), which held power in Islamic Iberia between 756 and 1031, established political stability and promoted advances in education and literature. Muslim scholars brought classical Greek and Roman texts, preserved in the Arabic language, to Iberia and, by extension, to Western Europe. Due to early Catholic prohibitions on secular learning and knowledge, combined with political instability, such texts had not been preserved in Western European kingdoms. Additionally, Muslim scholars made breakthroughs in medicine at a time when European physicians had a hazy understanding of the workings of the human body. The Alhambra in Granada and the great mosque of Córdoba are two of the iconic Islamic contributions to Iberian architecture that still stand today.

Great Mosque of Córdoba

The [Mosque of Córdoba](#) is renowned as one of the most distinctive architectural achievements of the Islamic period in the Iberian Peninsula. Originally the site of a pagan temple, the location was transformed into a Visigothic Christian Church, then a Mosque during the Umayyad period. During the Reconquest, a Catholic Cathedral was constructed at the center

of the structure.



Interior photograph by Michal Osmenda



Exterior photograph by Jeremie Geoffra

In many ways, Islamic culture brought enlightenment and advancement to Iberia. Although the era was generally a period of convivencia (coexistence) between Christians, Jews, and Muslims, at times cooperation broke down. Jews made important contributions to Iberian society as tax collectors, physicians, merchants, and bankers. Christians at times visited Jewish and Islamic houses of worship with friends or associates, despite their refusal to participate in the rites of “infidels.” Even in the moments of most cooperation, however, Jews and Christians were required to recognize Islamic superiority by accepting the political power of Islam and adhering to certain aspects of Muslim law, including the payment of a head tax called the [*jizya*](#). Additionally, as Christian conquests advanced, Jews were forced to wear badges of identification and were subject to higher rates of taxation.

Ptolemy’s Cosmographia



By the 1030s, Muslim political unity began to erode and Christian reconquest efforts intensified. Within two hundred years, the reconquest had been all but completed as Muslim peoples were pushed back to the southern province of Granada. By 1200 smaller Christian domains had coalesced into the larger kingdoms of Portugal, Castile, and Aragón. In 1249 forces loyal to the Portuguese crown gained control of Algarve, the last Muslim holdout in the western section of Iberia. At about the same time, Castilian forces loyal to King Fernando III captured Andalusia, Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's future birthplace. Andalusia was the population and political center of Al-Andalus. The important port city of Seville and the capital city of Córdoba were its key urban centers. To mark the conquest, Castilian Catholics built a cathedral at the center of Córdoba's great mosque. Although they maintained most of the original structure, Muslim prayers and observances were banned in favor of Christian rites.

Even at its height, however, La Reconquista was not solely focused on issues of religious difference. A desire for land and resources to support growing populations, as well as for plunder and slaves, provided the impetus for conquest just as often as religion. Reconquest kings did not typically possess large amounts of wealth, so adelantados (from a phrase meaning "go-ahead men") with the ability to finance and outfit expeditions completed most of the military campaigns. Due to feudal vassalage, or sworn loyalty, to their specific king, adelantados did not typically attempt to construct their own individual kingdoms. Instead, they continued to support their monarch because their

rights to lands, wealth, and titles of nobility were guaranteed by the king in return for their dedicated service. Such patterns subsequently facilitated the relatively rapid expansion of the Spanish Empire throughout the Americas in the 1500s. Motivated by the desire to gain wealth, status, and glory through service to God and king, adelantado conquistadores led the charge to subdue native peoples.

La Reconquista forged a hyper-masculine and hyper-Catholic society and culture based on a rigid social hierarchy. Members of the titled nobility, including dukes and counts, remained at the top of society. Many laid claim to descent from Visigothic kings, and others established their notoriety through service against Muslims. They typically owned large tracts of land and enjoyed the loyalty of many different vassals. Men of lower social rank pledged their services to kings and nobles in exchange for financial, political, or religious support for themselves and their families. Untitled nobles, known as *hidalgos* (meaning “sons of something”), were among those that entered into such pledges of vassalage. In return, people of still lower status pledged loyalty to *hidalgos*. All nobles, whether titled or not, claimed [*limpieza de sangre*](#) (purity of blood) to underscore the idea that their ancestors had never been Jews, Muslims, or heretics tried by the Inquisition.

In Europe, such claims were at times based on detailed documentation (here’s an [example of such documentation](#) from eighteenth-century Granada). In the Spanish Americas, however, *limpieza de sangre* was often based on lifestyle, wealth, patterns of speech, and dress because documents to prove status typically were not available. Noble title did not always accompany wealth, and at times common folk who worked as merchants, physicians, teachers, or small farmers possessed more worldly goods than *hidalgos*. Despite a lack of wealth, nobility provided men with exemptions from some taxes and protection against arrest by anyone except the king’s representatives. In the years just prior to contact, nobles comprised only about ten percent of the total population of Castile, but their decisions and actions drove their communities.

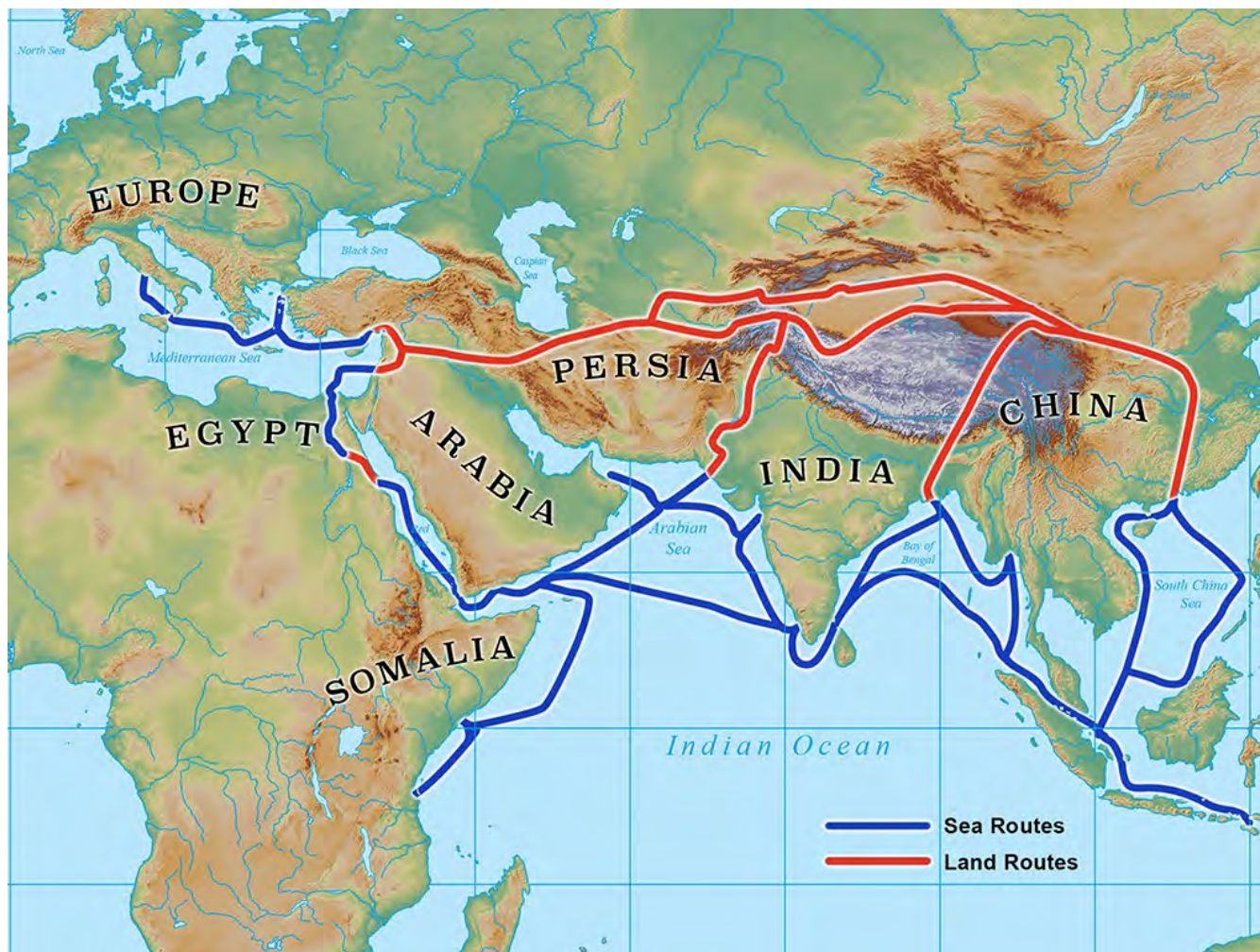
The significance of the reconquest to New Mexico’s histories stems from the

ways in which it created unique patterns in Iberian society that then carried over to the Americas following contact. By connecting status and social influence to bestowals of royal authority, kings consolidated their power and ensured the allegiance of the nobility. Many times during the reconquest, Christian forces relied on Muslim allies to outflank their enemies. Such was the case during intermittent conflicts between Castile and Portugal between 1200 and 1450. Additionally, the use of violence as a means to power was a hallmark of the period. Attempts to create religious conformity and the perpetuation of a heavily patriarchal society that accepted sexual double standards and based women's honor on their chastity and life in the private sphere also defined Iberian societies by 1492. These patterns were tested and reshaped in the desert environment of New Spain's far northern frontier between 1540 and 1821, when Mexico gained its independence from Spain.

An Age of Exploration

Once each Iberian kingdom completed its leg of the reconquest, its resources were freed up for other pursuits. After the capture of Algarve, Portuguese kings focused their attention on solidifying royal administration during the remaining years of the thirteenth century. Such efforts were intermittently disrupted by Castilian kings' and [adelantados](#)' efforts to subjugate Portugal to Castile. Civil wars between those loyal to the two Christian kings took a toll on Iberia's economies and its political advancement. By the early 1400s, Portugal had been able to hold off Castilian advances for a long period of time, a development that allowed its nobles to focus their attention on the seas.

Beyond a simple curiosity about the unknown world that lay beyond the oceans, the possibility of commercial expansion and economic gain motivated Iberian monarchs to support maritime exploration. By the 1400s people throughout Europe had long been accustomed to the use of spices and other luxury items from Asia. Not long after the Portuguese completed their reconquest and Castilian forces captured [Andalusia](#), Marco Polo embarked on his famous journeys to the Far East. Although not the first European to make contact with China or the fearsome leaders of the nomadic Mongolian Empire, Polo was the first to leave a detailed account of his journeys. His tales, despite their embellishments, introduced Europeans to peoples and cultural practices that they came to consider as exotic and luxurious. Silks, spices, diamonds, rare dyes, and pearls were among the trade goods that most excited those who read his narrative.



Silk Road Prior to the development of Iberian maritime exploration, spices from India, China, and Indonesia reached Europe via the old overland trail known as the Silk Road. Water routes also facilitated trade to the Arabian Peninsula, and then to Europe.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, spices from the [Moluccas](#), known to Europeans as the Spice Islands, became the hottest trade commodity in most Western European domains. Spices were a luxury item coveted by nobles and wealthy professionals. They were used to flavor and preserve meat and other foods, as perfume, and for medicinal purposes. Some believed that certain spices would ward off the Bubonic Plague if held over the nose and mouth while in public. By the 800s, spices such as cinnamon, ginger, cassia, and turmeric were traded in Islamic realms in the Middle East. During the [Italian Renaissance](#), Mediterranean merchants made a fortune by forging a link between Islamic traders and the growing markets for spices in Europe.

By the early 1400s, Portuguese leaders sought a means to capitalize on the trade in spices as well. Their efforts to modernize maritime technology and

shipbuilding opened the way for Portuguese sailors to seek out a new sea route to China, India, and Indonesia. Prince Henrique, known in English-language history texts as [Henry the Navigator](#), is largely credited with heading up Portuguese exploration programs. He was the son of João I, the founder of the Aviz royal dynasty. As the third child of the king, Henrique did not stand to inherit the throne, but he did possess great political sway and resources to support his interests. In the 1420s, he invited cartographers, shipbuilders, and other maritime experts to his [villa](#) (sanctioned township) at Sagres in southern Portugal. Although there has been some historical debate over whether or not the group at Sagres constituted an actual school, new technologies emerged due to Henrique's efforts. Through his patronage of maritime research, new means of mapping and navigating open waters paved the way for longer-range sea exploration.

Prince Henry: The Navigator



Painted by Nuno Gonçalves

Henry's patronage allowed Portuguese sailors to develop new maritime technologies that allowed them to travel around the southern cape of Africa and to India by the 1480s. Learn more about Henry the Navigator in his [biography](#).

New ships, called [caravels](#), were developed to allow for increased maneuverability closer to shorelines. Additionally, the new ships were sleek and

agile, allowing them to sail much nearer to the coast than conventional vessels. Yet the ships maintained a large cargo capacity. More precise maps allowed sailors to document their travels more accurately, thus furthering geographic knowledge and continued exploration. Henrique pushed the Portuguese sailors to find a way to travel around Cape Bojador on the west-African coastline. The cape was a region of fierce winds that had long prevented journeys along the southern coasts of Africa. After Henrique's death in 1460, Portuguese sailors continued to press forward. By the 1480s, Portuguese sailors had achieved his goal for them and much more. At mid-decade they had navigated around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and proceeded eastward into the Indian Ocean.

As they traveled around Africa and to India, Portuguese captains made contact with people that lived along the coasts. In the process, they established trade relationships and permission to create a series of outposts. Theirs was a commercial empire constructed on navigational technology and diplomacy. Rather than seeking territorial conquest as representatives of Castile and Aragon would later do, Portuguese sailors established small footholds in faraway lands that allowed them to create and maintain trading dominance for the better part of the sixteenth century.

Christopher Columbus initiated his efforts at exploration with much the same model in mind. He certainly targeted the same economic activity; he wanted to locate yet another route to the Spice Islands by sailing west. If he was successful, his patrons would cut away at Portugal's dominance of European commerce. After years of planning and pitching his desired excursion, Fernando and Isabel agreed to finance Columbus in the spring of 1492. That January had marked the end of their Reconquista when the final Muslim stronghold of Granada fell following ten years of sustained conflict.



This lithograph from the mid-nineteenth century portrays Christopher Columbus kneeling before Queen Isabel of Castile. After years spent formulating and pitching his idea of sailing west to arrive in India to establish trade relations for spices, Isabel agreed to fund his journey in 1492.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Shortly thereafter, the Catholic Kings (Fernando and Isabel received that nickname for their stringent dedication to the defense and expansion of Catholicism) entered into a contract with the [Genoese](#) navigator. Both had high expectations for his journey across the “Ocean Sea,” the name then used for the Atlantic Ocean. Isabel named Columbus “admiral, viceroy, and governor” over any lands that he might encounter and subdue. His contract also granted him “one-tenth of all merchandise, whether pearls, gems, gold, silver, spices, or goods of any kind, that may be acquired by purchase, barter or any other means, within the boundaries of the Admiralty jurisdiction.”⁵ In August, Columbus set sail with three ships and ninety sailors.

Despite the persistence of the claim that most people in Columbus' day [believed the world to be flat](#), such was not the case. That idea was actually the creation of nineteenth-century commentators as they looked back on late fifteenth-century explorers. Instead, people living across the globe had conceptualized the world as a sphere since ancient times. The debate during Columbus' lifetime was over the size of the earth. Columbus used the best knowledge and methods then available to reach the conclusion that the world was about two-thirds its actual circumference. He was not aware of the American continents, and his calculations led him to believe that sailing to the west would allow him to reach China and other points in India and Indonesia.

Columbus als er in **India** er siltich ankommen/ wirdt von den **IX.**
 Einwohnern mit grossen Geschenck verchret vnd begabet
 auffgenommen.



Columbus in seiner ersten Schiffahrt zu Land gefahren/
 hat er an dem Gestaden des Meers ein hölzern Crucifix lassen auffrichten/ dar-
 nach ist er in die Insel Haytin/ welche er Hispaniolam nennet/ kommen/ vnd
 mit vielen Spaniern auff das Land aufgestiegen/ An demselbig Ort ward
 er von dem Cacico (also nennet sie die Königsche auff ihre Sprach) welcher
 Guacanarillus mit Namen hieß/ ganz freundlich vnd herrlich auffgenommen/ vnd als sie
 beyde einander mit Geschenck vnd Gaben verchreten/ haben sie ein Bündnuß der zukünfftigen
 Freundschaft mit einander gemacht vnd bestätiget: Es verchret vnd begabet Co-
 lumbus den König mit Hemdtern/ Hüten/ Messern/ Spiegeln vnd dergleichen/ Hergegen
 verchret vnd schencket dem Columbo der Cacicus ein grossen vnd schweren gloßen Goldts/
 Capit. 7.

C ij Columbus

Engraving illustrating Columbus' landfall at Guanahaní on December 6, 1492, where the Europeans first contacted Arawak and [Taino](#) peoples.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

In early October, Columbus' contingent made landfall on the island of [Guanahani](#) in the Bahamas, which he promptly renamed San Salvador. He then proceeded to explore the region, passing along the northern coast of Cuba and then eastward to the island of [Hispaniola](#). In the spring of 1493 he made his triumphant return to the royal court of Queen Isabel, where he reported that he had “found very many islands, inhabited by numberless people.” He brought with him native Taino people that his party had captured on Hispaniola. His various reports on the indigenous peoples—whom he erroneously called Indians—and their lands were positive to the point of exaggeration. He noted that both Cuba and Hispaniola were veritable tropical paradises, complete with fertile soil, excellent harbors, abundant vegetation, freshwater, delicious fruit, and colorful birds and animal life. Native peoples in those places were “exceedingly straightforward and trustworthy and most liberal with all that they have.” His accounts also painted the natives as “readily submissive,” not given to idolatry, and willing traders of gold, silver, and other precious objects.⁶

This type of overblown reporting fit the general pattern of exploration and conquest that had been followed by agents of Iberian kings since the early years of reconquest. Eager to secure their claim to wealth, authority, and noble titles, adelantados wrote [probanzas de mérito](#) (proof of merit). In order to convince kings or queens that their conquests had merit, and also to show their competence as leaders, conquistadores made their case in the strongest way possible. Their appeals to the monarch were made to give their own acts legitimacy and justification. If their actions were legitimate and just, by extension they stood to receive the wealth and authority stipulated in the terms of their individual contracts. As one historian has explained, “the very nature and purpose of *probanzas* obliged those who wrote them to promote their own deeds and downplay or ignore those of others.”⁷

Unfortunately for Christopher Columbus, his efforts did little to guarantee his own wealth or standing. Isabel dispatched seventeen ships carrying almost 1,500 people, mostly men, to the Caribbean to establish a permanent colony on Hispaniola in late 1493. Columbus proved inept as an administrator, however,

and the queen revoked her earlier contract with the sailor in 1500. Another governor took control of the colonial government at Santo Domingo, the first Castilian settlement in the Americas. His first official action was to place Columbus under arrest. Although Columbus led three other sailing expeditions in the Caribbean and along the coast of Yucatán, glory eluded him during his own lifetime. Even the name of the “new world” escaped his mark. Instead of being named after Columbus, the continents of the Western Hemisphere were named after Amerigo Vespucci, Columbus’ friend and associate who wrote prolifically of his various exploratory journeys.

Columbus’ attempts to undercut Portuguese commercial dominance and create a name for himself set the stage for extended contact between Europeans and indigenous Americans. Despite the rosy accounts penned by early explorers, [First Peoples](#) were not naturally submissive or pliant. Many forcefully resisted Spanish attempts to subjugate them. Others retreated to remote areas beyond the reach of the Europeans. Still others created alliances with the conquerors. Despite more recent characterizations of such people as traitorous, most had complex reasons for supporting the newcomers. To refer to such people as traitors is to misunderstand the nature of relations between indigenous groups. They clearly did not consider themselves to be part of a single society, although the term “Indians” cast them as such. Alliances between indigenous groups and Spanish entradas allowed a seemingly small group of colonizers to take control of large swaths of land that were inhabited by advanced societies.

The Conquest of Mexico



Portrait of Hernán Cortés commissioned in Mexico in the years following his conquest of the Aztec Empire.

Courtesy of Mcapdevila

Indios amigos (one Coronado historian's term for indigenous allies) were absolutely essential to all of the conquests enacted by Spaniards during the sixteenth century. As leader of the expedition that pacified the great Aztec Empire, [Hernán Cortés](#) has been remembered as the archetypical conquistador. Without native allies, including an interpreter, and other elements of the long established pattern of conquest, [Cortés'](#) efforts would have likely fallen flat.

During the early decades of the 1500s, the Caribbean was the administrative center of the Spanish Empire in the Americas. Its various islands were the first targets of conquistadores'

ambition. From Cuba, new exploration and colonization missions fanned out to other islands. By 1520 slaving expeditions became more and more prominent as Caribbean populations succumbed to European diseases, violence, and overwork. According to some estimates, only about thirty thousand native people remained on [Hispaniola](#) in 1520. Early reports had claimed that the island was very densely populated. As they searched for laborers, Spaniards also hoped to find great cities of wealth or fabled items, such as the Fountain of

Youth or the Sierra Azúl (rumored to contain a mountain of pure silver). They also searched for the [Strait of Anián](#) (which the English called the Northwest Passage), a much hoped-for waterway through the Americas that would allow European sailors to make their way to the Asian spice trade.



Pre-Columbian Mexico This animation illustrates the extent of the Aztec Empire and the Maya cultural zone in [Mesoamerica](#) just prior to the arrival of Spaniards.

In 1517 a group of Spanish explorers landed on the shores of the Yucatán peninsula where Maya peoples told them of a great civilization further inland. Up to that point, Spanish explorers had conquered native peoples that lived in small villages. Even in their current state of decline, Maya cities exceeded anything that the Europeans had yet seen in the Americas. Members of the first expedition dreamed of means to take control of the area and its people. After initial contacts that the Spaniards interpreted as friendly, however, Maya warriors forced them to retreat. The next year, another group returned in an attempt to secure small amounts of gold in Maya temples, reported by the earlier expeditionaries. The 1518 excursion returned to Cuba once again with news of a marvelous society beyond the coast.



Cortés' Route from Cuba to Tenochtitlán Cortés first landed among Maya peoples in the Yucatan Peninsula before proceeding along the coast to the site of present-day Veracruz. With the aid of his captive interpreter, Malintzin, and a number of indigenous allies, he led his forces inland to the great city of Tenochtitlán—the site of present-day Mexico City.

When Cuban Governor Diego Velásquez issued the call for someone to lead an expedition to the mainland, Hernán Cortés jumped at the chance. Cortés came from a family of minor nobility in the region of Extremadura in west-central Iberia. Seeking adventure and the opportunity to increase the wealth and standing of himself and his family, he sailed to Santo Domingo in 1506. He distinguished himself in battle by quelling a native revolt and by participating in the conquest of Cuba in 1511. Once the indigenous [Taíno](#) people (called Arawak by the Spaniards) were subdued, Velásquez received the governorship and Cortés, just twenty-six years old, was named treasurer of the new colony. Cortés married a Spanish woman of high status to further increase his prestige.

Who were the Taíno of Hispaniola?

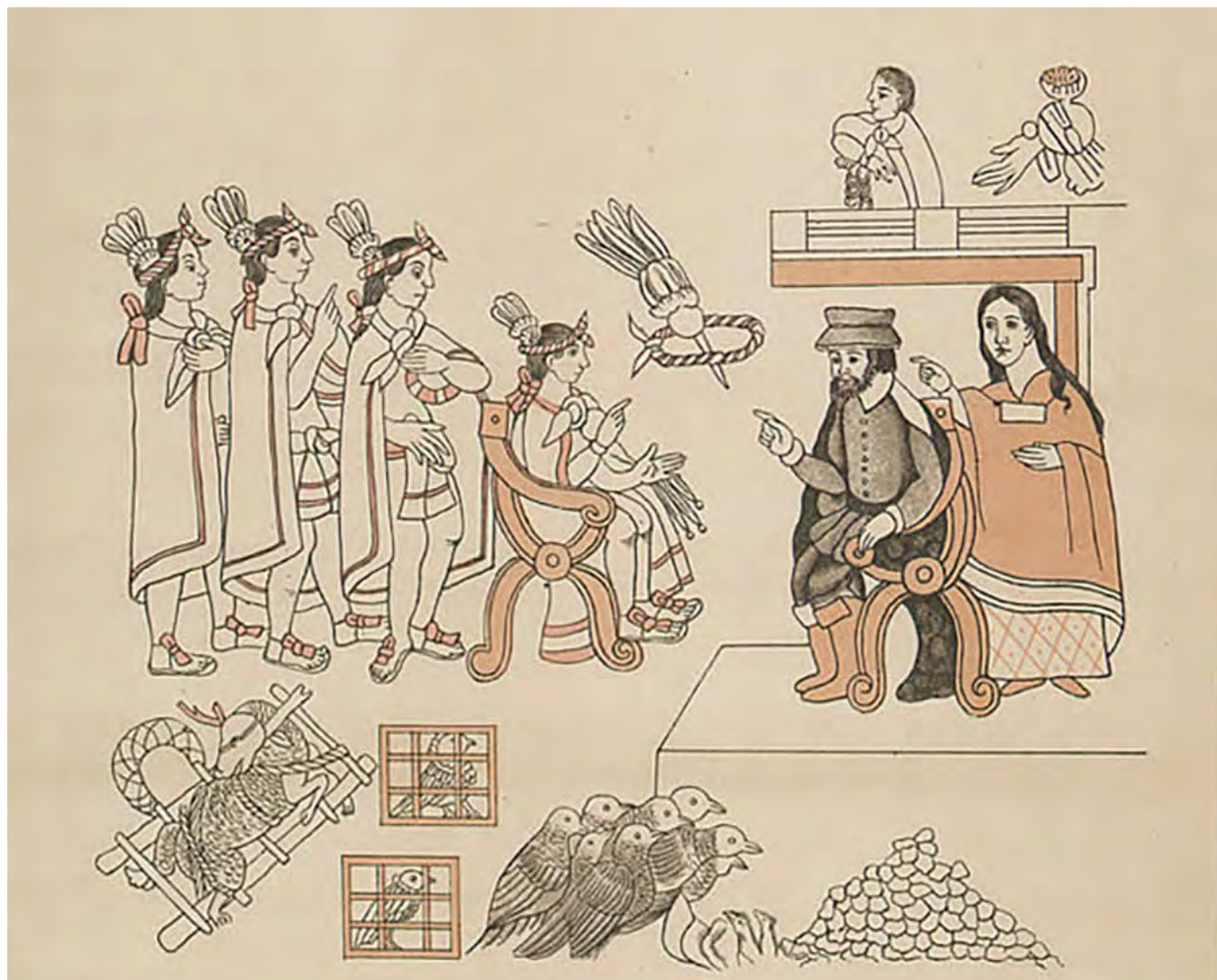
Find out who the [Taíno of Hispaniola](#) were from Yale University.

His desire to lead the expedition to the mainland was not based on simple plunder. Cortés coveted the power and authority that would come to him through conquest. As he made his preparations for the expedition, Governor Velásquez recognized Cortés as a threat to his own authority and ordered him to abandon the journey. With eleven ships and nearly five hundred men set to leave, however, Cortés ignored the governor's attempt to revoke his commission and set sail.

Cortés' forces made landfall near the present-day port city of Veracruz, then at the center of a northern group of Maya city-states. His soldiers quickly overpowered a group of warriors and negotiated a truce with the local people. In the process, Cortés met Gerónimo de Aguilar, a survivor of a Spanish shipwreck on the coast a decade earlier. Aguilar acted as translator for the expedition. The defeated Mayas presented Cortés with a group of twenty young women to solidify peaceful relations with the Spaniards. One of these women was named [Malintzin](#), later known to the Spanish as Doña Marina or [Malinche](#). Her captors soon realized that she was able to converse not only with Mayas, but also with Nahuatl-speaking people. Her services were invaluable to the Europeans as they moved toward the Aztec capital of [Tenochtitlán](#). She translated Nahuatl into the Mayan dialect in order to speak to Aguilar who then translated the conversation into Spanish (Castilian). After only a short time, Malintzin learned to speak Spanish as well and she took complete responsibility for the translation efforts.

Malintzin has come to represent many different things to different groups of people since her lifetime. "Malinche" is a highly derogatory term used in current Mexican Spanish to refer to someone who is a traitor. During the period of Mexican nationalism that followed its early-twentieth century Revolution, Malintzin was remembered prominently as the woman that betrayed her own people by facilitating the conquest. Yet she had been sold by her own people, a [Nahua](#) group subject to the [Mexica](#), into slavery among the Mayas as a young girl. At the time that she was given to Cortés' party she was probably about fourteen or fifteen years old. It seems that she would have had no real affinity for either her Nahua relatives or the Mexica since they had placed her in a state

of servitude. She recognized the opportunity to “improve her grim situation by making herself an invaluable member of the expedition.”⁸ Cortés fully realized her vital place in his mission of conquest. Significantly, he did not take her as his mistress until after the fall of Tenochtitlán. He could not risk her becoming pregnant.



Entrance of Hernán Cortés to Tenochtitlán, with Malintzin (La Malinche), to meet Moctezuma II in 1519. This image was included in the “Lienzo Tlaxcala,” a mid-sixteenth century codex created to tell the history of the conquest from the perspective of the Tlaxcalan people.

Created by Tlaxcala artists

As the expedition’s interpreter, Malintzin became a particularly important indigenous ally. Without the military support of thousands of others, however, her contributions may have come to naught. Following another long-established pattern of conquest, Cortés also worked to discover the existing political situation in the Aztec heartland. He learned that the Mexica had

subjected many central Mexican peoples to their rule over the previous couple of centuries, and that many of those tributary groups wished to throw off the yoke of Aztec rule.

By exploiting existing political and social divisions, Cortés was able to reverse his numerical disadvantage. Early in the Spaniards' march inland from the coast, they encountered discontented village leaders that offered them the services of hundreds of porters. Then, Cortés learned that the people of [Tlaxcala](#) were antagonistic toward the Mexica. After the Spaniards defeated them in battle, the Tlaxcalans pledged their military support for the expedition against Tenochtitlán. There were several other Nahuatl-speaking groups that opposed Mexica dominance. Most chafed under the burden of the tribute that was required of them. Still others disliked the official religion of the Aztec Empire that had been imposed upon them. All seemed to recognize the power and determination of the Spaniards and sought to make alliances with the new military and political force in the region.

Moctezuma II (referred to in Nahuatl texts as *Moctezuma Xocoyotl*, “the young”) sat at the head of the Aztec Empire in 1519. He was the ninth head of the empire, and his rule had begun in 1502. He was impressed by the horses and weapons that the Spaniards brought with them and he considered the newcomers to be prospective allies, or even potential subjects. Although he has often been described as weak and deferential, he is better characterized as a shrewd leader that sought to bring the Spaniards under the Aztec imperial umbrella. As Cortés' army marched toward Tenochtitlán, Moctezuma sent emissaries bearing gifts. Early commentators and historians considered this action to be a sign of Moctezuma's feeble reaction to the Spaniards' presence, yet his actions suggest the exact opposite when considered in the context of Mexica traditions. In Mexica custom, gift giving was a means of demonstrating power and wealth. The gifts, then, were intended to create friendly relations and to show the Spaniards that they were dealing with a leader of great authority and ability.

<https://mind.cnm.edu/miles/nmh/nm> <https://mind.cnm.edu/miles/nmh/nm>

[h_export/OPS/assets/widget_data/index_b275c53e60ae40058174e49213ab1de73.html?configFile=https%3A%2F%2Fmind.cnm.edu%2Fmiles%2Fnmh%2Fnmh_export%2FOPS%2Fassets%2Fwidget_data%2Fconfig%2Fd0726d4b4b704b50b01224b93ab1de73.json](https://mytext.cnm.edu/lesson/the-conquest-of-mexico/ops/assets/widget_data/config/d0726d4b4b704b50b01224b9d/index_b275c53e60ae40058174e49213ab1de73.html?configFile=https%3A%2F%2Fmind.cnm.edu%2Fmiles%2Fnmh%2Fnmh_export%2FOPS%2Fassets%2Fwidget_data%2Fconfig%2Fd0726d4b4b704b50b01224b93ab1de73.json)

Moctezuma had many reasons to have considered himself in the dominant position. Much like the Iberians, the Mexica constructed their society through conquest. Aztec forces had brought the neighboring peoples of Texcoco and Tlatelolco together in the Triple Alliance in the late 1400s. Although the three rulers theoretically shared power, after the death of the powerful Texcoco King [Nezahualcoyotl](#) in 1472, the Mexica ruler dominated political affairs. Although Moctezuma could not have known it, the city of Tenochtitlán was larger and more prosperous than European capitals of the time. Seville, Barcelona, and Córdoba contained less than 50,000 residents each. The largest European capitals at Paris and London boasted about 100,000 inhabitants. According to the best estimates, Tenochtitlán was home to between 200,000 and 250,000 people. The Valley of Mexico (the present-day Mexico City metropolitan area) contained several other cities and a total population of between one and two million.

By all accounts, those connected to Cortés' contingent were both awed and perplexed by Tenochtitlán. The great city was built on an island in Lake Texcoco, connected to the shore via a series of causeways. Its peoples' ability to prosper through [chinampa](#) agriculture on the Texcoco shores and swamps impressed the soldiers. Yet the Mexica religion, with its use of bloodletting and [human sacrifice](#), was an aberration to them. Most could not reconcile the grandeur of Tenochtitlán's buildings and temples with the barbaric, pagan practices they heard about and witnessed. Indeed, as the conquest progressed, Cortés' forces destroyed Mexica religious figures and symbols and replaced

them with statues and images of Catholic saints, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ.



Depiction of Mexico City in 1572, just over sixty years following the initial conquest of Tenochtitlán. From "Mexico Regia Celebris Hispaniae Novae Civitas," *Civitates Orbis Terrarum, Liber I* by George Braun (1541-1622) and Franz Hogenberg (c. 1536-1588)

Used with permission—Osman Collection, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, Columbia, S.C.

Despite Malintzin's aid with translation, much was lost in the initial meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma. Spanish observers interpreted the Aztec Emperor's use of formal Nahuatl linguistic conventions as deference. Imagine two arrogant leaders standing toe to toe, each posturing and signaling his respective superiority to the other. As each man spoke through Malintzin, they were able to understand the other's words but not their respective cultural significance. For their part, the Spanish seemed to believe that there was no language barrier between themselves and indigenous peoples. Beginning in 1513, a royal edict initiated the practice of reading the [requerimiento](#) to natives prior to initiating attacks against them. This document, read in Spanish, stated a connection between the Spaniards and their God, and commanded native peoples to submit to the authority of the King and the Pope. Of course, native peoples did not relate in the same way to the concepts of God and King as did the Spaniards.

EL REQUERIMIENTO

Codex Chronicles of Aztec Life



Miscommunications characterized that ceremonious meeting between the two leaders on one of Tenochtitlán's causeways in November of 1519. In spite of barriers to understanding, if not to communication, Moctezuma invited Cortés and his closest advisors into his palace. Over the next few months, an uneasy peace existed between the various peoples of the Valley of Mexico and the Spaniards, with their Tlaxcalan allies. The calm was shattered when Cortés placed Moctezuma under arrest in his own palace and his soldiers took violent measures against Aztec priests in order to prevent them from practicing their traditional rites. In the spring of 1520, Cortés received word that Governor Velázquez had sent an army from Cuba led by Pánfilo de Narváez to bring his conquest to a halt. In response, he led a contingent to the coast while eighty of his captains remained in Tenochtitlán. In his absence, Pedro de Alvarado supervised the massacre of priests, as well as women and children, at the Templo Mayor (Main Temple) in the center of the city. A fierce rebellion against Spanish authority broke out, led by Moctezuma's brother [Cuauhtémoc](#). On July 1, 1520, in an event remembered by the Spanish as “La Noche Triste” (often translated to English as the *Night of Sorrows*), the remaining Spaniards were forced from the city.

Meanwhile, Cortés overpowered Narváez's men and convinced them to join his conquest. Upon his return to Tenochtitlán he attempted to salvage the situation by forcing Moctezuma to address the people of the city at his side from the balcony of the royal palace. In the process, the Emperor was killed. Although accounts differ—some indicate that Cortés murdered Moctezuma, others that he was shot down by his own people—the people of Tenochtitlán once again forced the Spaniards from the city upon his death. Cortés ordered his forces to regroup at Tlaxcala. The following December, about 550 Spanish soldiers and nearly 10,000 Tlaxcalans initiated their march toward the Valley of Mexico. The attack on Tenochtitlán began in May 1521 and it quickly became a battle of attrition. In August, after months of intense hand-to-hand conflict in the streets, forces allied with the Spaniards captured Cuauhtémoc, who had taken the title of emperor upon his brother's death.



Already inflicted with smallpox, the Aztecs lost their great city of Tenochtitlán to the joint forces of Cortés' army and Tlaxcalan warriors during the eight month siege of 1521. This seventeenth-century painting depicts months of battle in a single snapshot.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Cortés had indeed conquered one of the two largest and wealthiest civilizations in the Americas, but he could not have done so without the aid of Malintzin and Tlaxcalan allies. Other key factors in the Spaniards' success were technology and disease. Lacking immunity to European sicknesses, thousands upon thousands of native people died after the initial contact. Smallpox, influenza, typhus, measles, diphtheria, and whooping cough were among the devastating ailments that struck the peoples of the Americas. Firearms, including [harquebuses](#) and cannons, as well as the use of armor and horses gave the conquistadores a distinct advantage, but not as insurmountable as has previously been reported. Scholars have indicated that Spanish cannons were few in number, firearms inefficient and inaccurate, and armor in short supply. Another common misconception has been that Aztecs and others believed the Spaniards to be gods, therefore offering obeisance rather than resistance. Compelling recent research, however, illustrates such assumptions to be false.

The victorious Spaniards placed themselves at the head of the former Aztec Empire, rebuilding their own colony of New Spain atop existing administrative structures. They also literally built chapels and cathedrals on top of the ruins of Aztec temples in Tenochtitlán. In the years following the initial conquest, a new society took shape that was dominated by Catholicism and a transplanted version of the Iberian [caste system](#). Society was heavily stratified, with Spaniards who claimed [limpieza de sangre](#) at the top, and peoples of indigenous and African descent at the bottom. After only a few short years, a large class of [mestizos](#) emerged to fill the middle sectors of society.

[Mestizos](#) were people of mixed heritage, most often the children of Spanish fathers and indigenous mothers. Tellingly, syphilis was the one disease that disproportionately inflicted Europeans after contact. In 1512, the [Laws of Burgos](#) had established standards for the treatment of indigenous peoples. The laws indicated that natives were worthy to receive conversion to Catholicism and participate in Spanish imperial society. Despite their low place in the social structure, they were included as subjects of the empire rather than excluded from colonial society and pushed off of their lands as would be the British model of conquest.

The Conquest of Mexico

Perspectives always change as more history is discovered over time. Here are some new perspectives in regards to the Conquest of Mexico:

- Camilla Townsend: “[Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico](#)“
- [Tlatelolco's Plaza of Three Cultures](#) (*Plaza de las Tres Culturas*)

Fray Marcos de Niza's Journey

Although many portrayals of the early period of European conquest and colonization have been characterized as dichotomous contests between Spaniards and indigenous peoples, such was never strictly the case. Spaniards consistently relied upon *indios amigos* to achieve their goals and to build an American empire. Native peoples also became quite adept at playing different groups of Europeans against one another. For example, they noticed competition between French, British, and Spanish colonists in North America, and they used existing political divisions to their advantage. Similarly, natives recognized that Spanish bureaucrats, including governors and judges; clergymen, including Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit friars; and [encomenderos](#) were often at odds with one another. They astutely played one antagonistic faction against the other in order to improve their own situations.

Spanish conquistadores located and conquered the largest and wealthiest native civilizations in the early part of the sixteenth century. Because the Aztec and Inca Empires employed administrative systems that the Spaniards were able to relate to, they found the task of subduing such peoples to be relatively easy. This is not to say, of course, that there was not resistance to colonialism in those places. Indigenous peoples opposed Spanish attempts to stamp out their cultures and traditions no matter what type of lifeways they practiced. Some people from the Valley of Mexico and the province of Nueva Galicia, for example, joined the Coronado entrada in 1539 for the purpose of escaping to a land far to the north that lay beyond the control of European empires. Yet the fact remained that Spanish administrators preferred sedentary peoples with extensive bureaucratic establishments because such customs and practices were more legible to them. Nomadic groups beyond the Aztec frontier (or the

territory formerly controlled by the Aztec Empire), on the other hand, were far more difficult to subdue. In most ways, the total colonization of indigenous peoples never came to fruition.

[Cortés](#)' dreams of power and glory were shattered when the Spanish Crown appointed a viceroy from outside of the colony to rule the province of New Spain. In order to administer an empire that was far removed from (and far larger than) the mother country, Spanish kings created a system of overlapping jurisdictions to ensure the loyalty of their subjects. Since the king could not be present in his imperial holdings, it was in his best interests to ensure that ambitious figures like Cortés had checks on their authority. The viceroyalty of New Spain also included an *audiencia* (or judicial body), and a bishopric by the mid-1520s. The head of the *audiencia* often officiated over matters that were also the purview of the viceroy and the bishop. All three leaders might be in agreement about major decision, but more often they opposed each other in attempts to enhance their individual authority through appeals to the king himself. Despite the inefficiency of this type of system, the Spanish crown favored it because it required each leader to seek the approval of the king rather than going off on his (and such leaders were always male) own to challenge imperial control. Beltrán Nuño de Guzmán, for example, challenged Cortés' leadership early on in an attempt to garner the favor of the king. Much to the dismay of both men, the king replaced them with Antonio de Mendoza, the first viceroy of New Spain.

On the heels of the reports and rumors generated by Cabeza de Vaca and his companions' harrowing experiences (recounted at the beginning of this chapter), many European residents of New Spain imagined the existence of another Aztec Empire in the far north. As the stories were told and retold, they were conflated with existing Spanish legends. By the time that Viceroy Mendoza commissioned Fray [Marcos de Niza](#) to lead a reconnaissance mission to the far north, the Spaniards believed that they would there find the [Seven Cities of Cibola](#). Their imaginations were stoked by legends that had originated during the Iberian reconquest. As early as the eighth century, the tale of the Seven Cities of the Antilles began to circulate. According to the legend, seven (or in

some cases eight) Catholic bishops had escaped the Islamic conquest and fled to the Antilles with great wealth. Such legends perpetuated belief in European superiority because they assumed that if advanced societies existed in the world, they were the product of European-descended peoples.

Seven Cities of Cibola



Native peoples consistently fed the Europeans' desire to locate mythical cities of wealth. They may have misunderstood the types of items upon which Spaniards placed value because their own notions of ownership and wealth tended to be quite different from those of the explorers. More likely, however, indigenous peoples realized the ease with which they could send entire expeditions away from their homes and families. By the mid-1500s, as we will see in the case of the Coronado entrada, sending Spaniards on wild goose chases for wealth took on added risks of retributive violence. Yet even in the instances that Spaniards came up empty-handed, they never lost the hope that somewhere in the unknown interior of the continent cities of grandeur did, in fact, exist.

Once Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions returned to Mexico City in the

summer of 1536, it did not take long for rumors to circulate of a wondrous land in the far north. Viceroy Mendoza refused to be caught up in the wave of excitement. He lodged the four men in his own home and spent the better part of two months conversing with them about their experiences during their long foray across the deserts of present-day northern Mexico. Although the stories that they reported were highly provocative, they were based on hearsay and the existence of a single copper bell that the survivors had acquired through trade.

After much deliberation, Mendoza concluded that Cabeza de Vaca was “a person who should be relied upon,” and he initiated efforts to organize a reconnaissance party to investigate the rumors.⁹ Despite his caution, Mendoza wanted to act before other ambitious men undertook their own expeditions to the north. Potential competitors included [Hernán Cortés](#) and Beltrán Nuño de Guzmán, both of whom had spoken with Cabeza de Vaca and the others. Cabeza de Vaca himself balked at the proposition of leading the viceroy’s fact-finding mission. He had his own status in mind, asserting the idea that were he to engage such a journey he would require a royal appointment on par with that of Mendoza himself. He did not want to subordinate himself and potentially achieve glory for someone else at his own expense. Concerns for the well-being of the indigenous peoples that he encountered also crossed his mind. By not lending his support to Mendoza, he would not be responsible for death and destruction that he thought would surely accompany the expedition.

In October of 1536, Cabeza de Vaca and Andrés Dorantes de Carranza set sail for Spain in an effort to curry favor through personal reports to the king himself. To ensure that someone with knowledge of the far north remained in New Spain, Mendoza purchased [Esteban](#) from Dorantes de Carranza. Esteban thus remained the only survivor “willing” to retrace the steps of their journeys.

A slave, however, could not lead a royal mission. In order to find an acceptable alternate, Mendoza turned to the leadership of the [Franciscan order](#) in Mexico City. Franciscan missionaries had accompanied Cortés on his first mission to the Valley of Mexico, and they had established themselves as the ecclesiastical authorities in the young colony. Additionally, the efforts of two friars, Antonio

de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas, to refine royal policies regarding indigenous peoples were gaining traction in royal circles by the late 1530s. Las Casas had been an encomendero prior to his entry into the Dominican order. He and Montesinos wrote volumes on the types of violent abuse that the colonizers enacted against native peoples. Las Casas' writings in particular conjured up images of constant blood baths and sadistic actions on the part of the Spaniards. Unwittingly, his work gave rise to the infamous [Black Legend](#) which painted Spanish conquistadores as intensely violent. Many of the cases of which he wrote were based on rumor and hearsay, but the message that indigenous peoples needed royal protection did not go unheeded.



Illustration of Spaniards killing women and children along with feeding their remains to dogs. Images such as this one, from *Illustrations de Narratio regionum indiarum per Hispanos quosdam devastatarum*, fueled the Black Legend.

Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

By 1542 King Carlos I issued a package of legislation known collectively as the

“New [Laws of the Indies](#) for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians” (or simply as the “New Laws”). The idea was to set a different tone for Spanish expansion in which religious orders were to play a more prominent role. Officials hoped that the participation of priests in new colonization ventures would curb the violence, but not all friars were of the same mindset as Las Casas or Montesinos. In New Spain, Franciscan prominence meant that missionaries would take the lead in keeping settlers and explorers in check. Missionaries, despite their general inclination to stand up for indigenous peoples’ right to live free of Spanish violence, had the goal of stamping out indigenous religious practices in favor of Catholicism. At times, they were willing to use violent means of coercion themselves.

Although the reconnaissance mission to the far north predated the New Laws by three years, Mendoza was already thinking in terms of carrying out “pacification” (not “conquest”) by protecting the lives and interests of “the good of the people of the land.” Under these circumstances, Mendoza chose Fray Marcos de Niza to lead the venture northward.

Niza came with the endorsement of Bishop [Juan de Zumárraga](#), one of the most powerful ecclesiastical leaders in the early colonial period. Niza was among the Franciscans that accompanied Francisco Pizarro’s mission to subdue the Inca Empire in the Andes. He longed for another adventure and, like most other Franciscans, he wanted to open new mission fields. Although preparations



Fray Marcos de Niza was a Franciscan friar who arrived in the New World in 1531 as an explorer. He traveled from Peru all the way to the Southwest in search of new mission fields among indigenous peoples. He led Coronado’s expedition to present-day Zuni Pueblo in 1540, despite failing to locate the Seven Cities of Cíbola the previous year.

for the journey began in November 1538, [Francisco Vázquez de Coronado](#), acting in his role as the new governor of Nueva Galicia, was not able to escort the group to their launching point at [Culiacán](#) until the spring of 1539. Culiacán lay at the northernmost edge of Spanish settlement at the time. On March 7, 1539, Niza and Esteban set out, accompanied by a large contingent of indigenous allies that had been gathered from the surrounding areas.

Courtesy of Jose Cisneros Estate



Fray Marcos de Niza's Journey North Route followed by Estevanico and Fray Marcos de Niza during their reconnaissance journey to locate the Seven Cities of Cibola in 1539.

The party met with general success as it marched northward, finding native groups that received them with kindness, but also suspicion. When Niza paused to observe the Easter holiday at a native settlement known as Vacapa, Esteban pressed ahead. He was to send white crosses of different sizes back to the friar to indicate the types of societies he encountered. If he located settlements of little to moderate importance, he was to send a cross one palmo (about the width of four fingers) in proportion. The size of the crosses were to indicate the respective significance of the settlements, as well as their wealth. The largest crosses were reserved for sites that were “grander and better than New

Spain.”[10](#)

Before Niza had departed Vacapa, Esteban’s messengers returned with a cross that was “the height of a man.” The messengers also reported that the advance party had received word that the Seven Cities of Cíbola lay just thirty-days’ journey beyond the point that they had reached. Niza departed once the Easter celebrations were completed, following about sixteen days behind Esteban’s group. All the while, messengers returned to the friar’s group with more news of great cities of wealth to the north, as well as crosses to indicate that they had located settlements of great substance. The messengers communicated Esteban’s faith in the validity of the reports that he had received from the natives, and Niza also wrote that he trusted the accounts he had received.

Then, on May 5, 1539, Esteban reached the first of the settlements that the Spaniards referred to as Cíbola. In reality, they arrived at the Zuni village of [Hawikuh](#) which was the westernmost of the six Zuni settlements. Zuni traditions tell of a “black Mexican” that arrived just outside of Hawikuh that fateful day. Rather than inviting him into their village, however, the Zuni people repulsed his advance with a barrage of arrows. In the skirmish, most of the advance party was killed, including Esteban himself. Two frightened survivors made their way back to Niza, reporting the tragedy at Cíbola.



HAWIKUH (B)

From Geography Photograph, 1925 by L. F. Curtis

Ruins of the Zuni village of Hawikuh, which was the largest of the Zuni villages at the time of Coronado's arrival in New Mexico.

Courtesy of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University

Various accounts of Esteban's death provided different explanations of the Zuni people's reasoning. According to some, he had been treated as a "black god" during previous months, receiving gifts including turquoise, gourd rattles, clothing, and women. When he expected similar privileges of the Zunis, they turned on him. Another take is that Esteban sent his gourd rattle ahead to Hawikuh as he had done in previous peaceful encounters with new groups of people. When the one of the Zuni leaders received the rattle, he "flung it to the ground with much wrath and anger."¹¹ Apparently that particular gourd had originated from a group of people who were the Zuni's enemies. By Zuni oral history accounts, Esteban was received initially at Hawikuh with great hospitality. Once inside, however, "his rude behavior toward the women and

girls of the pueblo” caused the men to force him and his companions from the village.¹² In his most recent biography, researcher Dennis Herrick reminds us that, “Ironically, the Zuni Indians who most writers accuse of killing Esteban are the ones who keep his memory alive in their oral history and through their ancient, traditional religion of kivas and katsinas.”¹³ Herrick argues that recognizing the Zuni relationship to Esteban’s memory suggests that they may not have killed him, although he apparently died somewhere near Hawikuh.

According to Fray Marcos de Niza’s official report, when the story of Esteban’s death reached him he pressed on until within sight range of Hawikuh but he made no attempts to enter the pueblo. Most scholars of the Niza reconnaissance mission, however, argue that the friar more likely turned and fled without attempting to see Cíbola. At best, he may have viewed the village of Hawikuh from a distance. Despite his lack of firsthand knowledge about the settlements that Spaniards still referred to as Cíbola, upon his return to Mexico City in late-August 1539 he reported the existence of the fabled cities. Although he did not expand on the specific types of wealth they possessed, neither did he attempt to dispel rumors that Cíbola indeed housed seven cities of gold that were of greater size and importance than Mexico City itself.

Searching for “Nuevo México”

However the friar, who was subsequently named provincial (administrative head) of the [Franciscan Order](#) in Mexico City, justified his misrepresentation of the truth, the story of another Mexico in the far north gained credence in late 1539. Based on Niza’s report (which essentially did nothing more than verify the existence of cities in the far north), Viceroy Mendoza remained unconvinced of Cíbola’s value. Almost immediately after Niza’s report was filed and sent to Madrid, Mendoza sent Melchior Díaz from [Culiacán](#) to retrace the friar’s steps.

Despite the viceroy’s lack of faith in the significance of Niza’s account, public opinion in the capital city was abuzz with the idea that a “new Mexico” lay hundreds of miles to the north. Fearful that ambitious settlers might attempt to organize unsanctioned expeditions to investigate, Mendoza authorized Governor [Francisco Vázquez de Coronado](#) to lead the official entrada to the [Seven Cities of Cíbola](#). In October 1539, Mendoza wrote to the Spanish royal treasurer that he had “decided at present . . . to send as many as two hundred horsemen by land and two *navíos* by sea with as many as a hundred arquebusiers and crossbowmen” on the excursion.¹⁴



On a quest to find the Seven Cities of Cíbola (or Gold), Coronado marched north through the Southwest gathering information from Pueblos, often through violence.

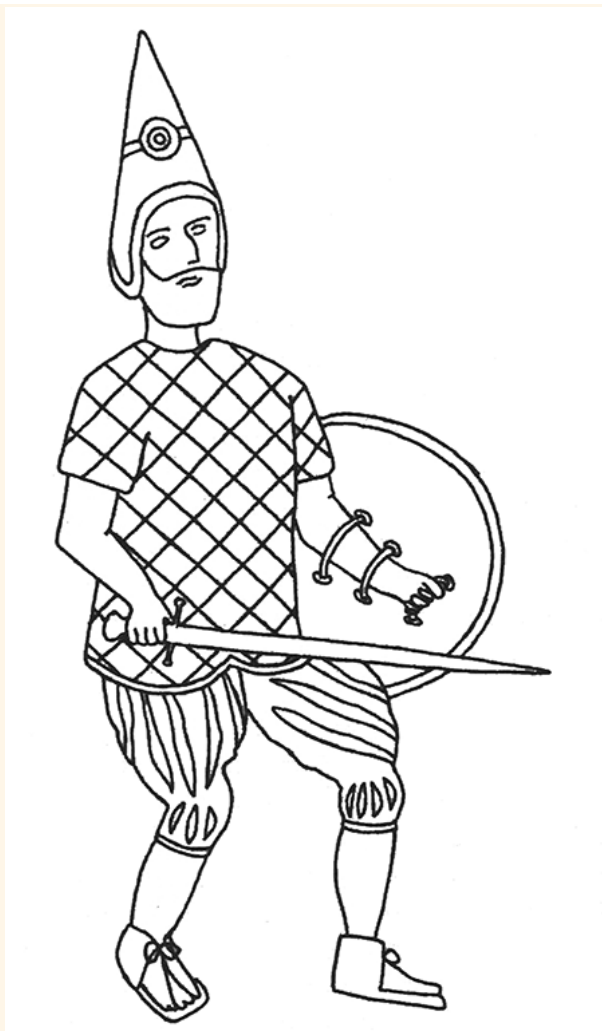
Courtesy of Library of Congress

Although Mendoza dragged his feet based on his feeling that New Spain's resources and manpower could be better spent than on a quixotic voyage to Cíbola, Coronado's preparations were well underway by November. The young governor had arrived in New Spain with Mendoza's company and had the confidence of the viceroy. As a traditional adelantado, Coronado put up his personal resources to finance and outfit the expedition. His reward would be the glory and spoils achieved in Cíbola. In all, Coronado mustered nearly 300 horsemen, 6 Franciscans (including Niza who was to be the entrada's guide), and about 1,300 indios amigos from the areas surrounding Mexico City. Additionally, the wives and children of a few of the soldiers also accompanied the entourage. Hundreds of cattle, sheep, mules, and extra horses were tended by native allies.

Indios amigos vastly outnumbered the other members of the entrada, yet their presence was either downplayed or completely ignored in the reports filed by Coronado and his captains. Such was the traditional practice of Spanish expeditions. Indigenous allies were invaluable to the conquest, but they long remained invisible to historians because Spaniards did not so much as record the number of natives that accompanied any given expedition. The work of historians Oakah L. Jones, Jr., Richard Flint, and Shirley Cushing Flint, has recovered evidence of the indigenous allies' contributions to the entrada. Although still unable to reconstruct the personal stories of most of these people, some existing documents recount the presence of [Mexica](#) expeditionaries, as well as others from Tlatelolco and Coyoacán. Still others were added to the entrada as it made its way through the present day states of Michoacán, Jalisco, Nayarit, and Sinaloa.

Dressing for the March but not the Winter

[Guadalcanal](#) native Juan Jiménez had a harsh winter to survive while on Coronado's Expedition in 1541-42. The types of clothing Juan Jiménez would have worn include head armor, a quilted cotton tunic, and *alpargates* (hemp sandals). In this image, he carries a sword and *rodela* (a round shield). Though not mentioned in his inventory, the *rodela* would be standard protection for a swordsman. A winter coat probably would have been nice! [Learn more about Juan Jiménez.](#)



*Used with permission—Richard and Shirley
Flint*

Indigenous men had many reasons for joining Coronado. Spanish colonial practice allowed local native leaders to maintain their positions of political prominence as long as they pledged loyalty to Church and Crown. Whenever colonial authorities requested men to accompany an expedition, indigenous leaders were expected to provide them. Depending on the internal dynamics of the community, volunteers might be called for, potential political challengers appointed, or a draft made. Among those that volunteered to accompany Coronado, many apparently hoped that the expedition would afford them the opportunity to escape to a place far beyond the control of Spain. After the failed entrada abandoned the Pueblos along the Rio Grande, hundreds of indios amigos took advantage of the chance to stay behind.

Viceroy Mendoza's impressions were confirmed in the spring of 1540 when Díaz's report made its way to his desk. Díaz's findings were the exact opposite of those made by Niza in virtually every way possible. His party also never reached [Hawikuh](#), but along the trail the reports that they received made it clear that the Zuni Pueblos were not large cities of spectacular wealth. Instead, they were reportedly comprised of "crudely worked buildings made of stone and mud." Based on the intelligence he received, Díaz concluded that the far north was not suited for any purpose other than missionary work.

Ultimately, the report was of no avail. By the time Mendoza read it, Coronado's men were already well underway. As they followed existing foot trails used by indigenous groups along the Pacific coastal plains, members of the expedition complained of intense heat and suffocating dust. The few soldiers who possessed traditional chainmail armor soon shed it in favor of the buckskin and cotton clothing worn by their indigenous allies. Since the men were required to provide most of their own equipment, and Spanish manufactures were in short supply in New Spain, very few owned crossbows, [harquebuses](#), or swords. Instead, they armed themselves with the same types of weapons used by the natives, including atlatls, bows and arrows, slings, spears, obsidian swords, and clubs.

Coronado himself was cut from the traditional conquistador mold. In 1510, he had been born to a noble family in the province of Salamanca in Iberia. At the age of twenty-five he sought to enhance his and his family's prestige by accompanying the newly appointed viceroy of New Spain to the Americas. Once in the colony, he set himself apart by quelling a slave rebellion. He subsequently married the daughter of the colonial treasurer and gained possession of a large estate. He proved an able administrator during his short tenure as governor of Nueva Galicia. Like many who both came before and after him, he seemed poised to make a great name for himself as conquistador.

Aware of the narrow trails and the environmental conditions that lay ahead, Coronado broke his expedition into several smaller groups that set out from Culiacán at different times. Staggering the impact of the humans and animals

allowed the trail, grazing fodder, and watering holes to recover. At the halfway point to Cíbola, at a site called Los Corazones along the Rio Sonora, Coronado ordered the establishment of a [villa](#) to be called San Gerónimo. The villa was subsequently moved northward to a point in the Sonora Valley called Suyá by its native inhabitants. Coronado similarly established several supply checkpoints along the route, but San Gerónimo was the only town that he commissioned.



Reproduction of a nineteenth-century Frederic Remington drawing depicting Coronado's advance into the Southwest.

Courtesy of Louis S. Ganzman/National Park Service

On July 7, 1540, Coronado and his advance party arrived at Hawikuh. The Captain-General was immediately disappointed by what he encountered. The pueblo was nothing like the inflated Cities of Cíbola that Niza's earlier foray had invented in the Spaniards' imaginations. Coronado's group made their way toward the town just as its inhabitants were performing a vital seasonal ceremony. To the Zuni people, the Spaniards' interruption of their sacred rites

was a major affront. Medicine men laid out a sacred corn meal line and warned the soldiers that they must not cross; to do so would be a severe act of aggression.

A small group of Spaniards neared the corn meal barrier, illustrating what the Zunis correctly perceived as a lack of respect for Pueblo religion and culture. As the man nearest the dividing line read the [requerimiento](#) in fulfillment of one of the Spaniards' own rituals of exploration and conquest, Zuni warriors fired warning shots near the men and their animals. Coronado's forces refused to back down, and they sacked the village in the ensuing battle. When they entered the village, the gravely disappointed soldiers fully realized the exaggerated nature of the rumors of Cíbola. A dejected Coronado called Hawikuh a poor town that had been "all crumpled together."¹⁵ Its inhabitants did not possess gold or other forms of wealth.

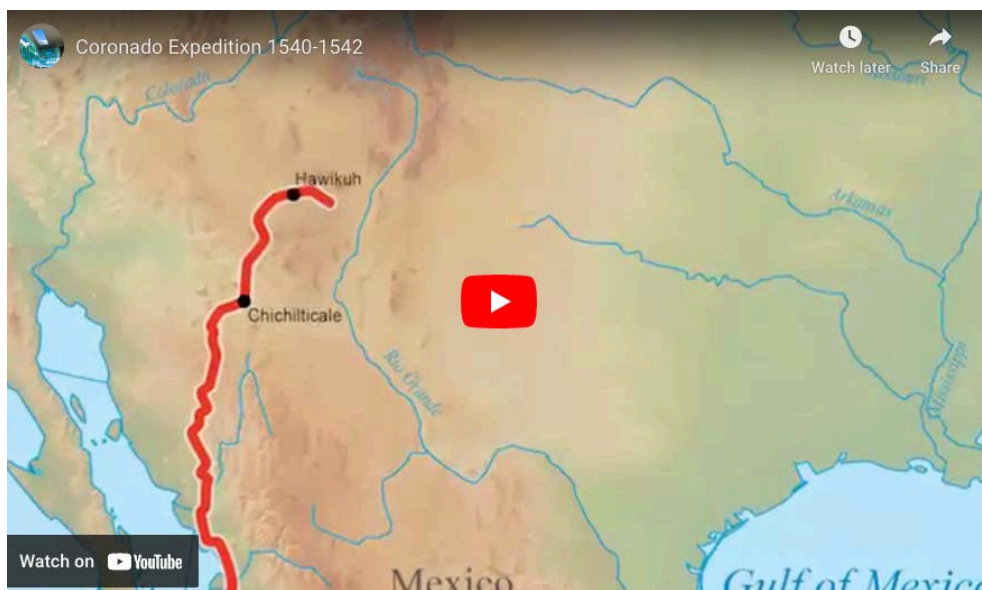
Coronado was furious with Fray [Marcos de Niza](#) for perpetuating a great deception. In a letter to Viceroy Mendoza, the Captain General reported that "everything the friar had said was found [to be] the opposite."¹⁶ Hawikuh was one of six Zuni Pueblos, not the foremost among seven cities of gold. Desperate to salvage the mission, Coronado resolved to press on in search of other settlements and, hopefully, wealth. Coronado divided his forces, sending a small group west through Hopi country and toward the Grand Canyon. The main body of the entrada headed eastward toward the Pueblos of Tiguex near present day Bernalillo. As was the purview of conquerors, before leaving Hawikuh, he renamed the village Granada because it reminded his men of the Muslim section of the Iberian city of the same name.

With cold weather fast approaching, Coronado elected to make his headquarters at Tiguex during the winter of 1540-1541. Proximity to the Rio Grande and the produce of the Tiwa peoples that inhabited the region were attractive to the weary Spaniards. As the soldiers pressured the Tiwas to provide them with food, clothing, and shelter, interactions between them became increasingly violent. Further exacerbating the situation, several Spaniards raped Tiwa women. The Pueblo people initially resolved to bear the

Spaniards' presence in order to avoid confrontation, but the Europeans' arrogance made such an arrangement impossible.

Some of Coronado's captains later testified that his actions placed Tiwa leaders in an untenable position. According to Pedro de Castañeda, Coronado's demand that one headman provide the Spaniards with three-hundred items of clothing disrespected Pueblo custom. The headman informed Coronado that he lacked the authority to comply; he would first need to council with other leaders. The Captain General and others, however, refused to work with the Pueblos. Castañeda recalled that Coronado continued his demands, placing the natives in a situation with no other option than to "take off their own cloaks and hand them over until the number that the Spaniards asked for was reached." If Spanish soldiers later encountered a Tiwa with better cloaks than their own, "they exchanged it with him without any consideration or respect, and without inquiring about the importance of the person they despoiled." Castañeda concluded that "the Indians resented this very much."¹⁷

Over the two winters between late 1540 and early 1542, the Spaniards' continued demands for provisions intensified such resentment. When the people of Arenal refused to hand over provisions, Coronado's men destroyed the Pueblo and executed thirty of its men by burning them at the stake. During what have been dubbed the [Tiguex War](#), Spanish soldiers decimated thirteen of the fifteen Pueblos in the region along the Rio Grande. Tiwa peoples did not forget the brutality of Coronado and his men as they regrouped and rebuilt their homes in the years following his departure.



Coronado Expedition, 1540-1542

Route followed by the Coronado expedition between 1540 and 1542. Upon their failure to locate either the Seven Cities of Cíbola or the rumored wealth of Quivira on the Great Plains, the expedition returned to Mexico City with little to show for their efforts.

Besides creating tensions and bringing outright devastation to Pueblos along the Rio Grande, Coronado's expedition fanned out to explore other areas. One party traveled northward to Taos Pueblo, while another, led by the Captain General himself, headed to **Cicuye**, called Pecos Pueblo by the Spaniards. A party from Pecos had initially met the Spaniards at Hawikuh following the battle there. Coronado's men referred to the headman of the Pecos people as **Bigotes**, because he apparently had a mustache. Along with the party from Pecos was a captive from among the Plains peoples whom the Spaniards referred to as **El Turco** (the Turk) because his appearance was similar to that of Turkish people. El Turco told Coronado and his captains of a civilization called Quivira that lay far to the west. According to his account, Quivira was a place of incredible wealth, containing vast amounts of gold and silver as well as a large population. When Bigotes claimed that Quivira was a product of the Plains captive's imagination, El Turco accused Bigotes of withholding a silver bracelet that would prove his claims. As a result, Coronado placed Bigotes under arrest, and commissioned El Turco to lead his force towards the plains in search of Quivira.

The party set out from Pecos Pueblo, which lay on the eastern edge of the Pueblo world. By the time the Europeans reached Cicuye, its people had no doubt already heard stories of their brutality and their affinity for gold and other types of mineral wealth. When they learned the gruesome details of the attack on Hawikuh, their leaders made the decision to attempt to establish peaceful relations with the newcomers. Bigotes led his small party to Hawikuh with such purpose in mind. They brought buffalo robes, shields, headdresses,

and little bells as gifts to the Spaniards to indicate their diplomatic intentions. Chronicler of the entrada, Pedro de Castañeda, wrote a description of Cicuye. He and his companions were impressed by the town “of as many as five hundred warriors.” He wrote of its many kivas and four-story construction. Castañeda also commented on Cicuye’s role as a center of trade between Pueblo and Plains peoples, and added that its people “pride themselves that no one has been able to subdue them, while they subdue what pueblos they will.”¹⁸

Shortly after their arrival, the Spaniards also read the requerimiento to those present at Cicuye. Whether or not they understood its message, the Pecos people certainly recognized its implications due to their knowledge of the events at Hawikuh. As one historian of early Latin America has illustrated, the language barrier mattered less due to the Spaniards’ use of violence and other actions taken to force the submission of indigenous peoples. The Pueblos did not understand the implications of becoming subjects of Crown and Church, but, for the most part, they wanted to avoid inciting the Europeans’ wrath. Additionally, according to Coronado’s reports, the people of Cicuye and the Tiwa pueblos were enemies. The Spaniards were able to exploit such existing divisions to facilitate their conquest of Pueblo peoples.

Despite language barriers, El Turco understood what the Spaniards were looking for. Through a difficult translation effort that involved Nahuatl-speaking indios amigos, Franciscan Fray Juan de Padilla, and elaborate gesturing, the Spaniards came to believe that at Quivira they would finally locate the Seven Cities of Cíbola. In early May 1541, having laid waste to the Tiwa Pueblos, Coronado’s entire army relocated to Cicuye. Despite Bigotes’ insistence that no such place as Quivira existed, Coronado committed all of his forces and energy to the plains. By Spanish accounts, El Turco had exaggerated his description of Quivira to the extent “that had it been true, it would have been the richest thing in the Indies.”

The motives of El Turco remain somewhat mysterious. Ultimately, his tale of Quivira resulted in Bigotes’ release from captivity when the Spaniards set out on their journey, but it also resulted in his own death at the hands of the

newcomers when they learned that Quivira was, in fact, nothing more than the grass-hut villages of the Wichita people in July 1541. Once again there were no cities of Cíbola, no quick wealth, no “Nuevo México.” Although unclear what reasons he had to lead the Spaniards on a wild goose chase, El Turco’s actions mirror those of numerous other indigenous peoples that reported great civilizations of wealth in order to send the expeditionaries on their way.



This morion-style helmet was common among Spanish explorers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This particular helmet dates to about 1600 and features the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. *Blair Clark (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 177904.*

By the fall of 1541, a dejected Coronado realized that his entrada had been a failure. Following one more winter at the now-abandoned Tiguex, the Captain General led his forces back toward New Spain in the spring of 1542. When the group passed through the Suya valley of Sonora, they found that the villa of San

Gerónimo had been destroyed by local peoples. Few survivors remained, and the losses were personal for Coronado and many of his captains that had left family members behind. Diego de Alcaraz, one of the captains left to administer San Gerónimo, “committed many outrages” against the area’s native inhabitants. According to one survivor’s account, Alcaraz’s atrocities included “taking provisions against their will and seizing their wives and daughters in order to have sexual relations with them.”¹⁹

Coronado emerged from the expedition a broken man. His personal fortune was depleted and he stood trial for atrocities committed against the Zuni, Tiwa, and Suya peoples. Viceroy Mendoza’s attempts to ensure that the entrada avoid brutality toward indigenous peoples came to naught. Much to his chagrin, the expeditionaries’ actions seemed to provide evidence for the validity of the [Black Legend](#). The stresses placed on them by a dry, inhospitable climate and Pueblo peoples who were unwilling to submit to their authority proved overwhelming.

The Coronado entrada underscores the inherent contradictions of Spanish colonization. The “formal policy or intent” was never deliberately to destroy native peoples’ livelihoods.²⁰ Yet the Spaniards’ sense of political, cultural, and religious superiority targeted indigenous cultures. Colonization of indigenous peoples’ customs and beliefs proved impossible without violence—something that Spanish officials and conquistadores understood, at least implicitly. They never considered a mission of exploration or colonization without weapons.

Despite the overall failure of the Coronado entrada to conquer or settle the far north, Spaniards learned vital new information about the Pueblo world and the Great Plains. Coronado’s group was the first to see [Acoma Pueblo](#), which Castañeda described as “one of the strongest fortresses ever seen” due to its position high atop a mesa. Members of the expedition also described the trade between Pueblo and other peoples that took place at Cicuye and Taos.

Coronado’s failed attempt to locate Quivira resulted in the first European report of the Great Plains. He and others of his men described the great herds of bison that roamed free. By one account, they numbered “as many as the fish of the sea.” They also described the ways that Plains peoples hunted the buffalo before

they were introduced to the horse.



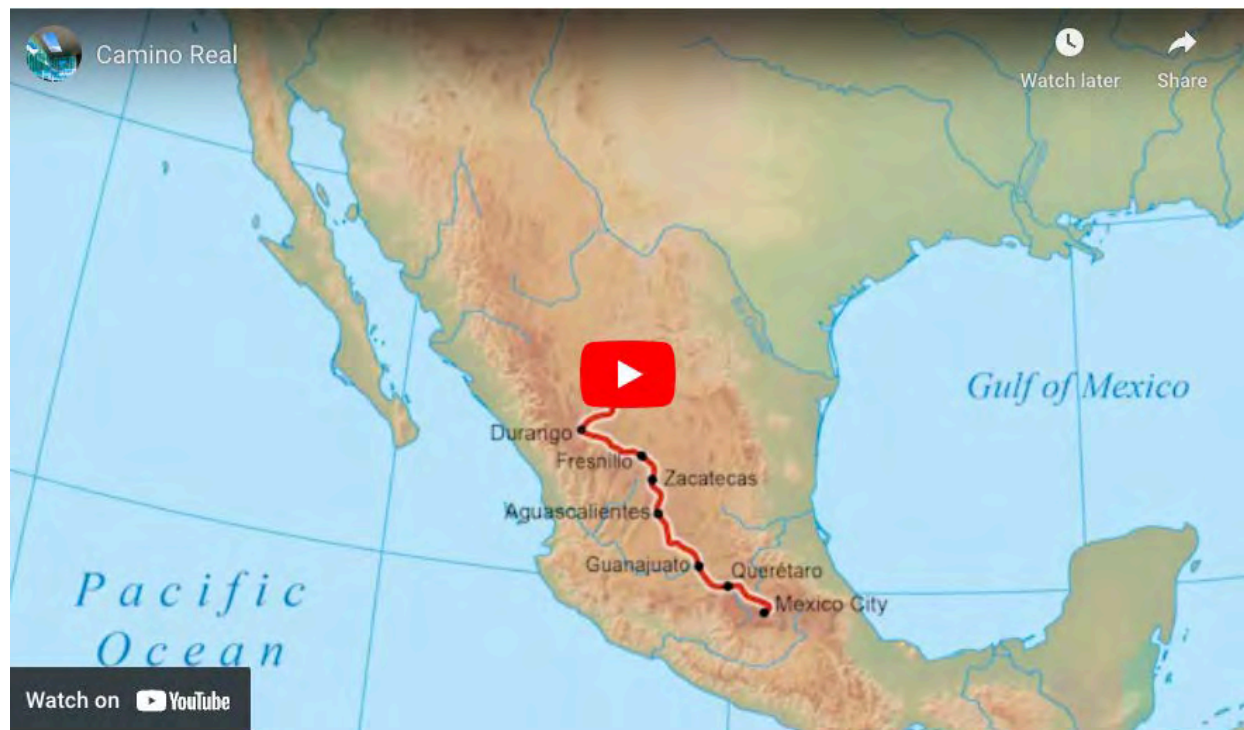
Also called Sky City, Acoma Pueblo has continuously occupied the area 60 miles west of Albuquerque for over 800 years.

Courtesy of Marshall Henrie

Yet Coronado concluded that New Mexico was unfit for Spanish settlement. He reported that it was “impossible for anyone to spend the winter here, since there is no firewood” and few other provisions.²¹ Three Franciscans and hundreds of indios amigos, however, elected to stay among the Pueblos. It appears that many of the Nahuatl-speaking allies planned all along to abandon the expedition when the opportunity presented itself. Unlike Coronado, the Franciscans saw New Mexico as a place of great potential as a mission field. One of the three friars attempted to work among the Wichita people, but was killed upon his return. Although the fate of the other two is unknown, it is likely that they also met death at the hands of Pueblo people.

Conquest Redefined

Between the Coronado entrada and the 1598 colonization mission led by [Juan de Oñate](#), many residents of New Spain continued to hope for new economic and missionary opportunities in the north. Coronado's reports alerted them to the existence of thousands of people who, from their perspective, were potential laborers. Franciscans and secular settlers alike appreciated the Pueblos' sedentary lifeways. By the mid-1500s, Spanish settlers had learned the hard way that it was virtually impossible for them to subdue nomadic peoples. From the Pueblos' perspective, however, the Coronado expedition created enduring fear. The excessive violence and brutality that characterized the first meeting of Spanish soldiers and Pueblo peoples at [Hawikuh](#) and Tiguex left an indelible mark in their collective memories. Even though the people of [Cicuye](#) avoided open warfare with the Spaniards, they learned from Coronado's methods that the Europeans were willing to use the threat of violence to manipulate their people.



Camino Real

Despite Coronado's failure to establish a permanent Spanish presence in New Mexico, Juan de Oñate's later colonizing expedition extended the Camino Real northward to the Rio Grande Valley.

Spanish officials in Mexico City and Madrid, as well as Catholic leaders, wished to put an end to the continued brutality of conquest. The 1542 New Laws were regularly ignored or enforced with great leniency. By 1550 the line of settlement had been pushed northward to the mining center of Zacatecas. Within a short time, Zacatecas became the second most populous city in New Spain due to a silver-mining bonanza. In 1565 a permanent colony was established in Florida.

Expansion turned royal attention once again to the problem of violence. In another attempt to redefine Spanish colonization through legislation, King [Felipe II](#) issued the [Comprehensive Orders for the New Discoveries](#) in 1573. This body of legislation gave Catholic missionaries the primary role in the colonization process. The regulations expressly prohibited the use of the word "conquest" in favor of the more diplomatic term "pacification." Royal officials forbade unsanctioned colonization expeditions in hopes of preventing unwanted brutality against native peoples. In officially authorized missions, Catholic friars were to rein in conquistadores' excesses.

As in the case of the earlier legislation, the 1573 colonization laws were unenforceable. The patterns of conquest that dated back to the Iberian reconquest and the early explorations of the Americas, including the use of the [requerimiento](#), native allies, and display violence, persisted well into the seventeenth century. Beyond the borders of the former Aztec Empire, even in cases where settlement had already taken place, violence often abounded. Such was the situation in Zacatecas between the 1550s and 1590s. Shipments of silver made their way down the newly established [Camino Real de Tierra Adentro](#) (Royal Road of Interior Lands) to Mexico City, and then on to the port at Veracruz where they were transported to Spain. Along the way, nomadic peoples referred to as [Chichimecas](#) by the Spaniards attacked the convoys.

Chichimeca was a Nahuatl term that meant “lineage of the dog.” Although the [Mexico](#) themselves considered nomadic peoples to the north to be the kin of their own ancestors, Spaniards disparaged them. The [Chichimeca Wars](#) that raged in the region between Mexico City and Zacatecas between the 1550s and 1590s created greater loss of life than any other conflict in Mexican history, including the initial conquest as well as the [Mexican Revolution](#) of the early twentieth century.

What is the significance of the Camino Real?



Over time, the violence abated—but never vanished—as missionaries and other Spaniards alike learned to normalize relations with indigenous peoples through the practice of gift giving, subsidized by the Spanish Crown. Missions sprung up around mining centers to instruct native peoples in the ways of Christianity and Spanish civilization. Zacatecas became a springboard to further northern exploration, and it also boasted a different type of society based on wage labor because the systems of [encomienda](#) and [repartimiento](#) proved ineffective for bringing laborers to the mines. Within the context of the northern mining

frontier, young men proved their valor through their abilities to wage war against nomadic peoples. It was from this group of men that the leadership of the first permanent settlement in New Mexico would come.



El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro is a trail corridor which nurtures the exchange of customs, ideas, and language between Mexico and the American Southwest.

Courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management

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Chapter 4: Spanish Colonization of New Mexico, 1598-1700

Spanish Colonization of New Mexico, 1598-1700

Toward New Mexico

Oñate & Initial Spanish Colonization

Oñate's Troubled Tenure

Building a Royal Colony

"The First American Revolution"

References & Further Reading

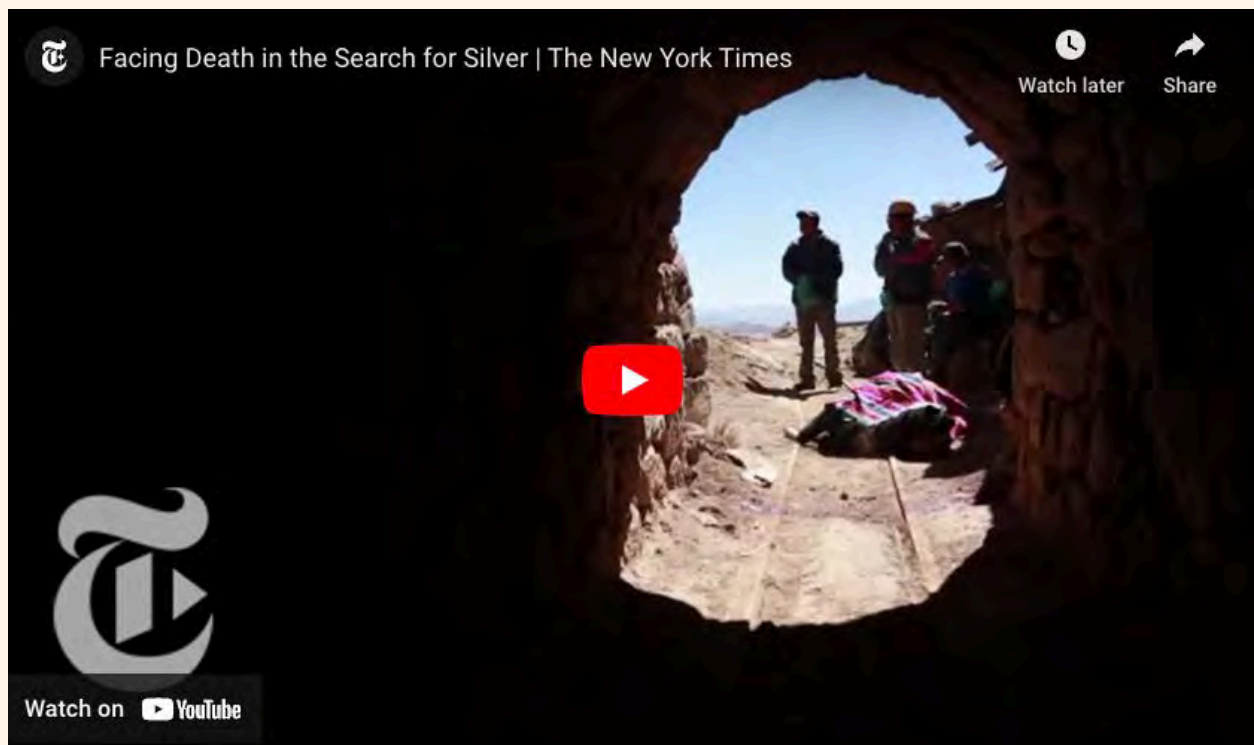
Spanish Colonization of New Mexico, 1598-1700



By the mid-1550s, Spanish authorities and would-be [encomenderos](#) alike continued to dream of the prospect of wealth to the north, although the failures of Coronado had tempered their vision. In 1563 Francisco de Ibarra was tapped by King [Felipe II](#) to renew northward exploration from the mining center of Zacatecas. Ibarra's appointment came in response to calls from Luis de Velasco, the second viceroy of New Spain, "to explore the lands Coronado had seen superficially, to locate suitable sites for towns, and above all, to look for mines."¹

Silver Mining in the New World

Much of Northern Mexico and the American Southwest were part of the New Spain Silver Frontier. From Zacatecas, Mexico to Potosí, Bolivia the Spanish pursued mining riches to send back to Spain. Today, the mining culture in Bolivia continues to fuel the world with silver.



Ibarra was cut from the traditional conquistador mold. He came from a family of means, although he did not stand to inherit the bulk of the family fortune. He was the son-in-law of the former viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, who was a favorite in the Spanish court, and his uncle Diego had been among the principal beneficiaries of the Zacatecas mining boom. Family wealth allowed Francisco to undertake missions of exploration and discovery. Expeditions in the territories of the indigenous Chicomostoc and Chalchihuites contributed to his reputation as an experienced and able frontier leader.

Despite the shortcomings of his initial exploration effort, his second foray was more successful, albeit more life-threatening. In 1565 he led a group of sixty soldiers northward, each provisioned with five horses, along with a large number of indigenous allies and interpreters. Heeding the call to “explore the lands Coronado had seen superficially,” his group followed a path that led them to the lands of the indigenous peoples of present-day Sonora. They had not forgotten their earlier encounter with Coronado’s forces, however, and they immediately united in opposition to Ibarra’s presence in their homelands.

Such pressure pushed the terrified Spaniards along an eastward retreat that led them into the Sierra Madres and across the inhospitable Pulpit Pass. When they descended into the Carretas plains of present-day northwestern Chihuahua they were depleted of supplies and energy. Fortunately for Ibarra, the group was met by friendly [Suma](#) people who told them that golden cities lay to the north. Despite their continued hope that such riches might yet exist, Ibarra’s men did not have the wherewithal to investigate at that time. Instead, they pressed southward in hopes of quickly relocating Spanish civilization in order to resupply. Due to their incomplete knowledge of the region’s geography, they nearly perished in the Sierra Madres. But then, seemingly just in the knick-of-

time, they located a Spanish slaving expedition and their ticket to rest and provisions.



King Philip II (Felipe II) of Spain called for the exploration and colonization missions led by Francisco de Ibarra and [Juan de Oñate](#) in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Portrait of King Philip II of Spain, c.1531-88 (oil on paper, laid on panel), Sanchez Coello, Alonso (c.1531-88) (studio of) / Private Collection / Photo © Philip Mould Ltd, London / Bridgeman Images

Mexico.

As a result of this grueling ordeal, the Spanish Crown granted Ibarra the governorship of the newest province of New Spain: Nueva Vizcaya. An amorphous territory with its capital city at Guadiana (present-day Durango City), the new province was defined only as the “lands north of Zacatecas.” Despite his jurisdiction’s lack of demarcated borders, Ibarra proved to be an adept governor. In that capacity he furthered Spanish exploration and encouraged the foundation of missions and haciendas. During his tenure, ranching and mining came to prominence as the main economic thrust of the region—a pattern that continues to this day. Ibarra’s efforts colonized the next swath of northern territory, however tenuously, and reaffirmed patterns of Spanish expansion that later influenced the exploration and settlement of New

Toward New Mexico

During the four decades between the Coronado expedition and King [Felipe II's](#) 1583 directive to explore and colonize the territory then imagined as Nuevo México, very few Spaniards trekked into the region. Pueblo peoples retained the memory of Spanish violence and atrocities, dreading the day in which Europeans returned to their homelands. Indeed, when [Juan de Oñate's](#) colonizing entrada neared the Pueblo heartland in the late-spring of 1598, Piro peoples fled their river-valley homes to find refuge in higher elevations. Oñate's group also later encountered natives whom they called the "Crossed Ones."² It was rumored that these people had long before been instructed by a Franciscan priest that the symbol of the cross would protect them from the violence of Spanish explorers and colonizers.

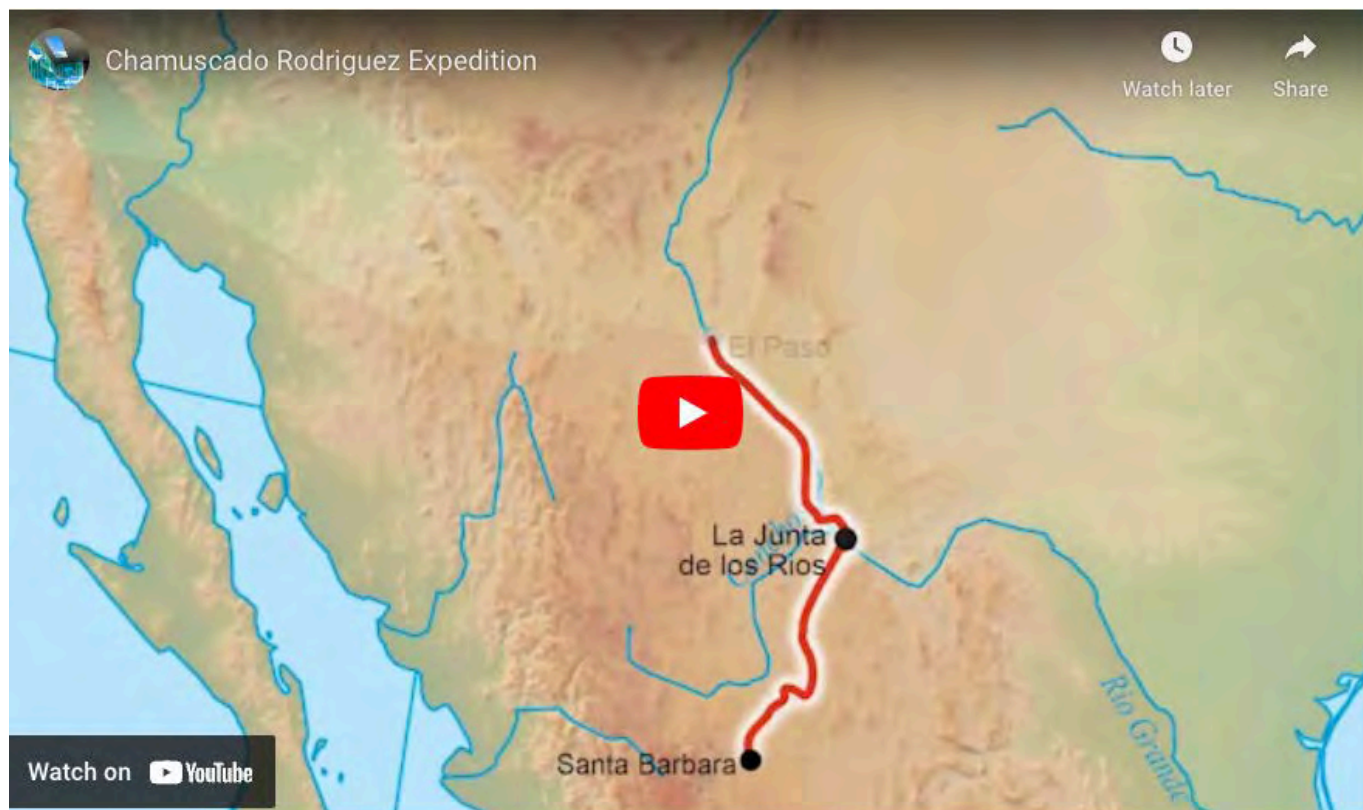
Following the Zacatecas mining bonanza of the 1550s and the creation of Nueva Vizcaya, the official colonization of New Mexico seemed to be a matter of time. Miners in New Spain's northern frontier hoped to become the beneficiaries of the next mother lode in lands they had not yet explored. Additionally, Franciscan missionaries hoped to continue the work of spiritual conquest among the indigenous peoples of the upper Rio Grande. For them, memories of the Coronado excursion signaled an

Did mining have economic consequences in Spain?



untapped missionary field in the far north. These types of motivations dovetailed with Felipe II's renewed interest in further settlement.

Prior to the official, Crown-sponsored colonization mission of the late-1590s, a few other forays into New Mexico renewed Spanish contact with Pueblo peoples. In the summer of 1580, Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado and Fray Agustín Rodríguez became the first Spaniards with the viceroy's official sanction to return to Pueblo lands since the days of Coronado. The [Chamuscado-Rodríguez Expedition](#) traveled a direct route from the mining outpost of Santa Bárbara (located in present-day southern Chihuahua, about 400 miles north of Zacatecas) to the Rio Grande, and then as far north as the Galisteo basin south of present-day Santa Fe. Along the way, they encountered and reported on various groups of people who, from the explorers' perspective, held similar customs and traditions. Chamuscado made his headquarters at Puaray, a Tiwa pueblo in the Galisteo valley. From there, he and the Friars oversaw a handful of journeys into the surrounding region. The Spaniards learned of mines in the Sandia Mountains, although the Pueblos hastily told them of even greater mineral wealth on the plains far to the east.



Chamuscado-Rodriguez Expedition Route

Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado and Fray Agustín Rodríguez led an expedition along this route to the Rio Grande Valley in 1580.

During the expedition's short tenure in New Mexico, its members observed some of the Pueblo peoples' basic patterns of life. Many aspects of Pueblo lifeways were familiar to them, including their sedentary, village lifestyle; their consumption of corn, beans, and squash; and their production of pottery and blankets. Pueblo religious practices, patterns of dress, and gender relationships based on [matrilineal](#) descent, however, they deemed inferior. Despite the general overtones of a peaceful encounter, the Pueblos' desire to send the expedition quickly away to the plains hints at their continued misgivings about the Europeans' presence.

When the expedition returned to Santa Bárbara in the spring of 1581, Fray Francisco López and Fray Rodríguez determined to stay behind among the Tiwa people in spite of their lack of missionary success. In November of 1582, [Antonio de Espejo](#) led another officially sanctioned venture into the Rio Grande valley to discover the fate of the Franciscans and perhaps offer them assistance. Espejo's group reported new details about the Piro peoples, including the first description of the pueblo's central plaza and several kivas, which the Spaniards referred to as *estufas*, or stoves. Upon arrival at Puaray the group learned that the two Franciscans had been killed, although apparently not by the local Tiwas.

Saddened by the news of the Friars' demise and painfully aware of the lingering legacy of Coronado's violence against Pueblo peoples, Espejo led his men on a trading mission that passed through Cochiti, Zia, Jemez, and Acoma prior to ending up in Zuni. In the several Zuni towns the party found wooden crosses, books, and other artifacts left behind by the Coronado

The Voyage of Antonio de Espejo

expedition. Notably, they also encountered natives originally from central Mexico that had been part of Coronado's entrada. Although unpracticed for decades in Spanish, the former native allies translated for Espejo and his men. When the group returned to Puaray they found its residents up in arms. After a bloody skirmish, the party moved on to Pecos. By the time they arrived in Santa Bárbara in the late fall of 1584, the soldiers and explorers counted themselves lucky to have returned alive. Their tales of the Pueblo peoples' exotic cultures, however, appealed to others that hoped to make their own fortunes in the north.

The 1590 journey to the Pueblo homeland by [Gaspar Castaño de Sosa](#) is notable in that it never received the endorsement of the Crown. As lieutenant governor of Nuevo León, Sosa hoped to relocate his colony to a more prosperous location. When his group arrived at Pecos, they found its people unwilling to receive them. Following a six-hour negotiation, Sosa realized that his party would suffer in the freezing winter unless he took action. His group set up their camp at Pecos



NEW MEXICO.

Otherwise,

The Voiage of Anthony of

ESPEJO, who in the yeare 1583. with his company, discovered a Lande of 15. Prouinces, replenished with Townes and villages, with houses of 4. or 5. stories height. It lieth Northward, and some suppose that the same way men may be places inhabited go to the Lande termed De' Labrador.

Translated out of the Spanish copie printed first at Madreal, 1586. and afterward at PARIS in the same yeare.



Printed at London for
Thomas Cadman.

Courtesy of Haithi Trust Digital Library

In 1582, Antonio de Espejo led a relief expedition into the Rio Grande Valley. Espejo kept a record of his travels in New Mexico. During these trips, he learned that the Franciscans who had remained among the Pueblo people had been killed. [Learn more](#) about Antonio de Espejo and his journey to the pueblos of New Mexico.

only after a battle that ended in the deaths of several Pecos warriors. There the Spaniards remained until mid-1592 when agents of the viceroy arrived and arrested Sosa for heading the illegal New Mexico expedition.

These failed ventures illustrate the state of affairs in New Mexico when Juan de Oñate's colonization party arrived in 1598. Pueblo peoples were willing to trade and make some pragmatic accommodations to the Spaniards, but they remained deeply distrustful of the newcomers' intentions. They never forgot the Spaniards' proclivity to use violence, and they were willing to use force to resist Spanish encroachments. Although details can easily be lost in historical surveys of the distant past, Pueblos and Spaniards alike recognized the complexities of their relationships to one another. As already pointed out in a previous chapter, the terms "Spaniard" and "Pueblo" themselves are generalizations that we use to make the past more intelligible to us today. European people on the northern frontier in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appreciated the lack of social and cultural unity among the different Pueblo groups, as well as the important distinctions between Franciscans, governors, and settlers on the European side. Additionally, a new population of [mestizos](#) (people of mixed indigenous and European heritage) had already taken hold in New Spain by the mid-1500s.

Oñate's colonization efforts were tempered by such realities. On a larger scale, King Felipe II advocated the official colonization of New Mexico to address global geopolitical concerns. Principally, he was concerned by recent English incursions into North America that could potentially pose a threat to the Spanish Empire. [Sir Francis Drake](#) entered the Pacific Ocean in late 1578 and initiated raids of Spanish fleets and settlements along New Spain's western shores. [Roanoke](#), although failed, was established in the 1580s on the Atlantic coast of North America. At that moment in time, European officials, explorers, and colonists had very general, and often incorrect, ideas about the geography of the Western Hemisphere. Such issues persisted even on the regional level, as the case of Francisco de Ibarra illustrates. For Felipe II, this lack of geographic accuracy meant that he could not be sure how far removed from New Spain, and specifically from the mining wealth of Zacatecas and Nueva Vizcaya,

French and English explorers on the eastern seaboard actually were. In his geographic imagination, he conceptualized the future New Mexico colony as a buffer zone that would hold off Spain's European rivals and nomadic natives.

Where was Sir Frances Drake?



English privateer Sir Francis Drake made a career of raiding Spanish ships. In 1578 he entered the Pacific Ocean—an alarming move from the perspective of Spanish administrators intent on protecting shipments between North America and the Philippines. [Learn more](#) about Sir Frances Drake.

Courtesy of National Maritime Museum



Oñate & Initial Spanish Colonization

The King's 1583 decree for the settlement of New Mexico was a call for a wealthy individual to step up and finance the enterprise. [Juan de Oñate](#) was not the only nobleman to put in a bid for the position of colonizer, but he was one of the best connected. By the 1580s, his family had a strong reputation in the northern frontier of New Spain. His father, [Cristóbal](#), had been a partner of Diego de Ibarra and two other Basques in the foundation of the prosperous Zacatecas mines. Additionally, Juan established his own reputation as an able leader during the costly [Chichimeca Wars](#) of the 1550s through the 1580s. In that capacity Oñate also displayed a pronounced aptitude for violence against the various nomadic peoples who refused to recognize Spanish dominance.



Equestrian statue of Juan de Oñate, First Governor of New Mexico. Statues of Oñate in New Mexico and Texas have been a source of controversy in recent years due to his highly contested historical legacy.

Courtesy of Advanced Source Productions

Viceroy Luís de Velasco had campaigned alongside Oñate in several skirmishes during the long years of conflict with indigenous peoples. Due to that prior connection, in 1592 Velasco called on him to step in as the official founder of San Luís Potosí because the actual founder was not a man of nobility. Oñate's marriage to Isabel de Tolosa [Cortés](#) Moctezuma also enhanced his political, economic, and social standing. She was the granddaughter of [Hernán Cortés](#) and Isabel Moctezuma, a daughter of the last Aztec emperor. Thus, Oñate's family and experiences as a young man attuned him to all of the complexities and paradoxes created by the Spanish conquest of New Spain and made him an excellent candidate to lead a new colonizing expedition.

Finally, in September of 1595, Oñate formalized a contract with Viceroy Velasco that authorized him to take control of New Mexico in the name of the King and the Catholic Church. The contract designated him as Governor and *adelantado* (a title left over from the Iberian Reconquista of an earlier generation). As was typically the case in such arrangements, Oñate agreed to bear the venture's economic costs. In this way, Spanish Kings had expanded the size of their empire with minimal investment and risk. Oñate willingly took on the burden in exchange for the promised titles, concessions, and honors that would come with the governorship. Additionally, he agreed to lead exploration missions to locate coasts and ports, as well as the fabled [Strait of Anián](#), rumored to be a water passage that connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Such missions were intended to complete the geographic picture of North America and to discover whether New Mexico was near enough the Pacific to be a trade station for Asian spices. Success would enhance the prestige of Oñate's yet-to-be-colonized province.

Juan de Oñate

WITH MATTHEW MARTINEZ, PH.D.



In order to comply with the 1573 Colonization Laws, ten Franciscans were assigned to the entrada as well. Their presence highlighted the close ties between the Spanish government and the Catholic Church, as well as the idea that missionary work promoted pacification of indigenous peoples and that it prevented the violent excesses that had been a hallmark of the Coronado expedition, among others.

Oñate agreed to provision and arm two-hundred soldier-colonists and their families, and he proposed to set out for Santa Bárbara the following spring. Due to administrative delays and other setbacks, however, the group's supplies dwindled while they waited for official authorization to initiate the journey. Under such circumstances, some of the would-be colonists abandoned the mission. When the entrada finally set out from the small mining outpost in the spring of 1598 it was probably composed of about five hundred people (including women and children), but due to unclear documentation estimates vary.

In the unknown north they hoped to gain status and wealth. By remaining with the colony the men were guaranteed [hidalgo](#) status (the most humble of noble titles) and they stood to gain exemption from certain taxes, forgiveness of debts, and [encomienda](#) grants. [Encomienda](#) was as an allotment of native labor, although its legal definition rarely matched its implementation in frontier areas. For the colonists, encomienda promised the ability to require others to perform labor for them. By 1598 most of them recognized that New Mexico did not offer quick wealth—it was not another Aztec or Inca Empire as Antonio de Mendoza, [Marcos de Niza](#), or [Francisco Vázquez de Coronado](#) (among many others) had imagined. Instead, the “wealth” of New Mexico was the Pueblo people themselves. Pueblos would provide [encomenderos](#) (those who held encomienda grants and formed the regional aristocracy) with the fruits of their labor, and they presented a promising missionary opportunity for the Franciscans. All colonists, whatever their background, considered the Pueblos to be their subjects.



Oñate's Route, 1598

This map outlines the route followed by Oñate's colonizing party in 1598. At a site on the Rio Grande that became known as [El Paso del Norte](#), the group read the "[requerimiento](#)," and performed other official actions of possession of the New Mexico territory.

Despite the realities of the far northern frontier, many of these settlers viewed Oñate as an old-time conquistador, cut from the mold of Cortés. Indeed, Oñate believed himself heir to the fame and honor that came with conquest. Yet, his was a different historical moment in which the Crown looked to temper the excesses of military conquest. Oñate's mission pitted the Spanish culture of nobility and conquest against the impulse to abandon violence and instead pacify indigenous peoples. As one of his biographers has asserted, Oñate may well have been "the last conquistador."³ Unfortunately for him, during his lifetime the actions of conquistadores were no longer warranted. Instead, pacific colonization was the ideal. The existence of these two, conflicting ideals helps us in part to understand (although not justify) Oñate's violent actions as governor. Cultural conflict and the fluidity of ethnic identity on both the European and native side of the equation are other pieces of the puzzle.

The ethnic backgrounds of the various "Spaniards" involved in the colonization venture was quite varied. As historians of this period have noted, the term could include people from the [Iberian Peninsula](#) (the present-day nations of Spain and Portugal), as well as people from places like Greece, Belgium, and the Italian provinces. In the sixteenth century, none of the European nations of today existed in their present form. Spain itself was a new geopolitical entity,

which meant that most of its people had yet to develop a sense of shared identity based on “Spanish” culture or history. Figures like Cortés, Coronado, or Oñate identified instead with their families’ regions of origin (Extremadura, Salamanca, or the Basque provinces, for example) rather than as “Spaniards,” although we tend to remember them as such. Adding to this complexity was the reality of interracial marriages and sexual liaisons in the Americas following initial conquests. Many of those who accompanied Oñate were [mestizos](#). Indigenous allies from north-central New Spain, as well as several African slaves also accompanied the expedition. Social, cultural, and ethnic diversity made the northern frontier a place of constant exchange, conflict, misunderstanding, and accommodation.

From Santa Bárbara, the Oñate party blazed a new, more direct trail to the Rio Grande. The governor called a halt on April 30, 1598, just before crossing the river at a point that became known as El Paso del Norte. It was there that Oñate performed the official Spanish ceremonies of possession which had a long precedent in earlier conquests. As was the case for all new acquisitions of indigenous lands, he read the *requerimiento*. This official document, written and read in Spanish, stated that inhabitants of the vaguely defined region of New Mexico were now subject to the Spanish Crown and under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church. They were promised protection, peace, and everlasting bliss through conversion. A group of Manso people made friendly contact with the colonizers while they were there, although it is not at all clear that they welcomed the idea of subjugation to Crown and Church.

During the day of thanksgiving and ceremony, the colonists enacted a new play written by prominent expedition member Marcos de Farfán. Although the performance of dramas was typical of Spanish colonizing ventures, this play was specific to the concerns of the New Mexico colonization attempt. No copies of the play itself remain, but Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà, a soldier in Oñate’s contingent, recounted briefly its subject matter and tenor in his *Historia de Nuevo México*. It depicted a peaceful encounter between friars and indigenous peoples. Those portraying indigenous people humbly knelt before benevolent priests to receive the benefits of the Christian faith. Pérez de Villagrà referred to

the scene as promising that “many barbarians” would be purified through Catholic baptism. As with so many other aspects of Spanish colonial culture, ceremonies and performances were formalities that reminded people of their roles and obligations within society. In this case, the performance reminded Oñate’s party of their responsibility to peacefully and respectfully pacify the indigenous peoples they were to encounter. The play also emphasized the Spaniards’ deep sense of superiority relative to the indigenous “barbarians.”

“If you do not do this...we warn you, we will enter your land against you with force and will make war in every place and by every means we can and are able, and we will then subject you to the yoke and authority of the Church and Their Highnesses.”

– excerpt from El Requerimiento

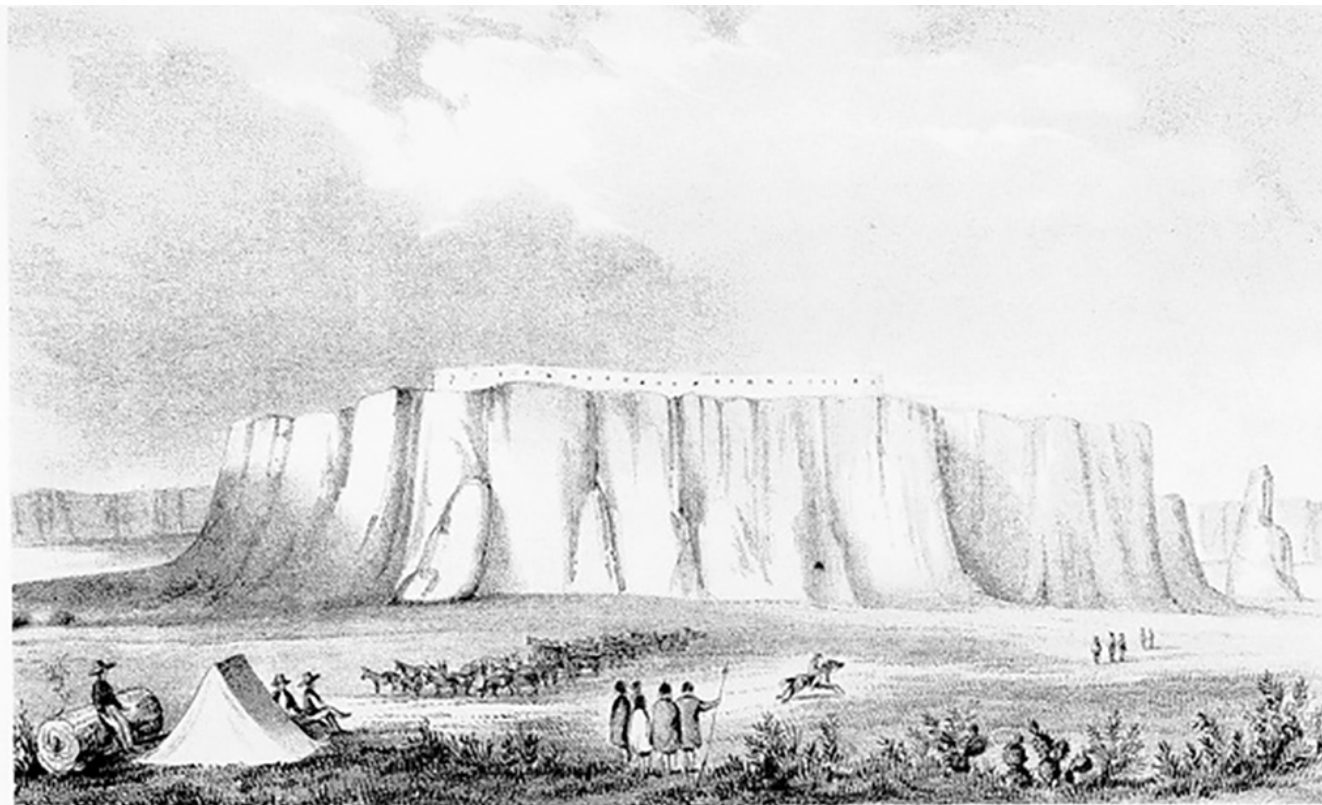
As the group continued northward, they encountered several abandoned pueblos. On the edge of the inhospitable stretch of the Camino Real later dubbed the [Jornada del Muerto](#) (dead man’s journey), the pueblo of Qualacu lay vacant. Its inhabitants apparently feared the Europeans’ intentions and had fled to join others. Much further to the north the party also found Puaray vacant. At other pueblos, such as Kewa (later renamed Santo Domingo by the Spaniards), the Spaniards were received peacefully but cautiously. Speaking through indigenous interpreters, Oñate called a council at Kewa that united the leaders of seven surrounding Keres-speaking pueblos. He explained to those present at the council the Spaniards’ intention to establish a permanent colony in the region. He also informed them that they were now subject to the King of Spain and the Catholic Church. Once each indigenous leader pledged loyalty to the Crown, Oñate considered the matter closed. Following the council, he announced that Santo Domingo (now renamed) was to be the site of a Franciscan abbey. Without further consideration of the Pueblos’ feeling about

the new order he had imposed upon them, Oñate pushed further northward to locate a suitable site to headquarter the colony.

On July 4, 1598, Oñate's advance party reached the meeting point of the Rio Chama and the Rio Grande. Not far away was the pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh, renamed [San Juan de los Caballeros](#) when Oñate decided to make it the site of the first Spanish settlement in New Mexico. Repeated public performances in San Juan and the surrounding areas illustrate the reality that the Spaniards relied on military force and intimidation to assert their dominance over Pueblo peoples, regardless of the 1573 Colonization Laws. During the summer of 1598, the colonists staged carefully laid out reenactments of the Spanish victory over the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula, as well as dramatized scenes from the conquest of the Aztec people—an event with which Pueblo peoples were well-acquainted by that point in time. Each play involved the use of artillery, horses, and [harquebuses](#). The message to the native people was straightforward: any act of resistance to Spanish rule would be quashed with military might. To the Spaniards, such measures were crucial because they were vastly outnumbered. By best estimates, the overall indigenous population of the New Mexico colony was somewhere between 35,000 and 40,000 people in 1598.

Oñate's Troubled Tenure

Conflict with Pueblo peoples and the isolation of the Spanish colony from other points in New Spain defined Oñate's tenure as governor. By the fall of 1598 he initiated a tour of the pueblos in order to further solidify the Spanish hold over the colony. In late October, he took oaths of allegiance from leaders of [Acoma Pueblo](#). He seemed unaware that the Acoma people had invited him there in order to kill him. Atop the 365 foot-high mesa that housed their community, some Acomas attempted to lure him into one of their kivas where a number of armed warriors waited to ambush him. Not completely trusting of the Acoma, Oñate declined the tour at the behest of his men.



James Abert's 1846 drawing of the Acoma Pueblo. Since at least the days of Coronado, if not earlier, outsiders have marveled at the town's location atop the mesa.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

After unwittingly escaping the Acoma plot, Oñate set out on a mission to locate the Pacific. A heavy snowfall prevented the governor from completing his journey, and as his group made their way back toward San Juan they received word that Oñate's nephew, [Juan de Zaldívar](#), had been killed at Acoma along with others under his command. Furious at the news, he returned to San Juan where he learned the details of the skirmish. Survivors of the battle reported that Acoma warriors approached their camp to invite Zaldívar and a few others to tour the pueblo. Once atop the mesa Zaldívar's group initiated trade for food, as was their usual practice. Without warning, Acoma warriors attacked and then tossed the bodies of Zaldívar and his twelve companions off of the mesa toward the rest of the party. The frightened survivors fled in three groups to warn the colonists at San Juan, the Franciscans in their missions, and to report the attack to Oñate.

Unfortunately for Pueblo peoples elsewhere in New Mexico, the Acoma Revolt (as the Spaniards referred to the incident) created an atmosphere of fear and apprehension toward all natives. When Oñate returned to San Juan, he found a heavily armed guard around the settlement. Oñate called a council of war to consider what action to take. Above all, Oñate and his advisors recognized that they were greatly outnumbered by the pueblos. Such had typically been the case for Spanish explorers and conquistadors. The established practice was to divide and conquer native peoples by finding and exploiting existing divisions and antagonisms between them. Also well-established was the use of “display violence or the theatrical use of violence” that enhanced the weight of the performances discussed above.⁴ Oñate understood that through a display of violence, he could assert Spanish dominance in an isolated place where the colonists were in the minority.

Much historical debate has surrounded the Acoma Massacre or Battle of Acoma Pueblo that took place in January 1599. The mere fact that it is remembered by so many different titles illustrates this point. Depending on perspective, the violent skirmish was viewed alternately as a “Revolt” (Spanish perspective) or a “Massacre” (Acoma perspective). Additionally, modern interpretations of the

event have either taken one of these two sides or used the term “battle” in an attempt to be more objective. The recent work of historians and anthropologists has recognized the capacity of language to tilt the balance of power. Some even argue that words themselves can enact violence. The description that follows attempts to take these multiple and varied perspectives into account.

A Revolt or Massacre?



After much discussion at San Juan, Oñate elected to allow Vicente de Zaldívar, brother of the fallen Spanish leader and another of his nephews, to lead the assault against Acoma. Although vengeance certainly motivated the Spaniards, Oñate’s orders to his nephew illustrate his recognition of the Spaniards’ tenuous position in New Mexico. His response to the events at Acoma was calculated to enhance the ability of the colony to thrive in the midst of tens of thousands of potentially hostile Pueblo peoples. He instructed Zaldívar to position his men for battle upon their arrival at Acoma, but to first “summon the Indians of Acoma to accept peace once, twice, and thrice, and urge them to abandon their resistance, lay down their arms and submit to the authority of

the king, our lord, since they have already rendered obedience to him as his vassals.”⁵

According to reports of those in his company, Zaldívar complied with his uncle's orders. After extending the invitation to a peaceful return to Spanish subjection on January 21, 1599, he asked that the warriors responsible for the attack be handed over to him. He assured the Acoma people that they would “be justly dealt with.” At that point, he assessed the situation before taking further action. If the Acomas' strength appeared too strong, Oñate had advised him not to commence an attack. If he appeared to have any advantage, Oñate's instructions were to “punish all those of fighting age as you deem best, as a warning to everyone in this kingdom.” The governor was clearly concerned with the colonists' ability to maintain control over the region. He additionally ordered Zaldívar that if he should see fit to show mercy to the Acomas following the battle (he assumed that the Spaniards would be victorious), “you should seek all possible means to make the Indians believe that you are doing so at the request of the friars with your forces. In this manner they will recognize the friars as their benefactors and protectors and come to love and esteem them and to fear us.”⁶

Despite some calls for negotiation, Acoma's leaders readily dismissed Zaldívar's demands and he moved his soldiers into positions on two opposite sides of the pueblo. Their taunts and insults struck fear into the hearts of many of the Spanish troops, as Pérez de Villagrà later reported. Spaniards recalled that during the night following their arrival, the Acoma people engaged in “huge dances and carousals, shouting, hissing . . . challenging the enemy to fight.”⁷ The army's interpreters also reported that they vowed to go to war against the Keres, Tigua, and Zia people due to their collusion with the colonizers. The Acoma warriors' attitude toward other local peoples illustrates the often deep divides between the various groups that the Spaniards' collectively called the Pueblos.

“You shall seek all possible means to make the Indians believe that you are doing so at the request of the friars with your forces. In this manner they will recognize the friars as their benefactors and protectors and come to love and esteem them and to fear us.”

– Juan de Oñate

On the morning of January 22, Zaldívar once again demanded that that Acoma people surrender unconditionally. This time his request was met with a volley of arrows. Zaldívar withdrew his forces and waited until about three o'clock that afternoon to commence the assault on the pueblo. His strategy worked: the Acoma warriors focused on the soldiers that ascended the main ladders toward the pueblo above, completely ignoring the backside of the bluff. A small group of Spaniards hoisted a small cannon toward the pueblo from the rear. The first day of battle ended with the surrender of many of the Acoma people, although many warriors held out by hiding in the surrounding caves.

As the fighting continued into its second day, Zaldívar realized that the Acoma warriors were killing women and children rather than have them fall prisoner to the Spaniards. Accordingly, he issued orders that his men capture as many of the women and children as possible in order to prevent their deaths. By midday, he ordered his men to proceed with no quarter. The Spaniards set fire to all of the Acoma peoples' homes and belongings. Not until the next day did the last of the warriors surrender. According to the Spaniards' estimates, about eight hundred Acoma people lay dead. None of the Europeans had been killed, and only a few had been wounded.

Reportedly, all of the survivors, about five hundred total, were taken to Santo Domingo to stand trial. It had been estimated, however, that somewhere around 6,000 people were living at Acoma in 1598. Many of Acoma's people were able to escape the Spaniards' wrath, although their town had been leveled during the fighting. At Santo Domingo, the prisoners were charged with the

murder of Juan de Zaldívar and twelve others. Captain Alonso Gómez Montesinos received the appointment to represent the defendants during their hearing, which ultimately lasted three days. Gómez Montesinos performed his task to the best of his ability, and he petitioned for the release of several prisoners that had not been present at Acoma on the day of the initial attack on Zaldívar and his men. Several other colonists also pleaded for leniency.

Yet, holding to his conviction that a show of force had to be made against the people of Acoma, Oñate issued an incredibly harsh sentence. All of the men over the age of twenty-five were condemned to have one foot cut off. They were then to serve select Spaniards for a period of twenty years. Men between the ages of twelve and twenty-five and women older than twelve were also sentenced to twenty years of labor. Children under the age of twelve were placed in the charge of the Franciscans.



Spanish conquistadors were known for their cruel punishments, typically intended to strike fear into the hearts of indigenous peoples. This scene depicts an event in Florida where the Spanish cut off the hands and feet of native men who opposed them. Spanish cruelty, although very real, was often over-emphasized through the [Black Legend](#).

Courtesy of Dorothy Sloan Rare Books

In recent years, historians have debated whether or not the mutilations actually occurred. Documents indicate that the punishment was later limited to twenty-four Acoma warriors, rather than applied to all men over twenty-five years old. Yet, no evidence of the act itself remains in the historical record. Whether or not the sentence was carried out, Oñate's goal was clear. He used intimidation to force the submission of much larger groups of indigenous peoples. Significantly, he was required to use brutal methods to suppress the Tompiro people in 1601.

Much of the rest of Oñate's tenure in New Mexico was occupied with exploration missions and the continuance of intimidation through violence. Shortly after the trial of the Acoma prisoners, he relocated the capital of New Mexico across the Rio Grande to the Tewa Pueblo of Yúngé. His methods of coercion seemingly worked in the short term because the Yúngé people offered no resistance to the Spanish occupation of their homes. Most of them relocated to San Juan, and Oñate renamed the new capital San Gabriel. The move also illustrates Oñate's strategy to prevent further violence between the colonists and the pueblos. He hoped that by placing distance between the groups, he would be able to build a strong Spanish colony in the midst of overwhelmed natives.

OÑATE'S CONTESTED LEGACY

His dreams were short lived. Although the colonists knew that New Mexico did not promise quick riches, most were not prepared for its isolation, rugged topography, and arid climate. Even with the promise of [encomienda](#), survival was a constant struggle for a group of people that was used to milder climates and fertile soil. By the spring of 1601, word reached Viceroy Velasco that many

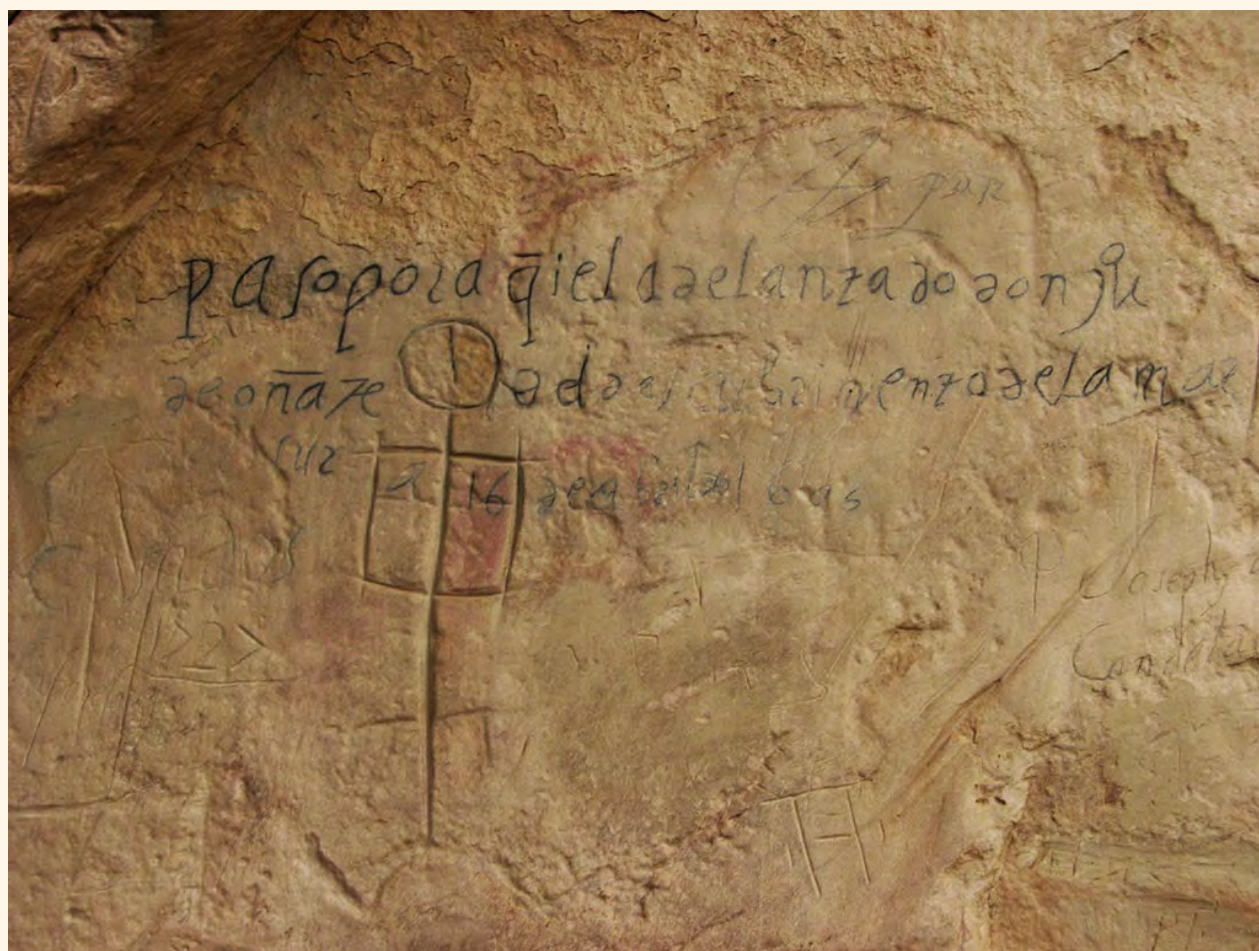
of the colonists, specifically a group of seventy-three settlers that reached New Mexico in December 1600, “complained that they had received reports, information, and letters, telling of much greatness and riches, and that they had been defrauded.”⁸ Many had given up prosperous estates in order to join the new colony. They reported that food and clothing were always in short supply in New Mexico, despite Oñate’s promises to the contrary.

Oñate’s near-constant exploration journeys added fuel to the fire. In the fall of 1601, while the governor was away on an expedition to locate the fabled city of wealth known as Quivira, about two-thirds of the colonists (four hundred or so) fled the province. Their decision was significant because desertion was considered a crime punishable by the loss of title and prestige, and, in certain cases, death.

In November 1601, following his unfruitful journeys in the Great Plains, Oñate returned to San Gabriel to the news that most of his colony had deserted. In this instance, his brutal methods were not directed toward Pueblo peoples. As was his character, he moved quickly to prevent the entire failure of the venture in which he had invested his life and material possessions. He issued a sentence of death by beheading for the leaders of what he deemed to be a mutiny, and he sent Vicente de Zaldívar to return them to New Mexico. Zaldívar, however, found that the group had already reached safety and royal protection far to the south in Nueva Galicia. Instead of returning the deserters, Zaldívar spent the next few years working to defend his uncle against charges of abuse against both native peoples and colonists, as well as the mismanagement of the colony.

Oñate & the El Morro Inscriptions

Jim Kendrick, archaeologist, explains the history of El Morro and describes the connection and inscription linking Oñate to El Morro.



Fifteen years before the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, [Juan de Oñate](#) inscribed the following at El Morro on his return from the Gulf of California and the South Sea: "Governor Don Juan de Oñate passed through here, from the discovery of the Sea of the South on the 16th of April, 1605."

Courtesy of Ken Lund

Oñate's governorship continued its downward spiral until he preemptively resigned in June 1606 in order to avoid impending removal by royal officials. The final years of his governorship witnessed further excursions against recalcitrant Pueblo peoples. In 1603, Oñate reportedly killed a Taos leader during an expedition to quash a rebellion there against Spanish domination. That murder was added to the long list of charges against him. In 1604, he led another excursion to the Gulf of California in search of the Pacific Ocean. In all, his calculated violence against Spaniards and Pueblos alike and his absenteeism left New Mexico on the verge of abandonment in 1607. Only a few hundred colonists and a handful of Franciscans remained in the desolate far northern frontier. Although Oñate was able eventually to clear many of the charges against him, he was unable to reverse the sentence of lifetime banishment from the New Mexico colony.

Building a Royal Colony

In 1607, the New Mexico colony stood at a crossroads. From the perspective of Spanish royal officials, it seemed a spectacular failure not unlike Coronado's earlier mission. This time, however, a few hundred Pueblo people had accepted Catholic baptism at the hands of the Franciscans. The question facing the viceroy of New Spain was whether or not New Mexico should be abandoned. Ultimately, he decided to provide royal funds and support to continue the colony. One of the contributing factors to that decision was the Franciscans' report that they had baptized 7,000 Pueblo people in the summer of 1608.

During the period of Oñate's governorship, the Franciscans slowly built the power of the Catholic Church in New Mexico. Isolation and the governor's near-constant travels outside of the colony allowed them to stake a claim on ultimate religious and administrative authority. As stipulated in Oñate's contract, he was to protect the Friars and support their missionary work as an essential part of the royal program to redefine colonization. This tight connection between church and state was a hallmark of the period. Agreements between Spanish Kings and Catholic Popes known as the *patronato real* (Royal Patronage) had been in place since 1508. Pope Julius II initiated the patronage pacts in order to ensure that the Church would play a major role in the conquest and colonization of the Americas. In exchange for the authority to appoint clergymen, the Spanish Crown agreed to make the conversion of indigenous peoples a central piece of its colonization program. The 1573 Colonization Laws further enhanced the role of the Church in the process of Spanish expansion.

When royal officials considered the question of New Mexico in 1607 and



This statue of Governor Pedro de Peralta is located on Grant Avenue in Santa Fe. Peralta was the first Governor of New Mexico after its transition to a royal colony.

Photograph by Monica Cioffi

from natives that had not converted. In his report, he added that the Christian Pueblos “implore your majesty not to leave them in a situation in which, having abandoned their faith for ours, they would be in danger of being slaughtered.”¹¹ In his resignation letter, Oñate had also offered the opinion that the abandonment of the colony would place any remaining Spaniards in grave danger, and doing so would hamper future attempts to retake the region.

In late January of 1609, Viceroy Velasco issued the order to place the New Mexico colony under royal control. His decision was heavily influenced by the Franciscans’ claim of 7,000 baptisms the previous summer. Their numbers may certainly have seemed suspicious: by 1608 the Franciscans had been in New Mexico for just over ten years. Only six remained in the colony after four others

1608, geopolitical and ecclesiastical concerns were at the top of their agenda. New Mexico still offered a buffer zone between the lucrative silver mines of Zacatecas and the threat of English, French, and indigenous expansion. The far northern colony also promised to provide a springboard for continued explorations for minerals and other natural resources.

Viceroy Luís de Velasco considered the fate of the Pueblo people that had already received baptism. Fray Francisco de Velasco informed the viceroy that the abandonment of those people would not only deprive them of further tutoring in Catholicism, it would leave them open to hostilities

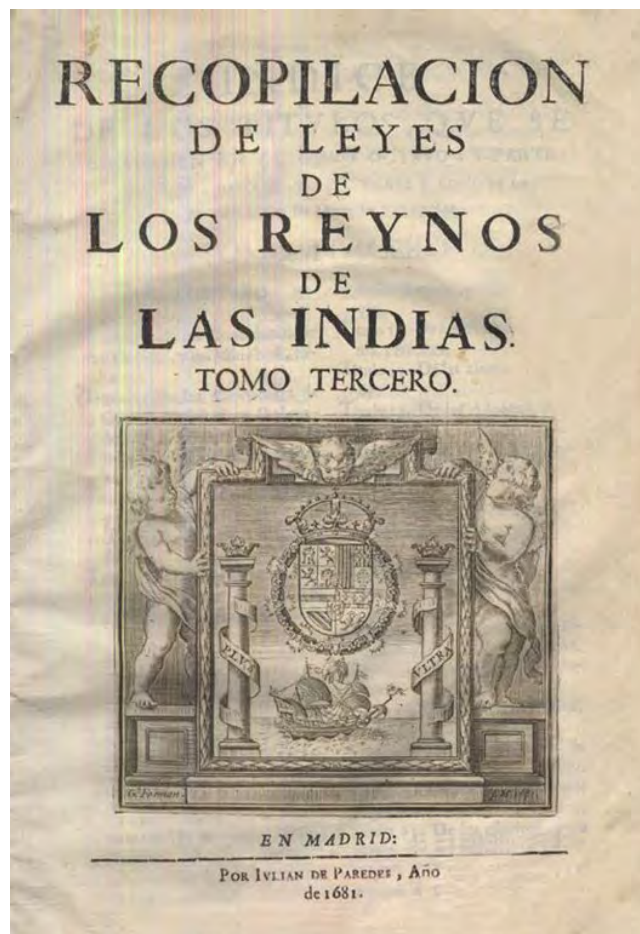
fled with the other discontented colonists in 1601. As of the spring of 1608 they had baptized only about 400 Pueblos, an extremely small percentage of the total population of about 40,000. Although Velasco did not leave a record of his reasoning, he perhaps realized that the Franciscans' desire to stay could work in tandem with the royal motivations for maintaining the colony. Whether or not the conversions were genuine, there was clearly a group of people in the colony that were dedicated to its success.

Once New Mexico became a royal colony in 1609, all financial and administrative responsibility shifted to the Spanish Crown (under Oñate's contract, he had been personally accountable for the colony's economic, political, and social survival). With royal funding, governors, Franciscans, [encomenderos](#), and other settlers worked to establish Spanish institutions to oversee New Mexico. A body of legislation known as the [Laws of the Indies](#) (*Recopilación de las leyes de los Reynos de las Indias*) dictated the colony's organization. Viceroy Velasco appointed Pedro de Peralta as the first royal governor of New Mexico. Under the new terms of administration, the governor still remained in charge of the colony's affairs of state. Governors had the authority to establish laws, pass legal judgment, issue land grants, appoint members of the [cabildo](#) (town council), and handle relations with indigenous peoples.

Land grants have been a point of contention over nearly the entire course of New Mexico's history since the Spanish period. Generally, they were large land tracts that governors conferred to individuals, families, or communities. In return, the grant holders pledged to settle and develop the terrain allotted to them. Land grants were formalized through official contracts that outlined the method of usage for each parcel. Typically, grants

were set aside for small-scale farming or ranching. At times they were designated as large-scale ranches to raise horses or mules for the good of the colony at large. Grantees took upon themselves the role of steward to care for the land and to use its resources in a sustainable manner.

[Acequias](#) (communal irrigation systems) provided essential water that allowed grant holders to farm. Agriculture based on irrigation had existed in the region since the [Ancestral Puebloan](#) period, although the form of its administration changed over time. Under the Spanish system, a [mayordomo](#) (overseer) was elected to allocate water usage and to address potential conflicts or issues with the communal water-sharing program. Laws and traditions that dated back to medieval Spain applied to the practice of acequia agriculture, and the spirit of its practice is best captured by a short New Mexican proverb: “agua que no has de beber, déjale correr” (water that you don’t need, let it run).¹² Over time, land grants and [acequias](#) became far more than means to allocate resources. Proverbs, folk tales, dances, and *corridos* (or ballads) tied both institutions tightly to New Mexican culture, identity, and tradition. A governor’s land-grant policies, therefore, could endear him to or alienate him from the people.



Title page from a 1681 printing of the *Laws of the Indies*.

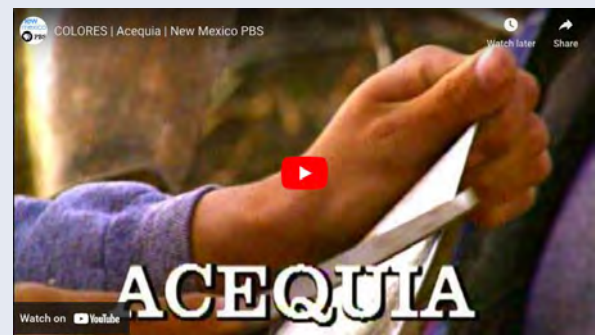
Courtesy of The National Library of Chile

In 1610 Governor Peralta commissioned the founding of the [villa](#) de Santa Fé and established it as the new capital city of the colony. For most of the seventeenth century it was the only sizable Spanish township in New Mexico, and it remained pitifully small by comparison to the urban areas of New Spain. To govern the colony outside of the capital, the governor divided the territory into smaller *alcaldías mayores*, similar to modern U.S. counties. An *alcalde* (mayor) was appointed by the governor or elected by the cabildo to oversee each *alcaldía*, depending on circumstances. Alcaldes administered both civil and criminal affairs. The *alguacil* (or sheriff), always a governor-appointee, assisted in law enforcement in each *alcaldía*. By the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, larger settlements also included a *cabildo* (called the *ayuntamiento* by the early 1800s). The town council provided a check on the administrative powers of the *alcalde*.

As was the pattern elsewhere in New Spain and the Spanish Americas, Pueblo peoples were organized into jurisdictions called *repúblicas* within which they directly participated in their own local politics. Colonial officials hoped that allowing the Pueblos to elect their own local leadership would more rapidly integrate them into Spanish

What is an acequia?

Acequias are irrigation ditches that have allowed for agricultural production in northern New Mexico since the period prior to Spanish contact. During the seventeenth century, Spanish administrative methods were introduced to New Mexico for the coordination of water usage via acequias.



Photograph by Arnold Valdez

forms of governance. To their dismay, traditional forms of Pueblo administration persisted. Shamans, or medicine men, seemed to pull the strings behind each election. In an effort to sidestep traditional leaders' influence after 1620, Spanish administrators chose and appointed a *gobernador* to act as the head of government for each pueblo. Some gobernadores failed to gain the full support of their own people, however, because they owed their authority to the Spanish governor and not to their clan. In other instances, traditional Pueblo leadership continued to exert their influence to ensure that their preferred candidate was chosen by Spanish officials.

Pueblos faced more than political reorganization under the Spanish colonial system. Franciscans' attempts to transform Pueblo traditions through religious persuasion were even more disconcerting. Franciscan prelates (the overall ecclesiastical leaders) established their base of operations at Santo Domingo Pueblo, removed from the governor's base of authority at Santa Fe. Early on, friars reported that leaders of the major tribal groups welcomed them. Franciscan leaders named their mission field the [Conversión de San Pedro](#) after the conversion of St. Peter, celebrated in colonial times on January 25. They then further divided their work into various mission jurisdictions with priests assigned to each. Although records for the seventeenth century are spotty at best, estimates reveal that throughout the century an average of thirty Franciscans ministered to population of about 20,000 baptized Pueblos. According to the report of an official 1629 *visita* (inspection tour), fifty different missions (which included churches and agricultural lands) had been established in New Mexico, most near existing Pueblos. Fray [Alonso de Benavides](#), who served as prelate between 1626 and 1629, [wrote extensively](#) and worked determinedly to expand missionary work in New Mexico.

Franciscans were able to expand their influence among Pueblo peoples in a number of ways. Members of the order had been the first Catholic missionaries in New Spain. In their earliest efforts, they established a pattern of limited tolerance for indigenous religious traditions. Most learned the languages of the people to whom they ministered, and they realized that they could not expect

them to convert fully to Catholicism all at once. The friars were willing to accept a syncretic, or blended, form of religious practice from indigenous people. Their hope was that with time their pupils would let go of their former beliefs in favor of Christianity. Although there is much scholarly debate over the level to which Franciscans accepted the limited continuation of Pueblo tradition, the hard realities of the Pueblo mission field suggest that the friars would either have had to accept or ignore the blending of belief systems.

Missions themselves were quasi-utopian, contained societies. Within mission walls, Pueblo people were educated in reading and writing, music, the catechism, and European cultural practices, including new forms of dress, cultivation of new crops, and lessons in animal domestication. Friars focused on children because they considered them to be the easiest to convert and change. Their hope was that the children would influence their parents to leave behind their native beliefs. The priests also sought to attract people of all backgrounds to the missions by offering them Spanish goods. These included hatchets, knives, bells, cloth, watermelon, wheat, fruit trees, horses, and even fire-arms. By offering such items, Franciscans built on their knowledge of indigenous practices of gift giving as a means to establish peaceful relationships with outsiders.

LADY IN BLUE: SOR. MARÍA DE JESÚS DE ÁGREDA

Interestingly, the mission system helped to unite Pueblos across previous community and linguistic barriers. There was no such thing as pan-Pueblo unity prior to the mission system, and even then common ground did not always lead to alliances between indigenous groups. By the mid-1600s, however, Spanish had become the lingua franca of New Mexico. People from Pueblos that spoke different languages or that held distinct cultural practices then had the shared experience of dealing with Spanish missionaries, governors, encomenderos, and settlers.

Additionally, as one scholar of this period has noted, “colonists’ isolation from

events transpiring to the south and their numerically small presence in a land where the indigenous inhabitants numbered in the tens of thousands meant that everyday contacts between Hispanic settlers and Pueblo Indians were as extensive as they were inevitable.”¹³ In seventeenth-century New Mexico, this meant that Spanish and Pueblo boys often sat side-by-side in the Friars’ classes. They likely played together and built cross-cultural relationships early in life. Such intermixing likely began as early as the Oñate period. The wives of only thirteen of Oñate’s soldiers accompanied their husbands. Other men in the group took concubines and mistresses among indigenous women, African slaves, and Apache captives. In a few cases, Spanish men took these women as their legal wives. For example, Juan de la Cruz married Beatriz de los Angeles shortly after his arrival in 1598. She was described as “a Mexican Indian fluent in Spanish and Hispanicized.”¹⁴

The Caste System



In 1601, a Spanish traveler spoke of a Spanish boy in the colony who spoke the Keres language “better than the Indians themselves, and they are astonished to hear him talk.”¹⁵ Officials also reported, usually with disdain, of intermarriage

and illicit sexual liaisons between Spaniards and Pueblos. By mid-century a large group of [mestizos](#) were even appointed to fill positions in the colonial government. During the tenure of governor [Luis de Rosas](#) (1638-1641), one of the early colony's most controversial leaders, a friar accused him of tampering with the cabildo election in Santa Fe and allowing "four [mestizo](#) dogs" to take seats on the council. The bottom line was that New Mexico was a place of cultural exchange where the claim of Spanish blood purity ([limpieza de sangre](#)) was less a genealogical reality and more a means to claim positions of social and economic authority.

In many ways, Pueblo peoples were willing to make accommodations to the Spaniards. Relatively prosperous times allowed cooperation to prevail, although periodic opposition to Spanish authority occurred as well. Pueblos had several reasons to coexist with the demanding colonizers. European plants and animals expanded and enriched their diet and allowed for added mobility and fighting ability. The [Columbian Exchange](#) was mutually beneficial to Europeans and indigenous peoples. In New Mexico Spanish colonists adopted Pueblo horticulture patterns and Iberian goods helped prevent starvation and allowed Pueblos to grow crops that were more tolerant of the cold. One example was the adoption of winter wheat at Picuris. Exchange also altered the lives of nomadic peoples, such as the various Apache bands that began to base their group identity on their prowess on horseback. Domesticated animals also offered new means of supporting local economies through trade. Horses found their way to the Plains peoples through trade at [Cicuye](#) (which the colonizers renamed Pecos).

What was the Columbian Exchange?



Even in the more sensitive areas of religion and labor, Pueblos made significant accommodations. Compared to Spanish Catholicism, Pueblo religion was quite flexible. Such was the case for many of America's indigenous peoples. Flexibility was not evidence of fragile belief systems, however. On the contrary, as a Jemez Pueblo historian has stated, for the Pueblos "to give up their religion would have been like giving up life itself."¹⁶ Pueblo people had a tradition of integrating new elements into their existing cosmological views when it made sense for them to do so. For example, most scholars believe that the [kachina](#) rituals were adopted through contact with other native peoples in the area of present-day Sonora sometime in the 1300s. Pueblos that converted to Catholicism did so on their own terms, whether or not the Franciscans realized it. They agreed to incorporate Christianity into their existing beliefs, rather than to replace their traditions with the European faith. These different ways of understanding conversion led to religious conflicts that became more and more pronounced in New Mexico by the 1650s and 1660s.

The onerous institutions of [encomienda](#) and [repartimiento](#) were also part of the complex accommodations that took place in seventeenth-century New Mexico. [Encomienda](#) was the tribute of labor and agricultural produce given to specific encomenderos twice each year. Because of royal concerns over maintaining control of Spain's far-flung colonies, governors were specifically prohibited from receiving encomienda in order to curb their potential economic power. They did control repartimiento, however, which was a labor draft for public works. Through repartimiento, governors required Pueblo people to spend a certain number of days per month contributing to public works projects,

including tasks such as sweeping Santa Fe's streets or constructing government buildings. Like *encomienda*, *repartimiento* was often abused. [Encomenderos](#) and governors alike required heavier tribute than the legal stipulations allowed. Some governors misused *repartimiento* by requiring natives to work their own fields.



Casta painting from 1770 that depicts the union between a Spanish man and indigenous woman. Their child is known as a *mestizo*, due to her mixed heritage. Hundreds of similar casta paintings depicted the various labels given to people of mixed heritage in the Spanish Americas.

Courtesy of Maison de l'Amérique Latine

Despite such abuses, Spaniards felt that Pueblos should be grateful to them for imposing these labor requirements. In return for *encomienda* labor, *encomenderos* pledged to provide military protection against the raids of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, such as Apaches, Utes, and Navajos. From their perspective, they also brought eternal salvation through conversion to the one true faith. Although most Pueblos did not appreciate the Spaniards'

conversion efforts (and they certainly did not understand them in the same way as the colonizers), they did see some benefit in added protection against raiding. In the 1660s when drought and famine set in, Apache raids on Pueblo and Spanish settlements increased markedly. As all of New Mexico's people struggled to survive, encomenderos were increasingly unable to keep their promise of protection against raids and their demand for tribute became unbearable for Pueblo peoples.

Outright slavery was the most exploitative labor system that existed in New Mexico. Spanish colonists openly participated in the trade in captive people that had taken place at Pecos Pueblo since long before their arrival. Plains peoples arrived at Pecos each fall with hides, meat, and slaves that they looked to exchange for Pueblo corn, pottery, and blankets. In the 1630s governor [Francisco de la Mora y Ceballos](#) issued permits authorizing colonists to trade for native children "as if they were yearling calves or colts."¹⁷ Although the governor's rival, Fray [Estevan de Perea](#), reported on the slave permits, Franciscans themselves also took captive children for the ostensible purpose of Christianizing them. In 1630 Santa Fe's Spanish population of 250 was served by about 700 native and mestizo slaves. By 1680 half of New Mexico's households held at least one slave, and some had as many as thirty.

To further augment these numbers, Spanish officials capitalized on any excuse to attack Apache, Ute, and Navajo peoples because such conflicts typically yielded new captives. By characterizing their efforts as "just war" to right wrongs or to pacify and later convert their nomadic enemies, Franciscans often, but not always, gave their blessing to the assaults. In 1620 Governor [Juan de Eulate](#) initiated the practice with a campaign against a peaceful Apache trading party. Following the assault, he was accused of selling male Apache captives to work in Nueva Vizcaya's silver mines. In the late 1630s, Governor Rosas led a similar expedition, but failed to seize any captives. Instead, he ordered the slaughter of the Apache band his men had pursued, and the atrocity created ill-will between Pecos people and Apaches. The Spanish Crown never sanctioned New Mexico slave raids nor the slave trade, but royal officials were powerless to curb the practice that had become an integral element of the isolated colony's economy.

The Map You Normally Won't See in School

Check out the [Map Of Native American Tribes](#) you've never seen before.

Apache bands kept their distance whenever possible, but the agricultural produce, horses, and finished goods of the colony enticed them to trade with Pueblos and Spaniards in good times. During less-prosperous times they turned to raiding as an effort to gain the resources they needed to survive. Nearby Utes and Navajos also maintained very guarded relations with Spaniards and Pueblos because they too were often targeted. These tense relations with [indios bárbaros](#) point to cracks in the foundation of the Spanish administrative system that became much more pronounced by the late seventeenth century.

“The First American Revolution”

On August 16, 1680, the inhabitants of Santa Fe faced a dire situation. A combined force of Pueblo, Apache, and [mestizo](#) warriors laid siege to their community. All water and supplies were cut off. War leader Juan el Tano presented Governor Antonio de Otermín with a stark choice, symbolized by two crosses. If the governor chose the white cross he would agree to abandon New Mexico forever. If he chose the red cross it would signify his intent to continue the fight. Rather than fully surrender, Otermín led a final military charge against the assailants. In the attack, three hundred natives lost their lives, another forty-seven were captured, and about 1,500 fled. Yet, Otermín’s offensive did not result in a victory for the Spanish colonists. Instead, he led the desperate settlers on the long southward journey to [El Paso del Norte](#), the southern gateway to the New Mexico colony. There, the Spaniards remained in exile for the next twelve years.



A watercolor illustration of Hopi people tearing down the cross from the mission church and putting a Catholic priest to death.

Cat. No. 54019/13. 1680 [Pueblo Revolt](#) at Hopi, Fred Nakayoma Kabotie, 1976. Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe.

Despite the grounds for accommodation discussed above, it is crucial to remember that Spanish domination of New Mexico was maintained by violence, both implicit and explicit. Yet, to explain the Pueblo Revolt only in terms of Spanish violence and abuse fails to capture the complete picture. That Pueblos accommodated to colonization helps explain, at least in part, why a successful rebellion took eighty years to occur. Other important factors include Spanish factionalism and infighting, lack of unity among the different Pueblo groups, Spanish advantages in technology and firepower, and syncretic religious practices. The stress of disease, drought, and famine altered the terms of colonial accommodation and reignited sharp cultural and religious differences. In 1640, for example, 3,000 Pueblo people, or about one-tenth of their total

population, died during a smallpox epidemic. A pronounced period of drought began in 1666 and famine plagued New Mexico throughout the following decade. All of these various factors came to a head in the fall of 1680.

Control of the indigenous population intensified factionalism within the Spanish population of New Mexico. Franciscans and governors vied for access to Pueblo labor. [Encomenderos](#) at times sided with governors and at times with the priests, depending on which side promised to enhance their own position. As noted in the [“Interpreting the Pueblo Revolt”](#) section, Franciscans and governors went to great lengths to discredit the other. Missionaries pointed to governors’ abuses of [repartimiento](#), as well as [encomenderos](#)’ misuse of their grants. At times, encomenderos were able to entice Pueblos away from the missions by offering them better protection or material goods. To the dismay of the friars, encomenderos and other settlers instilled bad habits in them. Priests accused secular Spanish colonists of promoting Pueblos to drink, smoke, swear, and become prostitutes, among other things. Such developments threatened to undermine the Franciscans’ work, from their perspective, and, more damagingly, they held the potential to erode the political and economic power of the Church.

Governors took issue with the Franciscans’ hold on power and they rightfully viewed the missions as the base of the Church’s economic prowess. From their vantage point the Franciscans exploited native labor without pay, while reaping the benefits of that labor. In their reports, they cast the friars as ruthless taskmasters that prevented Pueblo peoples from enjoying life. Their claims were bolstered by Pueblo pleas to rescue them from forced Catholic indoctrination. Franciscans did put native people to work in the missions. They even employed Pueblo labor in the construction of the buildings. The Pecos mission complex completed in 1625 under the direction of Fray [Andrés Juárez](#) was the product of the tireless efforts of the Pecos people themselves. The structure was quite imposing. Its walls towered forty feet in height and were constructed of at least 300,000 adobe bricks.

Pueblo Revolt of 1680

WITH MATTHEW MARTINEZ, PH.D.



As both sides attempted to portray themselves as the champion of the Pueblo people, the natives themselves astutely manipulated the disputes. As indicated above, Pueblos played each side off of the other by reporting abuses to the rival faction. Further complicating matters, the growing mestizo population in the colony provided a different outlet for native labor that excluded the authorities of both Church and State. This group of people generally practiced small-scale farming. They had familial ties to both natives and Spaniards, and they navigated both cultural landscapes. At times, they offered wages to Pueblo people for agricultural work.

Although the accusations of the governors and friars should be taken with some skepticism, there were substantiated cases of abuse on both sides. According to the existing documentation and oral history testimonies, Franciscans did not systematically work to destroy Pueblo religious artifacts and fetishes until at least the late 1640s or so. One scholar has pointed out that by that time Pueblos began to realize that the priests “were no longer the supermen that they had once seemed.”¹⁸ The native peoples saw that earlier Franciscan promises of

supernatural power over rainfall, general prosperity, and peace had fallen short. Many of the original friars had been replaced by a younger, less charismatic, generation. Also, by that time the mestizo population in New Mexico had become a larger and more important segment of the colony. Friars expected people of mixed ethnic heritage to be dedicated Catholics, yet many of them subscribed to the blended traditions of their parents and extended family members. Over the next few decades, this reality caused many of the Franciscans to bring their acceptance of a syncretic faith to a halt.

Bufalo Hide Paintings: En Un Sueño de Santa Fe, Agosto 1680

Ramón José López's painting depicts the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 which drove the Spanish settlers to El Paso del Norte. Twenty-one of the thirty-two Franciscan priests present in the colony were killed during the Revolt.



Hide painting, Courtesy of Kay Hammock



Detail, Courtesy of Kay Hammock



Several substantiated instances of gruesome violence on the part of Franciscans provide further evidence of these overall trends. In 1655, Fray [Salvador de Guerra](#) viciously whipped a Hopi man named [Juan Cuna](#) until “he was bathed in blood”¹⁹ as punishment for reported idol worship. Apparently the initial beating was insufficient, and the friar inflicted a second punishment on the same day inside the walls of the church. Following the assault, the priest covered Cuna’s body in turpentine and the Hopi man met an extremely painful death. Fray Guerra later testified that other Pueblo people been killed in equally gruesome ways. Priests like Father Guerra believed that their actions were warranted in order to put a stop to the practice of rituals that they considered idolatrous and the work of the devil. To the Pueblos, however, such abuse served to turn them against the Franciscans and toward efforts that would allow the continuation of their traditions.

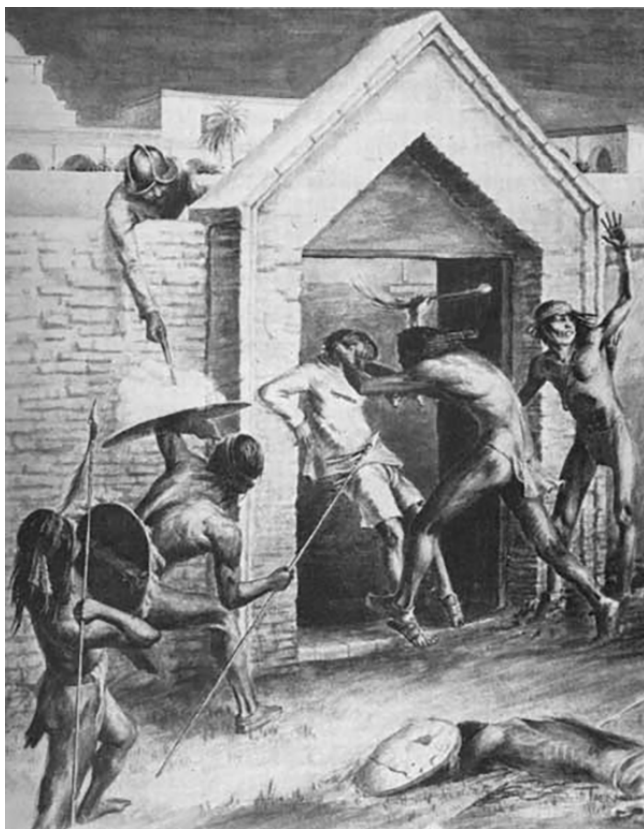
Pueblos also remembered a few specific governors as especially corrupt and deceitful. These included [Juan de Eulate](#) (1618-1625), [Luis de Rosas](#) (1637-1641), and [Diego Dionisio de Peñalosa](#) (1661-1664). Eulate’s and Rosas’ efforts against Apache peoples are mentioned above. Rumors claimed that Peñalosa had so many Apache slaves that he had given away over one hundred of them at one time. All three supported the abduction of orphan children from Pueblo communities in order to turn them into servants for the colonists. Their campaigns against Apaches, Navajos, and Utes also placed Pueblo peoples in an awkward situation. Even before the arrival of the Spaniards, trade with nomadic peoples sometimes eroded into raiding. At the annual Pecos and Taos trade fairs that predated the colonial period, Pueblos worked to build peaceful exchange relationships with their neighbors. The colonists’ demands, however,

complicated such relationships. Especially following attacks, Pueblos that seemed too closely allied with the Spanish leadership were also targeted by Apaches, Navajos, and Utes for retaliation.

The colony transformed Apache bands' abilities to trade and raid by providing them with horses. Once they adopted the use of horses, Apache warriors expanded their trade networks and became more fearsome raiders. Spanish observers consistently spoke of "depredations" and "treacheries" committed by Apache bands. Yet, the colonists did not understand that the natives understood raiding and warfare to be two different things. The translations of Apache terms for each concept, respectively, are "to search out enemy property" and "to take death from an enemy."²⁰ The terminology indicates more than a simple linguistic distinction. Each activity served a unique purpose for the local community; raids were enacted to stave off a shortage of food whereas warfare was reserved to avenge the death of a kinsman slain on the battlefield. Sacred preparatory dances and rituals accompanied each type of action. Spaniards were never quite understood the distinction, and their misunderstanding and blatant violence against Apache people placed their Pueblo allies in a precarious position.

Beginning in 1666 a sustained drought pattern set in. By 1670 severe famine placed intense strain on the complex system of accommodations that had allowed for general peace to prevail in New Mexico during the seventeenth century. Franciscan food surpluses allowed for some relief early on, but drought and famine persisted throughout the 1670s. Fray [Francisco de Ayeta](#) reported to the King that the famine "compelled the Spanish inhabitants and Indians alike to eat hides and straps of the carts."²¹ Under such desperate conditions, [encomienda](#) and repartimiento tribute became unbearable. Pueblo people could hardly produce enough for their own families, let alone the encomenderos and governor. Apache raids intensified as they also reached a point of desperation. The lack of protection from raiding meant that most Pueblos no longer had reason to continue their partnership with the colonists.

Tensions hit a breaking point prior to



An Apache raid on the outlying mission settlement at Tumacácori.

Courtesy of Earl Jackson

the drought and famine of the 1670s. In 1645, for example, Jemez Pueblo rebelled against colonial authorities. Governor [Fernando de Argüello](#) ordered the public hanging of twenty-nine Jemez warriors after the uprising was quashed. In 1650 another, broader rebellion surfaced that involved an alliance between Jemez, Keres, Tiwa, and Apache peoples. Despite its broader base of support, other Pueblo peoples that remained loyal to the Spanish facilitated its demise. That time, officials hanged nine of the leaders and sold others into slavery. The continued support of some native allies created fissures in the opposition

and allowed the colonists to maintain their hold on New Mexico. Events of the desperate 1670s, however, pushed almost all of the Pueblos, as well as Apache groups, into an alliance against the Spanish.

Agents of both Church and State initiated a vicious campaign against Pueblo rituals and traditions at the height of the drought. Their reasons for doing so remain hazy, but it seems that drought conditions and the persistence of syncretic faith signaled that their authority was on the decline. During the early 1670s, the Franciscan and secular Spanish authorities began to enforce the legal prohibition of Pueblo religion by confiscating and destroying altars, masks, and prayer sticks. They also filled in the kivas (which they derisively referred to as estufas) with dirt and forbade ritual dances. In 1675 Governor Juan Treviño attempted to make an example of a group of forty-seven medicine men from several different Pueblos that had been arrested on charges of attempting to bewitch Fray Andrés Durán. Treviño hanged four of the prisoners and ordered the others to be flogged and held at Santa Fe.

Illustrating the growing unity across the different Pueblo groups and their disaffection with Spanish rule, armed Tewas from the upper Rio Grande region converged on the governor's palace and demanded the release of the prisoners. Treviño realized that his back was up against the wall. If he refused to give in, the Tewas were prepared to kill him. Also, he realized that if the Pueblos united en masse, the colony would likely be destroyed. Faced with this intractable situation, the governor allowed the medicine men to be set free.

Among them was a spiritual leader from Ohkay Owingeh named [Po'pay](#), whom the Spaniards called El Popé. Although there is some dispute among scholars about the extent to which Po'pay orchestrated the successful revolt of 1680, Pueblo tradition holds that he was the key figure behind the uprising but that he did not act alone. Representatives from each village also aided in the planning stages and execution of the revolt. Significantly, mestizo leaders and indigenous men with knowledge of the Spanish language and customs, like Juan el Tano, also provided leadership. Among the [mestizos](#) known to have participated were Francisco El Ollita (San Ildefonso), Alonzo Catiti (Santo Domingo), and Domingo Naranjo (Santa Clara). Based on genealogical research, scholars believe that Naranjo was not Pueblo. His father was of African descent, a former slave that had been included in the household of one of the men that accompanied the Oñate entrada. His mother was an indigenous woman from central Mexico. Apache people also joined the uprising.

Planning was carried out in secret. Piro people and others with known loyalties to the Spanish, such as the gobernadores, were excluded from knowledge of the plot. Secrecy was taken to extremes. It was rumored that Po'pay ordered the murder of his son-in-law, Bua, because of his allegiance to the colonists. The Ohkay Owingeh leader also made known his intention to destroy any Pueblos that did not

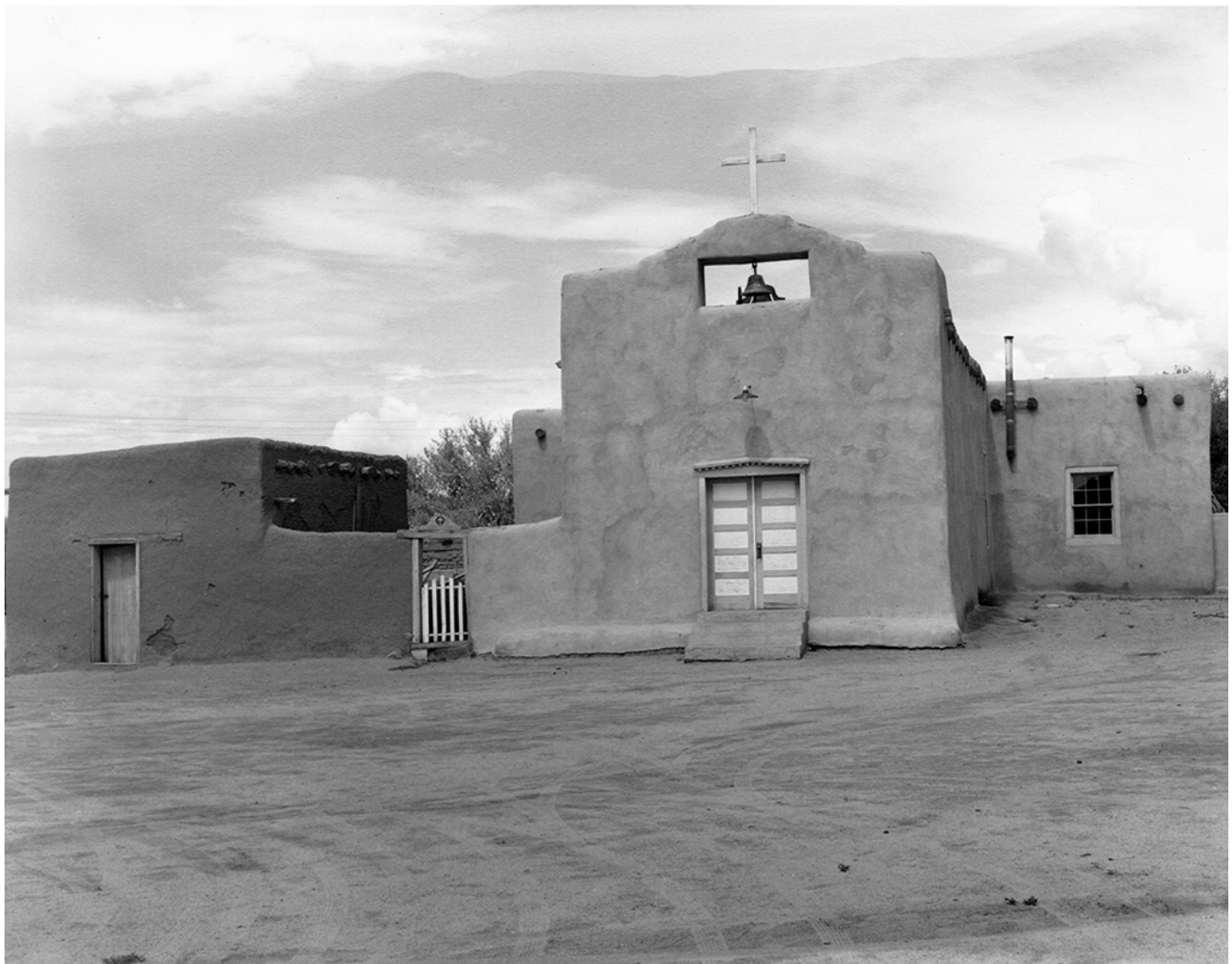
join the effort. Leaders returned to their villages from the clandestine war councils with knotted yucca ropes that signaled the day, August 13, that all would take up arms against the Spanish. The timing was deliberate. Pueblos chose to strike before the annual supply caravan made its way up the Camino Real in October. They were to strike at a moment of vulnerability for the colonists.



This statue of Po'pay stands in the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque. Pueblo sculptor [Cliff Fragua](#) created it as a companion to his other rendition of Po'pay that stands in the Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol.

Photograph by Indian Pueblo Cultural Center

Despite these measures, rumors of a general uprising made their way to Governor Otermín. Gobernadores in Taos and Pecos warned the Santa Fe [cabildo](#) of the planned revolt. On August 9, Fray [Juan Pio](#), priest at [Tesuque Pueblo](#), returned to a deserted village following a trip to Santa Fe. He found “his children” in the surrounding hills, but they did not welcome his arrival. The priest’s guard later reported that when Pio approached the Tesuque people in their ravine hiding place, they took his shield and killed him. Based on such events, runners hurried to spread the word to all of the Pueblos that the day for the attack was now. On August 10, New Mexico was openly at war.



Photograph of the mission church at Tesuque Pueblo, taken in 1954.

Thiels (photographer). Courtesy of the [Palace of the Governors](#) Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 039398.

As described at the beginning of this section, battles raged over the next several days until Otermín made the decision to fight his way out of Santa Fe on August 16. According to best demographic estimates, the Pueblo warriors outnumbered armed colonists by a ratio of sixty to one. Estimates are sketchy at best, but the overall death toll on the Pueblo side was in the hundreds. Losses for the colonists, although smaller overall, were far more staggering. Of the thirty-two Franciscans in the province, twenty-one were actively targeted and killed during the revolt. Otermín later estimated that about 380 colonists were killed, “not sparing the defenseless, of the women and children.”²² When Otermín regrouped the survivors at El Paso del Norte, he counted about 1,900 survivors. Over the next few years, many of the colonists deserted the colony.

Following the victory, Pueblo unity was short lived. Po'pay's leadership was crucial during the campaign, but viewed by many Pueblo people as overbearing thereafter. Once the Spaniards had fled, he ordered the destruction of all images, churches, rosaries, and crosses. He told men to leave wives that had been married to them in Catholic ceremonies, and he pushed them to destroy or abandon all of the material goods, and even the ideas, that had come with the Spanish. Separating Spanish from Pueblo concepts was no easy task. Most of the people who lived along the Rio Grande corridor had grown up under Spanish rule. As was the case in their family lives, the dividing lines often blurred. Even Po'pay himself continued to utilize syncretic religious terms as he called for revolt. He reported communication with three gods, one of them was "father of all Indians, who had been so since the flood."²³ He told of his communication with the devil who had become much stronger than the Catholic God. Christian concepts and stories were thus reshaped to support the rebellion, although Po'pay himself possibly utilized such ideas unconsciously.

Po'pay, True American Hero?



Like the continuance of Spanish religious conceptions, most Pueblo people wanted to maintain their use of Spanish material goods. Po'pay's prohibition of the planting of all crops of European origin and the destruction or removal of all Spanish herds and horses was too extreme and he soon fell from power. Acculturation was part of the everyday lives of Pueblos, and it had actually been a significant factor in the revolt's success. Spaniards no longer had technological advantages that allowed them to subdue the Pueblos eighty-two years previously. Such disputes combined with the continuation of drought and famine throughout the 1680s to restore the Pueblos' former cultural separations and factionalism. The Apache alliance ended as well.

INTERPRETING THE PUEBLO REVOLT

The period of climatic and agricultural crisis intensified excesses and factionalism on all sides of the New Mexico colony, and abruptly brought the delicate balance of seventeenth-century accommodations to an end in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. The reemergence of Pueblo divisions paved the way for Spaniards to return to New Mexico twelve years later. Contrary to popular legends, the Reconquest of New Mexico was bloody and hard fought. Yet, the New Mexico colony was reestablished under very different terms. [Encomienda](#) was never reinstated and the Franciscans worked with Pueblos with far less force and violence. After 1700, Pueblo peoples, mestizos, and Spaniards constructed new types of accommodations that allowed New Mexico to become the anchor of New Spain's northern frontier until it broke away from Spain as the independent republic of Mexico in 1821.

How did Pueblo Voices survive Columbus?



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Chapter 5: The Reconquest: Building a Durable Colonial Society

The Reconquest: Building a Durable Colonial Society

Waging Reconquest

Renewing Spanish Colonial Society

References & Further Reading

The Reconquest: Building a Durable Colonial Society



A los Padrinos del Niño le pido en primer lugar si me da paso y entrada que al Niño vengo a buscar. Ya conseguimos le entrada con gusto y con buen cariño pasaremos los Comanches a ver a ese hermoso Niño. Por los enfermos Niñito te pido en primer lugar con tus mano poderosa Tú los tienes que sanar. Tú que eres tan bondadoso y me diste mi salud aqui me tienes presente bailando con ansiedad.

At twilight on a snowy Christmas Eve, *los Comanches* filtered into a New Mexico village while its residents sat in the chapel listening to mass. The Chief, *El Capitán*, led a group of about twenty other men, all clothed in buckskins,

moccasins, and feather headdresses. They stalked quietly about town, taking *mantas* (cloaks), tools, and ropes from the buggies, wagons, and cars parked outside the church, and then moved on toward the houses around the town plaza. Among the group of Comanches was El Capitán's daughter, *La Cautiva*. She was adorned in a communion gown that blended in with the white color of the intermittently falling snow.

El Capitán sought out one house in particular where his party would find *El Santo Niño*, or a doll of the Christ child dressed in swaddling clothes placed in a wooden manger. Nearing the house, El Capitán quietly sang:

Spanish	English
<i>A los Padrinos del Niño le pido en primer lugar si me da paso y entrada que al Niño vengo a buscar.</i>	<i>From the Godparents of the Christ Child I ask first for permission to come within for I seek the Christ Child.</i>

When they finally located the correct house, El Capitán continued the song:

Spanish	English
<i>Ya conseguimos la entrada con gusto y con buen cariño pasaremos los Comanches a ver a ese hermoso Niño.</i>	<i>Now that we are allowed within with pleasure and affection we Comanches will enter to see that handsome Child.</i>

Bursting into the living area of the house, the group overpowered El Santo Niño's protectors, his [padrinos](#), and carried the figure with them as they retreated to the plaza. Villagers poured out of the chapel in response to the

padrinos' cries for help, and a struggle commenced between townsfolk and Comanches. In the end, the raiding party made their escape with El Santo Niño. La Cautiva, captured during the skirmish by the villagers, did not flee with her kinsmen.



La Danza de Matachines is a Native American oral tradition, turned dance, of “The Dance of the Moor’s and the Christians.” The tradition was introduced by the Spanish as a masked dance. The dances have deep religious purpose to venerate Mother Mary or saints, but are also performed to worship God, Christ, and the Holy Trinity. This performance of Los Matachines occurred at Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, December 2014.

Courtesy of Larry Lamsa

Just outside of the village, los Comanches came to an abrupt stop. Instead of continuing their flight, they lined up ceremoniously and returned to the village plaza. Their procession was headed by El Capitán who held El Niño Santo in his hands. As the group passed by the homes of the elderly or sick who had not attended the mass that night, they sang:

Spanish

*Por los enfermos
Niñito te pido
en primer lugar
con tu mano poderosa
tú los tienes que sanar.*

English

*In the name of the sick
I beg of you
Christ Child that
with your powerful touch
you will cure them.*

*Tú que eres bondadoso
y me diste mi salud
aquí me tienes presente
bailando con ansiedad.*

*You who are so generous
and gave to me my health
you now see me before you
dancing with yearning.*

At the same time, the men of the village had also formed their own ritual line, marching La Cautiva at the head of their procession. They similarly passed by the homes of the ill, calling on the healing power of the young child in their behalf. In the plaza, a band seated in an open wagon played violin and guitar music to accompany both groups' ceremonies. When the chants concluded, the bells of the church began to ring, accompanied by the rhythm of *tombés* (hand drums) that called both groups back to the plaza.

With the line of village men facing the line of Comanches in the firelight directly in front of the chapel doors, negotiations for [rescate](#) initiated. El Capitán and the village [mayordomo](#) soon agreed on the terms for the exchange of their captives. The mayordomo provided los Comanches with locally produced wine, promised meals, and cash payments in return for El Santo Niño. For his daughter's surrender, El Capitán pledged that his people would return once again on the community's saint's day, or to officiate when a community member was in need of a *velorio* (death vigil). In the flickering light of the *farolitos* (small bonfires) the men shook hands and returned their respective prisoners. Shedding their headdresses and buckskins, los Comanches reemerged as well-known [vecinos](#) (village residents), and La Cautiva, having changed into warmer clothing, also rejoined her family and the continued festivities. Although having its roots in the eighteenth century, this particular rendition of a ritual known in New Mexico communities as "Los Comanches" was performed in Placitas (a village located just to the north of Albuquerque) in 1938.

Los Matachines: A Cross-Cultural Celebration



In the seminal study, [Captive and Cousins](#), from which the above narration of the Los Comanches dance was borrowed and adapted, James F. Brooks details the means by which a unique borderlands society took shape in New Mexico during the late Spanish Colonial period. Isolated from New Spain's larger communities, New Mexicans refined colonial customs to meet regional conditions. As Brooks has argued convincingly, New Mexico's culture and traditions were forged through cycles of violence that were not "solely destructive but [that] produced enduring networks of economic and social relations."¹ In New Mexico, the cycles of violence were based on conflicts with Apache and Comanche peoples.

Don [Diego de Vargas](#)' reconquest of New Mexico in the 1690s created new terms for the Spanish presence in New Mexico. Never again would [encomienda](#) plague Pueblo peoples. Indeed, in many ways the threat of raids by Apache, Ute, and, by the mid-to-late eighteenth century, Comanche bands pushed Pueblos and Spaniards to make mutual accommodations in order to hold off the nomadic peoples. One historian of the Vargas era has commented that the reconquest paved the way for a society that has perpetuated "an amazing continuity of people and place" in New Mexico.² Such has certainly been the case since many present day New Mexicans (especially in the northern part of

the state) trace their family histories back to the days of Vargas or even Oñate. What is often forgotten, however, was the means by which this durable culture was forged. This chapter will explore the complicated process of building a durable New Mexican society during the Spanish colonial period.

Waging Reconquest

The flow of power and authority along the northernmost section of the Camino Real was reversed following the success of the 1680 [Pueblo Revolt](#). Unified Pueblo warriors forced Spanish colonists into refuge at [El Paso del Norte](#) (present day Ciudad Juárez). As if the defeat endured in 1680 was not enough, the next two decades were marked by other indigenous revolts, and threats of uprising, all across the far-northern frontier of New Spain. The Spaniards referred to this time period as the Great Northern Rebellion. Unlike the case of the Pueblo Revolt, however, Spanish forces acted quickly and brutally to quash other potential uprisings.

Although a mission congregation of Manso and [Suma](#) peoples had been established in 1659 at the mission called Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe del Paso del Norte and a few Spanish families inhabited the area, the creation of the [villa](#) of El Paso del Norte did not take place until 1680 when Governor Antonio de Otermín arrived there with the refugees from New Mexico. The people settled in several different temporary camps until permanent homes were constructed. In 1683 a presidio was established to defend the settlement against attacks of nomadic natives in the region. It was initially built eighteen miles to the south of the mission, but relocated the following year to the mission itself due to a general uprising that occurred among various indigenous peoples in Nueva Vizcaya.



1850s painting by A. de Vauducourt of the Guadalupe Mission church at El Paso del Norte—today's Ciudad Juárez. The mission had been founded in 1659 for Mansos people. In 1680, it was the center of the community of El Paso del Norte—the site of New Mexico colonists' refuge during the Pueblo Revolt. *Courtesy of A. de Vauducourt/U.S. Department of the Interior*

Other groups of refugees settled at a site called San Lorenzo, situated four miles downstream along the Rio Grande at the Pueblo of the same name.

Additionally, two small groups of Piro Indians had relocated to the area from New Mexico. Isleta people fled with the lieutenant governor when hostilities broke out in August 1680. Their descendants continue to inhabit the area of Ysleta, Texas, near present-day El Paso. Despite the resolve of most of the refugees from New Mexico, a large number of them abandoned the colony after the Pueblo Revolt.

In evaluating the settlers' decision of whether or not to abandon the colony, we must consider the fact that by 1680 most Spanish, Pueblo, and [mestizo](#) residents of New Mexico had grown up under the Spanish-colonial system. No matter their ethnic or cultural affiliation, they had lived their lives together. Most of the refugees at El Paso considered New Mexican properties to be the legacy of their families, as did, of course, Pueblo and mestizo peoples who remained behind. At least twelve families of Spanish descent remained among

the Pueblo peoples after 1680, indicating the extent to which accommodations had defined the seventeenth century in the colony.

To understand the successful reconquest of New Mexico, orchestrated by Diego de Vargas, knowledge of the larger context of events that were taking place throughout the northern frontier of New Spain is crucial. In 1697, the mission of Nombre de Dios was established about 265 miles south of El

Paso del Norte. The mission was initially founded to serve a congregation of Conchos people that inhabited the areas surrounding it, but in subsequent years more and more people of Spanish descent arrived in the area due to the prospect of mining. By the early eighteenth century, [Ciudad Chihuahua](#) developed on the site immediately surrounding the mission due to the discovery of nearby silver deposits. The city was important to the reinvigorated New Mexico colony as a way station for trade along the Camino Real. Miners and farmers filtered slowly into the settlement throughout the 1700s.

Prior to the founding of Ciudad Chihuahua, however, the region of northern Nueva Vizcaya was the scene of general unrest in the wake of the Pueblo Revolt. Understandably, in the years following the revolt, Spanish inhabitants of Nueva Vizcaya feared that the desire for revenge had spread to virtually every native group in the northern section of New Spain. For the first time, the Concho, Janos, Jocomé, Manso, and Suma peoples confederated. By and large, most indigenous peoples had maintained their independent identities even in the face of Spanish colonization. Now, various groups came together, through negotiated alliances and intermarriage, to stand against the colonizers—at least such was the conclusion of Spanish officials. In the context of the Pueblo Revolt—the only successful indigenous rebellion against a European power—it is easy to understand why Spanish suspicion reached a crescendo.

El Paso Missions

El Paso became a thriving center with a diverse mix of people. [See how El Paso was formed](#), and find out about the events before the Spanish came to El Paso.



New Spain This 1768 map shows the limits of settlement in the New Mexico colony. Due to the dominance of Apache, Ute, Navajo, and Comanche people, the colony did not expand very far beyond the Rio Grande corridor.

Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior, housed at the Woodson Research Center, Rice University

Spanish colonists never forgot that native peoples were the first inhabitants of northern New Spain. The refugees at El Paso certainly could not neglect that fact. As seemingly consistent reports of native unrest filtered into El Paso del Norte, Spanish settlers lived in constant fear of retribution for the conquest. Rumors filtered in that a group of natives had attacked and burned to the

ground the chapel at Janos. Sumas attacked Santa Gertrudís, mines were ruined, haciendas set ablaze, cattle and horses driven off.

Calamities that beset the region's indigenous peoples only intensified their hostility toward the Spanish and continued the cycle of suspicion and rumors. The drought and famine that had plagued the New Mexico colony since the late 1660s also affected people in Nueva Vizcaya. To make matters worse, epidemics of smallpox, measles, and dysentery devastated indigenous communities. Such contagions hit newly established Jesuit missions particularly hard. By some estimates, approximately one-third of the entire native population died due to famine and disease.



Native American Groups Near Texas Location of the various Native American groups surrounding the New Mexico and Texas colonies in the eighteenth century.

With all of these factors multiplying, Spanish inhabitants of the area in and around El Paso del Norte heard a terrifying rumor that a knotted rope had been

distributed among local native peoples. They fired off alarmed and desperate pleas to Mexico City for reinforcements and arms, but distance meant that such aid would not be quickly forthcoming. By the long, hot summer of 1699, colonists believed that a full-scale rebellion might break out any day. Their fears were not merely the product of rumor and apprehension. The [Tarahumara](#) people had a history of turning against friars at mission settlements in Nueva Vizcaya that dated back to the early 1600s. In 1652, for example, a widespread Tarahumara uprising ground Jesuit missionary work to a halt in the Sierra Madres. Their political cooperation with other tribes was a product of the crises of the era, as well as the growing practice of intermarriage between their peoples.

In what some historians termed the [Great Northern Revolt](#), raids led by nomadic peoples intensified across the entire northern frontier. From the Spanish perspective, the Pueblo Revolt had created a drive for rebellion among all indigenous peoples in the north. There is some evidence that Pueblo peoples had been in contact with native groups in Nueva Vizcaya, but the fact also remains that raiding typically intensified during times of climatic and ecological crisis.

Tarahumara groups orchestrated much of the cooperation between themselves and the other native groups of Nueva Vizcaya. Although no single, coordinated insurrection came together, several successful skirmishes against Spanish outposts and missions resulted. At Yepómera and Tutuaca, warriors killed Jesuit missionaries.

Meet the Tarahumara

Discover the traditions and ways of life for the [Tarahumara](#). Their celebrations and events, such as “foot throwing,” make them famous for their unique way of life.



Ethnographer Carl Lumholtz photographed these Tarahumara men at Tuaripa, Chihuahua, in 1892.

Courtesy of Carl S. Lumholtz

Throughout the 1690s, military officials made routine inspections of missions and indigenous settlements in the Sierra Madres in order to take preemptive action against potential uprisings. Such inspections involved the taking of a census in order to determine the movements of the native peoples. Generally, the Spanish were pleased that their presence seemed to generate the desired level of intimidation. They interrogated many of the prominent members of each community or band, and then admonished the people to live upright Catholic lives before moving on to the next settlement. In a few cases, however, inspectors found Tarahumara people guilty of treasonous actions and hung them on the spot.

Following this pattern, Spanish generals smothered a larger revolt near Casas Grandes that seemed to threaten Spain's grip on the entire region. Summary executions, combined with violent military campaigns, quelled the specter of further revolution on the heels of the Pueblo Revolt. Intensified violence was the Spanish method of restoring peace to the northern frontier. Such a peace was always uneasy, however, because of its foundation in brutality and the Spanish drive for domination. Additionally, the rising prominence of Apache, and then Comanche, bands during the eighteenth century provided regular

reminders of the tenuous position in which the colonists found themselves.

As in 1607-1608 at the time of [Juan de Oñate](#)'s resignation, the New Mexico colony once again found itself at a crossroads between 1680 and 1692. Royal officials again debated the viability of maintaining the isolated settlement, and some even considered abandoning the Rio Grande corridor altogether. Many of the New Mexico settlers deserted the colony after the harrowing and narrow escape from Santa Fe in late 1680. Only seventy families accompanied Governor Diego de Vargas when Santa Fe was resettled at the end of December 1693. For those that remained, the desire to reclaim their families' homes and properties was strong. Most of the refugees had known no other life than that of the New Mexico colony.



Map of Pueblo Migration A map of significant towns and pueblos in 1680 from the Border Heritage Booklet, "The [First Peoples](#): A History of Native Americans at the Pass of the North." Note that neither Las Cruces nor Mesilla had yet been established; neither had the Texas city of El Paso. *Courtesy of El Paso Community Foundation*

engaged warriors at Sandia, Cochiti, Santo Domingo, and Santa Ana Pueblos.

Only a few months after the colonists' flight from Santa Fe and the Rio Abajo settlements near Isleta Pueblo, Governor Antonio de Otermín attempted a reconquest. He had the added impetus of salvaging his reputation for leadership and strength. His return to New Mexico, however, was far from successful. Otermín's party witnessed destruction at every site they visited. Piro peoples had completely abandoned the southern Pueblos and churches and kivas alike lay in ruin, suggesting that Apache attacks were to blame. Otermín forced the remaining Isletas to pledge their allegiance once again to Spain (many of the Isleta people had fled with Otermín's lieutenant governor at the height of the uprising), and his troops

After destroying many Pueblo homes and inflicting casualties, Otermín's forces returned to El Paso del Norte essentially empty handed.

While at Sandia, the group had conducted a small-scale investigation of the Pueblos' motives for rising against them. Most of the survivors could not comprehend how and why the Pueblos had defeated them. Some, such as the surviving Franciscans, thought the Pueblo peoples were ungrateful. From their vantage point, they had only offered salvation and goodness. How could they reject such valuable gifts? Others among the refugees believed that the Pueblo Revolt was God's punishment for the sins they had committed against the indigenous people. These colonists recognized their own excesses, and, at some level, seemingly wished to atone for them. The viceroy in Mexico City shared this opinion. Another group reached the exact opposite conclusion—that the revolt was the work of the devil who had possessed Pueblo leaders in order to thwart the work of God that the Spaniards had effected in New Mexico. Such people were unwilling to take responsibility for the misdeeds of late-seventeenth-century New Mexican society.

Pueblo peoples [recall](#) the interrogations somewhat differently in their collective memory. Jemez historian [Joe S. Sando](#) has suggested that their responses to the Spaniards are still considered a “legendary joke.” When Otermín demanded that a group of captive Pueblo men tell him who had orchestrated the revolt, one [Keresan](#) man replied, “Oh it was Payastiamo.” The governor persisted, asking more information about Payastiamo. The same man told Otermín that he lived “Over that way,” indicating a path toward the mountains. When asked the same set of questions, a Tewa prisoner recounted, “The leader's name is Poheyemo. He lives up that way,” pointing to a separate mountain chain further to the north. A Towa man responded similarly, “His name is Payastiabo and he lives up that way.” The three names, Payastiamo, Poheyemo, and Payastiabo, are those of Pueblo deities who act as intermediaries between the people and the “One above the clouds.” He is generally said to live toward the north in the highest mountain peak or in the clouds. The joke was lost on the Spaniards, who believed that “Poheyemo must have been the revolt's leader.”³



Following the Pueblo Revolt, Pueblo people told the Spaniards that someone named Payastiamo, Poheyemo, or Payastiabo had orchestrated the uprising. The joke was on the Spaniards, however, as each was actually a Pueblo deity said to live atop the highest local mountain peak or in the clouds.

Courtesy of G. Thomas

Whatever the perceptions of those involved, the King of Spain ultimately wanted New Mexico to remain as part of the empire due to geopolitical concerns. Carlos II issued the official order to resettle the colony in 1683, a full century following the initial settlement decree issued by [Felipe II](#). Due to increased Apache raiding, Spanish officials believed that a buffer colony in the far north was more important than ever in order to protect the silver mines of Nueva Vizcaya and Zacatecas. Also, in 1682 French explorer [René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle](#) successfully navigated the Mississippi River and laid claim to the delta region in the name of [Louis XIV](#). The new French claim effectively drove a wedge between Spanish Florida and New Mexico, the two northernmost colonies of New Spain. Formerly imagined threats to Spain's territorial claims all of a sudden became a reality, especially because La Salle pitched to Louis XIV the prospect of using the Mississippi River Valley as a springboard from which to invade New Spain. According to the French explorer, local native peoples would back the French due to their "deadly hatred

for the Spaniards because they enslave them.”⁴

La Salle's Cartography

In 1682, La Salle sailed down the Mississippi River, claiming all the land that he could see in the name of King Louis XIV of France. His attempt to bring French settlers to [Louisiana](#) ended in his own death in 1687, but Spanish authorities feared the incursion of French colonists not far to the east of the New Mexico colony.

These two maps illustrate the advances in cartography over the centuries. René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle did not have the same types of technologies for map making as us. As a result, some maps displayed exaggerated or underrepresented areas. Starting in 1787, the modern theodolite, a precision surveying tool that measured angles in both horizontal and vertical planes, helped mapmakers create much more reliable maps.



Courtesy of Patent and Copyright Office, Library and Archives Canada



1701 French map that highlights the 1682 travels of Robert La Salle along the Mississippi River. Courtesy of Library of Congress



A modern map of La Salle's journey produced with data gathered by satellites.

New Mexico's vital role as a buffer zone in the geographic imagination of royal officials dovetailed with the El Paso refugees' desire to take back their former homes and to restore their honor. They had the distinction of being the only European people to have been forced to abandon a colony by its indigenous inhabitants. After Otermín's efforts to salvage his own legacy failed, his successors made a few equally futile attempts to reestablish Spanish rule in Santa Fe. In 1687, for example, Governor [Pedro Reneros de Posada](#) led an expedition to Santa Ana Pueblo. His forces razed the pueblo, but returned to El Paso without reclaiming the former colonial capital.

The following year, in exchange for a payment of 2,500 pesos, [Diego de Vargas](#) received the royal commission to become the next governor of the colony in exile. Preparations and travel time delayed his arrival at his new post in El Paso until February of 1691. Vargas was similar to Juan de Oñate in that he was very much a traditional conquistador in an era that no longer welcomed the former violence of conquest. Unlike Oñate, however, Vargas was more calculated and shrewd in his use of brutality and threats of violence. Vargas came to New Mexico at the age of forty-eight. A native of Madrid, he was raised by his grandmother and eventually left his wife and five children behind in Iberia in order to settle his father's affairs in the Americas. Much like other noblemen, he possessed large tracts of land but very little liquid wealth. His time in the Americas did little to



A portrait of Diego de Vargas from the New Mexico History Museum collection. This is a reproduction of the only known portrait of De Vargas that was commissioned during his lifetime.

Courtesy of the [Palace of the Governors](#) Photo

resolve that situation, although he served admirably in administrative posts in Oaxaca and Michoacán in

Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 011409.

southern New Spain. He hoped to enhance his family name and his personal fortune through service as New Mexico's governor. First, however, he would have to reconquer the province.

Almost immediately after his arrival in El Paso, Vargas began to organize a reconnaissance mission of the Pueblo heartland. In the fall of 1692, he made his first foray northward along the Rio Grande with a small, but concentrated force of about sixty soldiers and one hundred indios amigos: Piro from Senecu and Socorro and Isleta people, comprised the bulk of the native allies. In his mind's eye, he imagined precisely how the reconquest was to proceed. Vargas intended to retake the colony without so much as firing a single shot. As his group approached each Pueblo, they intentionally kept their weapons holstered. The first move was to simply announce their presence and then invite the Pueblo people to return to Spanish rule and the Catholic faith. Once the people consented, the Franciscans who also accompanied the mission would hear the natives' confessions and baptize any children born during the Spaniards' absence. Despite such principled hopes for the reconquest, all of the men in the expedition were armed and the group brought two cannons at its rear guard. Vargas understood that most Pueblos did not welcome the idea of their return.

As the group moved northward, they encountered numerous abandoned Pueblos. Due to the continuation of drought and famine, Apache raiding only intensified in the years between 1680 and 1692. Their skillful use of horses meant that the raids were swift and precise. Entire villages were deserted when Pueblo peoples attempted to find more defensible positions against the raids. Many also



This statue of [Po'pay](#) stands in the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque. Despite his success as a leader of the Pueblo Revolt, Po'pay's insistence that Pueblos abandon all Spanish material culture and his heavy-handed leadership style caused him to fall from grace not long after the successful 1680 offensive.

Courtesy of Indian Pueblo Cultural Center

his son-in-law, Bua, to maintain the revolt's secrecy. Once successful, he ordered Pueblo peoples to abandon all aspects of their lives that had come to New Mexico with the Spanish. He went so far as to tell them to stop using their Catholic names and to divorce spouses they had married under Franciscan authority. He also wanted them to give up firearms, horses, watermelons, cattle, and any other material items that had not existed in the Pueblo world before the Europeans' arrival. Paradoxically, he also utilized syncretic religious concepts as a justification for his mandates. In his campaign against all things European, he claimed a connection to the trinity as well as to the devil, yet

moved in search of more regular access to water. Due to these stresses, by the time of Vargas' entry into the area, unity between the different Pueblo groups had all but evaporated.

Despite his ability to galvanize Pueblo resistance, Po'pay's leadership style provides a good lens through which to consider the reasons that cooperation failed to outlive the revolt. In certain ways, he was willing to be just as brutal as the Spaniards had been. He reportedly orchestrated the murder of

those concepts had not existed in the Pueblo world prior to 1540.

La Entrada de Diego de Vargas



Most Pueblo people found Po'pay's directives to be extreme. As was the case for the Spanish refugees, by 1680 very few of them remembered a time before Spanish colonization. They relied on the tools, implements, animals, and seeds that Europeans had introduced to the region, and they saw no reason to abandon them. Indeed, as we saw in [Chapter 4](#), acculturation and the use of Spanish technology were factors in the success of the Pueblo Revolt. Opposition to Po'pay's leadership style, as well as differences in terms of how to reestablish each Pueblo's traditional political, religious, and familial structures meant that by 1692 the various Pueblo groups had once again divided.

Isleta and Piro peoples had accompanied the Spanish during their retreat to El Paso, and more Isletas joined the refugees following Otermín's failed reconquest venture. Some Pueblos reportedly welcomed the Spaniards' return, if with trepidation. These people faced the harsh reality of continued famine and Apache raids without the advantage of European weapons and goods. By

the early 1690s, their supplies of ammunition had dwindled to nearly nothing and, at any rate, the weapons had not allowed them to permanently repel nomadic raids. This group did not forget the abuses and excesses of the colonial past, but they apparently began to consider the Spanish presence preferable to their current situation.

One such Pueblo supporter accompanied the Vargas party as they made their way northward to Santa Fe. Their Zia informant, [Bartolomé de Ojeda](#), decided to accompany the Spaniards back to El Paso following a 1689 excursion into the Pueblo world led by another governor in absentia, [Domingo Jironza Pétriz de Cruzate](#). Jironza's forces wrought havoc in Ojeda's home of Zia, forcing most of its residents to take refuge at a site to the west of present-day Jemez Pueblo. Ojeda himself had participated in the Pueblo Revolt and the early resistance to the return of the Spaniards under Otermín and Jironza. In the course of battle, he was gravely wounded and left for dead. He survived and the Spaniards took him to El Paso. Despite (or, perhaps because of) the violence, Ojeda became a valuable informant to the refugees there. Historian John L. Kessell has posited that Ojeda began to support the Spanish return to New Mexico when he decided that further resistance was futile.⁵ Additionally, tribal traditions hold that a group of men from Jemez, Zia, Santa Ana, San Felipe, and Pecos travelled to El Paso in late 1691 or early 1692 to speak with Governor Vargas and other officials. Their purpose was to invite the Spaniards to return.

When Vargas' party arrived outside of Santa Fe on September 12, 1692, they had received mixed signals about Pueblo intentions toward them. The villa was occupied by a recalcitrant group of Pueblos that refused to believe that the Spaniards were who they claimed to be. Instead, they figured that Vargas' contingent was an Apache raiding party trying to trick their way inside the city's walls. When

they were finally convinced of the group's true identity, they made it clear that the Spaniards were not welcome to enter. Despite their resistance, they surrendered to Vargas' demands by twilight. The twin cannons trained on the town were one of the main reasons that the Pueblos changed their minds. Governor Vargas' method of diplomacy through intimidation seemed to pay off.



Tom Lea's 1947 illustration of Don Diego de Vargas. In this particular image, Vargas is portrayed as a warrior.

© James D. Lea

Vargas later boasted of his success in retaking New Mexico “without wasting a single ounce of powder, unsheathing a sword, or without costing the Royal Treasury a single cent.”⁶ His comment was a deliberate cut at the failed methods of his predecessors. After he led his men into Santa Fe, he marched the same royal banner through the streets that had been carried to New Mexico by Oñate in 1598 and then by Otermín in retreat in 1680. The Pueblos present were organized into a procession behind the banner. As they paraded around the villa, they were instructed to chant “Long Live the King” each time the standard was raised.

Once again, public performance played a central role in the Spanish act of possessing the colony. After pledging loyalty to the Crown, the Pueblos received

pardon for their sins from the Franciscans who accompanied the reconnaissance party.

Over a period of four months Vargas toured the Pueblo homeland, repeating similar acts of persuasion and possession. During that time frame, just over 2,200 Pueblo people, mostly children, received Catholic baptism and twenty-three different Pueblos pledged loyalty to Spain. Despite the veneer of success, signs of trouble remained. After touring the northern Pueblos, Vargas made his way back south and then moved west to the relocated Zia Pueblo, then on to Jemez Pueblo. There, warriors greeted the Spaniards by throwing dirt in their eyes. Due to the difficult state of affairs following seven years of sustained drought, however, they were unwilling to directly challenge Vargas. When pressed about their actions, they claimed that they had accidentally hit the Spaniards with dirt in an act of rejoicing at their return.

Suspicious but hopeful, Vargas returned to El Paso before the onset of winter to organize a full-scale resettlement expedition. Had the reconquest been completed at that point, the claim that it had been enacted without the shedding of blood would have been true. In reality, however, the reconquest had yet to begin. Vargas filed the necessary paperwork with the viceroy and earnestly worked to organize families to recolonize New Mexico. By October of 1693, Vargas had enlisted a group of one-hundred soldiers, seventy families, eighteen Franciscans, and a large contingent of indios amigos for the return journey to the Pueblo homeland. According to Spanish records, twenty-seven of the settlers were of African descent. They also prepared all of the livestock that the colony would need, including two-thousand horses, one-thousand mules, and nine-hundred head of cattle. And, this time, they brought three cannons instead of two.

Vargas was disappointed by the turnout. He had envisioned a group of at least five hundred settlers, and the smaller numbers left doubts in his mind about the future status of the villa de Santa Fe and its corresponding presidio. In 1694 the colony's numbers were boosted when Fray [Francisco Farfán](#) led a caravan of an additional seventy-six families from the mining town of [Parral](#) (in present-

day southern Chihuahua) to settle in New Mexico.

The main body of settlers moved at a sluggish pace due to the cattle and supplies they transported. Vargas led an advanced party to ascertain the general mood of the Pueblos before the rest of the group arrived. The governor was dismayed to find that during his absence of nearly a year, most of the Pueblos had become openly defiant toward Spanish rule once again. Ojeda traveled with the vanguard in order to act as an emissary to Pueblo peoples. Despite the maintenance of defiant attitudes, the unity Pueblos had achieved in 1680 had lapsed. Some people understood Ojeda's support of the Spaniards, while others resolved to prevent Vargas' reentry into their lands.

Men, women, and children alike suffered privation and hardship as they traversed the section of the Camino Real that they dubbed the [Jornada del Muerto](#) (Dead Man's Journey). That stretch of the trail between present-day Rincon and San Marcial departs from the Rio Grande along a more passable course that is devoid of water. By the time the settlers reached Santa Fe on December 16, 1693, they were desperate to re-enter the city. The winter was fast approaching, and they wanted to get settled before deeper cold set in. As had occurred the year previously, however, the city was occupied by Pueblo people, and, once again, they refused to allow Vargas to enter. This time the threat of cannons was not enough to make them stand down. They offered fierce resistance to Vargas and his soldiers, forcing the Spaniards to erect a more permanent camp outside the town. As the group weathered the cold and snow over the next two weeks, twenty-one children died.

Jornada del Muerto



On December 30 the Spaniards initiated a relatively one-sided battle due to their superior weapons and artillery. Dwindling supplies and the toll of sustained drought left the Pueblos unable to mount an effective defense. Even with such advantages, however, Vargas was still forced to order a siege of Santa Fe to pressure the Pueblos to surrender. After a period of only a few days the Pueblos could no longer hold out. In the course of the various battles eighty-one Pueblos were killed. Another seventy were summarily executed by order of the governor as a show of Spanish might, and four hundred others were placed in captivity. Even though the capital city was back in the hands of the colonists, outlying areas had yet to submit to Spanish rule. Vargas' dream of a bloodless reconquest was not to be.

“The reconquest would neither be bloodless nor quick.”

Over the next few years, Vargas led numerous military expeditions against various Pueblo peoples in order to assert his authority over New Mexico. Between 1693 and 1696, he realized that the reconquest would neither be bloodless nor quick. Instead, it was a slow and arduous process of warfare and negotiation. In many ways, Vargas' efforts mirrored earlier patterns of Spanish

conquest despite his intentions to deviate from them. As in the earlier episodes, the reconquest of New Mexico would not have been possible without Pueblo allies. Despite the presence of Franciscans and the desire to “pacify” the Pueblos rather than conquer them, violent action was necessary. And, in a step that could have arguably been avoided, Vargas used display violence in order to make an object lesson of Pueblo holdouts at Santa Fe.



“De Vargas Day” reenactment during the 1921 Santa Fe Fiesta. The photograph’s original subtitle was “ceremonies as they occurred in 1693.”

Courtesy of Library of Congress

It was perhaps no wonder that other Pueblo groups defied Spanish authority for as long as they possibly could. For a full nine months in 1694, northern Tiwa and Tewa groups allied with the Jemez people continually raided Santa Fe from their base at San Ildefonso. In the midst of such activity, disputes between some Pueblo peoples erupted into open hostility. Clashes between the Jemez people and their Keresan neighbors at Zia and Santa Ana intensified due to the Keresans’ renewed alliance with the Spaniards. In an effort to quell the dispute, Vargas personally visited Jemez in the company of several Franciscans. Despite superficially friendly relations and the baptism of over one hundred Jemez children, raids on the Keresans’ livestock continued. In mid-1694, following a raid in which four Zias and one Jemez man were killed, Vargas led a combined force comprised of 120 Spanish soldiers supported by Zia, San Felipe, and Santa Ana warriors against the Jemez people. Despite hopes for a rapid victory, the combined Spanish-Pueblo force only subdued Jemez after a frantic and bloody battle.

When the dust settled, eighty-four Jemez were killed (five of that number were burned to death and another seven pushed off of cliffs) and 361 women and children taken captive. According to Jemez oral traditions, many people

jumped off of nearby cliffs to avoid capture. Not long thereafter, the image of San Diego materialized on one of the cliff faces. To this day, the likeness of San Diego is still visible on the ridges of the San Diego Mesa.



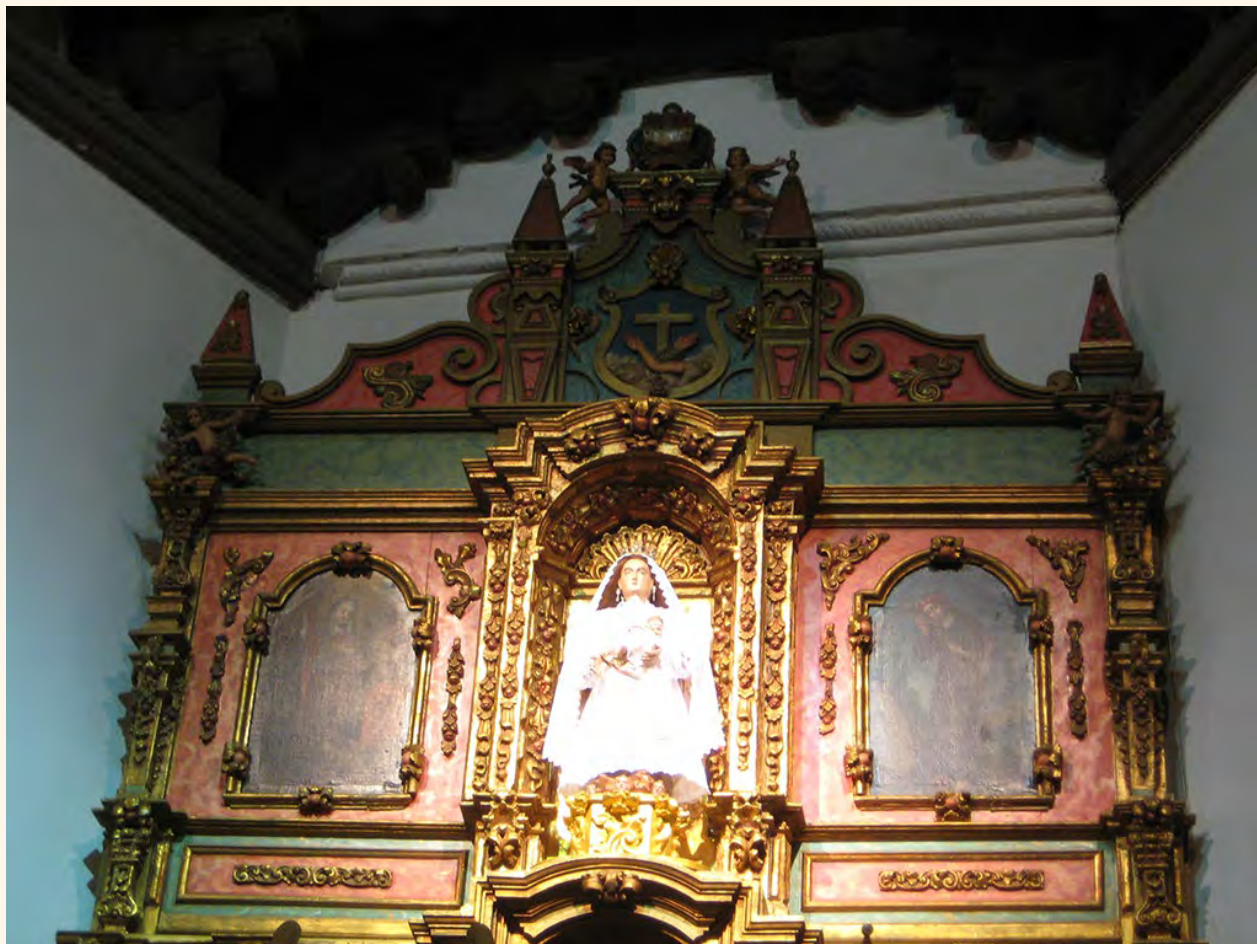
The Coronado Expedition made contact with the people of Jemez in 1541. Forty peaceful years later, the Rodriquez-Chamuscado Expedition (1581), Espejo Expedition (1583), and then Don Juan de Oñate (1598) encountered the Jemez people. Revolts and uprisings began due to the Spanish forcing Christianity on the Jemez.

Photograph by David Liu

The victors remained upon the mesa for over two weeks following the battle in order to loot Jemez Pueblo and secure the captive women and children. Nearly five hundred bushels of corn were awarded the Spaniards' Zia allies for their service. By mid-August 1694 Jemez leaders were able to negotiate the release of the prisoners. In exchange, they were to reconstruct the mission church at Jemez and join Spanish forces against Pueblos that had yet to submit to Vargas' leadership. By September the prisoners had returned home and reconstruction began.

Saving La Conquistadora

During the Pueblo Revolt, Spanish survivors managed to rescue the wooden statue of La Conquistadora, originally brought to Santa Fe in 1625, seen here in the Cathedral.



Courtesy of Richie Diesterheft

Several northern Tewa peoples, including San Ildefonso, as well as the Zuni and Acoma people, remained opposed to the Spanish reoccupation of their homeland. By 1695, Fray Francisco de Jesús María Casano was appointed as the parish priest for Jemez at the newly reconstructed mission church. Despite efforts to maintain peace, on June 4, 1696, Jemez people rose against Fray Francisco and killed him. On that same day, several Tewa Pueblos as well as Zuni, and Acoma opened hostilities once again against the Spaniards. At San [Cristóbal](#) Pueblo and San Ildefonso Pueblo the mission friars also met their

deaths. Widespread revolt continued until the end of July in what some scholars have termed a second Pueblo Revolt. The unrest is more appropriately understood, however, as a continuation of the reconquest.

https://mind.cnm.edu/miles/nmh/nmh_export/OPS/assets/widgets/show_hide/index_4bd81dabb0bd4a8ab7c894007a69b521.html?configFile=https%3A%2F%2Fmind.cnm.edu%2Fmiles%2Fnmh%2Fnmh_export%2FOPS%2Fassets%2Fwidget_data%2Fconfig%2F4bd81dabb0bd4a8ab7c894007a69b521.json

In the summer of 1696, Vargas engaged in a war of attrition with the aid of Pueblo allies. Spanish forces besieged those Pueblos that refused to recognize their authority, burning their lands and homes. Once again, Vargas relied on traditional patterns of conquest as he used existing conflicts between Pueblo groups to his advantage. By the end of 1696, most Pueblos except for Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi had once again submitted to Spanish authority. [Luis de Tupatú](#) led the people of Picuris to El Cuartelejo, an Apache ranchería (encampment) in order to elude submission to Vargas' leadership. Additionally, the people of Sandia relocated to the Hopi village of [Payupki](#) until 1742 when Padre Menchero worked to secure their return to their homeland, secured by a royal land grant. And Tano Pueblos from San Cristóbal and San Lázaro occupied La Cañada, a site later elevated to La [Villa de Santa Cruz de La Cañada](#). A large body of Jemez people also refused to accept Vargas' leadership and they fled their homes to join Navajo communities to the northwest. Many scholars believe that it was at that time that Navajo women learned the practice of weaving from the Jemez refugees. The Hopi people were the only ones able to retain their autonomy until the American period.



Establishing a New Villa [Santa Cruz de la Cañada](#) was the second officially sanctioned villa in the New Mexico colony. In 1695, forty-four families from Santa Fe moved north to the Española Valley, where they established the new villa.

Once the long and drawn-out reconquest efforts finally came to a close in the late 1690s, none of the factions involved had fully achieved what they had hoped. Vargas was unable to maintain his dream of a peaceful, bloodless reconquest of New Mexico and the overall Pueblo population was further reduced through his actions. The Spaniards did learn some valuable lessons during the period between 1680 and 1692, however. Never again did they attempt to reinstate the onerous [encomienda](#) system, although [repartimiento](#) and the practice of [rescate](#) (trade for native captives) did continue in altered forms. Franciscans no longer sought to annihilate Pueblo traditions, instead contenting themselves with the syncretic or [compartmentalized](#) religious practice with which the Pueblos themselves were comfortable. The result was 120 years of relative peace on both sides. Even with all of these concessions, it was the imposing threat of Comanche and Apache raids that forced Pueblos, Spaniards, and [mestizos](#) to come together in New Mexico. And, despite accommodations, Spanish political, economic, and religious systems dominated all others throughout the remainder of the colonial period.

Renewing Spanish Colonial Society

The actions of Governor Vargas and his supporters laid the groundwork for the society that developed in New Mexico over the next 120 years. Victories of the reconquest came at great cost, and, despite superficial peace after 1696, for the next two decades animosities lingered just beneath the surface. The loyalty of different Pueblo groups to the Spanish Crown seemed always to be in question, a situation that created deep suspicions between and within the Pueblos.

Pueblo decline was one defining feature of the colonial period. At the close of the eighteenth century, the population of Pueblo peoples was only about half of what it had been at the onset of Vargas' governorship. Smallpox epidemics seemed to plague New Mexico about once a decade. The other leading factor in the decline was the rise of Apache and Comanche power with its concomitant increase in raiding. As the New Mexico colony attempted to piece itself back together at the beginning of the 1700s, only nineteen of the original Pueblos remained and of those only four, Isleta, Taos, Picuris, and Acoma, occupied the locations they held when Coronado first ventured into the area. The Piro peoples abandoned their settlements at the time of the [Pueblo Revolt](#) and they never returned. Some Isleta people remained in the area near [El Paso del Norte](#) rather than return. Pecos Pueblo slowly emptied and then disappeared over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as its people made the decision to join their cousins at Jemez due to repeated raids on their homes. The last few Pecos people left their homes in 1838, leaving the former Pueblo stronghold completely abandoned. Only [Laguna](#), constructed to the northeast of Acoma in 1699 by a migrant group formerly from Santo Domingo Pueblo, was added.

Spanish settlements expanded during the same period, albeit at a slow pace. In 1695 forty-four families from Santa Fe moved north to the Española Valley where they established the [villa](#) of [Santa Cruz de la Cañada](#). Under the direction of Governor Francisco Cuervo y Valdés, thirty-five other families (252 men, women, and children total) established the villa of Albuquerque eleven years later in 1706. Santa Fe and El Paso del Norte (on the site of today's Ciudad Juárez) were the other two officially sanctioned New Mexico villas during the colonial era. Following its inauspicious new start under Vargas, the colony's population (excluding El Paso) reached 3,402 in 1752. Growth continued and the population had more than doubled by 1789. Although these four villas were the only ones to gain official land grants and benefits from the crown, twenty-five other ranchos, townships, or distinct neighborhoods were listed in the 1790 census of the Province of New Mexico. Notably, by 1821—the year of Mexico's independence from Spain—New Mexico's population was far larger than any of the other northern provinces, including [Alta California](#), Baja California, and Texas.

Despite artificial distinctions between Pueblos and Spaniards, a unique [nuevomexicano](#) society took shape toward the end of the Spanish colonial period. As in other areas of the Spanish Americas, heritage and claims of [limpieza de sangre](#) allowed members of society to claim status and clout. By some counts, New Mexicans used fifty-four different terms to categorize various gradations of ethnic intermixture. *Limpios* were those considered to have pure-Spanish blood and they claimed the top spot in the hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy were people of mixed African and indigenous heritage referred to as [zambos](#). The mention of this category in colonial records illustrates the presence of African-descended peoples, despite the fact that they are not often mentioned in most histories of New Mexico.

Although the fifty-four different *casta* categories did matter, recent research has shown that *casta* labels, like *coyota*, *lobo*, or *limpia* tend to obscure more than they actually tell us about



This eighteenth-century casta painting depicts sixteen different casta combinations. Such paintings were principally created for an Iberian audience to illustrate the various ethnic combinations that were forming in the Spanish Americas. The original painting is located at the Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico.

Courtesy of Schalkwijk/Art Resource, NY/Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico

society at large.

To make sense of New Mexico's [caste system](#), other scholars have boiled it down to four broad categories: nobility, landed peasants, *genízaros*, and Pueblos. Although simplified, these categories illuminate significant socioeconomic groupings of New Mexico's people during the colonial period.

status during the eighteenth century. Historian [Deena J. González](#) has done extensive work with wills and other probate records to recover the stories of people who might not otherwise enter New Mexico's historical narrative. In one poignant article, she describes the life and times of Juanotilla of Cochiti. Labeled a coyota, Juanotilla's will reveals her status as a property holder and leader of her household. Without a careful reading of such documentation, the gender and ethnic labels applied to people like Juanotilla often lead researchers to dismiss their contributions to New Mexico's histories. Yet, as González convincingly argues, Juanotilla's story emphasizes the important contributions that women made to

Juanotilla of Cochiti WITH DEENA J. GONZÁLEZ, PH.D.



Most of those who fit in the category of nobility also claimed to be *limpios*. In all, this group comprised between fifteen and twenty of the colony's most illustrious and politically powerful families. Many also traced their lineage back to the original colonists that had accompanied Oñate in 1598. This small group of people possessed very real social superiority due to such assertions. They also practiced intermarriage amongst themselves, whenever possible, to solidify their hold on New Mexico's politics and economy. The social system over which they presided was based on rank and honor, although the ideal rarely matched reality. Among the ideal markers of social status and authority were holding slaves, riding horses, carrying firearms, and avoiding manual labor. Members of the lower castes were the ones who performed all of the labor required to produce food—and survival—for the colony. Members of the nobility also used formal codes of dress and address. They referred to one another with the titles of [don and doña](#). Young noblemen spent their time holding *fandangos*, and all nobles consumed expensive, imported goods from as far away as China, which were extremely hard to come by in the far northern colony.

Again, such was the ideal, but not usually the reality. The claim to pure Spanish

blood was extremely suspect—especially in an isolated colony like New Mexico. It is highly likely that even the *limpio* nobility possessed mixed ancestry that included Native or African blood, or both. As we've seen, such was even the case for many of those who accompanied Oñate, and much racial mixing necessarily occurred in the New Mexico colony since so few immigrants made their way northward. According to Spanish and Mexican records, in the 13,200 legal marriages performed in New Mexico between 1693 and 1846 both bride and groom were required to declare their family history. Only seventy-six declared that their parents came from places other than New Mexico, and only ten claimed that their parents had come from Spain. Further, the [1790 census](#) reported that of 16,000 people, only two declared to have been born in Spain. Such figures bolster the assertion that a [mestizo](#) society was forged in New Mexico among the various groups of people that lived in the region. Of course, the nobility likely realized this reality, but the claim to *limpieza de sangre* was their ticket to elevated status.

In terms of day-to-day life, the distance between nobility and other *nuevomexicanos* was not far at all. In the arid New Mexican climate, survival was difficult for all, no matter their caste status. Factors like isolation, periodic drought, famine, disease, and raids impacted everyone. High infant mortality rates were common across the board. Like everyone else, nobles were always one Comanche or Apache raid away from total ruin, either due to the loss of property or deaths in the family. All *nuevomexicanos* suffered at the hands of the people that they derisively called [indios bárbaros](#). Nobles organized and led campaigns against the nomads to protect their honor and status, but all fought alongside one another. Peasants, *genízaros*, and *Pueblos* complained of horrible treatment at the hands of the governors who expected their military support. The constraints of the caste system, however, required them to answer the extremely frequent call to battle against Comanches, Apaches, Navajos, and Utes.

Catholicism served in certain respects to unite people across social strata. In theory, nobles, peasants, *genízaros*, *Pueblos*, and even *indios bárbaros* were equal in God's eyes. Rather than creating social leveling, however, the Church

tended to maintain and emphasize socioeconomic differences within a spiritual context. Wealthy patrons financed the construction of chapels, with artisans and peasants and Pueblos providing the labor. Quite often, nobles erected their own chapels on their ranches providing a constant reminder of who possessed economic and political power even as priests officiated over Catholic services attended by small farmers, peasants, and/or Pueblos.

To fully understand [New Mexico's colonial nobility](#), it is important to place the province's relative wealth in context. When a wealthy nuevomexicano died, he or she left behind an estate worth between three and four thousand pesos on average. By contrast, in the viceregal capital of Mexico City the wealthy left estates worth closer to 100,000 pesos in value. [Nuevomexicano](#) nobles were quite poor compared to the wealthy in more important cities in the Spanish Americas.

Below the nobility in the social structure were landed peasants. Despite their second-tier status, they possessed some wealth and usually enough land to provide for themselves and their families. They came from mestizo parentage and formed the economic and social backbone of the New Mexico colony. Those with the most land and wealth often attempted to add to their family's status by referring to themselves as *españoles*, a

What was the home like in Colonial Spanish America?



title that carried a certain level of honor. Many, however, were unable to make such claims due to skin color and ties to indigenous ritual practices based on the Pueblo side of their heritage. Still, those with land used their wealth to assert their social position relative to more lowly *genízaros* and Pueblos. Their land was precious to their identity, and most eked out a precarious existence from it. Even though the age of conquistadores had long passed by the seventeenth century, military service or marriage provided channels through which males in this group could gain hidalgo status. Once a landed family acquired enough wealth to gain the attention of the nobility, for example, their sons might be able to marry a third or fourth daughter of noble parents. The family of lower status increased their standing through the union, while the noble family added land and wealth to theirs.

Genízaros were detribalized indigenous captives and servants that worked for the nobility and, at times, members of the landed peasantry. Although indigenous slavery had been outlawed in the Spanish Americas in the 1542 New Laws, the practice had continued in New Mexico based on prior native practices



Miguel Cabrera's painting "Doña Maria de la Luz Padilla y Gomez de Cervantes" was created circa 1760. This image illustrates the ideal to which those in New Mexico who claimed *limpieza de sangre* aspired.

Courtesy of Museum Collection Fund and Dick S. Ramsay Fund/Brooklyn Museum

of taking captives. Royal officials repeatedly issued orders that indigenous captives not be “marketed as slaves,” but such entreaties were unenforceable.⁷ Once the Spanish became involved, they acquired slaves through waging “[just wars](#)” against native peoples—typically nomadic groups—that were considered defiant to the Church. Quite often, New Mexico’s governors led campaigns against Apaches, Navajos, or Utes to provoke them into battle. By making it seem as though the nomadic peoples had been the aggressors, officials could claim that their response was a just war, waged to defend Spanish society and Catholic religion.

Castes in New Mexico

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



Captives were also brought into New Mexico society through the practice known as [rescate](#). The ritual described at the opening of this chapter sheds some light on how this practice functioned. For generations prior to the arrival of Spaniards, Pueblos and nomadic peoples traded for captives at their annual trade fairs. Slaves from among Plains tribes and Apache bands were traded the Taos or Pecos trade events. Spanish colonists, including nobles and landed

mestizo peasants, began to purchase these people in order to rescue them from slavery (rescate is a term that means “rescue”). By the end of the eighteenth century, rescate became a reason unto itself for the exchange fairs that were held regularly at Taos, Pecos, and Picuris. At those events, colonists traded war captives that they had taken in retributive raids against Comanche or Apache groups in exchange for their own kin who had been captured by the nomadic peoples. Other peoples not involved in the ongoing struggles between colonists and nomads were “rescued” out of captivity to serve in nuevomexicano households.

Indios de rescate (or those subjected to these terms of service) typically served for a period of fifteen to twenty years in the service of their liberators. Colonists justified this form of continued captivity by claiming that they were doing the former captives a service through teaching them to adhere to Spanish cultural and religious norms. Most were women and children. Often, captive men were sent further south to work in the silver mines of Nueva Vizcaya and Zacatecas. Captive children were often referred to in wills and other documentation as *criados*. As historian Ramón Gutiérrez has emphasized, the term was regularly employed as a euphemism for “slave” to get around the official prohibition of slavery. Holding criados was a sign of wealth in New Mexican society. In all, from 1700 to 1849, 3,294 nomadic native people were taken into nuevomexicano homes through this process. In baptismal records, such people were typically listed as being “in the power of,” “in the dominion of,” or “a captive of” a certain person. Navajos comprised the largest portion of this group, comprising 37.5 percent of the total. Apaches accounted for 24 percent, Utes 16 percent, and Comanches 5 percent.⁸



Based on their horsemanship, Comanche people came to dominate the llano estacado (staked plains) to the east of the New Mexico colony in the mid-eighteenth century.

Courtesy of Charles Marion Russell

Once their terms of service had been fulfilled, [indios de rescate](#) were free to build their own lives in the colony. At that point, they were known as genízaros. Additionally, some Pueblos who were expelled or shunned by their own people became genízaros as well. The reasons they had been expelled from Pueblo society were varied and complex. Some had simply been marginalized, others committed acts considered transgressions by their kinsfolk. Any action that threatened to deculturate the Pueblo was condemned as a serious infraction. Most Pueblos who joined the ranks of genízaros in New Mexican society committed such actions. Many were women who had been raped by Spanish men and borne mestizo children. After the reconquest, these situations were deemed problematic. Pueblos understood the Spaniards were not going to leave and efforts to preserve their individual cultural identities became paramount. As anthropologist Edward P. Dozier has emphasized, Pueblos [compartmentalized](#) their spiritual, social, economic, and political lives in order to both adapt to Spanish rule and simultaneously preserve their cultural

heritage.9

Genízaros played a crucial role in colonial society as cultural intermediaries, or go-betweens. They had experience with native cultures, as well as mestizo colonial cultures. Once peace was arranged with the Comanches in 1786 (discussed in further detail below), genízaro people expanded the frontiers of the New Mexico colony. No longer fearful of Comanche raids, they settled towns beyond the villas of Santa Fe and Santa Cruz de la Cañada, including Abiquiú, San Miguel, Anton Chico, and Cuba. Their unique hybrid culture developed and expanded in the colony's hinterlands. Their traditions also influenced, and were influenced by, Santa Fe's colonial society, casting further suspicion upon the idea of *limpieza de sangre*. Even after the peace, however, genízaros were often subjected to raids by nomadic peoples and killed or forced to relocate.

Pueblo peoples formed another sector of New Mexico's colonial society that struggled to ward off decline and assimilation. During the colonial period, their lot in life was better than that of genízaros who pursued a more precarious existence on the dangerous edges of the Spanish frontier. Following the reconquest, as noted above, some Pueblo groups, such as the Piro and Tano, disappeared. They joined other Pueblos. In the eighteenth century, Franciscans lost the political hold on Pueblo peoples that they had enjoyed prior to 1680 as Spanish secular administrators took on most official responsibilities. Inside and outside chiefs also reasserted their traditional leadership roles among their respective peoples. Outside chiefs directly handled dealings with Spanish officials, ending Franciscan mediation between Pueblos and colonial leaders. Each outside chief worked to shield his people from the excesses of Spanish administrators and he worked against Spanish and mestizo cultural influences in the Pueblo.



Additional Towns Genízaros added to New Mexico society by expanding the boundaries of the colony beyond the Rio Grande Corridor in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Pueblo societies were thus forged by balancing the conflicting forces of Spanish cultural influence and the drive to preserve long-held traditions. Pueblos made a concession in the acceptance of Spanish as the region's lingua franca. They privately continued to observe their traditional ritual calendar while practicing Catholicism publicly. The most significant social change was the shift in some Pueblos toward patrilineal systems akin to those that ordered Spanish society. Even with the expansion of patriarchy, Spanish law provided women many rights that their counterparts in British and French colonial systems did not enjoy. Women had the right to own property in their own names, to file wills, and bring legal complaints against their husbands or others. They were still subordinated to men in family and political systems, but, as evidenced in the case of Juanotilla de Cochiti, women were also able to amass wealth and influence.

Mescalero Apache to Celebrate 100 Years of Chiricahua Autonomy

Learn about the commemoration of a journey of home to [Mescalero](#).

Nomadic peoples remained outside of nuevomexicano society. In contrast with the British colonial system that purposely placed indigenous peoples on the fringes, most Spanish officials wished to assimilate Comanche, Apache, and Ute peoples into the colony. Much to the credit of these mobile horse peoples, however, they preserved their own identities and cultures in defiance of Spanish colonial rule—and they thrived. Indeed, Comanche people built their own, independent empire in the borderlands of northern New Spain during the eighteenth century. After 1760, the principle goal of colonial officials was to forge lasting peace between Comanches and the New Mexico colony.

What is the history of New Mexico in maps?



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Chapter 6: New Mexico & The Battle for North America

New Mexico & The Battle for North America

Imperial Competition in North America

Bourbon Reforms & New Mexico

Late Colonial Age

References & Further Reading

New Mexico & The Battle for North America



As a unique [nuevomexicano](#) society took shape along the Rio Grande corridor, power relations among the region's nomadic peoples shifted. Inspired by their prowess on horseback, Utes expanded their territorial control into Navajo lands in the San Juan Basin in the early 1700s. Their presence also threatened New Mexican settlements. As had been the case since the arrival of the Coronado entrada, independent indigenous peoples vastly outnumbered those loyal to the Spanish crown.



This photograph of the Abiquiú chapel and plaza dates to the early 1920s.

T. Harmon Parkhurst (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 013695

Social, political, and economic life in New Mexico was shaped by the demographic disparity. In 1716, Ute warriors attacked Taos. Abiquiú, a small community of about twenty families that had developed along the Chama River during the late 1730s, endured frequent Ute and Navajo raids. In 1747, a combined Ute and Comanche attack forced the settlers to abandon their homes. Three years later, Spanish authorities in New Mexico backed the resettlement of the community a few miles upstream at its present-day location. Many of those who resettled Abiquiú were genízaros from the areas of Santa Fe and [Santa Cruz de la Cañada](#).

Within the context of ongoing violence, in the summer of 1750 a contingent of nearly 130 Comanche men arrived on the outskirts of Taos looking to trade. Despite misgivings that the traders posed a threat, Governor [Tomás Vélez Cachupín](#) allowed a trade fair to transpire. Cachupín, who had taken office the

previous year, recognized that existing policies had done nothing to quell conflict and instead had left the colony economically broken. He advocated a program of diplomacy, noting that nomadic peoples “must be ruled more with . . . policies of peace than those which provoke incidents of war.”¹

Pragmatically, Cachupín also warned the Comanche traders that any raid or attack, no matter how minor, would be an act of war. Although the warning dissuaded the traders from violence, in November a separate Comanche band led a daring raid against Pecos. At the head of an army raised from the presidio of Santa Fe, Cachupín engaged the Comanches far to the east in what later became known as the Battle of San Diego Pond. Aided by the element of surprise, the nuevomexicano forces subdued their opponents after a bitterly cold afternoon of bloodshed. Forty-nine Comanches surrendered and Cachupín’s men captured over 150 horses and mules. All of the others perished.

That episode solidified the governor’s resolve to realign ties between the New Mexico colony and the various nomadic peoples that surrounded it. Recognizing the developing state of conflict between Ute and Comanche bands, in 1752 Cachupín spearheaded a peace arrangement with a group of Ute headmen. Over the next few decades, the alliance with the Utes helped to diminish the threat of Comanche attacks. Pleased with the results, Cachupín noted that “the friendship of this Ute nation and the rest of its allied tribes is of the greatest consideration because of the favorable results which their trade and good relationships bring to this province.”²



This painting depicts the annual trade fairs that took place at Pecos Pueblo in the 1700s. Trade fairs at Taos and Pecos were quasi-legal affairs that attracted nuevomexicanos, Pueblos, Comanches, Apaches, and Utes. *Courtesy of The Greenwich Workshop, Inc.*

New trade outposts sprang up in the areas beyond principal New Mexican settlements, like Galisteo, Pecos, Santa Fe, and Taos. Despite economic and military ties to Ute allies, such places continued to face the specter of periodic Comanche and Navajo raids. Somewhat paradoxically, the trade that transpired at outposts like Abiquiú also contributed to increased violence. Trading posts were particularly attractive to certain groups of Comanches and Navajos. Bloody contests between settlers and nomadic peoples were all too commonplace between 1750 and the 1770s.

Not content with the state of affairs, Governor Cachupín, in 1754, established a schedule of protocols and prices to govern trade fairs between settlers and Comanches at Taos. He recognized that, despite the devastation that was often wrought through raiding, the New Mexico colony's fragile economy depended on the Comanche presence at the annual trade events. Due to a lack of currency in New Mexico, the pricing arrangement established equivalencies between common New Mexican commodities and goods that Comanches typically brought to exchange. By the mid-eighteenth century, Comanche wares included traditional items, such as buffalo hides, supplemented by ammunition, arms,

and other finished goods acquired from French traders.

Cachupín's combination of pragmatism and military prowess earned him a reputation among the Comanches as the "captain who amazes."³ Despite his best efforts, however, the New Mexico colony floundered throughout the eighteenth century. Nomadic raids, coupled with a lack of transportation to and from the colony (the Camino Real was the only official trade corridor), contributed to the problem. As difficult as those issues were, a crisis beyond the governor's control exacerbated matters. The economic and political decline of the Spanish Empire on a global level also meant that the isolated colony received little, if any, support.

As this brief account of Cachupín's tenure illustrates, during the eighteenth century nuevomexicanos united to confront the problems of violent raids, economic decline, and social discord. By the 1780s, new leadership in Madrid took measured steps to reverse the overall decline of the Spanish Empire in the form of legislation that has since been known as the [Bourbon Reforms](#). In New Mexico, the Bourbon Reforms, although imperfect, created the conditions for a lasting peace with Comanches, Navajos, and Utes that began in 1786 and lasted until Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821. During the period of peace, unique expressions of cultural and religious life emerged in New Mexico.

Imperial Competition in North America



Nineteenth-century painting that portrays Jacques Cartier's first meeting with Indians at Hochelaga now Montreal in 1535.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

To understand late-eighteenth century relations between nuevomexicanos and Comanches, we must also consider the types of competition that defined relations between North America's various inhabitants between the late 1600s and late 1700s. The French and the British sought to build North American empires to compete with Spain's hold over most of the hemisphere. As each European empire worked to gain the advantage over the others, they also had to contend with a wide variety of indigenous peoples

who sought to preserve their homelands and lifeways. As in the case of Pueblo savvy in negotiating the conflicts between various Spanish factions in seventeenth-century New Mexico, other peoples, such as the [Illinois](#), [Oendats](#) (also called Hurons), and [Iroquois](#), adeptly played Europeans off of one another to their own advantage whenever possible.

French settlement in North America began along the St. Lawrence River in the northeast. By the mid-sixteenth century, French explorers had established a series of fortified trading posts near the mouths of the St.

Lawrence and Hudson Rivers. Much like the Portuguese, the French worked to create a commercial empire based on trade with native peoples. In the case of the area that became known as New France, French explorers sustained a lucrative trade with the Huron people and their allies for fish and beaver pelts.



St. Lawrence River This map shows the physical geography and present-day political boundaries of the St. Lawrence River Valley.



Champlain's Explorations Map of Champlain's Explorations in the name of France, through 1616.

Early settlements were lightly populated forts established for the sole purpose of preserving the French foothold in the region. By the early seventeenth century, however, French officials realized that they needed a stronger presence if they were to hold their claims against Dutch and British encroachment. To that end, in 1608 Samuel de Champlain led an expedition up the St. Lawrence River to establish the city of Quebec. Within a few years of one another, Quebec, Jamestown (1607), and Santa Fe (1610) were all founded as the French, British, and Spanish sought to shore up their own territorial claims against one another. Although those cities were distant from one another, geographic knowledge was limited. Each new colony was evidence of the respective empire's desire to protect its place in North America.

Much like the Spanish, the French

followed a model of inclusion relative to native peoples. They had realized early on that their place in the St. Lawrence River valley was tenuous; a handful of Frenchmen established initial ties with the Hurons, who numbered between 15,000 and 20,000. The French quickly realized that their very existence depended on friendly relations with indigenous peoples. Amicable contact with Hurons also shored up the fur trade that was the basis for Quebec's economy. Early British attempts to colonize [Roanoke](#) were a known example of what could happen if Europeans attempted to subjugate native peoples when they were in a precarious position themselves.



European Colonization in 1700 Map showing the extent of European colonization of North America as of 1700. Originally published by Cambridge University Press.

Courtesy of University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

After 1663 Quebec became a royal colony, under the purview of King [Louis XIV](#) who issued an official policy to promote intermarriage between French colonists and indigenous peoples in order to strengthen France's place in North America. Specifically, the policy was an attempt to address the issue of meager population growth in the colony. Despite efforts to attract European migrants through a [system of indentured servitude](#) and enticements to bring orphaned children or widowed women, known as [filles du roi](#) (king's daughters), the population of French-heritage colonists remained small—especially when compared to the large numbers of indigenous peoples in the St. Lawrence River area. The French learned to create peace with natives through a Jesuit-led conversion effort that was far more willing to accept blended belief systems than the Spanish mission system. They also established strong trade relations with Huron and other peoples as they continued to migrate throughout the

Great Lakes region, down the Mississippi River. The French remembered that “Native Americans thought of trade not simply as an economic activity but rather as one aspect of a broader alliance between peoples,” a lesson that was often lost on Spanish settlers.⁴



Painting that illustrates the arrival of brides for French settlers at Quebec in 1667.

Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, Acc. no 1996-371-1

With LaSalle’s 1682 navigation of the Mississippi River, French explorations began to impact the course of New Mexico’s histories. As he sailed south, La Salle made the initial French claim on the area that became known as Louisiana, in honor of King Louis XIV. By 1683 La Salle had returned to France to propose the creation of a new French colony near the mouth of the Mississippi that would serve as a springboard to further exploration and settlement in the region. With royal support, on August 1, 1684, he embarked on his colonization mission. In part, his proposition depended on France and Spain’s continued hostilities, which seemed likely because they had been fierce competitors for centuries. Two weeks after he set sail, however, the two kingdoms negotiated a peace settlement.



February 6, 1682, La Salle's Party arrives at the mouth of the Mississippi River in canoes. Painting by George Caitlin.

Courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington

Extend Your Knowledge

Indulge your mind with information of French Explorer, Jacques Cartier, and the Native American ways of life including the Fur Trade and Native American-French Intermarriage.

- W.J. Eccles, Encyclopædia Britannica: "[Jacques Cartier, French Explorer](#)"
- Indians of the Midwest: "[The Fur Trade](#)"
- Ann C. Tweedy: "[From Beads to Bounty: How Wampum Became America's First Currency—And Lost Its Power](#)"
- Native American Netroots: "[Native American and French Intermarriage](#)"

- Tanya Basu, National Geographic: “[Have We Found the Lost Colony of Roanoke Island?](#)“



Royal portrait of King Louis XIV (“the Sun King”) of France.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

No longer interested in waging war against New Spain, Louis XIV withdrew royal assistance for La Salle’s venture. The small expedition of about 280 people was left to its own devices. Although La Salle left France with four ships, by the time he reached the Gulf of Mexico only one remained. One ship had been taken by pirates and another ran aground in the West Indies. A third ship remained in the Caribbean rather than continue the seemingly disastrous mission. As La Salle attempted to locate the mouth of the Mississippi, he miscalculated and became lost. Eventually, his crew disembarked on the present-day Texas mainland where they constructed a base of operations from which La Salle intended to locate the river overland.

The forty or so who remained with the expedition fanned out in all directions for the purposes of exploration and opening relations with local native peoples. In the process of their various journeys, La Salle’s companions became fed up with his leadership and initiated a mutiny that resulted in his murder in March 1687. Exposure, disease, and conflicts with hostile native peoples had taken a great toll on the French survivors by that point.

Although French officials maintained secrecy about the true aims of La Salle’s mission, Spanish officials learned in 1686 of his intent to establish a French stronghold that would isolate Florida from northern New Spain. Worried about the implications of such a development, they hastily organized an expedition to

locate La Salle. Over the next three years, a total of six Spanish expeditions combed the area of present-day Texas in search of the French colonists. Some of the earlier expeditions located abandoned forts that La Salle's group had constructed, but not until 1689 did the Spaniards learn about La Salle's fate.

A party led by Alonso de León, governor of Coahuila, located two French survivors, [Jean L'Archevêque](#) and Jacques Grolet (progenitors to New Mexico's Archibeque and Gurulé families), who were then living among native peoples in east Texas. From them, they learned of the disastrous results of the French attempt to colonize Louisiana. Although León did not know at the time, L'Archevêque had played a direct role in La Salle's murder. In an effort to evade capture and prosecution by French officials, L'Archevêque joined León's group. He later accompanied Vargas during the reconquest of New Mexico.

Following León's report of his findings, officials in Mexico City and Madrid quickly decided to expand the Spanish presence in the area between New Mexico and Florida. Other French explorers followed La Salle and solidified France's claims on the Mississippi River corridor. To hold off further French advances, the first town in what became known as Texas was settled in the early 1690s. Over the next three decades, several small mission-presidio complexes sprung up in Texas. Although Spanish officials pointed to these settlements as evidence that the Spanish Empire controlled the area, the reality on the ground was far more precarious for Texas' first European settlers. Due to their small numbers, Spanish Texans remained at the mercy of native peoples, such as the Caddos, Lipan Apaches, and Comanches. The settlers were



Spanish Expansion into Texas This map illustrates the first Spanish settlement expeditions into Texas in the late 1680s and early 1690s, not long after La Salle's disastrous attempt to settle the lower Mississippi River Valley in the name of the French.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

obligated to exchange gifts with the natives on their terms, a grudging recognition of indigenous political and economic power.

By Texas' early days, Comanche bands had already begun to build dominance on the southern plains. Their use of the horse and European weaponry, acquired through trade with French merchants, contributed to their ability to construct an empire. Although Spanish, and later Mexican, officials refused to acknowledge it, Comanches dominated the borderlands through the mid-nineteenth century. Only recently, historians have recovered Comanche perspectives on this period of the region's history, enabling them to tell the story of their strength and prowess. Unlike European models of expansion and political control, the Comanche model of empire was not based on claiming land or imposing borders. Instead it was based on the trade of goods and captives, building new kinship ties, dominance in warfare, and raiding.

With such factors at play, colonial Texas remained in an insecure position. The town of [San Antonio de B exar](#) was established in 1718 and it quickly became the political and economic center of Spanish Texas. Commonly referred to as B exar during the colonial era, San Antonio was a way station between missions in East Texas and the Rio Grande corridor. In an effort to strengthen the settlement, Spanish officials promoted migration from Spain, Cuba, the Canary Islands, and northern New Spain. Most people had no desire to relocate, however, no matter the incentives. There was no guarantee of safety against indigenous peoples in Texas. As late as 1742, Spanish Texas only held about 1,800 colonial settlers. At the 1790 census, Texan settlers numbered only about 2,500.

Along with providing the impetus to colonize Texas, the French presence in Louisiana also impacted nuevomexicanos in the form of new trade opportunities. Much of the trade with New Mexico arrived through indigenous middlemen. At the turn of the eighteenth century, for example, Apache traders first arrived at Pecos and Taos with French finished goods. The addition of European wares to the annual trade fairs was a welcome development in the colony because manufactured goods were expensive and rare. Spanish imperial

economic policies placed tight restrictions on the way that trade was organized. Certain merchants were designated as official traders, and no others were legally allowed to exchange goods in Spanish domains. In the northern frontier of New Spain, merchants based in [Ciudad Chihuahua](#) claimed the official monopoly on trade along the upper Camino Real. This type of system was intended to keep all of the empire's wealth within the empire itself. Scholars have termed this type of tightly regulated economic system [mercantilism](#). Although all European empires were mercantilist in the eighteenth century, Spain's system was the most byzantine.



Replicas of eighteenth-century French trade goods.
Photograph by Robert Norment

Trade in French goods through native intermediaries was both exciting and troublesome for New Mexico's administrators. On the one hand, the goods were sorely needed in the colony. On the other, trade outside of the official channels was a violation of Spanish law. Due to isolation and longstanding efforts to maintain peaceful relations with regional nomadic peoples, officials tended to look the other way when indigenous traders entered New Mexico's markets. Trade provided an important channel of communication and negotiation that quickly transformed into raiding and warfare anytime it was closed off.

Indeed, native raids took a toll on New Mexico's population throughout the eighteenth century. Apache bands threatened settlements along the Rio Grande corridor. Western land-grant communities in the area between Albuquerque and Mount Taylor (Sierra de Cebolleta) tried to fend off Navajo raids. Far northern settlements feared the Ute people, and in the northeast Comanches worked to enhance their dominance through raiding. In that context, officials capitalized on any opportunity to build friendlier relations based on trade.

The presence of French merchants and explorers themselves, however, presented a different conundrum for [nuevomexicano](#) officials. In 1706 [Juan de Ulibarri](#), one of Albuquerque's founders, heard rumors that the French had forged ties with Pawnee people on the central plains near the Platte River. French traders trekked from Natchitoches in western Louisiana to Santa Fe between 1719 and 1721. Just as the trading party set out, Governor [Antonio Valverde](#) learned from Apache allies that the French had established two towns among the Pawnee, each "as large as that of Taos." The Apaches also reported that the Pawnees used French firearms in a recent skirmish between their two peoples. To round out the report, they added that the French among the Pawnees had insulted Spanish honor by derisively calling them women. That same year, French forces attacked outposts in east Texas, led an offensive on Pensacola in Spanish Florida, and declared war against Spain in Europe.

Within the context of perceived French aggression, Valverde outfitted an expedition of forty-five nuevomexicanos and sixty indigenous allies under the command of lieutenant governor [Pedro de Villasur](#). In July 1720 Villasur's group set out on a path toward the north with orders to spy on the French and to verify the news conveyed by the Apaches. Jean L'Archevêque went along as interpreter. Much to Villasur's surprise, the march between Santa Fe and El Cuartelejo (a site in present-day southern Colorado) passed without incident. Earlier nuevomexicano forays into the area had been confronted by Comanche war and raiding parties there. As the group made its way toward the confluence of the North and South Platte rivers in present-day central Nebraska, Villasur saw no sign of the alleged French settlements.

On August 13, just as Villasur's men made final preparations to return to New Mexico, a combined Pawnee and Otoe force attacked. Despite their best attempts to defend themselves, the nuevomexicanos were taken off guard. Only thirteen members of the expedition survived to tell the tale in

What are the Segesser Hide paintings?



Santa Fe. Villasur and L'Archevêque were counted among the casualties. When the horrified survivors told their tale, fear of impending attack spread across the colony. Nuevomexicanos believed that the French must have put the Pawnee and Otoe peoples up to the massacre. Governor Valverde organized improved defenses around New Mexico's perimeter. The story of the Villasur massacre, as well as several other nuevomexicano campaigns against native peoples between the 1690s and 1720 were recorded via paintings made on hides. Known as the [Segesser Hide Paintings](#), their origins are obscure. Historians, such as Thomas Chávez, believe, however, that a father-son pair with the surname Tejada created them. The younger Tejada served under Villasur and was killed in the battle. If the hypothesis is true, the senior Tejada painted a remembrance of the mission in which his son, and painting partner, had been killed.

By 1721, France and Spain had once again negotiated peace. During the short period of their aggressions, however, Spanish Texas was strengthened by the addition of new presidios and military units. New Mexico seemed to be in a vulnerable



At the center of this Segesser II is Franciscan Fray Juan Mínguez. Dressed in a blue robe and holding tight to a crucifix, the priest rushes to administer last rights to the nuevomexicano soldiers on the battlefield. Directly behind the friar is Joseph Naranjo, war captain of the Pueblo auxiliaries who accompanied the Villasur Expedition.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 005828

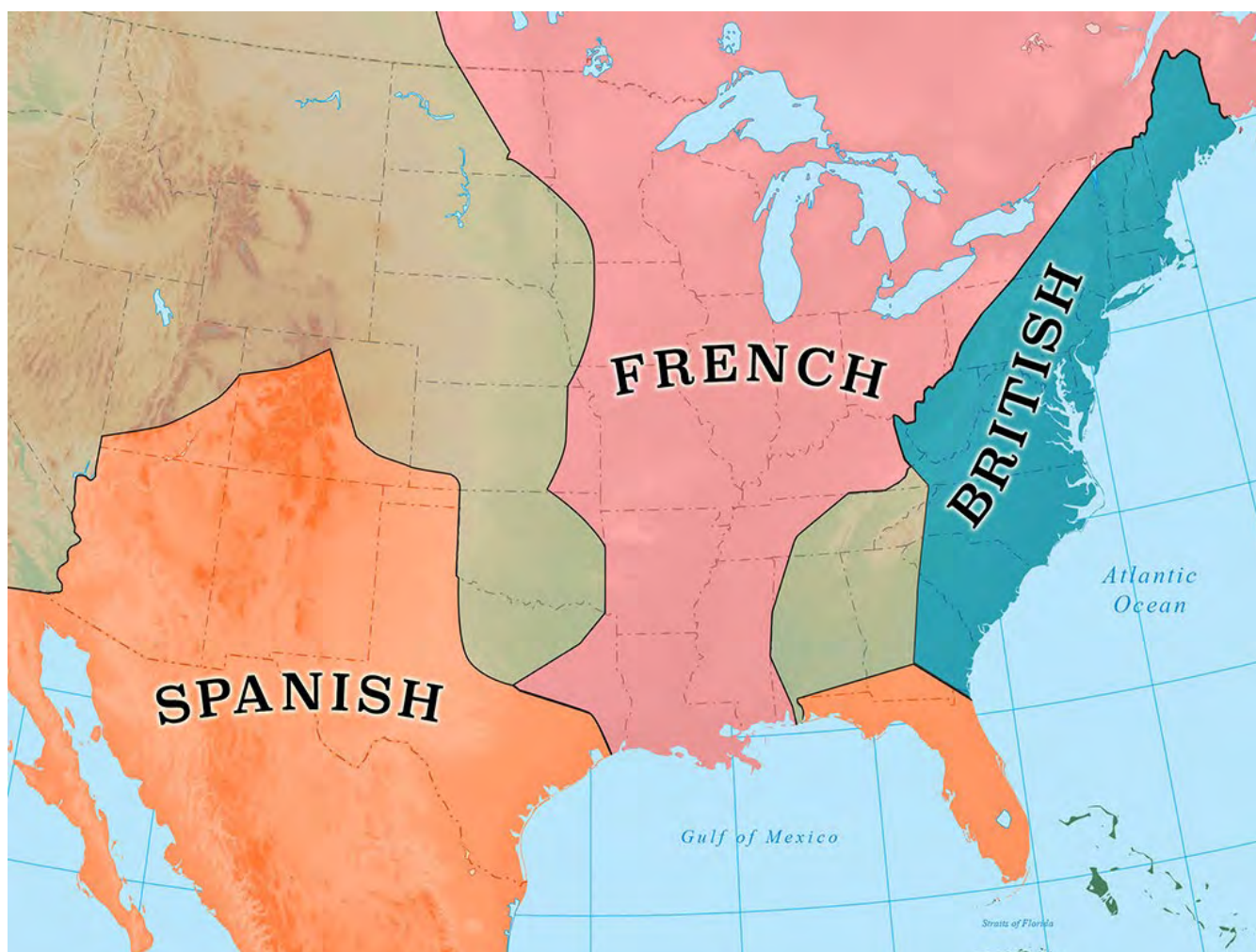
The Battle that Stopped Spain's Eastward Expansion

From painted battle scenes to fragmented olive jars, learn

position, and Governor Valverde prepared the colony for the worst. As French weapons and goods filtered into the Taos trade fair, nuevomexicanos ignored trade prohibitions and armed themselves in any way that they could.

about the first [archaeological evidence from the Villasur Expedition](#).

When the French threat subsided, the practice of acquiring French goods through Apache and Comanche traders only grew. In 1739 [Pierre and Paul Mallet](#), French traders from Illinois, made their way to New Mexico with six companions. New Mexico officials reported that the Mallet party entered Santa Fe without any merchandise, having lost it during a rough river crossing. As they waited for word from the viceroy on what to do with the Frenchmen, the outsiders received great hospitality for a period of about nine months. Ultimately, the official word was that the Mallets had to leave or face arrest—the trade prohibition would be enforced.



European Claims in North America This map illustrates the extent of Spanish, French, and British claims on North American territories in the mid-1700s. It is important to note that native peoples occupied and controlled much of the territory claimed by these European powers. Such was especially the case in present-day eastern New Mexico and northern Texas where Comanches controlled economic exchange and movement through the region.

The official report of the lost merchandise may have been a fabrication to hide the fact that nuevomexicanos had traded with the Mallets. Suffering due to scarcity of manufactured goods, and weary of the Chihuahua merchants' exorbitant prices, at least one frustrated nuevomexicano sent a shopping list with the Frenchmen when they left New Mexico. When the trading party returned to Illinois, French merchants there drew two conflicting conclusions based on the experience. First, Spanish officials had prohibited their entry into northern New Spain. Second, and somewhat contradictorily, nuevomexicanos wanted access to new wares and trade options. As a result, French traders occasionally tried their luck in New Mexico during the rest of the eighteenth century.

Fast Fact: Expedition Calorie Costs

Explorers burned enormous amounts of energy breaking trails, paddling, and portaging canoes. Learn how many [calories were needed to fuel an expedition](#).

Bourbon Reforms & New Mexico

As the Segesser Hide Paintings illustrate, New Mexico's colonial history was characterized by isolation, the constant threat of raids, and contests with other European colonists. One lifelong scholar of New Mexico history has asserted that the colonial period was a time of general misery.⁵ Indeed, governors, Catholic priests, and colonists alike often reported miserable conditions in their communications with people beyond the colony. Yet to characterize the colony as a place of sustained misery is misleading. Nuevomexicanos often characterized their experience in such terms to bolster petitions for reinforcements, new supplies, and other types of aid. As indicated by the case of the trade in French goods, they took the initiative to carve out the best situation possible.

By the late eighteenth century, King Carlos III of the Bourbon royal family recognized that his far-flung empire was in dire need of structural reforms if it was to once again be a political and economic powerhouse. The Spanish Empire was in a state of decline for a number of reasons. Spain's empire was the most far-reaching in history; the maintenance of lines of authority, communication, and shipping proved problematic. The wealth of the silver mines in Zacatecas and Potosí, Bolivia, promised an era of prosperity and dominance. Spanish kings' affinity for religious war, combined with pirates in the Atlantic, meant that the advantage presented by the silver deposits was ephemeral. The older system of overlapping jurisdictions, designed by Spain's first kings to ensure officials' personal loyalty, was cumbersome and inefficient.

Carlos III initiated a series of new legislation, known collectively as the [Bourbon Reforms](#), which applied insights of the [European Enlightenment](#) to

the empire's problems. The three main goals of the reforms were to “streamline public administration, raise productivity and trade, and increase security in the Americas.”⁶ The first target was the bloated administrative system of the Spanish Americas, which included an excessive number of governorships and regional posts that sapped imperial resources. Many of these positions had been purchased. The other two goals of the reforms had specific implications for New Mexico. In order to turn a profit in the Americas, the king wished to create conditions that opened new trade opportunities with native peoples. In this instance, the Crown simply accepted the reality of trade between Spanish subjects and indigenous peoples in peripheral areas, including New Mexico and the La Plata region of South America. Additionally, officials close to the king hoped to reverse the status quo in order to trade with Comanches on Spanish terms.

Bourbon Reforms came in the aftermath of the [French and Indian War](#) (which extended to become the Seven Years' War in Europe), which redrew the map of European empire in North America. The conflict itself centered on competing French, British, and indigenous claims to the Ohio River Valley. When the dust settled in 1763, the British and their native allies achieved a decisive victory. Spain joined the effort in support of the French near the end of the war, and found itself on the losing end of the conflict. Although the reasons remain unclear, France ceded Louisiana west of the Mississippi River to Spain through the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau in November 1762. Louisiana was a financial liability for France. The gesture may also have been an attempt to compensate Spain for losses it had incurred as a French ally during the conflict.

The February [1763 Treaty of Paris](#) officially ended the war. England recognized Spain's right to western Louisiana, but took the eastern portion of the colony, all of New France, and Florida. England emerged as Spain's only European rival in North America, a situation of grave concern to Carlos III who had only reluctantly accepted economically unstable Louisiana. Despite the potential for fiscal drain, he recognized the necessity of holding as much territory as possible as a buffer against English colonists who looked covetously toward the west.

Given such momentous changes, Carlos III resolved to address issues of security and stability along New Spain's northern frontier. To that end, he dispatched the [Marqués de Rubí](#) to make a reconnaissance of the area's defenses and populations. The king needed a clearer picture of the realities faced in each of the northern provinces, especially those at the edge—Texas and New Mexico. Between 1766 and 1768, Rubí traversed over 7,500 miles as he surveyed the various settlements in the north. In his various reports he detailed the barriers to communication and transportation between New Mexico and Texas. Despite their geographic proximity, Comanches and others dominated the spaces in between their corridors of settlement, forcing travelers to hold to the Camino Real rather than attempt to move more directly between the northern colonies.

Other royal officials, such as [José de Gálvez](#), also toured the north in order to assess the situation there. Both men supported Carlos III's efforts to curtail the political and economic power of the Catholic Church. Based on recommendations from a number of royal administrators, and in order to reinforce the power of the state over the Church, all members of the Jesuit order were expelled from the Spanish Empire in 1767. Major administrative decisions hung on the recommendations of the Bourbon king's advisors. Gálvez's and Rubí's reports provided the king with a much clearer understanding of the situation in the north, but royal administrators still lacked local knowledge. Issues such as language barriers and alliances that had been formed through



José de Gálvez was an official visitador (inspector) in northern New Spain during the era of the Bourbon Reforms. His recommendations, along with those of other administrators like the Marqués de Rubí, informed royal decisions about how to refine the administration of New Mexico and other areas in the northern frontier.

Courtesy of PhilFree

intermarriage and gift giving still eluded his view.

Most directly, the [Reglamento de 1772](#) (Regulation of 1772) was issued as a result of the work of Rubí and Gálvez. The Reglamento was a set of legislation that applied Enlightenment reasoning to the problems faced in the northern frontier. Rubí reached the overall conclusion that New Mexico's development was hindered by the hostility of native peoples. Santa Fe boasted the only presidio north of El Paso, and it was not a very strong garrison. The [nuevomexicano](#) population was ill-prepared for war with local natives, let alone the British (if it ever came to that). Poverty and stifling trade restrictions exacerbated the problem; many nuevomexicanos were armed with only bows and arrows, while Comanches carried guns. To the south in Nueva Vizcaya, Rubí found that many settlers had simply abandoned their towns wholesale in the face of conflicts with natives. Despite the persistent unwillingness to recognize their power, Comanches were expanding their own empire at the expense of New Spain.

Regulation of 1772

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



The Reglamento de 1772 offered solutions to these issues. More money was budgeted for military defense. Soldiers received uniforms and regular pay due to increased military spending and measures to curb corruption. Significantly, uniforms and regular pay went a long way in promoting professionalism and loyalty among the troops. Additionally, the Reglamento called for a “rational line” of presidios along the 30th parallel, to the south of the present-day U.S.-Mexico border. The result was a series of fifteen presidios, spaced one hundred miles apart, between Altar, Sonora, and La Bahía, Texas. Far to the north of the rational line, Santa Fe and San Antonio, the capitals of their respective provinces, were considered a “separate frontier.”⁷ Although the Reglamento was a vast improvement to frontier security, it was also shortsighted. The line that appeared so rational on maps was laughable to Apaches and Comanches who continued to traverse the spaces in between the presidios.

To supplement and enhance the Reglamento, in 1776 the northern section of New Spain was reorganized into a separate administrative jurisdiction called la *Comandancia general de las provincias internas* (Internal Provinces). A *comandante general* who held authority independent of the viceroy was to preside over the Internal Provinces. Yet the new Internal Provinces remained within the viceroyalty of New Spain, making the jurisdiction only semiautonomous. Teodoro de Croix was appointed as the first *comandante general*, a post he held until 1783. As he set about to apply and enforce the Reglamento, he quickly realized that its stipulations did not match local realities. To rectify the situation, he created a contingent of light troops, the *tropas ligeras*, trained to move rapidly with fewer horses. Additionally, he organized flying companies, or *compañías volantes*, which were trained cavalry units. Together, these new military forces worked to fill in the gaps along the line.

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New Mexico and Texas, however, remained far north of the rational line of protection. Among the various conversations of Bourbon officials regarding the northern frontier, the notion that the borders be pulled back if necessary had gained some credence. In order to shore up settlements beyond the line, Croix pushed governors of the Internal Provinces to forge alliances with native peoples. Governor [Juan Bautista de Anza](#) arrived in Santa Fe with the specific assignment to build an alliance with the Comanches—a seemingly impossible task. José de Gálvez had said as much during his tour of the northern frontier. Croix, however, believed that the continued existence of New Mexico depended on it.



This portrait of Governor Juan Bautista de Anza was painted in 1774 by Fray Orci. Anza is known in New Mexico history for his role in establishing peace with Comanches, Navajos, and Utes.

Fray Orci (painter). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors](#) Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No.

Governor Anza's life and outlook had been shaped by his experiences in the north. He had been born in Sonora in 1736, and his father was a presidio captain. His own career was initiated through service in a frontier presidio army, where he built a reputation as an able leader, explorer, and fighter. Eventually, he became commander of the several presidios throughout Sonora. Anza blazed new roads to connect Sonora with [Alta California](#) which was a new target of Spanish colonization from the 1740s through the end of the colonial period. Having laid out the sites for the future [villa's](#) presidio and mission, Anza is credited with the founding of San Francisco in 1776.

050828.

Despite the level of frontier experience that the new governor brought to New Mexico, forging peace with Comanches would be no small task. The [Numunu](#) (or “the people”), as the Comanches called themselves, first appeared in Spanish records in 1706. Known for their dominance of the Comanchería, as their homeland on the Southern Plains came to be known, they were relative newcomers to the region. Much like the histories of the Spanish and the French, theirs was a story of colonization, conquest, and empire building. Only recently historian [Pekka Hämäläinen](#) has offered this reevaluation of Comanche dominance of the northern frontier. As he convincingly illustrates, Comanches practiced a type of imperialism that forced all inhabitants of the northern frontier, whether European, [mestizo](#), or indigenous, to recognize their prowess. And, as Hämäläinen reminds us, “The Comanche empire was powered by violence, but, like most viable empires, it was first and foremost an economic construction.”⁸

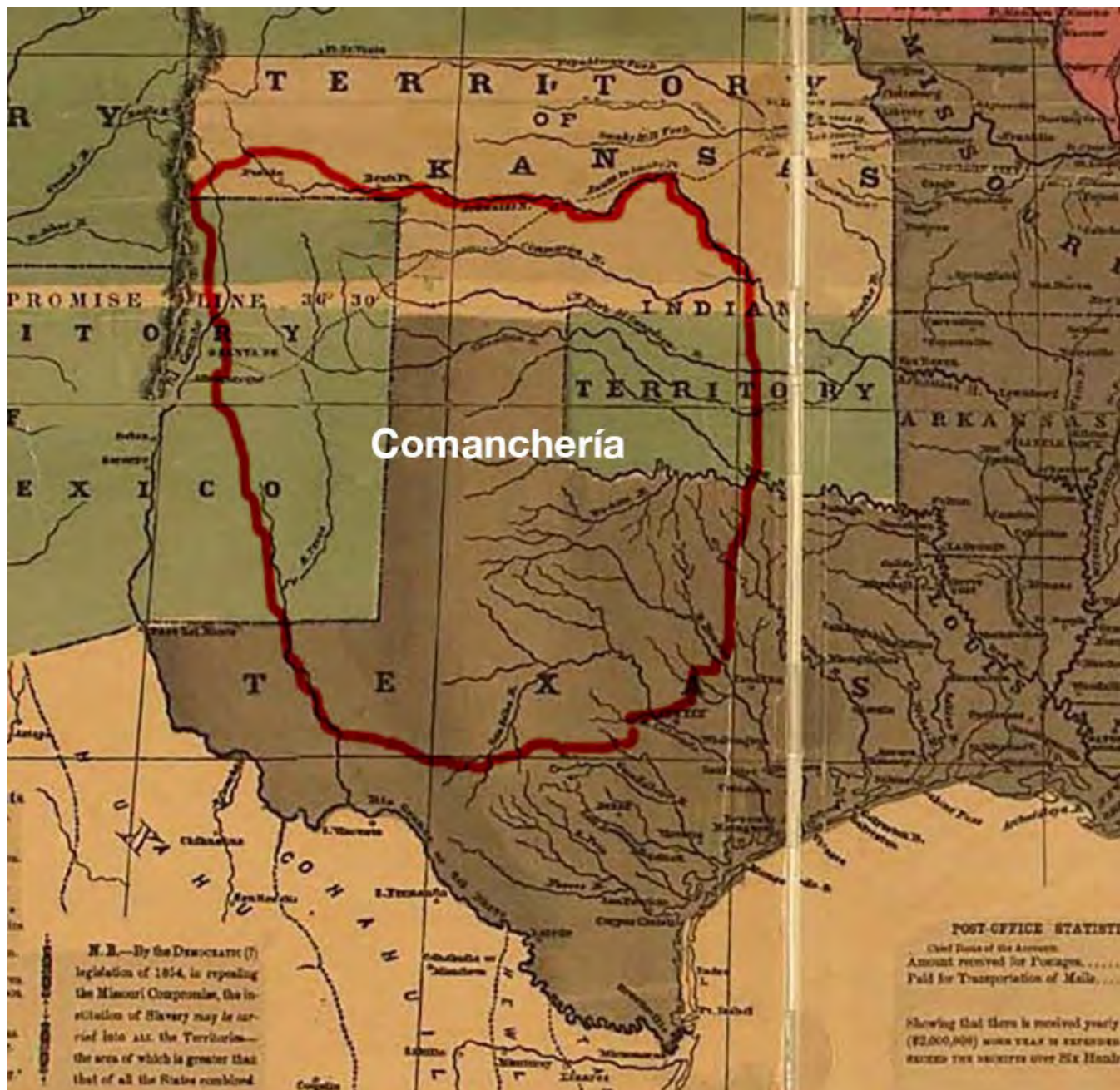
Tradition holds that the Numunu migrated southward from the central Great Plains at the turn of the eighteenth century. Theirs was part of a series of native migrations in North America during the late 1600s and early 1700s that came in response to the expansion of the French fur trade, British and French conflicts, and the expansion of European territorial claims. Native peoples moved in search of new fur trapping opportunities due to the depletion of beaver populations in the northeastern sector of the continent. They also relocated in order to preserve their cultures and identities in the face of European colonialism.

Comanches followed this pattern into the southern llano estacado, where they reinvented themselves as a formidable political and economic challenge in a geographic area that had long been a meeting place of cultures. Originally descendants of Shoshone bands, upon their arrival on the northeast fringes of the New Mexico colony they relied on new connections with Ute and Apache peoples to stake a claim to the area. Utes, for example, first introduced them to the trade fairs at Taos and Pecos. Yet they quickly moved to dominate the peoples that had helped them to gain a foothold at the trade fairs. Ute and Apache peoples migrated toward the west and southwest in order to escape

their dominance. The Apache informants who spurred the Villasur expedition had fled to Santa Fe to escape Comanche attacks. By 1726, nuevomexicano Brigadier Pedro de Rivera characterized the Comanches as a brutal, nomadic people, traders in captives who “make war on all nations” and “travel in battle formation” at all times.⁹

Conventional reports trace the origin of the term “Comanche” to Spanish corruptions of a Ute word, *kumantsi*, which has been translated as “enemy.” Although we know that Comanches and Utes initiated close relations as soon as the Numunu arrived in the region, this single word is our only clue about the nature of those early encounters. If the term is translated to mean *enemy*, the inference is that the first contact was based on violence or intimidation. More recent linguistic interpretations, however, suggest that *kumantsi* refers to “a people who were considered related yet different.” This reevaluation pushes us toward a new understanding of the initial encounter as “a reunion of two Numic-speaking peoples, who...despite centuries of physical separation, found a unifying bond in their persisting linguistic and cultural commonalities.”¹⁰

Adoption of the horse allowed the Comanches to create a unique culture and society that was born in the llano estacado in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Horses were not simply tools used to enhance travel, hunting, or warfare; they became central to Comanche identity. Through their mastery of the horse, they expanded their hunting grounds, contact with other peoples (including French and Spanish colonists), and trade capabilities. They constructed trading circuits that allowed them to gain French firearms and manufactured goods along the eastern flank of the Comanchería in exchange for bison hides and meat. They then traded those items at New Mexico’s exchange fairs as well. As their prowess with the horse and their economic savvy increased, they claimed more territory to hunt buffalo.



Comanchería Adapted from William C. Reynolds' "Political Map of the United States" (1856) showing the approximate area of Comanchería, the land occupied by various Comanche tribes prior to 1850.

Courtesy of Left Hook and Library of Congress

Along the eastern fringes of New Mexico, Comanches had displaced Jicarilla Apache bands by the 1720s as they expanded their empire. Apaches, although great horsemen, did not match Comanche prowess on horseback. As the Numunu pushed the Jicarillas to migrate, they inserted themselves into existing Apache trade networks. By the 1720s, then, Comanche presence at Taos and Pecos became an annual occurrence. At first, nuevomexicanos resisted trade with Comanches because they were unsure of their intentions. Comanche raids on eastern Pueblo and nuevomexicano settlements, coupled with the sheer lack

of manufactured goods in the colony, caused them to quickly change their attitude. In this case, as in many others over the course of the colonial period, raiding was clearly utilized as a tool to create the desired economic outcome. [Nuevomexicano](#) officials began to see Comanches as an important barrier between themselves and the French by midcentury.

Even as trade ties increased, however, tensions remained. Interestingly, Texas colonists maintained their attitude of defiance toward the Comanches and refused to open trade relationships. As a result, Comanche raids on Texas settlements continued with regular frequency, and at times Texan goods that had been secured during raids were traded to nuevomexicanos at Taos or Pecos. Conflicts with New Mexican settlements also persisted at times despite the trade. As indicated at the opening of this chapter, captives taken during raids often perpetuated cycles of retributive violence that were at once destructive and economically beneficial. Nuevomexicanos chafed at Comanche dominance of trade, communication, and transportation. By the 1760s, for example, Comanches sold more horses and manufactured goods to nuevomexicanos than nuevomexicanos sold to them.

Comanches were successful in building a powerful, nomadic empire because they were adept hunters, traders, and diplomats. Also of great importance was their ability to absorb other peoples, including Apaches, Utes, Pawnees, Pueblos, and, at times, people of European descent. Many of these people began their lives among the Comanches as captives or runaways hoping to escape retribution in their own societies. Over time, even captives were offered opportunities to marry into Comanche clan and kinship networks if they so desired. This is not to say that Comanche forms of slavery were somehow benign, but it is important to recognize that captivity was not necessarily a permanent status among the Numunu. The overall Comanche population grew from about 15,000 in 1750 to over 45,000 in 1780 through such dynamics.

Governor Juan Bautista de Anza fully recognized the immensity of the task that Croix had assigned to him. As soon as he took up his post in Santa Fe, he began to construct a plan and to outfit a military force. Anza understood that Croix's

hope was that Comanches would become dependent on the Spanish Empire economically when an alliance was forged. Such hope may have been a bit shortsighted due to Comanche dominance of trade flows to New Mexico, but the use of the prospect of trade rather than conversion to Catholicism to bind indigenous peoples to Spain was a novel one. And, Anza, Croix, and their superiors in Mexico City and Madrid all hoped that such alliances would form quickly enough to preempt possible alliances with the British who controlled all of North America east of the Mississippi River.

In late 1778, Anza gathered five hundred nuevomexicano recruits and two hundred Pueblo allies at San Juan Pueblo (Ohkay Owingeh) where they were supplied with new weapons and fresh horses. They set out toward the north, looking for Comanche bands. Along the way, they encountered some Ute warriors that they convinced to join their contingent. Anza's plan was to strike a major offensive against the Comanches that would force them to come to the negotiating table. His plan was risky because a decisive military strike might also result in the destruction of his own forces, or, if successful, in new cycles of retributive violence against New Mexico.

The force travelled by night in order to preserve the element of surprise. They crossed the Rocky Mountains at [Pike's Peak](#) and moved eastward onto the plains where they located a Comanche encampment (near present day Pueblo, Colorado). Apparently undetected, Anza ordered a hasty attack in order to press their advantage. In the ensuing skirmish, a few Comanches were killed and the rest taken captive. The nuevomexicanos quickly realized that no warriors were present at the encampment. This type of victory was not what Anza sought.



This breathtaking photograph shows Pike's Peak, the major landmark not far from the spot where Governor Anza's forces located and subjugated a Comanche encampment in late 1778. Although the New Mexicans only found women and children at the encampment, Anza subsequently led his men against Cuerno Verde and other Comanche warriors. In the ensuing battle, Cuerno Verde was killed.

Courtesy of Beverly Lussier

As Anza's forces prepared to move out with captives in tow, the governor received word that Comanche headman [Cuerno Verde](#) (Green Horn; Tabivo Naritgant was his native name) had just led an attack against Taos. Anza pressed his men southward as rapidly as possible in an effort to head off the Comanche war party. Cuerno Verde's force had been repulsed by the garrison at Taos, and as they made their retreat they encountered Anza's contingent near present-day Green Mountain, Colorado. The nuevomexicanos trapped the Comanches, and in the ensuing battle Cuerno Verde and twenty warriors were killed. Anza sent Cuerno Verde's headdress to Croix as evidence of his success.

Although Anza had achieved the type of strike that he had hoped for—he

certainly got the Comanches' attention—it remained to be seen how the Numunu would react. Fortunately for Anza, events played out much as he had imagined. In the fall of 1779 peace negotiations began with [Ecueraacapa](#), another of the most prominent Comanche headmen. A treaty emerged that both sides viewed as a success. Comanches correctly believed that they had not ceded any of their power by becoming allies of the Spanish. As a result of the alliance, they were able to exchange for even more trade goods with nuevomexicanos, including guns, leather goods, knives, and other manufactured products that reached New Mexico via Chihuahua merchants. Governor Anza's actions solidified New Mexico's position far to the north of the rational line of presidios, and Comanches promised to be a powerful ally against continuing Apache raids.

In 1786, two years before the governor's death, Navajos and Utes were added to the negotiated peace. The result was an unprecedented system of exchange and cooperation that created long-term tranquility in New Mexico. Because peace arrangements were based on gift exchanges subsidized by the Spanish Crown, however, Mexican independence in 1821 signaled the beginning-of-the-end for the time of peace. Mexican officials, occupied with a plethora of political intrigues and economic concerns, refused further subsidies to support the negotiated arrangements. Yet thirty-five years of peace at the end of the Spanish colonial period allowed for the blossoming of a unique nuevomexicano culture and society.

The only people who remained outside of the treaties were Apaches. Hard on the heels of Governor Anza's peace settlement with Comanche, Navajo, and Ute peoples, [Bernardo de Gálvez](#) (nephew of José de Gálvez and successor to Croix as comandante general) initiated a system of *establecimientos de paz* (peace establishments) alongside borderland



presidios in an effort to pacify Apache groups. Officials believed that the time was ripe for solidifying peace with Apaches as well. In early 1786 Apache-Spanish raiding and violence had diminished, although small engagements continued infrequently.

Eighteenth-century painting of Bernardo de Gálvez by Carlos Monserrate. In 2014 Teresa Valcarce worked with Congress to fulfill a 231-year-old promise to hang a portrait of Gálvez in the Capitol for his assistance to U.S. [patriots](#) during the American Revolutionary War. The original portrait is located in a private collection in Malaga.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

To entice them to settle at the new peace establishments, Apaches “received food, liberal quantities of liquor, and weak-barreled rifles, which frequently misfired and required constant Spanish-provided maintenance.”¹¹ The idea was to create a situation of dependency that would force Apaches to adopt “civilized” Spanish lifestyles. Gálvez made this point explicit by arguing that the establishments and the trade terms he wished to produce were intended to create a system of supervised bartering between indigenous peoples and Spanish settlers. Specifically, he hoped to promote Spanish supremacy in terms of access to horses, rifles, and ammunition. He argued that the Natives receive weapons with extra-long barrels to limit their ease of use—especially on horseback.

Much to Gálvez’s dismay, Apaches either avoided the peace establishments or adapted them to their own purposes. On March 21, 1787, [Chihenne](#) Apache headman [Ojos Colorados](#) fled one such establishment at San Buenaventura (near Casas Grandes) with seven other Mimbrenño (as the Spanish then referred to the Chihene) chiefs and somewhere between eight hundred to nine hundred people. As they fled, they killed several Spaniards and three Chiricaguis and they took one other Chiricagui captive. From the Spanish perspective, this incident was a prime example of Apache treachery. Officials ordered a few hundred troops into the field to counter the terror inspired by Ojos Colorados and his people. The two-year campaign fed the population of the military colonies in northwestern Chihuahua as Spanish men proved their valor and were rewarded with land and status through war against Apaches. Then, just as abruptly as they had fled, Ojos Colorados led his people to seek peace at the Janos presidio in late 1789. Such actions indicated that his Chihenne band

treated “Janos as a headquarters and not a prison.”¹² In following this pattern of fleeing and returning to sue for peace at advantageous moments, Apaches maintained their independence as well as trade ties with the Spanish. Thus, the situation of peace proved to be ephemeral in the raid-and-trade economy of the colonial borderlands.

Even with such troubles, Gálvez’s policies were successful in that they forged different types of relations with native peoples in the northern frontier. By accepting the well-established cycles of raiding and trading as the reality of northern New Spain, officials found new ways to navigate them. Gálvez’s motto was “A bad peace...would be more fruitful than the gains of a successful war.”¹³ This statement illustrates the new willingness of Spanish officials to work with situations on the ground in order to achieve broader initiatives in the era of Bourbon Reforms.

Late Colonial Age

Despite the fact that peace establishments never worked in the ways that the Spaniards had envisioned, they did succeed in creating friendlier relations with Apache peoples. The period between 1786 and 1821 was characterized by peace in the larger New Mexico region. Significantly, Comanches, Utes, Navajos, and Apaches made peace with the Spaniards in a piecemeal fashion—Anza's efforts meant that New Mexico was at peace with various nomadic peoples. Other provinces had to manage their own relations with the nomadic peoples that surrounded them. *Tejanos* never forged a lasting peace like that enjoyed in New Mexico. Trade goods and even captives taken in raids on Texas continued to trickle into Taos and Pecos (although by the end of the eighteenth century, the importance of Pecos as a trade site had waned).

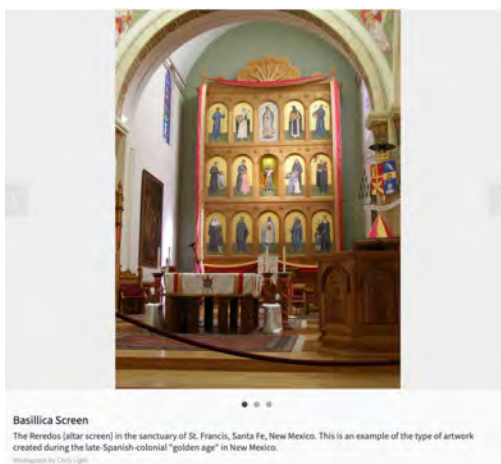
In New Mexico, the [Bourbon Reforms](#), in all their local manifestations, seemed to be a great success. Along with peace with native peoples, trade restrictions had been loosened. The combined result was an increase in trade, a heightened sense of security, and cultural blossoming during the late colonial era. In this context, distinctly [nuevomexicano](#) art forms took shape. Most of this artwork was based on religious imagery, in the form of three-dimensional [bultos](#), two-dimensional [retablos](#), and [altar screens](#) for regional chapels. These forms of [santero](#) artistry continue to the present day.

How does Santero artistry continue today?



Relative peace with Comanches and Apaches meant the construction of new chapels beyond the Rio Grande corridor. Without the constant threat of raids, nuevomexicanos felt more at ease branching out beyond the areas protected by the Santa Fe presidio. Many of the new towns were founded by genízaros, and as more Catholic chapels were constructed, new representations of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and saints were needed. New construction also inspired the repair of standing religious structures that had fallen into decay. Many wealthy nuevomexicanos also constructed their own private chapels on family lands, resulting in a system of patronage in support of religious art.

[Santero](#) Artistry



One of these patrons was [Antonio José Ortíz](#), a wealthy trader who had been born in 1734. His family traced its heritage to Vargas' reconquest, and participated in the colonial government in various capacities. Between 1790 and

1806, Ortíz established a pattern of making regular financial donations in support of Catholic artwork and chapel construction. His patronage facilitated the restoration of the Rosario Chapel in Santa Fe and the restoration of the Conquistadora Chapel and the aging church at San Miguel. Additionally, he financed the construction of his own private chapel on his hacienda near Pojoaque Pueblo. All of this work was carried out by local artisans and craftsmen and it impacted New Mexico in two important ways. First, the new and restored churches exhibited a unique nuevomexicano style and flair based in the region's [folk Catholicism](#). Second, the local economy grew as money and resources were reinvested in such projects.

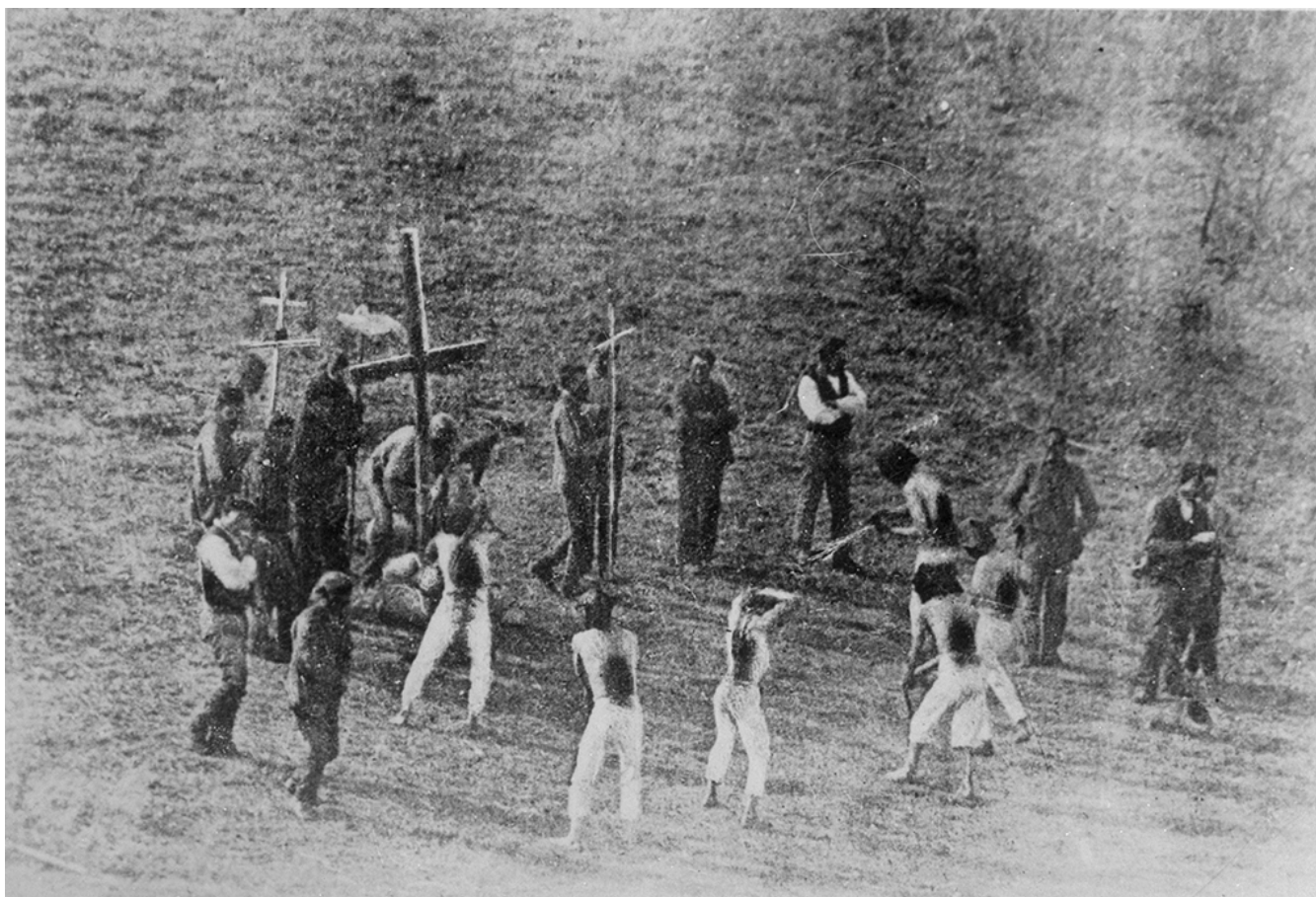
Many local artisans were known as santeros and held in reverence by their local communities. Their ability to create sacred bultos, retablos, and altar screens set them apart as holy men. Santeros were expected to serve their communities and to set good examples of daily living. [José Aragón](#) was among the most prolific santeros of the late colonial period. He utilized a variety of color schemes and formats in his artwork, and he also ran a *taller* (workshop where other santeros were trained) with his brother José Rafael Aragón. Although unknown by name, the [Laguna Santero](#) was another of the most well-known artisans of the era. This artist was known for his work on the altar screen of the chapel at [Laguna](#) Pueblo.

San Jose de la Laguna

At Laguna Pueblo inside San Jose Mission is an altar screen from an anonymous santero. [Learn more](#) from a National Park Service series about this piece of art as well as other New Mexico historical sites.

Some santeros, although not all, also participated in the [Penitente Brotherhood](#) (Hermandad de Nuestro Padre Jesús el Nazareno). This lay Catholic fraternity was created in the tradition of other such organizations that dated back to reconquest Iberia. Although there are several conflicting stories of the brotherhood's advent in New Mexico, it is likely that [Bernardo Abeyta](#) founded

the nuevomexicano Penitente order after his arrival from Durango around the turn of the nineteenth century. Abeyta is also credited with the construction of the fabled Santuario at Chimayó. Penitentes abided by their own set of bylaws and initiation ceremonies, but their main purpose was to serve their local communities and to purify themselves spiritually. Some practiced [self-flagellation](#) as part of this process. During a time frame in which Catholic leadership rarely visited New Mexico (the colony was part of the Bishopric of Durango, headquartered hundreds of miles to the south), Penitentes filled an important spiritual void in the lives of nuevomexicano Catholics.



A Gathering of the Penitentes—a photograph that dates to the late-nineteenth century.

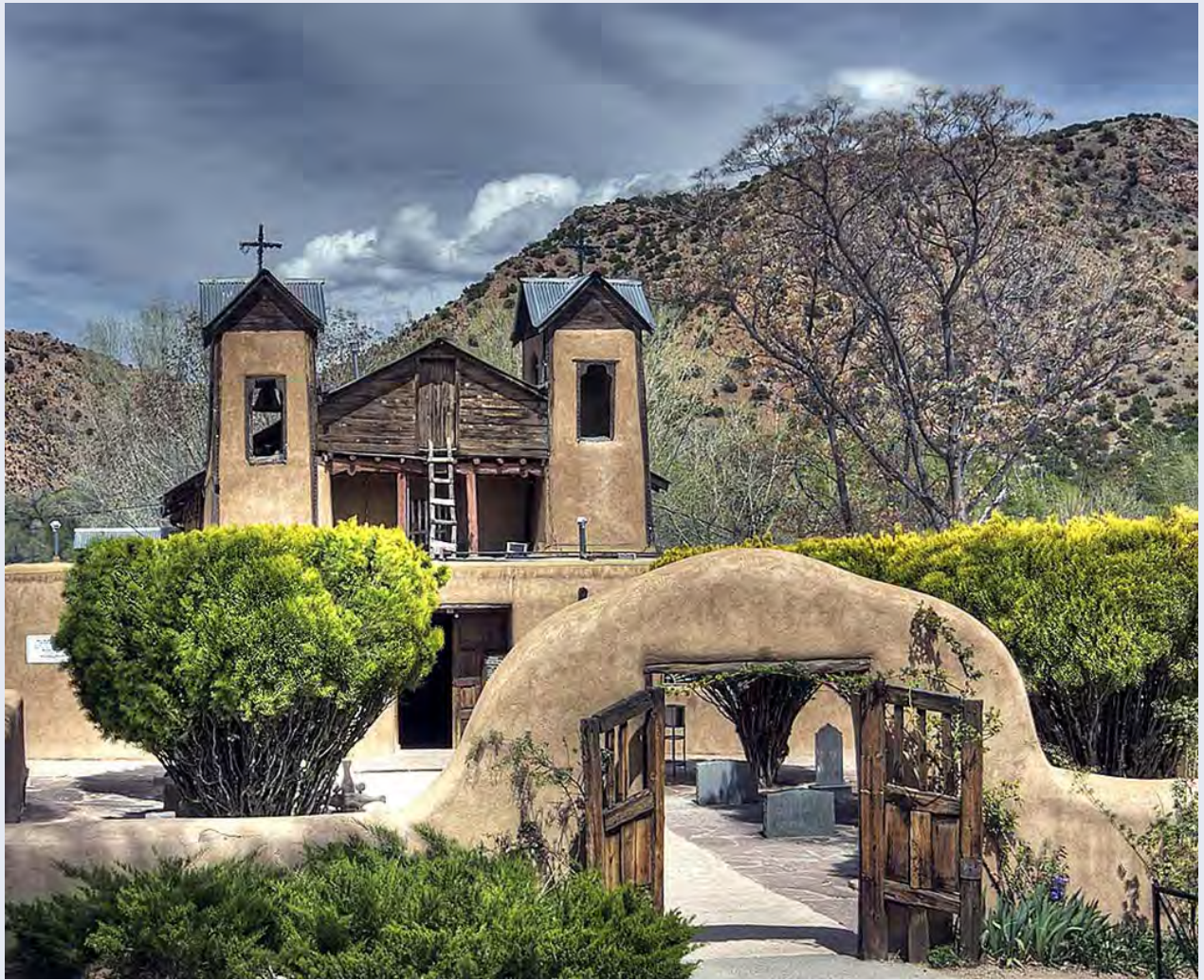
Courtesy New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Image No. 35940

The deeply folk-Catholic artistic traditions and cultural practices that expanded in New Mexico during the late colonial period aided in the adoption of Mexican national identity after independence in 1821. Specifically, the adoption of [vecino](#) identity allowed most nuevomexicanos to accept their place as citizens of the Mexican nation.¹⁴ Yet Mexico's independence from Spain also created

political and economic disarray in central Mexico, resulting in the breakdown of peace with nomadic peoples in New Mexico and the further isolation of the province from Mexico City. During New Mexico's tenure as a Mexican province, its people increasingly found themselves in an untenable position between the expansionist United States and other citizens of the Mexican nation. Unique cultural forms, methods of devotion, and artistic production aided in the transition from colonial status, but were later portrayed as evidence of New Mexico's "backward" status following the U.S. takeover of the Southwest in 1848.

Why has Santuario de Chimayó persisted as a Pilgrimage Center for 200 years?





Although accounts differ, many trace the establishment of the famed Santuario de Chimayó to Bernardo Abeyta in the early 1800s. – *Courtesy of Michael Martin*

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Chapter 7: The Mexican Period, 1821-1848

The Mexican Period, 1821-1848

Mexican Independence & New Mexico

Opening the Santa Fe Trade

“War of a Thousand Deserts”

Colonization, Political Conflict & Rebellion

References & Further Reading

The Mexican Period, 1821-1848



While Governor [Juan Bautista de Anza](#) worked to forge peace with Comanches and other native peoples in New Mexico, British colonists waged a war for their independence on the eastern seaboard. Few nuevomexicanos were aware of the plight of the [patriots](#), but Spanish officials carefully weighed developments in the struggle against the British Crown. King Carlos III maintained an ambivalent stance during much of the conflict. Although eager for any opportunity to chip away at British power, he recognized that an endorsement of the patriots might set a disastrous precedent for his own colonies in the Western Hemisphere.

Events on the ground, however, pushed Spain to aid the rebellious British colonists when [Bernardo de Gálvez](#), then governor of Spanish Louisiana, sent

men and supplies across the Mississippi River into Florida in 1779. Gálvez's actions prevented the British from taking control of the river's vital transportation and communication channels, and played an important role in the patriots' eventual victory. For its support, Spain regained Florida at the [1783 Treaty of Paris](#) negotiations which officially recognized the fledgling United States of America.

At that point in time, it appeared that the [Bourbon Reforms](#) were a major success across the board. The Spanish Empire, already the most extensive in modern history, was at its largest in terms of overall territory. Land did not necessarily equal power, however. Residents of the brand-new United States looked westward across the Appalachian Mountains with an eye to expansion. Even prior to independence, figures like [Daniel Boone](#) began to explore and settle west of the Appalachians. Indeed, one of the colonists' main contentions against Parliament (besides "no taxation without representation") was enforcement of the [Proclamation of 1763](#) that forbade migration west of the Appalachian mountains or into Canada.



Proclamation Line Following the [French and Indian War](#) (known as the Seven Years' War in Europe), British King George III issued a Royal Proclamation in 1763 that established a hard boundary that British colonists were forbidden to cross for the purposes of settlement. Due to the colonists' expansionist ambitions, they considered the Proclamation of 1763 an unjust imposition by a faraway King.

By the end of his reign in 1788, King Carlos III clearly understood Americans' expansionist goals. Further complicating matters, the Bourbon Reforms created as many problems as they solved. For example, attempts to reform political posts in the Spanish Americas pitted recently arrived appointees from Spain itself (called [peninsulares](#)) against people of Spanish heritage who had been born and raised in the colonies (called [criollos](#)). When Napoleon Bonaparte placed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne in 1808, [criollo cabildos](#) throughout the colonies seized the opportunity to take power until the rightful king, [Fernando VII](#) “*el deseado*” (the desired one), returned to power. When King Fernando was restored to the throne, many regional criollo governments refused to relinquish power, laying the groundwork for independence movements that spread throughout the Spanish Americas between the 1810s

and 1820s.

Even before he took control of Spain outright, Napoleon was able to exert influence over Spanish affairs in the Americas. In 1800 he negotiated the secret [Treaty of San Ildefonso](#) that returned Louisiana to France in exchange for an Italian duchy and the promise never to sell the territory to a third party. Although Spanish officials balked, Napoleon's meteoric rise in power over European affairs left them little choice. The French emperor considered Louisiana a springboard to regain North American colonies. Before that dream could become a reality, however, French forces would have to quell the [slave revolution](#) that was raging in Saint Domingue (today Haiti). At the same time, President Thomas Jefferson hoped to negotiate rights to the port of New Orleans. Yellow fever and a string of defeats convinced Napoleon to cut French losses in the Americas just as U.S. envoys approached his government in 1803. Hoping only for navigation and trade privileges, they received much more than they had bargained for when Napoleon sold them all of Louisiana for \$15 million in the transaction that became known as the [Louisiana Purchase](#). Spanish officials immediately raised a series of legal objections because the sale violated the terms of the Treaty of San Ildefonso. Their protests were to no avail.



Scene of the Battle of Vertières during the Haitian Revolution, engraved in France in 1845 by an anonymous artist.

Courtesy of Daniel Jorge Marques

In a period of a few short years U.S. expansion at the expense of the Spanish Empire became a reality. In 1804 Meriwether [Lewis and William Clark's expedition](#) undertook the task of exploring the lands acquired in the purchase. From the perspective of Spanish officials, their mission presented a threat to northern New Spain because the western boundary of Louisiana had never been clearly defined. Not only were the explorers surveying the new territory, then, they were assessing the extent of the claims that the United States could reasonably make based on the purchase. Spanish administrators had reason to worry; the Jefferson administration had already attempted to lay claim to Western Florida as part of the Louisiana acquisition.



Lewis & Clark The Corps of Discovery expedition (1803) led by Lewis and Clark initiated U.S. exploration and mapping of North America. In May 1804, President Thomas Jefferson described the mission: “We shall delineate with correctness the great arteries of this great country: those who come after us will fill up the canvas we begin.” The National Geodetic Survey continues to carry out this mission with new and innovative technology.

Courtesy of National Geologic Survey & National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Alarmed Spanish officials commissioned four separate parties to intercept Lewis and Clark, but none ever crossed paths with the Americans due to misconceptions about their intended course. [Facundo Melgares](#) led the last such expedition, which set out from Santa Fe in 1806, well after Lewis and Clark had made their way to the mouth of the Columbia River. Although his group failed to locate Lewis and Clark, he was dispatched once more upon his return to New Mexico. This time his target was [Zebulon Pike](#), another U.S. explorer whose journeys placed him firmly within Spain’s territorial claims. Melgares arrested Pike near present-day Colorado Springs, in the process saving his party from almost certain death in the harsh winter of 1807.



Zebulon Montgomery Pike, an American officer and explorer, explored the southwestern areas of the Louisiana Purchase, including the Mississippi River headwaters, prior to his capture by Spanish officials in New Mexico. The illustration was published in “Collier’s Weekly” in 1906.

Used with permission—Private Collection/Bridgeman Images

Charged with illegally trespassing into Spanish territory, Pike was escorted from Santa Fe to [Ciudad Chihuahua](#). After a short imprisonment, he was eventually released by way of San Antonio. His presence in Spanish territory pushed the governments of both Spain and the United States to settle the boundary between their domains through diplomatic means. That feat was not accomplished until over a decade later with the [Adams-Onís Treaty](#) (also known as the Transcontinental Treaty) of 1819. Although the boundary was finally resolved, Americans’ interest in northern New Spain (especially east Texas) had been whetted by the explorers’ published reports of fertile lands, abundant resources, and potential markets for trade.



Louisiana Purchase and Adams-Onís Treaty This map illustrates the confines of the Louisiana Purchase (1803). Despite the definite delineations of this map, part of Lewis and Clark’s mission was to determine the extent to which the United States could push the hazy boundaries of the Purchase. The boundary was finally settled by the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819.

This series of geopolitical incidents illuminates the historical context of New Mexico’s tenure as part of the republic of Mexico. The Bourbon Reforms’ shortcomings, coupled with Napoleon Bonaparte’s empire building in Europe, opened the door for independence movements in the Spanish Americas—including that of Mexico. After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, the Mexican government struggled to assert authority over its domains and continued to face the threat of U.S. expansion into its northern territories. Under Mexican rule, nuevomexicanos once again found themselves at odds with Comanches, Apaches, Navajos, and Utes. Political leaders in Mexico City imposed constitutions and legislation on New Mexico without providing fiscal or military support against nomadic peoples. Simultaneously, the Santa Fe Trade created connections between New Mexico and the U.S. economy. Despite

antagonisms between New Mexico (and the entire northern frontier) and central Mexican policy makers, during their short twenty-seven years under Mexican rule most nuevomexicanos came to identify as members of the Mexican nation. Yet economic, territorial, and political competition in North America meant that Mexico's hold on its northern provinces was not to last.

Mexican Independence & New Mexico

Two separate ceremonies held two weeks apart in Santa Fe marked Mexico's independence from Spain. The first was held on December 31, 1821, by order of [Agustín de Iturbide](#), Mexico's first (and only) emperor. Organized by [Facundo Melgares](#), the event focused on the *tres garantías* (or three guarantees) ensured by the brand-new Mexican empire: Catholic Religion, Union, and Independence. In Santa Fe, on a stage erected near the [Palace of the Governors](#), Don [Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid](#) led ceremonies that focused on symbols of each of the three items guaranteed by the Mexican government. Three images, a lamb and lion engaged in embrace, a liberty tree fed by four rivers, and a representation of Agustín de Iturbide, graced the stage as speakers extolled the virtues of the Catholic faith, union, and independence.

Striking quite a different tenor, the second ceremony took place on January 6, 1822—the feast day of Los Reyes (the three Wise Men, or the Magi). During this



Iturbide transformed Mexican independence into a conservative endeavor, and he was the first and only emperor of Mexico. By 1824 his empire had been replaced by a new democratic republic.

Painted by Primitivo Miranda

procession, nuevomexicanos turned out in the bitter cold through all hours of the night to honor those that had sought out the Christ child, according to Catholic legend. The occasion was marked with parades, patriotic plays, masses, music, rifle fire, Pueblo dances, and a ball sponsored by the governor. The January festivities clearly illustrated the tight connections between the Catholic faith and the idea of Mexican nationality. Future commemorations of Mexican independence held on the 16th of September followed a similar pattern.

What did these processions mean to nuevomexicanos? Although we cannot know with certainty, most of New Mexico's mixed-heritage residents likely reacted with much the same feeling as Pueblo peoples who heard Oñate's first strains of the [requerimiento](#). Most hoped to continue with their daily routines in the remote, desert landscape that they called home without interference from the government in Mexico City. In certain respects, they got their wish. Political infighting and economic devastation linked to the independence effort meant that Mexican officials largely ignored conditions in the north. Officials' indifference and their outright inability to provide support, however, also translated into the erosion of peace and a renewal of cycles of retributive violence between nuevomexicanos and their nomadic neighbors.

Post-Mexico Independence

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



The Mexican nation's shaky foundations are explained in part by the conditions under which it gained independence from Spain. Following Napoleon's 1808 installation of his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne, resistance movements sprang up across the Spanish Empire. In Iberia, a representative body called the [cortés](#) formed at Cádiz to rule in the name of [Fernando VII](#). Similar cortés took shape in the empire's major urban centers, such as Buenos Aires. Although their stated purpose was to maintain Spanish governance until the return of the rightful king, the cortés hoped to create conditions in their respective regions for liberal governance. Early [nineteenth century liberalism](#) was based on Enlightenment ideals such as constitutional government and the protection of individual liberties, including freedom of speech, to assemble, and of religion. In New Spain, however, the conservative viceroy and his closest advisors opposed such notions. They vocally opposed the liberal [Constitution of 1812](#) issued by the cortés in Cadíz and hoped to maintain traditional social and political structures.

Mexico City's leadership considered liberalism to be an invitation to uprising and social reordering. Even before the Cadíz Constitution was issued, their fears seemed to take shape when [criollo](#) priest [Miguel de Hidalgo y Costilla](#) incited his parishioners to action with the [Grito de Dolores](#). Hidalgo's was a popular movement—most of his parishioners were poor natives or [mestizos](#)—that called for independence from the “gachupines” (a derogatory term for



Late nineteenth century painting of Father [Hidalgo](#) with a flag depicting the Virgen de Guadalupe, painted by Antonio Fabres. Despite his defeat by conservative, anti-independence forces in 1811, Hidalgo is remembered as the father of Mexican Independence.

Painted by Eduardo Báez

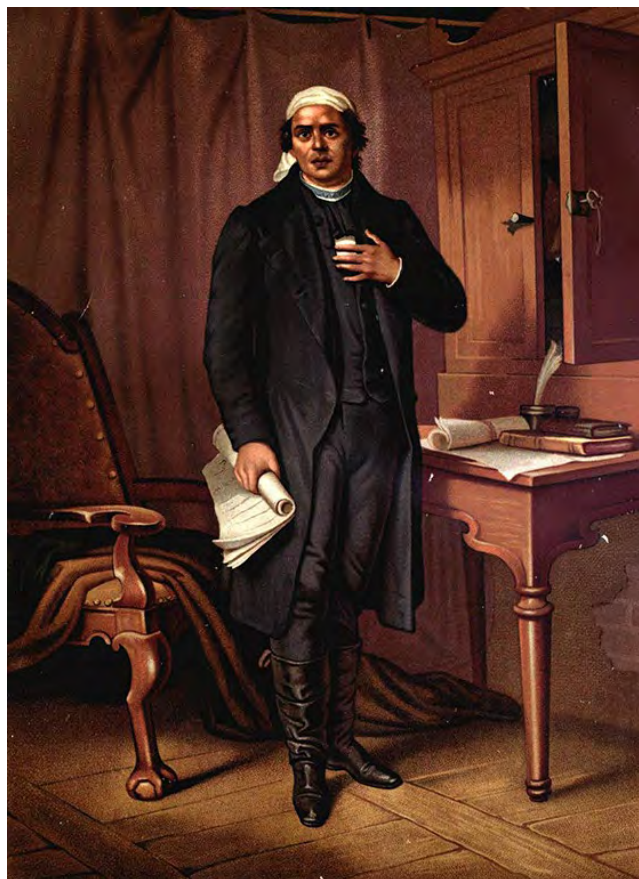
In Guanajuato, for example, his forces killed 500 Spanish soldiers and civilians. Although it appeared that they would next turn against the capital, Hidalgo's forces instead marched northward for unknown reasons.

After Hidalgo's capture and execution in Chihuahua in mid-1811, another priest, Padre [José María Morelos](#), took up the charge. Unlike Hidalgo, Morelos was of [mestizo](#) background—likely with both indigenous and

Spaniards). The independent status that they imagined was based solely on their call for an end to “bad government” under the watchful eye of the [Virgen de Guadalupe](#).

Within a few months Hidalgo had nearly 50,000 at his command. As numbers grew, however, the father of Mexico's independence was unable to maintain discipline among his troops.

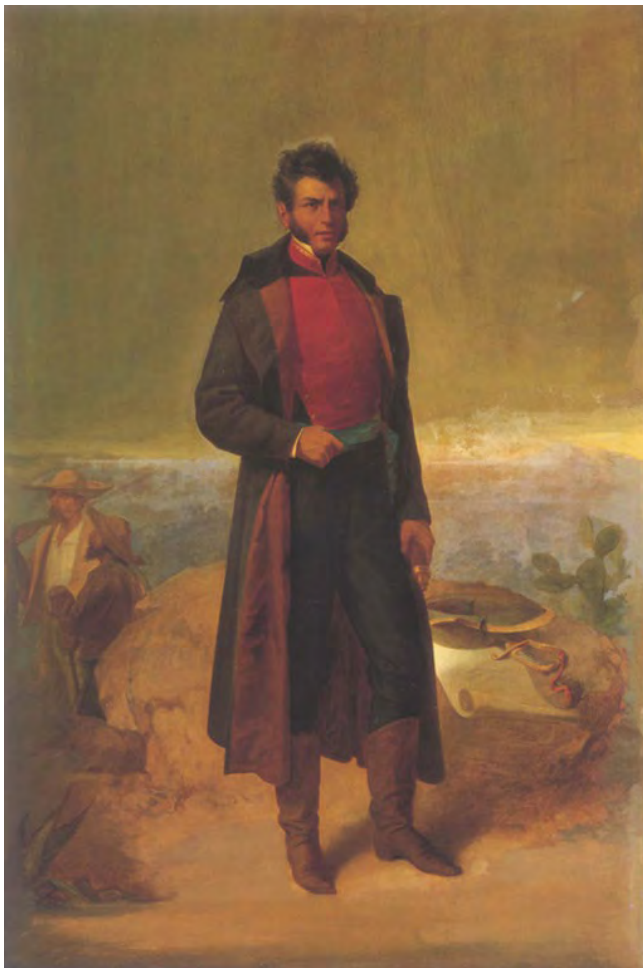
African heritage. His platform was more clearly defined, and much more troubling to Mexico City leadership. Morelos called for social and racial leveling. As he declared, “The lovely nonsense that divided Indians, mulattoes, and mestizos into distinct ‘qualities’ of human beings is henceforth abolished. From now on, all are to be called americanos.”¹ He held a broad democratic vision that would include all as citizens of the Mexican republic. As some of his reforms took hold at the local and regional level in the area south of Mexico City, New Spain’s criollo elite threatened genocide in an attempt to quash the movement. Royal forces captured and executed Morelos in 1815.



After Hidalgo’s execution, Father Morelos took up the charge of Mexican Independence. Morelos called for true social leveling and the end of the [caste system](#). Like Hidalgo, Morelos was defeated and executed in 1815. This image is from Vicente Riva Palacio and Julio Zárate’s 1880 *México a través de los siglos*.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Although strains of Hidalgo and Morelos’ popular movements for independence continued under other leaders, specifically [Vicente Guerrero](#), Mexico’s final break from Spain came under much more conservative auspices. Much to the relief of viceregal authorities in Mexico City, Fernando VII revoked the Cadíz



Ramón Sagredo's portrait of Vicente Guerrero, c. 1865. Guerrero led liberal independence forces in Mexico following the death of Father Morelos. In 1823 and 1824, along with figures like Antonio López de Santa Anna, he participated in a coup that unseated Iturbide and ushered in the Mexican Republic.

Painted by Ramón Sagredo

power. On August 24, 1821, Spain's envoy in Mexico City signed the treaty that recognized the independence of the Mexican nation.

General Agustín de Iturbide led the successful charge for independence by enlisting the aid of his political and social opposition, including Vicente Guerrero. He declared himself the first emperor of Mexico in September 1821. As the events of Mexico's independence movement illustrate, autonomy from Spain meant very different things to different groups of people. Many throughout Mexico championed the liberal ideals of Hidalgo and Morelos, others supported the conservative old guard, and still others (including most

Constitution when he returned to the throne in 1814 on the heels of Napoleon's defeat. In 1820, liberal members of the Spanish military staged a revolution that forced the king to reverse his decision and accept the constitution that had been drafted by the cortés in his absence. Fernando's decision to allow for constitutional rule alarmed conservatives in Mexico City who ultimately decided that independence from Spain would be the only way to maintain the traditional social, economic, and political order—an order in which they held immense

nuevomexicanos) wanted simply to be left alone. In the 1940s, historian Lesley Byrd Simpson coined the idea that historically there have been “many Mexicos.” In the early years following independence that concept was borne out by the difficulty of constructing a common national identity among peoples who held different customs and beliefs, spoke different languages, and faced different day-to-day concerns, but who lived in the territory defined as the Mexican nation.

By 1824, Iturbide’s empire met its end when a coalition led by Vicente Guerrero and the wily [Antonio López de Santa Anna](#) enacted a successful coup. Iturbide’s decision to dissolve congress galvanized the opposition. Like the composition of Mexico itself, the opposition included men of various ideological, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Although the most prominent ideological and political divide was between [federalists](#) (generally liberals) and [centralists](#) (generally conservatives), such factionalism was never drawn along clear-cut lines. Instead, opportunism, economic concerns, pragmatism, and a number of other factors often caused Mexican leaders to alter their ideological or political stances. Put differently, for example, federalists tended to be regional elites while centralists were national elites. Both groups contained wealthy figures who traced their lineage—at least in part—to Europe.



This nineteenth-century portrayal of Santa Anna was painted by Carlos Paris, and is today located at Museum of Mexico City. Santa Anna was a traditional caudillo leader who used his own wealth, machismo, and influence to maintain power. His ideologies constantly shifted. Such actions contributed to, and were illustrative of, the instability of Mexican politics in the mid-nineteenth century.

Painted by INEHRM/Secretaría de Gobernación

Following the coup against Iturbide, federalists held power in Mexico City. The Mexican [Constitution of 1824](#) was drafted under their purview, and it reflected the key difference between their faction and the centralists—the desire for a [federal system](#) of government. [Federalists](#) hoped to maintain regional autonomy by creating a government in which power was shared between state and local governments and the national government in Mexico City. The key to their vision of the republic was shared governance (much like the U.S. system). [Centralists](#), on the other hand, wished to curb regional political authority by placing more power in the hands of the national government.

The 1824 Constitution of the United States of Mexico (or Estados Unidos Mexicanos) designated nineteen “independent, free, and sovereign” states, and four territories that remained more tightly under the auspices of Mexico City.² The document was based heavily on the 1812 Cadíz Constitution and that of the young U.S. republic. The Mexican constitution guaranteed individual liberties, freedom of speech, assembly, and press, as well as the division of power between executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Of necessity, it embraced the stipulation from the Cadíz Constitution that political authority rested principally in regional [ayuntamientos](#). Unlike the U.S. Constitution, it established the Catholic faith as the official state religion and maintained special privileges for clergy and military officers, called [fueros](#). In terms of political inclusion it went far beyond its U.S. counterpart, ending (in theory, at least) all distinctions based on race or caste and extending the vote to all Mexican males. Any person born within Mexico’s national borders was granted citizenship—including nomadic peoples who did not recognize Mexican sovereignty.

Under the 1824 Constitution, New Mexico was given territorial status, meaning that it operated under the jurisdiction of the national government rather than as an autonomous political entity. Technically, nuevomexicanos depended on Mexico City officials for legislation and governance, but the national government never implemented any territorial laws. Civil officers replaced royal appointees in certain administrative posts. Local ayuntamientos performed most of the work of governance and they operated with very little

oversight from the national government, leaving the New Mexico territory self-governing by default.

In certain ways, these were welcome developments. Yet in other respects, especially in terms of dealing with Comanches, Apaches, Navajos, and Utes, [nuevomexicano](#) officials required economic and military support from the central government that was never forthcoming. New Mexico remained an impoverished frontier region that consistently failed to raise enough revenue to run its government effectively. Spanish subsidies that had provided gifts to solidify peace with nomadic peoples ended with independence, and Mexican officials were both unwilling and unable to renew them. Beginning in the early 1830s, one of the most devastating periods of Comanche and Apache warfare took hold throughout northern Mexico.

PADRE MARTÍNEZ

Figures like Padre Martínez played the crucial role of helping nuevomexicanos identify with the Mexican nation. His personal influence as someone who cared for the best interests of most people, despite his elevated economic status, enabled him to act as an ambassador of sorts. Yet even Martínez realized that not everything associated with independence was positive for New Mexico. Despite its promise to enhance New Mexico's economic situation, the Santa Fe Trade brought newcomers from the United States whose ideas about race and ethnicity caused them to look down on nuevomexicanos. Many who traveled the [Santa Fe Trail](#) established homes and families in New Mexico and other areas in the Mexican north.

What was the Santa Fe Trail?

Near the end of the [Camino Real de Tierra Adentro](#), Santa Fe was part of a commercial highway called the

Santa Fe Trail. Santa Fe connected New Mexico's economy with the United States to the east: Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri. After the U.S.-Mexican War, the economic route played a vital role in the United States expansion into the west. The documentary below was created to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Santa Fe Trail from the point of view of the Hispanic and Native American people of the territory of New Mexico.



Santa Fe Trail Beginning in 1821, the Santa Fe Trail opened trade connections not only between Missouri and New Mexico, but it also created trade avenues that extended along existing lines, such as the Camino Real and canals and overland routes to the eastern seaboard. The Santa Fe Trail played an instrumental role in reorienting New Mexico's economy toward the United States.



This is the only known image of Manuel Armijo, governor of New Mexico on several different occasions during the Mexican period. Armijo is a much-maligned figure in New Mexico



history due to his favoritism of Americans in land-grant proceedings, as well as his surrender of Santa Fe without a fight in 1846.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Particularly onerous to Padre Martínez and some other nuevomexicano politicians was Governor [Manuel Armijo](#) and his practice of granting land to Santa Fe traders. Under

Mexican administration, regional officials played a larger role in granting land and resources. Governors held authority to approve or veto grants made by town councils. During his various periods of service as New Mexico's governor (1827-1829, 1837-1844, and 1845-1846), Armijo approved the majority of grants created by the territory's ayuntamientos—in all, nearly sixteen million acres. Many such grants were made to American traders who were also close associates of Armijo and his [rico nuevomexicano](#) associates. The governor claimed that his actions were to solidify Mexico's hold on northern hinterlands, an argument that dovetailed nicely with prevalent ideas in Mexico City about increasing the population in order to prevent national territory from falling into the hands of nomadic peoples or the United States. Padre Martínez, on the other hand, accused Armijo of “the mean and ambitious desire of delivering a portion of this Department into the hands of some foreigners.”³

Opening the Santa Fe Trade

The 1821 opening of the Santa Fe Trade was the aspect of Mexican independence that most directly and most immediately impacted New Mexico. Mexican leaders hoped that loosening Spanish colonial trade restrictions would strengthen the new nation's weak economic situation—especially in its northern provinces. For decades American merchants in Missouri coveted the profits to be had in New Mexico, but they had been unable to establish trade ties. One of the first actions of the Mexican government was to end the prohibition, and American traders soon made their way to Santa Fe.

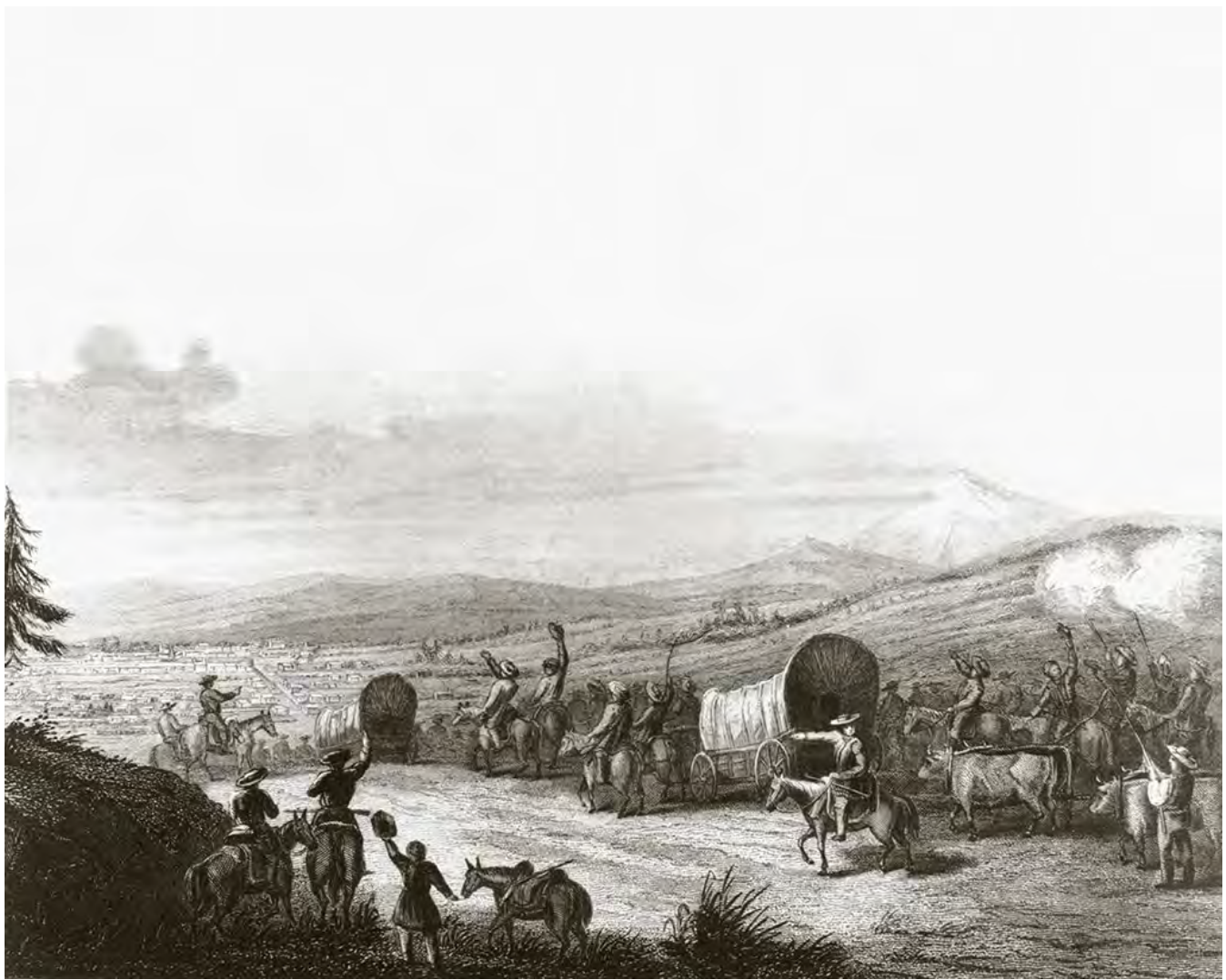
Missouri merchant William Becknell is credited with initiating the trade from Independence, Missouri. As early as 1819, however, other hopeful Americans entered Santa Fe along the same route in hopes of opening new markets. All comers followed a trail that had been blazed in 1792 by French explorer [Pierre Vial](#) (often called Pedro in Spanish records). Like [Jean L'Archevêque](#), Vial was a Frenchman who spent much of his life in New Mexico. By the 1790s, he was the province's informal explorer.



Pierre Vial's Trips to New Mexico During the late Spanish-colonial period, French settler Pierre (Pedro) Vial gained a reputation as New Mexico's informal explorer. His 1792-1793 expedition blazed the route that came to be known as the [Santa Fe Trail](#).

[William Becknell](#) was a young, thirty-one-year-old salt maker from Franklin, Missouri, whose livelihood had been crippled by the economic panic of 1821. On the verge of imprisonment for debts he had incurred, Becknell took the risk of leading a trade caravan along Vial's trail toward Santa Fe. Accompanied by five other men, he initiated the two-and-a-half month trip westward. His was apparently an act of desperation, because when his small party set out Mexico had not yet opened trade with Americans. For his efforts, however, he not only avoided debtors' prison, he opened a highly lucrative trade connection between the two nations.

As we have already seen, nuevomexicanos sorely needed goods and most considered new opportunities for trade with Americans to be a major boon. Products, such as guns, steel, knives, and textiles were of particular interest. Specifically, "calico, chambray, dimity, flannels, linens, muslins, percales, and silks" were among the types of cloth brought to New Mexico.⁴ Other Missouri goods included sewing implements, axes, and all types of tools. In exchange, Americans received silver and Mexican mules. In smaller quantities they gained gold and wool from New Mexico. Opening the Santa Fe Trade meant that nuevomexicanos more regularly accessed new goods. In the period between 1790 and 1810, when Padre Martínez was young, a round trip on the Camino Real took about eighteen months by carreta (a heavy, wooden mule or ox cart) between Santa Fe and Mexico City.⁵ By contrast, a trip between Santa Fe and Franklin or Independence, Missouri, might span three months.



This 1844 lithograph depicts the arrival of Missouri traders in Santa Fe.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 045011.

As poet and historian E. A. Mares emphasized, the Santa Fe Trail was “the northern extension of the older Camino Real.”⁶ The famed Santa Fe Trail, much lauded and traversed by modern history enthusiasts, was only the tip of the iceberg. Although the trail itself spanned the [nearly one thousand miles](#) between Independence and Santa Fe, the trade connected along the Camino Real to Chihuahua City, Durango, San Juan de Los Lagos, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, and then on to Mexico City southward, and along overland routes and canals from St. Louis or Independence eastward to Philadelphia and New York City. Trade connections had long defined New Mexico’s place in North America, but for the first time it was connected to larger, even global, commercial networks. Some New Mexico trade goods made their way to European destinations like London or Paris. The older economic channels of

the Spanish Empire had been global in certain respects, but imperial mercantilist policies limited their reach. After independence far more of the economic benefits that accompanied trade filtered into New Mexico.

Despite the Santa Fe Trade's economic significance to nuevomexicanos, Missouri traders typically brought more goods than New Mexico markets could absorb. During the Mexican period Santa Fe boasted 5,000 inhabitants and the entirety of New Mexico about 43,000. American merchants sought the expanded trade opportunities with other Mexican states provided by the Camino Real. Based on figures kept by [Josiah Gregg](#), a prominent Santa Fe trader, in 1822 Americans brought \$15,000 in total goods. By 1831, the number increased to \$250,000. Despite the setback incurred during the economic downturn that impacted the United States in 1837, by 1843, total goods along the Santa Fe Trail rebounded and increased to \$450,000.

Profits for American merchants tended to be high, but not always. In 1824, traders invested about \$35,000 in goods and grossed nearly \$190,000. In 1830, by contrast, they invested around \$175,000 and grossed approximately \$200,000. From nuevomexicanos' perspective, the Santa Fe trade was a nascent experiment in capitalist market forces. Many ricos, including Governor [Manuel Armijo](#), invested in the trade and earned handsome profits. Banker [Felipe Chávez](#) was another [nuevomexicano](#) who made a fortune on the Santa Fe Trade. His net worth hovered between \$110,000 and \$130,000 annually in the mid-nineteenth century. Chávez also exemplified the class of ricos who sought the advice of American financiers in places like St. Louis and New York prior to making business decisions. As a result, he prospered. Even after the U.S.-Mexico War, Chávez continued to make regular, massive purchases through Santa Fe traders from Missouri. Other nuevomexicanos, on the other hand, benefited little, if at all, from the imposition of capitalist economics. Their continued exclusion from the gains of the trade was one factor that pushed them to participate in the 1837 [Chimayó Rebellion](#) (which will be discussed below).

The impact of the Santa Fe Trade on New Mexico was not only measured in

economic terms. It served to pull the interests of the *rico* classes closer to those of the United States. For poorer *nuevomexicanos*—especially *genízaro* settlers of the frontiers and Pueblo peoples—the trade meant the exact opposite. Most of these people were excluded from the benefits afforded their wealthier countrymen and women. Their desire to maintain local autonomy in both political and economic terms pitted them against agents of the Mexican state and American traders alike by the late 1830s. And, further complicating matters, nomadic natives (who, under the [Constitution of 1824](#), were technically Mexican citizens) held their own agendas regarding Mexico and the United States.

For Apache and Comanche headmen, one of the most troubling transformations that accompanied Mexican independence was a lack of provisions at frontier presidios. Trade supplies had been the basis for the peace establishments that allowed for shaky peace during the late colonial period. Diminished rations were an ominous sign that seemed to indicate the impending disintegration of the truce. Further complicating matters was the reorientation of New Mexico's economy toward the rapidly expanding United States. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the U.S. capitalist economy grew by leaps and bounds due in large part to innovations in transportation technologies. As suggested by historian Andrés Reséndez, the Mexican north “became the outermost perimeter of this same economic revolution.”⁷

In the early fall of 1825, Governor Antonio [Narbona](#) recognized New Mexico's status as the point of contact for U.S.-Mexican trade relations. He expanded economic activity in the region by issuing hunting and trade permits to fur trappers from the east. Men like [Christopher “Kit” Carson](#) were attracted to northern New Mexico and the interior West by such policies. Although most American trappers who arrived in the 1820s and 1830s learned to speak Spanish (as well as various indigenous languages) and married into *nuevomexicano* families, their presence served to reorient the region's commercial development toward the United States, and increasingly away from Mexico City.

The story of [James Magoffin](#) clearly illustrates such changes. He was born in Kentucky in 1799 to a prominent family (his brother Beriah Magoffin, Jr., later served as governor of Kentucky). Although his first trip to Mexico was nearly upended when the ship he sailed on was wrecked in the Matagorda Bay, Magoffin made his way to Matamoros and began to build relationships with regional economic and political power brokers. By the late 1820s, he developed a profitable trade enterprise in northern Mexico. He also served as [U.S. Consul](#) in the city of Saltillo, the capital of the state of [Coahuila y Texas](#), between 1825 and 1831. As was the case with many American migrants to northern Mexico, he cemented his place in regional society by marrying [María Gertrudís Váldez de Veramendi](#), daughter of a well-connected family.

James Magoffin's first commercial enterprise was headquartered in Matamoros, a major city in the Mexican state of [Tamaulipas](#). He established trade relations that connected New Orleans to points in Texas and Tamaulipas. By 1836 he moved to Chihuahua in order to capitalize on the Santa Fe Trade. There, he also took an interest in copper mining. As he made more and more connections, he gained the nickname of "Don Santiago" and a reputation as one of the foremost Santa Fe traders. He was also known for maintaining a lavish lifestyle.

In the early 1840s Mexican officials in the north suspected that Magoffin was supplying weapons to Comanches in order to prevent them from attacking his wagon convoys. Due to the mounting pressure of such accusations, Magoffin relocated his enterprise to Independence, Missouri, in 1844. From his new base on the western edge of the United States, he continued to run wagons along the Santa Fe Trail. In June of 1846 his friend, Missouri Senator [Thomas Hart](#)

[Benton](#), introduced him to President [James K. Polk](#). The president convinced Magoffin to join [Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West](#) in 1846 with the specific assignment to negotiate the peaceful surrender of Santa Fe. Magoffin's commercial experience in Mexico, as well as the economic connections that pulled New Mexico closer to the United States, placed him in an ideal position to do just that.



Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton was a leading advocate of expansion and [Manifest Destiny](#) in the early 1840s. Along with other things, he dreamed of the creation of trade ties to Asia via U.S. expansion to the Pacific coast.

Painted by Ferdinand Thomas Lee Boyle

DONACIANO VIGIL

“War of a Thousand Deserts”

Intertwined with the histories of the shaky state of the Mexican government, the Santa Fe Trade, and U.S. efforts to expand to the Pacific Ocean was the story of Comanche and Apache dominance of the borderlands. Even as the Santa Fe Trade was established, people on all sides of it had to recognize the place of independent indigenous peoples as they moved their goods. [William Becknell](#)'s inaugural trading party was greeted by a battalion of nuevomexicanos under Captain [Pedro Ignacio Gallego](#), known as the [Urban Militia from Abiquiú](#). Gallego and his men, augmented by a group of Pueblo auxiliaries (unnumbered in the historical record, as was typical), campaigned in search of Navajo warriors who recently captured cattle in northern New Mexican settlements. As Gallego's convoy headed eastward in pursuit, they encountered six strangers at a point just to the south of Las Vegas. The six men turned out to be Becknell and his companions, and, after a few tense moments, the soldiers welcomed them into the department.

As Comanches and Apaches reinvigorated their raids on Mexican settlements in the north following Mexican independence and the opening of the Santa Fe Trade, old cycles of retributive violence once again came to dominate the region. Such was especially the case in Chihuahua and Sonora, although native-Mexican feuds also increased in [Coahuila y Texas](#), New Mexico, [Tamaulipas](#), and places as far south as Durango. The overall trend toward violent raids and warfare has been characterized by historian Brian DeLay as the [War of a Thousand Deserts](#). Mexican participants in the conflicts, as well as Mexican political officials, soon realized that the escalating campaigns by peoples who they deemed [indios bárbaros](#) had resulted in the creation of “man-made deserts where there had been thriving Mexican settlements.” As DeLay explains, “in

this context the term [desert] referred not to aridity, but to emptiness, silence, fruitlessness, desolation, to the absence of industry and improvement and of human mastery over nature.”¹⁰

From the Mexican perspective, Comanches and Apaches were actively turning back the clock of civilization in the north. One Chihuahua observer noted that indigenous raids had “destroyed the haciendas, the temples, the cities, all the work and glory of many generations, in order to recreate the desert which the Apache eye delights in.” The Mexican War Minister also used the term “immense deserts” to describe northern settlements that had been devastated and depopulated due to Comanche and Apache raiding.¹¹



This 1871 photograph shows Comanche buffalo hunters at an encampment in the southern plains. Between the 1820s and 1840s, Comanche peoples enacted near-constant warfare and raiding campaigns against settlements throughout northern Mexico. The conflicts were a central element of the conflict that historian Brian DeLay has described as the “War of a Thousand Deserts.”

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

To further contextualize the violence, Mexican independence had nominally

altered the relationship of nomadic peoples to the nation. Under Spanish colonial systems, those indigenous peoples who were not subjugated to the Crown were considered apart from society. The liberal ideals underlying the [Constitution of 1824](#), however, espoused full inclusion in Mexican citizenship by all who had been born within the confines of the territory claimed by the nation. On paper, this meant that Comanche, Apache, Ute, and Navajo people were Mexican citizens—whether they wished to be or not. In practice, those people continued to exercise their autonomy, as all too clearly evidenced by the renewed attacks that defined the War of a Thousand Deserts.

New Mexico was spared the worst of the bloody conflicts with Comanches and Apaches, who primarily targeted Chihuahua and Sonora. Even in New Mexico, however, nomadic peoples acted on their growing hatred of Mexicans, who, from their perspective, had broken earlier agreements and perpetrated injustices upon them. When Sylvester and James O. Pattie encountered [Chihenne](#) Apaches in the region of the Gila River and Santa Rita Mines in the 1820s, for example, the Chihenne apologized for attacking the father-son team because they had mistaken them for Mexicans. Chihenne warriors told James that their hatred for Mexicans ran deep because they were devious and conniving in their dealings with Apache peoples. On one occasion, Mexican settlers had lured Apache negotiators into their town under the pretext of creating a peace settlement. Instead, as the Chihenne recounted to Pattie, the Mexicans “commenced butchering them like a flock of sheep.”¹² Such atrocities occurred on both sides, and only deepened the violent blood feuds that rocked northern Mexico between the late 1820s and 1840s.



Frank C. McCarthy's "First Light" depicts Native peoples along the [Santa Fe Trail](#) in the nineteenth century. *Courtesy of Frank C. McCarthy/The Greenwich Workshop, Inc.*

In New Mexico, the redefined status of Pueblo peoples and increased Navajo raids also marked the Mexican period. The definition of citizenship espoused in the Constitution of 1824 ended former protections afforded the Pueblos by the Spanish Crown. As was also the case with later liberal reforms during *La Reforma* in Mexico, well-intentioned legislative changes had an adverse impact on indigenous peoples' ability to maintain traditional communal landholding practices. Under the 1824 constitution, Pueblo sovereignty was no longer recognized and the result was widespread land dispossession. Corrupt officials used the Pueblos' new status as fellow citizens with the right to buy and sell their lands as a pretext to sell pieces of Pueblo lands out from under their traditional owners. Falsified documentation and fraudulent land titles facilitated the land grab.

In most ways the Mexican government ignored Pueblo peoples and their plight. Yet that lack of attention also allowed them to renew their traditional rites and ceremonies with new vigor. Despite land loss, which was not as pronounced as it later became under U.S. rule, Pueblos "planted their corn, harvested their crops, worried about the water supply, and maintained traditional family life." They strengthened Clan connections and their "ancient customs began to take on new life."¹³

As Navajo raids intensified, however, Pueblos were not exempted from the militia drafts that placed great burdens on all poor nuevomexicanos. In the 1830s, approximately 7,000 Navajo people inhabited their traditional homeland to the west of New Mexican settlements. The [Diné](#) were a semi-sedentary people who relied on a combination of hunting, gathering, agricultural production, and shepherding for their livelihood. Their social and political organization was always confusing to nuevomexicanos (and it would also perplex later American administrators). Most of the time, Navajos resided in small extended family groups, but matters of grave importance, like raiding, warfare, and some large-scale trade dealings, brought the smaller family groups together to make decisions. In rare occasions, a *naach'id* (extended tribal council) brought together representatives from across the [Dinétah](#). This fluid social and political structure frustrated New Mexicans and Americans who wished to negotiate trade or peace treaties with Navajo peoples.



Navajo horsemen in [Canyon de Chelly](#).

Courtesy of Library of Congress

As the War of a Thousand Deserts resulted in heightened tensions and conflicts between Apaches, Comanches, and Mexican settlers in the northern states of Chihuahua, Coahuila y Texas, and Sonora, in New Mexico the erosion of peace meant seemingly constant campaigns against the Navajos. The central government refused to support northerners' attempts to alternately make war against and forge peace with indigenous peoples, so regional leaders took matters into their own hands. During the 1820s and 1830s, New Mexican governors regularly called local settlers to militia service against the Diné.

The province's empty coffers meant that participation in the militia offered no outfitting or pay to the poverty-stricken [mestizo](#), Pueblo, and genízaro men who comprised its rank and file. They brought along their own food, supplies, and weapons—often bows and arrows or outdated and ill-maintained rifles. If they were lucky, raids on Navajo herds and fields would allow them a small profit for their service. More often, however, they returned from the field physically, emotionally, and economically exhausted. Adding insult to injury, many servicemen filed complaints about harsh treatment at the hands of their rico commanders. When President Santa Anna implemented new centralizing measures in 1835 and 1836, some nuevomexicanos were hopeful that they would include new funds to carry out campaigns against the Navajos.

Unfortunately for nuevomexicanos, such was not the case. As violence continued to escalate throughout the north, Mexico City officials continued to refuse reinforcement or other support to Mexican settlers there. Governors, presidio captains, and other regional leaders sent a steady stream of correspondence to the capital in the 1830s and 1840s that generally went unheeded. When responses did arrive, they were generally condescending. In 1836, the Minister of War dismissed one such appeal from Chihuahua by reminding northerners that “Indians don’t unmake presidents.”¹⁴ Over the next few years, as the War of a Thousand Deserts was compounded by war against the United States, he was proven wrong

Colonization, Political Conflict & Rebellion

On the heels of Mexican independence, Americans continued to express their interest in the new republic's northern lands that had begun with the Lewis and Clark and Pike expeditions. When Major [Stephen H. Long](#) traversed the area that later became Oklahoma and Nebraska in 1820, he referred to it as the "Great American Desert." He declared it "almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence."¹⁵ Those areas were later settled by American farmers, and they were discovered to be less arid than sections of the Rocky Mountain West and Southwest. At the time, Long's assessment redirected others toward the far better climates and lands in east Texas. East Texas was also particularly attractive to southerners who hoped to expand cotton production and plantation agriculture supported by slave labor.



When [Moses Austin](#) and his son [Stephen F. Austin](#) initiated dealings with Mexico City officials for the colonization of Texas in the early 1820s, New Mexico was the northern province with the heaviest population. About 43,000 nuevomexicanos adjusted to the transitions that accompanied Mexico's independence. By comparison, tejanos numbered nearly 4,000 in 1810, but only about 2,000 in 1821 due to the conflicts associated with the independence

Stephen F. Austin followed his father's dream of creating a colony of Americans in Texas. During the 1830s and early 1840s, he brought settlers to Texas as an empresario.

Courtesy of The State Preservation Board, Austin, Texas

populations (not counting indigenous peoples) of Texas and California each numbered around 3,000. Leaders in central Mexico were concerned with the sparse population in those northern areas because, like Spanish royal administrators before them, they believed that large numbers of Mexican citizens ensured territorial claims.

movement. The majority lived in [San Antonio de Béxar](#) and La Bahia (later Goliad), and they were surrounded by as many as 40,000 Comanches, Caddos, and Kiowas. As late as the early 1840s the Mexican-heritage

Further complicating the issue was Mexico's meager national population overall. At independence, the entire nation, from [Alta California](#) to Guatemala, boasted only seven million inhabitants. Many of these were peasants of [mestizo](#) heritage who maintained deep ties to the lands they had grown up working with their extended families. Most had no incentive whatsoever to relocate to arid regions dominated by hostile nomads. Unable to rely on internal migration to increase the northern population, [Mexican colonization laws](#) were enacted in 1823 and 1824. The legislation guaranteed rights to colonists who were Roman Catholic, or who converted to the faith, although that provision was never enforced and not repeated in subsequent revisions of the laws. [Empresarios](#), or colonization agents, contracted to bring at least two hundred colonists to a designated frontier area and to act as guarantor that all colonists would adhere to Mexican laws. As an enticement, settlers were exempted from taxes for six years and given special rates on customs duties.

In the joint state of [Coahuila y Texas](#), the result was an influx of American settlers, mostly from points throughout the U.S. South. By 1835, nearly 27,000 had arrived in Texas along with 3,000 African American slaves. The [Constitution of 1824](#) prohibited slavery, so Texas settlers used inventive means to sidestep the law. They worked in tandem with [José Antonio Navarro](#), a former mayor of San Antonio and delegate to the state legislature in Saltillo who favored the idea of continued immigration and also supported colonists'

pleas to normalize slavery. Navarro sponsored a bill that allowed for the entry into Texas of “indentured servants” with ninety-nine-year contracts. In practice, this meant that slaveholders drew up contracts with their slaves which required them to accept the term of indenture in order to “learn the art and science of agriculture.”¹⁶ For most Texans, including Austin and Navarro, slavery was not a moral issue but an economic concern.

Political and economic conflicts arose occasionally between representatives of the two sections of Coahuila y Texas between 1821 and 1836 when Texas declared independence from Mexico. Figures like Austin and Navarro worked together across their ethnic differences to expand the Texan economy through migration and trade with the United States. They sometimes took issue with the policies crafted in Saltillo by the state legislature, but believed they could resolve differences through the systems that were in place. Another group of U.S. immigrants became known as the War Party. Many of these people came from areas in the deep South with the intention of breaking Texas away from the Mexican nation and then appealing for annexation to the United States. They viewed any conflicts, no matter how minor, as potential openings to realize their plans.

When President [Antonio López de Santa Anna](#) exacerbated existing rifts between [Centralists](#) and [Federalists](#) by switching sides and implementing a new constitution in 1836, the Texas War Party found the type of opportunity its members had been hoping for. A political chameleon, Santa Anna embodied the instability of the Mexican central government during the decades following independence. Between 1833 and 1855 there were thirty-six different presidential administrations. Of those, Santa Anna held power eleven separate times. He was an opportunist who held no consistent ideology or platform. He wavered on every major point of contention at the national level, including his stance on the Catholic Church. At times he was pro-Catholic, at others he was [anticlerical](#). Along the lines of a typical Latin American caudillo, he relied on personal charisma, machismo, patronage, and private wealth—rather than constitutional law or the electoral process—to maintain authority. Also typical of caudillo rule was a lack of regular means of succession. When the ruling

caudillo's wealth and power waned, stronger challengers led armed coups to take the reins of government.

In May 1835, the new [Centralist](#) congress in Mexico City replaced the nation's [Federalist](#) moorings by drafting a new constitution. Called the *Siete Leyes* (Seven Laws) or [Constitution of 1836](#), the new document revoked the autonomy of state and local governments and greatly enhanced the power of Mexico City. The new constitution extended the president's term to eight years, placed new property requirements on suffrage, and created age requirements for office holders. Most troubling to people in the north, the new constitution stripped them of governmental self-determination. It disbanded state legislatures, shrunk local militias, and refashioned the states as departments. Under the new system, governors of departments were appointed by the president—not elected by its residents.

Mexican Colonization Laws

Enrich your mind about provisions, settlements granted, and how the successor of Moses Austin set forth the laws and agreements of the [Mexican Colonizations](#).

Northern [federalists](#) in Coahuila y Texas and elsewhere anxiously considered the impact of such changes. The unstable foundations of Mexican national politics and the ascendancy of centralism under Santa Anna contributed to Texans' decision to declare independence. Moderates like Austin and Navarro reluctantly joined members of the War Party in declaring, and eventually winning, independence from Santa Anna and Mexico.

Far less famously, the Centralist-Federalist struggle also came to a head in New Mexico. Nuevomexicanos had a different type of relationship to the United States and the central Mexican government than tejanos. New Mexico had been granted territorial status in the Mexican republic, yet in practice the lack of resources and political will in Mexico City meant that nuevomexicanos enjoyed

a great deal of autonomy. They maintained their own [ayuntamientos](#) and expected a great deal of freedom to do as they wished with their local resources. Under the Siete Leyes, however, national officials attempted to change the status quo.

One of the most troubling developments under the Centralist government was the imposition of a new governor, [Albino Pérez](#). Despite Pérez's experience elsewhere in administrative posts, he was ill-prepared for the realities of life on the far northern frontier. His experience as governor brings together the threads of political instability in Mexico, lack of comprehension of the state of affairs between Mexicans and nomadic peoples, local [nuevomexicano](#) desires for autonomy, and the increasing influence of American traders and immigrants. As he attempted to instate provisions of the Constitution of 1836, he alienated nuevomexicanos of all socioeconomic backgrounds and unwittingly exacerbated existing political feuds.

Along with announcing his dedication to Mexican nationalism and a strong transition for New Mexico from territory to full-fledged department under the new constitution, Albino Pérez declared his intention to “annihilate the Navajo Indians.”¹⁷

Who was Albino Pérez?

Albino Pérez was a native of Veracruz who had built an illustrious military and political career by cultivating relationships with prominent Centralists. He worked tirelessly to ensure his place in what he envisioned as the up-and-coming modern and powerful Mexican political system. Among his goals were to create an educational system that would contribute to New Mexico's future as a strong Mexican state. His arrival in the province was met with much hesitancy and trepidation. Pérez was the first outside appointee to serve as governor in over a decade, making him immediately suspect—especially in the eyes of the ricos who traditionally controlled local and regional governments.

Weary of the seemingly endless campaigns that “forced them to leave their families, farms, and flocks to the mercy of Plains Indians in order to protect rich men’s sheep,” poor nuevomexicanos hoped that Governor Albino Pérez’s connections in Mexico City would translate into reinforcements and supplies that would take the burden of the Navajo wars off of them.¹⁸ Much to their chagrin, however, Pérez attempted to wage war without new resources from the central government. The governor led an unprecedented winter offensive in 1836-1837 that eventually resulted in negotiations with Navajo headmen at the staggering cost of 140 militiamen’s toes or ears lost to frostbite. Hundreds of animals also perished in the inhospitable conditions. Pérez then botched the peace talks. Once again, nuevomexicano militiamen came away from their ordeal with nothing to show for it.

Making matters worse, Pérez’s attempts to implement the Centralist Constitution of 1836 resulted in new taxation that New Mexico had never been subjected to as a territory. In a pragmatic, although ill-advised, effort to generate income for his administration, Pérez also issued new regulations that placed heavier duties on the Santa Fe Trade, required locals to purchase licenses to harvest timber, and charged fees at theaters and dances. His plan for a compulsory education system further contributed to nuevomexicanos’ feeling of repression. To poor New Mexicans, Pérez and the Centralist national administration exacted terrible sacrifices and then expected them to “pay for the privilege of membership in the republic.”¹⁹ When the governor attempted to take sides in regional political feuds that he did not understand, he also encountered the ire of rico politicians like former governor [Manuel Armijo](#).

In August of 1837 a small group of nuevomexicanos in the [Rio Arriba](#) village of [Santa Cruz de La Cañada](#) declared themselves in opposition to Pérez’s authority after he dissolved the local ayuntamiento in accordance with the centralizing policies of the 1836 Constitution. Within only a few days, nearly two thousand angry and frustrated residents of the surrounding area rose in revolt. Gravely miscalculating the earnestness of the situation, Pérez decided to lead a small contingent northward to quash the uprising. On August 8 the governors’ force was routed at San Ildefonso, and the insurgents captured Pérez the following

day on the outskirts of Santa Fe. Not long thereafter his head was paraded on a pike as a signal that the rebellion had successfully ended the usurpation of Mexican Centralists.

The event came to be known as the [Chimayó Rebellion](#), and it has been alternately characterized as a spontaneous class uprising, a battle over home rule, and a Federalist revolt. In reality, it was all of the above. The Centralist-Federalist struggles in Mexico City that resulted in the Constitution of 1836 caused smoldering regional conflicts between rico officials and poor nuevomexicanos to ignite. Those who participated in the rebellion, however, were more concerned with protecting their right to local village autonomy than they were about national politics.

The movement's reluctant leader, José Gonzales, illustrates the focus on local village concerns rather than department or national level issues. Members of the insurgency elected Gonzales to serve as the new governor, marking the only time in New Mexico history that a person of peasant status held the post. A genízaro from Taos, Gonzales was an experienced *cibolero* (buffalo hunter) who spoke various indigenous dialects and likely had kinship connections to certain bands among the region's nomadic peoples. Like so many other nuevomexicanos of his day, he was illiterate and inexperienced in political affairs. Historian Brian DeLay aptly characterizes Gonzales as “an honest, naïve, and ineffective leader.”²⁰ Indeed, the insurgent governor found the task of reconciling the various socioeconomic and political factions at play in New Mexico to be insurmountable. He was unable to create common ground for Federalists who favored a return to the Constitution of 1824, others simply content to be rid of Pérez, those who mainly desired village autonomy, and ricos whose central concern, whether they espoused [Federalism](#) or Centralism, was to maintain the benefits of the lucrative Santa Fe Trade.

Ricos, led by Manuel [Armijo](#), feared Gonzales' ascendancy and almost immediately initiated a counterinsurgency, dubbed the [Plan de Tomé](#). Armijo's home and base of support was located in Rio Abajo, and he drew strength not only from other nuevomexicanos of like mind, but also from Santa Fe Traders

with whom he associated. As he moved to mobilize forces to contest the rebellion, he called attention to the brutality exhibited by the insurgents. Not only had they beheaded Governor Pérez, they also tortured despised former Governor [Santiago Abreú](#). By one account, they “cut off his hands, pulled out his eyes and tongue, and otherwise mutilated his body, taunting him all the while with the crimes he was accused of.”²¹ Such reports convinced most of New Mexico’s [gente decente](#) (respectable people) that drastic reprisals were in order.

Armijo further stoked nuevomexicano fears by broadcasting the idea that Navajos, Apaches, and Comanches would use the occasion of their disunity to mount new offensives. In an open letter, Armijo declared that “Navajos, reassured by the deplorable condition in which we find ourselves, and in combination with the Pueblos of the frontier, wage a disastrous war that reaches into the very bosom of our families.”²² Although he had largely invented the threat of expanded nomadic invasion, Armijo’s rhetoric proved effective.

By September, the stability of Gonzales’ administration had already evaporated. In one last-ditch effort to bridge the factionalism that plagued his ability to govern, the governor issued a proposal that New Mexico request annexation to the United States. His desperate move played right into Armijo’s hands. Gonzales allowed the opposition to ignore the class and ideological divides at the heart of the conflict, and instead recast the struggle in the discourse of patriotism. Armijo painted the insurrection as a traitorous ploy to remove the department from the Mexican nation and hand it over to the United States. Gonzales was unable to overcome the label of traitor that had erroneously become associated with his name. Put in these simpler terms, even most Pueblo peoples declared their intention to remain loyal to Mexico. By mid-month the governor decided that further attempts to hold New Mexico’s government against Armijo’s forces were futile and he abandoned the capital.

Conflict continued to flare over the next several months. Fighting broke out in Taos just after Gonzales’ abandonment of Santa Fe in September, and another

leg of the revolt arose in Truchas in October. The final stand came at Pojoaque Pueblo in mid-January of 1838; Armijo's forces received reinforcements from Chihuahua. Armijo led 582 men against nearly 1,300 rebels entrenched at the pueblo. Despite the numerical disparity, the rico-led forces had superior firepower and the battle proved relatively one-sided. According to the account of Pedro Sánchez (who later wrote a history of Padre Martínez), Padre Martínez was present when Armijo captured Gonzales. Despite Gonzales' request for security if he surrendered, Armijo ignored the plea and told Padre Martínez, "Padre, confess this genízaro, hear his confession so that he may be given five shots."²³ Along with Gonzales, four other insurgent leaders were also executed. The Chimayó Rebellion came to a close at the cost of much bloodshed.

Initially, Padre Martínez had apparently supported the cause of the rebels. The uprising began in his parish, and he understood well the grievances that caused his flock to take up arms. Despite his rico and ecclesiastical background, Martínez was an advocate of social justice. Yet when the movement adopted an anticlerical and anti-rico stance, the Padre abandoned his parishioners and worked tirelessly to quash their efforts. Martínez used his sermons to demonize the rebels and add religious imagery to give weight to the accusation that they were nothing more than traitors to the Mexican nation. He also maintained regular correspondence with Armijo during the final weeks of the conflict to inform the commander of the rebels' activities.

In the end, the grievances that inspired the Chimayó Rebellion were not addressed through Armijo's violent campaigns. That an uprising occurred at all underscores the relative position of weakness that most poor, rural nuevomexicanos occupied. In order to send a message to the national government, they had to resort to violence as their only means of communication. In turn, Armijo and his supporters employed violence on several different levels to ensure the status quo. Their actions in quelling the revolt were especially important to Santa Fe Traders whose commerce ensured the ricos' wealth and status. Not only did Armijo physically suppress the revolt via military force and Gonzales' public execution, he also altered the terms of the conversation that the insurgents had initiated. Instead of addressing

problems of unpaid militia service and lack of access to the gains of the new capitalist economic order, Armijo's manipulation of Gonzales' desperate proposal of annexation to the United States redirected the debate toward the simpler question of Mexican nationalism. Through manipulation of the message, association with the insurgency was portrayed as treason while support for the ricos was projected as patriotism and loyalty to the nation.

Armijo emerged from the conflict with a reputation as an ardent Mexican patriot, and he maintained his status as New Mexico's leading political figure for the next decade. When General [Stephen Watts Kearny](#) led the U.S. [Army of the West](#) toward Santa Fe in 1846, however, Armijo was either unable or unwilling (perhaps both) to mount an effective defense. As nuevomexicanos resisted the U.S. occupation, their ongoing grievances were just beneath the surface.



Mexico in 1847 The Disturnell Map was used during the Treaty of Guadalupe-[Hidalgo](#) negotiations. Although it was considered the most accurate map of U.S. and Mexican holdings in North America in the mid-1840s, it was later found to be inaccurate.

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Chapter 8: U.S. Conquests of New Mexico

U.S. Conquests of New Mexico

War of North American Invasion

“The Border Crossed Us”

References & Further Reading

U.S. Conquests of New Mexico



The First Invasion: Texan-Santa Fe Expedition

In 1841 an ill-advised Texan expedition to Santa Fe provided [Manuel Armijo](#)

with another opportunity to enhance his personal reputation for Mexican patriotism. The independent Texas Republic had hoped for annexation to the United States that was not forthcoming, and its officials also sought to make the claim that their territory stretched to the Rio Grande (called the [Rio Bravo del Norte](#) in Mexico). According to the most audacious claim (later asserted by the Polk administration following U.S. annexation), Texas not only included lands along the southern section of the Rio Grande but stretched northward to the river's headwaters.

Had the Texan argument been legitimated, Santa Fe would have been located within Texas. Of course, nuevomexicanos and other Mexicans contested and dismissed the Texans' territorial pursuits. Despite the secret [Treaty of Velasco](#) signed by Santa Anna after the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836, the Mexican government never recognized Texas as an independent republic. Instead, they considered it a province in rebellion. Economic complications, political infighting, and the need to fend off British and French incursions to force the payment of debts, meant that Mexican forces were never able to attempt a military reconquest. Officially, the Mexican government held that the Nueces River was the actual southern boundary of Texas.



1891 painting of the Battle of San Jacinto by Henry Arthur McArdle. This battle secured Texas'

independence from Mexico, despite Santa Anna's unwillingness to formally recognize the Lone Star Republic.

Courtesy of Texas State Preservation Board

President [Mirabeau B. Lamar](#) sidestepped the Texas Congress and commissioned a group of 270 men to travel to Santa Fe in the summer of 1841. Ostensibly, their mission was to establish trade connections. The party set out from Brushy Creek, fifteen miles north of Austin, on June 19, 1841, under the command of Colonel [Hugh McLeod](#). Members of the debacle that became known as the [Texan-Santa Fe Expedition](#), or the Texas Invasion of New Mexico, generally understood that the real mission was to assert possession of territory all the way to the Rio Grande boundary. A former secretary to General Sam Houston and one of the expeditionaries, Peter Gallagher, summarized the group's purpose: "This 'wild goose chase' was sponsored by President Lamar for the express purpose of territorial expansion, of acquiring control of New Mexico —by peaceful means if possible; by military force if necessary."¹

Masquerading as traders along the Santa Fe-Chihuahua trail, the Texans encountered problems from the beginning. Their supplies and equipment proved insufficient for their journey, and they were unable to ward off [Kiowa](#) attacks. Due to scarcity of water and food, they plotted a circuitous route along the Brazos River, into the center of Comanche territory, westward across the Llano Estacado, and along the Red River. As they slowly attempted to traverse the 1,300-mile route, sweltering temperatures, aggravated by meager supplies, caused intense suffering. By the time they reached the Red River, they had shed most of their carts and baggage in an effort to more easily pass through thick woodlands and deep gorges.

The men were reduced to eating "frogs, lizards, roots, and 'every living and creeping thing.'"

The last leg of the journey was a grisly nightmare as the adventurers attempted to cope with starvation, dehydration, and repeated incursions of Kiowa bands. One survivor recounted that the men were reduced to eating “frogs, lizards, roots and ‘every living and creeping thing.’”² Another committed suicide, a few endured intense fevers, and still others were killed by Kiowa marauders.

Governor [Armijo](#) dispatched a military brigade as soon as he learned of the Texan expedition and its intentions (it had been well-publicized throughout the region). On September 17, the New Mexican force located the Texans and saved them from certain death. Lieutenant Colonel [Juan Andrés Archuleta](#) outlined their terms of surrender. First, they were to lay down their weapons. Second, Archuleta guaranteed their lives, liberty, and personal property. Third, he explained that he would escort them to San Miguel. Under the belief that there they would once again receive their weapons, the group surrendered.

Despite the Texans’ belief that they were to be taken to San Miguel and released, Governor Armijo had other plans for them. He had correctly characterized the group as an invasion force when he ordered Archuleta’s party to intercept it. At one point, he threatened to execute every member of the Texan expedition, but eventually the governor decided to hold them prisoner and transport them southward to [Ciudad Chihuahua](#) and then on to Mexico City. Along the way, many of them lost their lives. Those who were unable to walk of their own accord met execution. Others died under the harsh conditions of their long march to the Mexican capital. All along the way, compassionate locals provided the suffering Texans with water and food when possible.

In Mexico City, most of the Texas expeditionaries were held for a brief period and then released. A few were charged with treason and imprisoned at the San Lázaro leper hospital just outside the capital, the Acordada

prison inside the city, or in the notorious **San Juan de Ulúa** prison on an island in Veracruz harbor. As historian Andrés Reséndez noted, [San Juan de Ulúa](#) “was rapidly acquiring a reputation akin to the Count of Monte Cristo’s Chateaux d’If as described by contemporary novelist Alexandre Dumas.”³ As the only tejano to accompany the expedition, [José Antonio Navarro](#) received the harshest sentence for treason. He was held for two years at the Acordada and then two more at San Juan de Ulúa. In 1845, Navarro escaped the stronghold with help from sympathetic army officers and he returned to Galveston via Havana. From Texas, he used his family’s wealth to aid the U.S. cause in the war against his former nation.



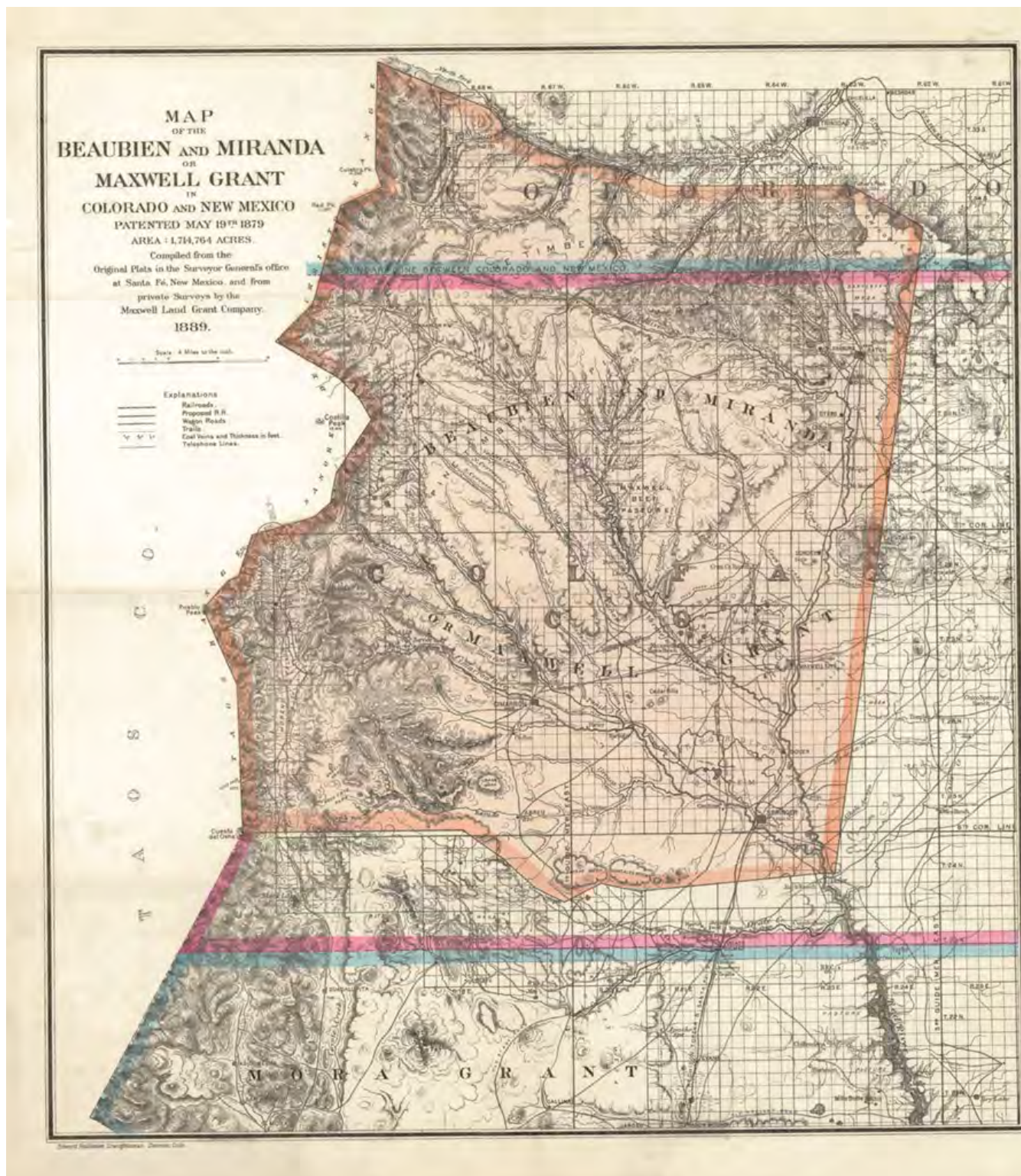
Navarro had participated in the Texas independence movement in 1836, prior to accompanying the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition in 1841. He received the harshest sentence of all of the participants due to his tejano heritage. He escaped from the San Juan de Ulúa prison in 1845, and he returned to Texas to support the U.S. war effort against Mexico.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

As Navarro languished in prison, Governor Armijo’s star ascended due to his harsh castigation of the [Texan-Santa Fe expedition](#). In early November of 1841, Armijo distributed a [broadside](#) throughout New Mexico to clarify and justify his actions. He explained that it was necessary to treat the Texans harshly because their intent had been to challenge the territorial integrity of New Mexico, and by extension, the Mexican nation. Although [George W. Kendall](#), a Louisiana newspaper man who had accompanied the expedition, published a series of

scathing articles that attacked Armijo as an overly cruel barbarian, the governor received nothing but praise from his superiors and fellow citizens for his actions against the Texans.

Armijo's land-grant policies were another issue entirely. Combined with reports like Kendall's, the critiques of his countrymen helped to weaken his strong reputation for Mexican patriotism. Especially damaging was Padre Martínez's vocal complaint that Armijo had handed the territory over to Americans. Between 1837 and 1846, the governor granted about 16 million acres of land. The year of his successful handling of the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition, he approved the massive [Maxwell Land Grant](#). Initially awarded to [Guadalupe Miranda](#) and [Charles Beaubien](#), the parcel included prime lands for the cultivation of cotton, timber harvesting, cattle ranching, and prospective mining. When Beaubien's son-in-law [Lucien Maxwell](#) took charge of the land grant, he claimed that it encompassed almost two million acres east of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains along the Cimarron and Canadian Rivers in present-day northeastern New Mexico and southeastern Colorado. Following the U.S. conquest, the Maxwell Land Grant came to symbolize the land grabbing excesses of [Anglo](#) newcomers to the region.



Maxwell Land Grant Among the land grants approved during Governor Armijo's administration was the massive Maxwell Land Grant, initially given to Guadalupe Miranda and Charles Beaubien.

Courtesy of Fray Angélico Chávez History Library

Such divisions among New Mexico's people intensified when war broke out between the United States and Mexico. Those, mostly ricos, connected to the Santa Fe Trade benefitted most from the American takeover of the territory.

Many of them maintained their positions of influence and authority. Poorer nuevomexicanos who already chafed under the introduction of capitalist modes of exchange had little, if anything, to gain under U.S. rule. Despite differences in economic standing, however, most nuevomexicanos resisted American occupation in one way or another.

War of North American Invasion

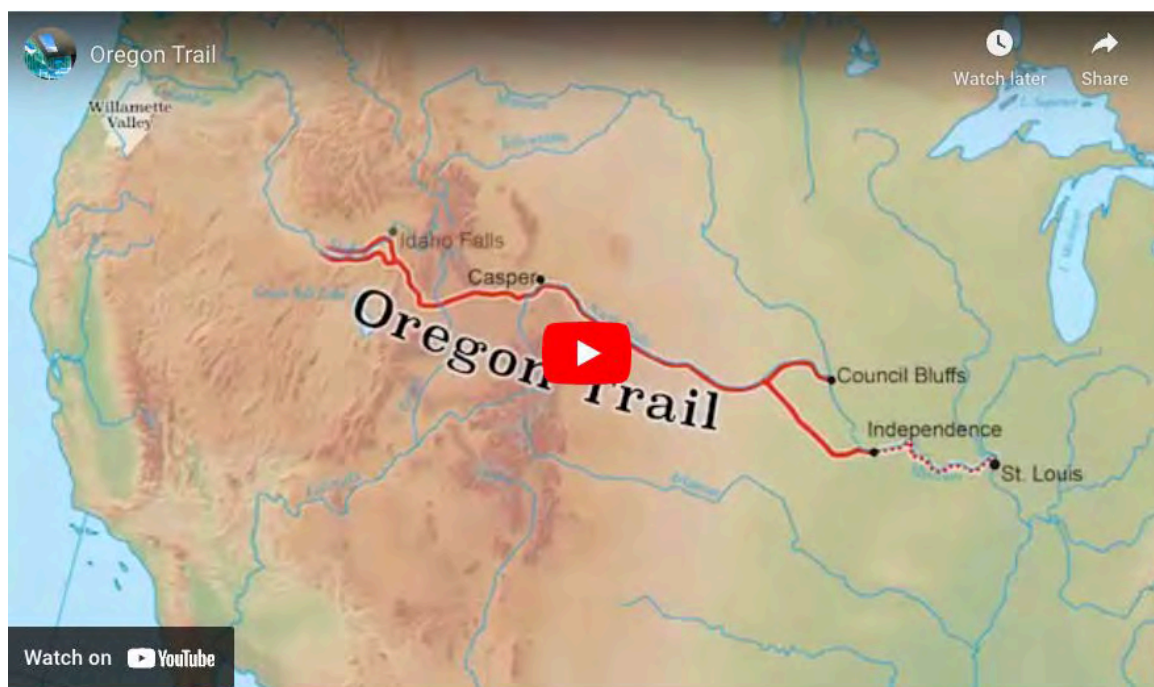
U.S. Political & Ideological Context

As early as the pre-revolutionary period, Americans looked to expand westward. Among British colonists' many grievances against the government in London was the enforcement of the [Proclamation of 1763](#), which forbade expansion beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Although the term [Manifest Destiny](#) was not coined until 1845 in John O'Sullivan's work in the *Democratic Review*, the idea that the United States had the right to expand westward from ocean to ocean was nothing new. O'Sullivan placed a label on the expansionist emphasis of the political discourse that took shape during the [Election of 1844](#). Prior to that time, sectional differences based on slavery expressly prevented the annexation of lands west of the Mississippi River. The fear was that the balance of free and slave states that had been struck by the [Compromise of 1820](#), or Missouri Compromise, would be shattered if the United States expanded to the Pacific Ocean.

Once the United States gained its independence, slavery divided North and South. Many Northerners looked to the West as a means of perpetuating the Jeffersonian ideal of the [yeoman farmer](#). Southerners hoped that the West would provide an opportunity to expand and solidify the institution of slavery as a viable economic system. Congressional negotiations, like the Missouri Compromise, maintained a tense unity between the states. The specter of westward expansion, however, promised to undermine the unquiet union. For precisely this reason, President [Martin Van Buren](#) refused Texas' pleas for annexation in 1836.

Concerns about Oregon Territory and the potential annexation of Texas and California changed the calculus in 1844. By the early 1840s, the United States became more and more preoccupied with the Oregon Territory, part of an area which had been disputed by Russia, Spain, Britain, and the United States earlier in the century. An 1818 agreement between the United States and Britain allowed fur trappers from both nations to work in Oregon—by that time Russia and Spain no longer attempted to assert their claims. Most American settlers chose the [Willamette Valley](#), between California and the Columbia River, for their homesteads. U.S. officials also hoped to secure Pacific ports along the Oregon coast to facilitate trade with China and other points in Asia.

A protracted economic downturn placed stress on people in what were then the western states following the [Panic of 1837](#). Hard times acted as a [push factor](#) which prompted many to traverse the [Oregon Trail](#) in the early 1840s. A torrent of [booster literature](#), including trappers' and traders' journals, missionary accounts, travelers' accounts, reports financed by the government, and letters to friends and relatives from those already in Oregon contributed to the rise of "[Oregon Fever](#)." Over 1,000 men, women, and children had undertaken the six month overland trek between Independence, Missouri, and the Willamette Valley by the late spring of 1843. Most of these people hailed from Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and they looked to Oregon as a place where they could make a new start as independent family farmers. Over the next two years, another 5,000 reached Oregon Territory.



Oregon Trail to Willamette Valley This map illustrates the Oregon Trail that led U.S. settlers from Missouri to the Willamette Valley. By the early 1840s, “Oregon Fever” led thousands to traverse the trail in search of new opportunities in Oregon.

Some of those who had intended to make their way to the Willamette Valley instead ended up in Mexican California, settling near Sacramento. Other Americans had arrived in the early 1830s both overland and by sea. As in the case of Oregon, booster literature targeted potential migrants to northern California. In the late 1830s, [Alta California](#) was only sparsely inhabited by Mexican citizens and indigenous peoples along the line of presidios and missions that had been established along the coast by [Juan Bautista de Anza](#) and others in the late 1700s.



Larkin served as [U.S. Consul](#) in Monterey at the outbreak of the U.S.-Mexico War. He had long

As was the pattern in New Mexico and much of Mexico’s northeastern states, U.S. newcomers during the 1830s tended to adopt Mexican cultural and social patterns. Many intermarried into local *rico* and [mestizo](#) families in order to expand their stake in California cattle ranching, the main economic enterprise there. A few, like [Thomas Oliver Larkin](#) who arrived in California in 1832, plotted for eventual annexation to the United States. Generally, these men were either squatters or landowners of questionable legality. Larkin, on the other hand, had constructed a successful mercantile enterprise in Monterey. In 1843, he was named [U.S. consul](#) in the same city. He penned a

envisioned the addition of California to the United States, and was in a position to help make that dream a reality in 1846.

Courtesy of New York Public Library

1843 and 1846, however, were cut from a different cloth than earlier arrivals. They tended to arrive overland rather than by sea, and very few intermarried into californio families. Rather than integrate into the local culture, they stood apart—a development that seemed to play into Larkin’s dream of Americanizing the region.

series of letters that in part inspired a new wave of migration to northern California. Those who arrived between

“Our manifest destiny is to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”

Migrations to Oregon and California coincided with the growth of a mentality of Manifest Destiny throughout the United States. Like all ideologies, Manifest Destiny was not all-pervasive in the 1840s, but it was quite influential. [As defined by John O’Sullivan in the Democratic Review](#): “Our manifest destiny is to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”⁴ Manifest Destiny described the United States’ providential mission to extend its systems of democracy, [federalism](#), and individual freedom to all between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Expansion across North America was ordained to accommodate the rapidly expanding population of the United States. O’Sullivan argued that the U.S. “true title” to the continent superseded any other nations’ or peoples’ competing claims to territory and resources based on prior discovery or settlement. Unlike many others, however, O’Sullivan insisted that the way to continental domination was to be peaceful through [“Anglo-Saxon emigration.”](#)⁵ Although not produced

until 1872, [John Gast's "American Progress"](#) offers a striking visual representation of the ideals of Manifest Destiny.



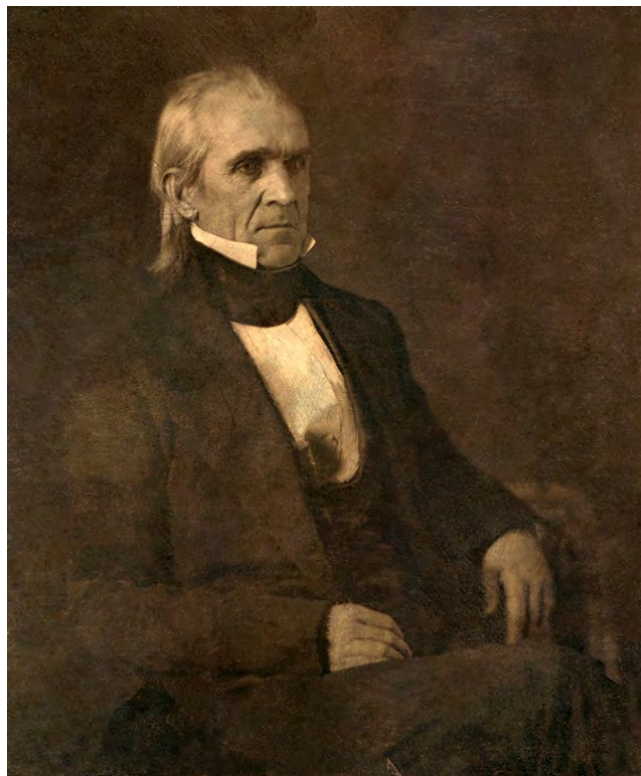
Although this painting was not created until 1872, it is an excellent visual representation of the ideals of Manifest Destiny. Note the artist's use of light and shadow to suggest the expansion of "civilization" in the face of "barbarism."

Painted by John Gast

Despite the growth of expansionist feeling due to migrations to Oregon and California, most Americans had not bought into Manifest Destiny during the first few years of the 1840s. Issues surrounding the potential proliferation of slavery kept westward expansion on the back burner. The electoral campaign of 1844 placed westward expansion front and center, however, and served to alter public opinion. As the election neared, rumors abounded that Britain wished to annex California to pay debts owed it by Mexico and that the British also had designs on Texas and Spanish Cuba. Fears of British incursions into North America caused [Northern Democrats](#) to call for an end to the joint occupation

of Oregon, and [Southern Democrats](#) renewed their calls for the annexation of Texas. President [John Tyler](#), who hoped for reelection on the Democratic ticket in 1844, championed a bill to annex Texas. With the prospect of Oregon entering the nation as a free state to maintain the balance of compromise, the Texas' annexation became less controversial.

Unfortunately for Tyler, the Democratic Party passed him over in 1844. Instead, dark-horse candidate [James K. Polk](#) got the nod. Known as "[Young Hickory](#)" due to his personal and ideological association with Andrew Jackson (whose nickname was "Old Hickory"), Polk championed the cause of westward expansion as a candidate for the presidency. He was a Southerner, born in North Carolina and educated in law at the state university. As a young man, Polk moved to Tennessee where he established himself as a successful lawyer and planter. He also built a promising political career, spending fourteen years in Congress—four as Speaker of the House—and two years as governor of Tennessee. During the campaign, his slogan was "[54° 40' or fight!](#)" He trumpeted his party's assertion that both Texas and Oregon already belonged to the United States by virtue of the large Anglo-American populations in both regions.



President Polk was elected on a platform of expansionism. His actions as president led to the U.S.-Mexico War that added nearly half of Mexico's territory to the United States and achieved the goal of extending the nation to the Pacific Ocean.

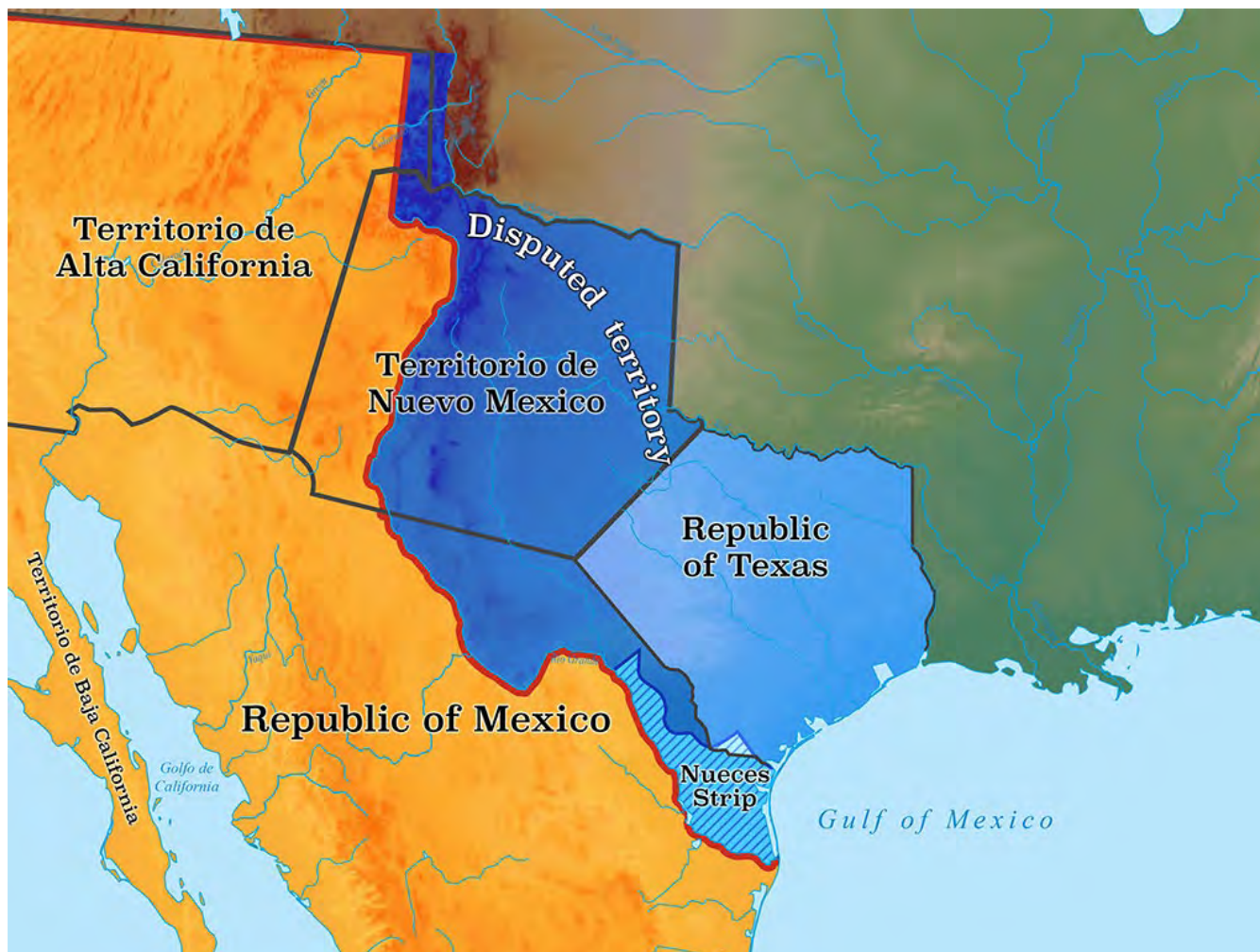
Courtesy of Matthew Brady

Polk considered his victory over [Whig Henry Clay](#) to be a [mandate](#) on the Democratic Party's expansionist platform. Over the course of his term in office, the United States expanded its boundaries to the Pacific Ocean, taking not only California, Oregon, and Texas, but also everything in between—the New Mexico

Territory. As president, Polk's intense ambition and work ethic took a physical toll. He died at the age of fifty-four, only three months after leaving office. The annexation of Texas was the spark that ignited the war of conquest that allowed for the realization of Polk's expansionist proposals. John Tyler signed the bill for Texas' annexation during his last days in office, and on December 29, 1845, Texas became a full-fledged state in the union.

Origins of War

President Polk hoped to engineer a war with Mexico in order to realize his dreams of westward expansion. Texas' claim on immense tracts of disputed land aided his efforts. Despite the dismal failure of the [Texan-Santa Fe Expedition](#), the Republic of Texas had not relinquished its assertion that the Rio Grande formed its southern and western border. The Congress in Mexico City never ratified nor recognized the two Treaties of Velasco as legitimate, and held that the Nueces River was the southernmost extent of Texas territory. Even if Mexico had recognized Texas' independence, it had been part of the dual state of [Coahuila y Texas](#) when it broke away from Mexico. Much of the disputed land was within the confines of the state of [Tamaulipas](#). The territory in between the Nueces River and Rio Grande, known as the [Nueces Strip](#), remained hotly contested up to the outbreak of war in May 1846.



Republic of Texas This map shows the territorial claims made by the Texas Republic in the early 1840s. New Mexicans balked at the notion that settlements like Santa Fe and Albuquerque had ever formed part of Texas.

The president did his best to keep the disputed nature of the Nueces Strip quiet. In July 1845, Polk sent General [Zachary Taylor](#) to the Nueces River with 3,500 soldiers under his command. At the same time, he sent [John Slidell](#), a Congressman from Louisiana, to Mexico City with orders to negotiate the purchase of California and New Mexico for up to \$30 million. As late as December 1845, however, Mexican officials refused to receive Slidell. They issued a statement that the annexation of Texas was illegal and that they would not treat with any representative of the nation that had perpetrated such an affront.

U.S.-Mexican War



Polk predicted the outcome of Slidell's mission and worked through other channels to achieve his ends. He hoped to sponsor an independence movement in California similar to that of Texas a decade earlier. Secretary of State [James Buchanan](#) advised [Consul](#) Thomas Oliver Larkin in Monterey to encourage Mexican residents of California to join American settlers in a declaration of independence from Mexico. Larkin was then to garner support for annexation to the United States. To support this covert proposal, [John C. Frémont](#) was dispatched on another exploration mission into California.

All of the various pieces of Polk's strategy initiated the gravitation toward war, but events did not move quickly enough for the president's liking. In January 1846, before Mexican President [José Joaquín de Herrera](#) officially rejected Slidell's diplomatic overtures, Polk ordered General Taylor to move his forces from their base at Corpus Christi to the northern bank of the Rio Grande—a

highly provocative move. By late March, Taylor had positioned his men within striking distance of the Tamaulipas city of Matamoros. Mexican troops under General [Pedro de Ampudia](#) arrived shortly thereafter and announced their intentions to prevent further U.S. incursions into Mexican territory. The two generals exchanged diplomatic, though sharply worded, [correspondence](#) to assert their respective refusals to back down.

In mid-April, Polk learned from Slidell that the purchase of California and New Mexico was impossible. Realizing that U.S. expansion could come only through war, the president grew increasingly impatient. General Taylor's unstated purpose was to ignite a war with Mexico, but his presence so near Matamoros had not yet accomplished that end. As [Ulysses S.](#)

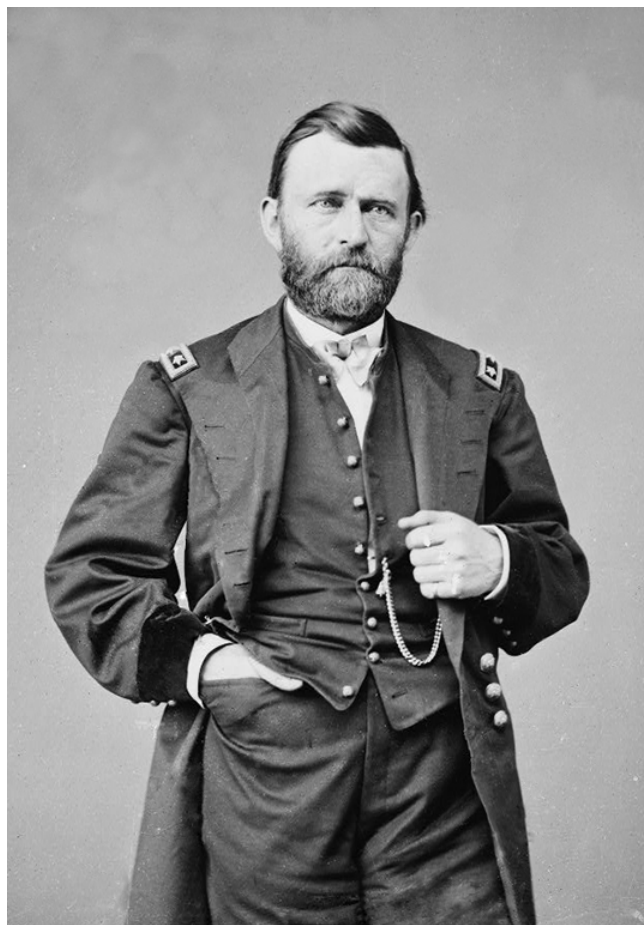


When General Zachary Taylor led his troops to the Nueces River in the summer of 1845, General Ampudia wrote Taylor to ask him to withdraw. Ampudia's forces attempted to hold Mexican Territory against the incursion of U.S. forces through the spring of 1846 when a skirmish occurred along the Rio Grande that left sixteen U.S. soldiers "killed or wounded."

Courtesy of Mexicanec

[Grant](#), who was among Taylor's forces, later stated in his [personal memoirs](#): "We were sent to provoke a fight, but it was essential that Mexico should commence it."⁶ During his presidential term, Grant famously lamented that the nation had blood on its hands for initiating the war with Mexico. President Polk and many other Democrats in Congress, however, did not hold similar qualms against using war with their southern neighbor to achieve their expansionist goals.

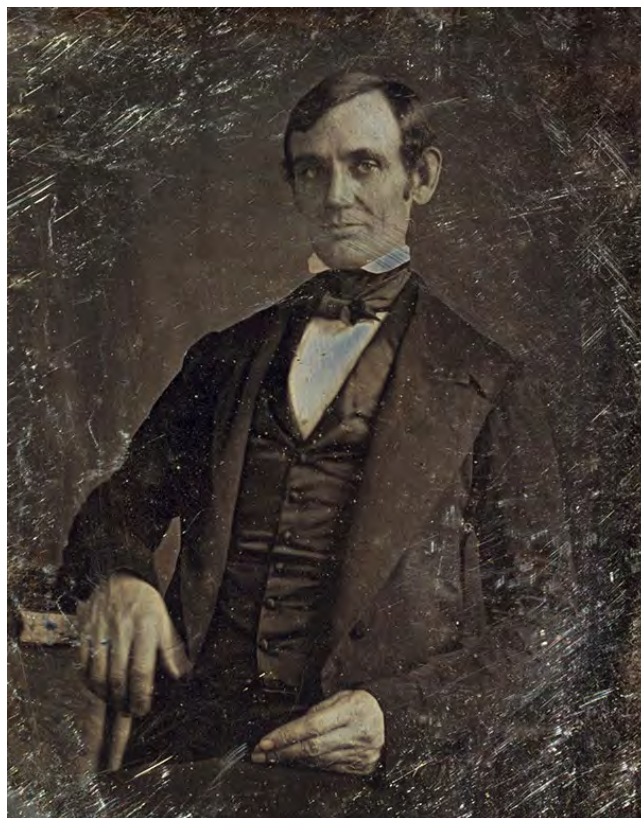
With no movement in the standoff between Taylor and Ampudia, Polk drafted a war speech and decided to take it to Congress anyway. Just before he did, news of a skirmish on April 25 between U.S. and Mexican forces that left "some sixteen [American soldiers] killed or wounded" reached Washington D.C.⁷ After hastily revising his speech, Polk approached



Grant accompanied Taylor's troops to the Nueces River, and then into Mexico, in 1845-46. In his later memoirs, Grant portrayed the U.S.-Mexico War as one of the nation's sins that resulted in the Civil War.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Congress for a declaration of war. He framed the relationship between the United States and Mexico as one in which Americans had been forced to patiently endure a series of diplomatic, economic, and military abuses from its southern neighbor. Under such circumstances, and considering that “Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon American soil,” a declaration of war was warranted.⁸ Despite some dissent from Whig Congressmen, including Representative [Abraham Lincoln](#), Polk’s tactics proved effective, and the United States declared war on Mexico on May 13, 1846.



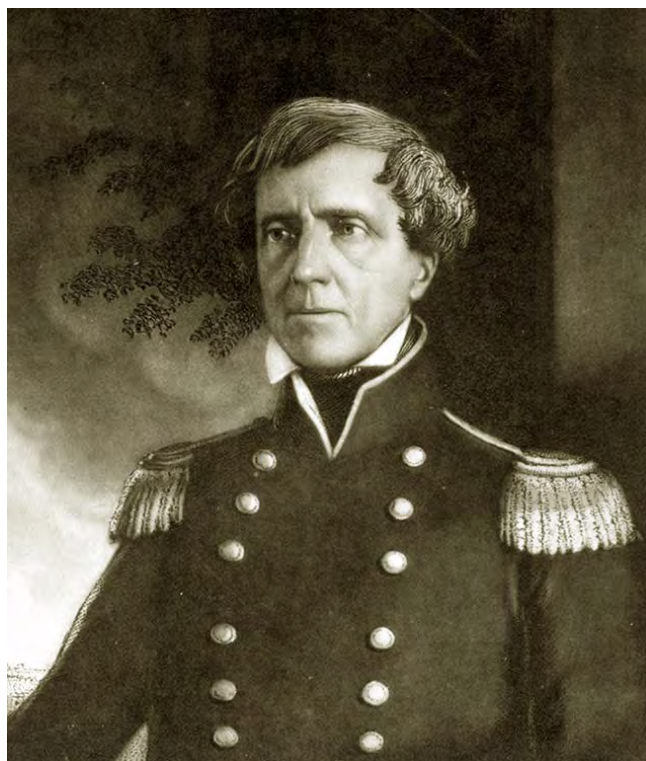
Daguerreotype of Congressman Abraham Lincoln by Nicholas H. Shepherd (1846). As a young Congressman, Lincoln challenged President Polk’s call for a declaration of war against Mexico. In his famous “Spot Resolutions,” Lincoln demanded to know the exact site upon which American blood had been spilled in the spring 1846 skirmish along the Rio Grande.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

From the Mexican perspective, however, the situation looked quite different. Due to the controversy over the Nueces Strip, Mexican military and political officials alike considered their actions to be in defense against a U.S. invasion of their territory. Polk’s assertion that “American blood” had been shed upon “American soil” was untenable. Indeed, the title that has been given to the conflict south of the Rio Grande is telling. In Mexico, it is known as the “War of North American Invasion” or the “U.S. Invasion.” Following the U.S.

declaration of war, most Mexicans echoed the sentiments expressed in the daily *El Tiempo*: “The American government acted like a bandit who came upon a traveler.”⁹ Many Mexicans attempted to arm themselves and join the effort to hold off the invasion, and most did not believe that the conflict would be as one-sided in favor of the United States as it proved to be. One of the major reasons for lopsided military contests was the reality that, for Mexico, the U.S. initiated a second war. As historian Brian DeLay has demonstrated, northern Mexico had already been devastated by the [War of a Thousand Deserts](#). Under the circumstances, Mexican soldiers and citizens alike found it extremely difficult to repel U.S. forces.

U.S. “Occupation” of New Mexico



In August of 1846, Kearny led the Army of the West into New Mexico. Governor [Armijo](#) had abandoned the forces organized to contest the Americans, and Kearny was able to take control of the region—at least nominally—without firing a shot. *Engraved by Y.B. Welch for Graham’s Magazine*

The conquest by Brigadier General [Stephen Watts Kearny](#) of Santa Fe on August 18, 1846, was marked as a bloodless event. While it was true that he was able to take possession of key

New Mexico towns such as Las Vegas and the capital city without any major battles, recent scholarship has shown the idea of U.S. “bloodless occupation” of New Mexico to be a myth. Most nuevomexicanos were shocked and bewildered by the sweeping ability of the [Army of the West](#) to capture their department. After marching into Las Vegas on August 15, Kearny made a speech before the town. He promised that nuevomexicanos would be included in the actions of

the U.S. republic from that day forth, and he leveraged local apprehensions about native attacks in his discourse. [As recorded by William Emory](#), Kearny stated: “The Apaches and the Navajhoes [sic] come down from the mountains and carry off your sheep, and even your women, whenever they please. My government will correct all this.”¹⁰ As circumstances had it, the Army of the West arrived in Las Vegas not long after Navajo raiders had stolen its residents’ sheep and cattle. Kearny understood the impact of the War of a Thousand Deserts on nuevomexicanos, and he leveraged that knowledge to facilitate the conquest.

President Polk had hoped that the Army of the West could capture New Mexico without firing a shot. In an effort to protect the Santa Fe Trade and hasten the overall war effort, he ordered Kearny to occupy (rather than conquer) the territory. Due to this charge, many of the reports issued by Kearny and his men emphasized their means of “peaceful persuasion” in New Mexico.¹¹ Their tenor contributed in part to the creation of the idea that most nuevomexicanos passively allowed, or even invited, the Army of the West to take control of their homeland. The writings of Santa Fe traders, principally [Josiah Gregg](#), also provided fodder for early U.S. historians of the Southwest, such as [Hubert Howe Bancroft](#), who sought to justify the U.S.-Mexico War with the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Their work ignored New Mexican sources and overlooked military reports that discussed [nuevomexicano](#) resistance.

Interestingly, the actions of Governor [Manuel Armijo](#) also contributed to the myth of bloodless occupation. As a beneficiary of the Santa Fe Trade, Armijo depended on the U.S. economy for his wealth. Yet he also had his own reputation to consider as the Army of the West approached Santa Fe. He had been riding high due to his capture of the [Texan-Santa Fe expedition](#) a few years earlier. The 1,600-man Army of the West, however, presented a far more formidable threat than the nearly 300 starving and dehydrated Texans. Although he led a group of 1,800 volunteers to meet Kearny on August 14, three days later Armijo decided to disband his forces and retreat to Chihuahua. Kearny marched into the capital city uncontested.

Bloodless Occupation



In a letter to Mexican President [Mariano Salas](#), Armijo explained his actions.¹² He argued that many of his volunteers had deserted and the trained officers agreed with his decision to retreat rather than mount a suicidal stand against Kearny. Armijo also cited the longstanding problem of military security in New Mexico and the north. He criticized Mexico City officials for failing to provide sufficient numbers of soldiers and armaments to defend against Navajos, Apaches, and Comanches in the years leading up to the U.S.-Mexico War.

Despite Armijo's efforts to redeem his reputation, a group of prominent nuevomexicanos also wrote the Mexican president to condemn the former governor's cowardice. They argued that Armijo had sufficient time to raise local militiamen and to request reinforcements from Chihuahua, but that the governor simply failed to act. According to their letter, most nuevomexicanos planned to resist the Army of the West but had been abandoned by their leader in the moment of necessity. Even Donaciano Vigil—who had counseled Armijo to retreat due to the superiority of the U.S. force—condemned him after the fact for abandoning New Mexico.

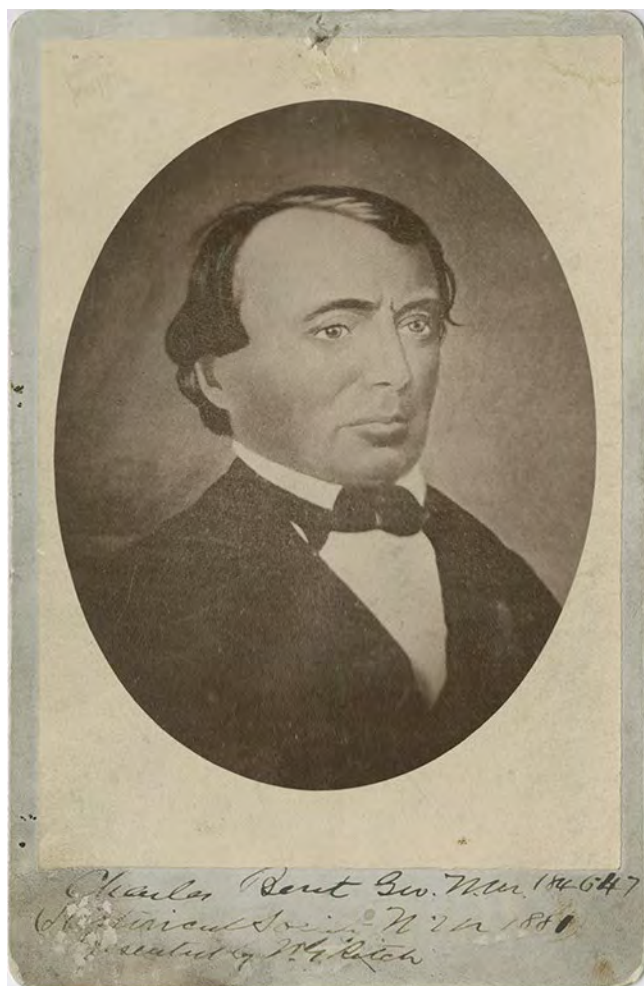
The conflicting correspondence leaves many questions unanswered, and it seems that Armijo and prominent nuevomexicanos alike wrote for the purpose of justifying their own actions. If the New Mexicans had been willing to fight, why did they not do so despite Armijo's retreat? On the other side of the situation, why did Armijo abandon New Mexico? His motives were much more complex and murky than his letter made them seem. In an effort to comply with Polk's order to peacefully occupy New Mexico, Kearny enlisted the aid of the well-connected trader James Magoffin. Magoffin and Armijo knew one another personally, and they held a closed-door meeting in late July or early August that also included the governor's second-in-command, [Diego de Archuleta](#). Magoffin's mission was to persuade Armijo to surrender Santa Fe without a fight. Archuleta reportedly was incensed at the offer and he nearly persuaded Armijo to walk out of the meeting. Rumors abounded at the time (and in later historians' accounts) that Archuleta and Armijo received a bribe from Magoffin to allow Kearny to take control of New Mexico.



A successful Santa Fe trader, [James Magoffin](#) used his personal acquaintance with Governor Armijo to secure a closed-door meeting with New Mexican officials prior to the arrival of the Army of the West. We will never know exactly what transpired during the meeting, but contemporaries and historians have suggested that Magoffin offered Armijo a bribe to abandon New Mexico.

Painted by Henry Cheever Pratt

Whatever their reasoning, Kearny established a military government in New Mexico which displaced nuevomexicanos in favor of Anglos at the territorial level. At the local level, Kearny worked to ensure the



Following the U.S. occupation of New Mexico, Kearny appointed a new civilian government under the Kearny Code. Bent was named as the first U.S. governor of New Mexico. Despite his family and trade ties to the region, Bent was killed during the 1847 Taos Revolt.

Courtesy of New Mexico Magazine Archival Collection

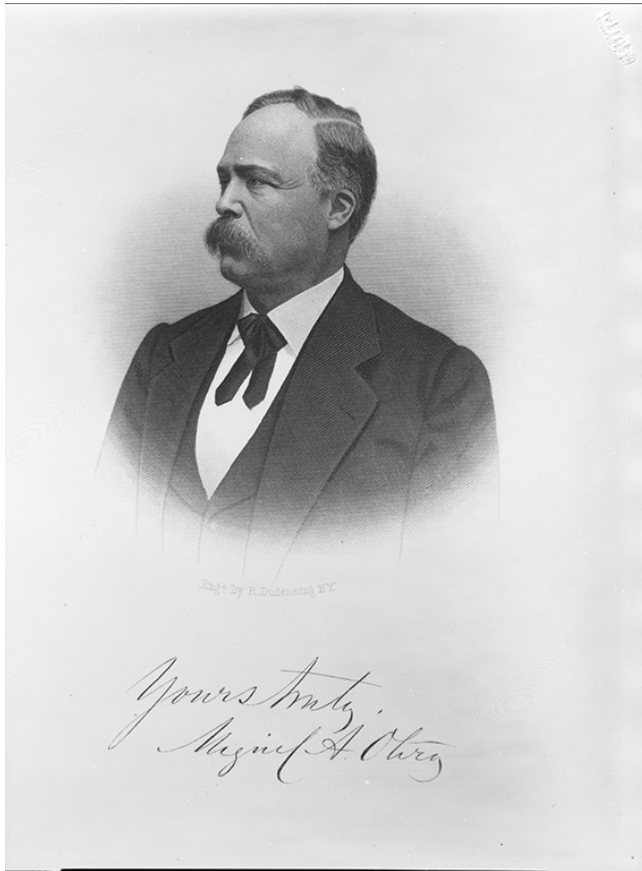
continued leadership of existing [ayuntamientos](#), alcaldes, and judges. Charles Bent, partner with his brother William in Bent's Fort on the [Santa Fe Trail](#), was named governor under the [Kearny Code](#) which went into effect as the legal code for U.S.-occupied New Mexico on September 22, 1846.

Governor Bent had a family in Taos with his wife, María Ignacia Jaramillo, an older sister of [Josefa Jaramillo](#), [Christopher "Kit" Carson](#)'s wife.

Indeed, Bent had informed Kearny that Armijo would be hesitant to fight the Americans if he did not receive reinforcements from Chihuahua or Sonora. Bent's role in Kearny's diplomatic maneuvering was well rewarded.

Armijo's Lieutenant Governor, [Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid](#), hesitantly accepted Kearny's occupation of Santa Fe. In a tone that inferred his desire to defy the superior Army of the West, Vigil y Alarid pointed out that his people would let officials in Washington D.C. and Mexico City formally decide whether or not they were to become U.S. citizens, as Kearny had proclaimed. Historians Robert J. Rosenbaum and Carlos R. Herrera have argued that Vigil y Alarid chose accommodation as a form of resistance, whereas Armijo decided to withdraw in order to fight another day. Rosenbaum has outlined a continuum of

nuevomexicano resistance which ranged from acts of withdrawal, to accommodation and assimilation, to outright armed revolt. Because withdrawal and accommodation can also be considered forms of submission, nuevomexicano resistance to the U.S. occupation tended to be overlooked.¹³



In his capacity as territorial judge, Otero was one of two nuevomexicanos named to the U.S. government of New Mexico under the Kearny Code. The Otero family had a long tradition of political service in New Mexico; Vicente, Antonio José's father, served as mayor in Valencia County, and his son, Miguel A. Otero, later served as territorial governor.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors](#) Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 152218

Donaciano Vigil and [Antonio José Otero](#) were the only nuevomexicanos to serve in the territorial government under the Kearny Code. Vigil and Vigil y Alarid had aided Kearny and his advisors in drawing up the legal code. Vigil was named secretary under Governor Bent, and Otero served as one of the territory's judges. All of the other territorial-level posts, however, were granted to friends and associates of Charles Bent who lived in and around Taos. Despite Vigil and Otero's efforts to use their posts to preserve their culture under U.S. rule, most other nuevomexicanos were infuriated by the new government that had not allowed for any type of democratic process. Kearny appointed all of the leaders to their positions and shortly thereafter moved on to aid the war effort in California, with Kit Carson as his guide.

Colonel [Sterling Price](#) remained in Santa Fe with a small contingent of troops to maintain peace. Most nuevomexicanos in rural areas removed from Santa Fe adopted a



Following the killing of Charles Bent, Price became military governor of New Mexico. In that capacity, he recognized nuevomexicanos' desire to continue resistance against the U.S. regime. Under his command, the Taos Revolt was eventually quashed in the fall of 1847. During the Civil War, he led the Missouri Militia in support of the Confederacy.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

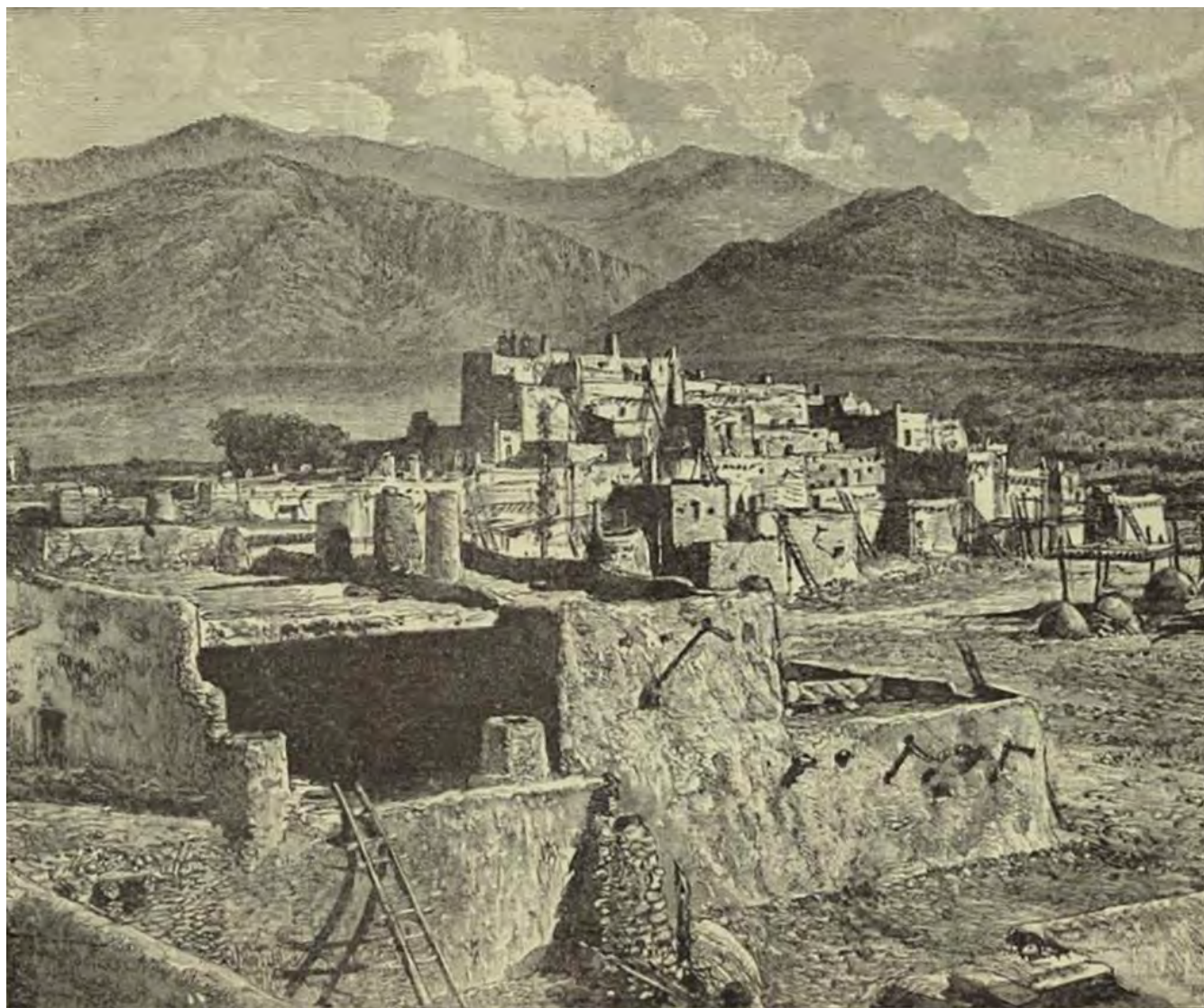
repeatedly underscored smoldering unrest just beneath the surface in New Mexico. The clearest evidence of open nuevomexicano resistance to the American takeover is found in Price's correspondence and in communications between nuevomexicano rebels and Mexico City officials. In October 1846, for example, [Tomás Ortiz](#) and Diego de Archuleta outlined their plans for a general uprising to begin on December 19. In an effort to garner more support, they pushed the date back to December 24. In the meantime, the group organized its own shadow government with Ortiz as governor and Archuleta as military commander.

The plot was quashed before it began when Donaciano Vigil learned of the planned insurrection. Most of the instigators were arrested, but Ortiz and

form of withdrawal to deal with U.S. rule. They attempted to ignore the new administration and continue with their lives as normally as possible under the circumstances. Almost immediately after Kearny left New Mexico, conditions grew increasingly unsettled. Padre Antonio José Martínez openly opposed the U.S. conquest and he was a target of Governor Bent's ire due to his opposition to land grants that had been generously given to American traders in the new governor's social circle.

In his reports to his superiors during 1846 and 1847, Colonel Price

Archuleta managed to escape and unrest continued. Governor Bent declared the affair resolved in early January, however, and ordered all residents to avoid any future plans for rebellion. Support for armed resistance was widespread; figures like Padre Martínez and Archuleta who represented a sector of the *rico elite*, combined with [mestizos](#) from Taos (including [Manuel Cortez](#) and [Pablo Montoya](#)), people from Taos Pueblo, and, by the summer of 1847, some Apache bands all joined the armed resistance to U.S. occupation of New Mexico.



From Taos Pueblo, Tomás Ortiz and Diego de Archuleta organized a rebellion against the U.S. regime in New Mexico in the fall of 1846. Although their initial campaign was defeated, the pair escaped and continued to support resistance to the U.S. government in New Mexico through the fall of 1847.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Despite Governor Bent's proclamations, revolt erupted in northern New Mexico in mid-January. Underestimating the magnitude of the hostilities, Bent

traveled to his Taos home to personally address the unrest. On January 19, 1847, a force led by Pablo Montoya, “the self-styled Santa Anna of the north,” and Taos Pueblo headman [Tomasito](#) killed Bent in his own home in the presence of his wife and children. Six other Anglo territorial officials met their deaths during what came to be known as the [Taos Revolt](#). The insurgents also worked to destroy land-grant documentation in order to revert local lands and resources to nuevomexicano communities.



The Battle of Taos was one of the confrontations between Mexican insurgents and forces under Sterling Price in New Mexico during the U.S.-Mexico War. Despite a numerical advantage, the nuevomexicanos were defeated and insurgent leader Pablo Montoya killed at Taos.

Courtesy of Az81964444

Some historians have characterized the Taos Revolt as a massacre separate from the unsuccessful December plot. Yet revisionists have illustrated that the subsequent actions of those involved in the Taos insurrection indicate that their primary goal was to thwart U.S. control of New Mexico. The day after Bent’s assassination, General [Jesús Tafoya](#) issued a formal declaration of war against the United States on behalf of the [Rio Arriba](#) region. That same day Colonel Price also found evidence of a planned insurrection in Rio Abajo. In response, Price moved to head off the Taos rebels with 353 men and four howitzer cannons.

The two sides met at La Cañada, where five hundred nuevomexicanos stood

against Price. Despite their superior numbers, they lost the day and Tafoya was counted among the dead. In February, nearly seven-hundred nuevomexicanos again challenged Price at Embudo Pass. This time, they were able to force the Americans to retreat to Taos where Price confronted another rebellion at the Pueblo. After a heated battle, Price's forces emerged victorious. The best estimates indicate that about two-hundred nuevomexicanos lost their lives in confrontations with Colonel Price during the first two months of 1847. Pablo Montoya was executed following the Battle of Taos, and eight other rebels were convicted of treason and hanged as well. They were tried in the court system established by the Kearny Code, which meant that the jury was dominated by Anglo newcomers. Following the executions, President Polk formally reprimanded Price for his actions. Because the United States and Mexico were still at war, the Taos insurgents should have been treated as prisoners of war, not tried for treason. Despite Kearny's pronouncement of U.S. citizenship for nuevomexicanos, they could not legally be considered such until the territory was officially incorporated into the nation by the U.S. Congress.

Despite Price's swift suppression of the uprising, the insurgency continued through the summer and early fall of 1847. As violence erupted between the Taos insurgents and Price's force, Manuel Cortez instigated a guerrilla war from his home in Mora. Reinforcements under the command of Jesse I. Morin arrived in Mora in early February to quell dissension there. From the surrounding mountains, Cortez and his supporters raided Morin's army rather than attempt to face them in a head-on conflict. After a few weeks of guerrilla fighting, Morin ordered the execution of captured rebels and laid waste to the town of Mora. His forces burned wheat fields in surrounding areas to prevent Cortez's men from subsisting off of the land. After the annihilation of the town, Morin led his men back to Santa Fe.

Cortez did not give up the fight, however, and he began to recruit native allies, including Apache people. Their raids on U.S. camps inspired retaliation against nuevomexicano villages which frequently resulted in the deaths of civilians. Such actions further solidified anti-American sentiment in the region and sharpened Cortez's resolve. By August 1847 U.S. military officials far from New

Mexico declared that the conflict was over, but Colonel Price knew better. He learned that Cortez had received a commission from the Mexican government to continue the struggle and that a large army was taking shape in Chihuahua for the purpose of moving against Santa Fe. Although war preparations in both Chihuahua and Durango continued for the next few months, such efforts came to naught when U.S. and Mexican officials signed the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) in February of 1848.

Although the efforts of Cortez, Montoya, Tomasito, and Tafoya failed to reverse the U.S. conquest of New Mexico, their continued struggle provides clear evidence of nuevomexicano resistance. Kearny's keen diplomacy did allow for the bloodless occupation of Santa Fe in August 1846, but that single event did not mean that nuevomexicanos were willing to accept conquest without a fight. Even after the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#), nuevomexicanos, Pueblo peoples, Apaches, and Comanches persisted in their struggle to maintain their cultures and identities as residents of a U.S. territory.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

By early 1847, U.S. troops controlled most of northern Mexico. Although Mexican forces were able to win some important battles, the devastation wrought by the War of a Thousand Deserts played a major role in preventing them from turning the tide in the overall war effort. U.S. military and political officials debated different means of forcing the Mexican government to capitulate. Initially, they hoped that victories throughout the Mexican north would be sufficient to force negotiations in Mexico City. Even after California was captured in the fall of 1846 and the vital ports of Tampico and Veracruz fell under U.S. control, the Mexican people were unwilling to concede defeat. Any politician who attempted to negotiate would have appeared weak and unpatriotic.

Within that context, [Antonio López de Santa Anna](#) was able to mount a brief resurgence in the arena of public

opinion with his campaigns against Taylor's forces in the north. Political unrest in Mexico City, however, forced him to return to the capital to resolve the turmoil before moving against U.S. forces. Although Mexican military and political officials faced opposition and defeat on all sides, they continued to hold out. By early 1847, General [Winfield Scott](#) led 14,000 men from the port city of Veracruz in a campaign to capture Mexico City. Along the way, some of the men read [History of the Conquest of Mexico](#) by [Walter H. Prescott](#) and imagined themselves on a mission similar to that of [Hernán Cortés](#). Several of Scott's officers, such as [P. G. T. Beauregard](#), [Robert E. Lee](#), and [George Meade](#), were trained at West Point and later rose to notoriety during the U.S. Civil War.



This lithograph illustrates General Winfield Scott at Veracruz in 1847. He led U.S. forces inland and captured Mexico City that September.

Courtesy of U.S. Army (NARA 111-SC-496992)

On September 12 and 13 of 1847, [Scott's forces](#) waged the Battle of Mexico City, which resulted in the defeat of Mexican forces and the U.S. occupation of the Mexican capital. Famously, during the assault on [Chapultepec Castle](#), Mexico's school for military cadets, several teenage boys gave their lives when they refused to retreat before the American onslaught. Today, they are remembered as [los niños heroes](#) (the boy heroes), and their memory is preserved with a large monument in Chapultepec Park.



The remains of the “niños heroes,” who sacrificed their lives in an attempt to hold Chapultepec Castle in September 1847, lie beneath this monument. Dubbed the “Altar to the Nation,” the monument was dedicated in 1952 in Mexico City’s Chapultepec Park.

Photograph by Thelmadatter

Santa Anna’s loss of Mexico City once again undermined his political power and he was forced to resign. An interim government was left to decide what measures to take. Despite Scott’s victory, guerrilla warfare continued in the streets of the capital and American casualties continued. Leaders of the liberal faction of Mexican politics, which had descended from the [Federalist](#) cohort of pre-war years, including influential figures like future president [Benito Juárez](#), [Melchor Ocampo](#), and [Ponciano Arriaga](#), urged continued resistance. Ocampo said, “give the people arms and they will defend themselves.” At the same time, peasant rebellions broke out across Mexico alongside continued resistance against U.S. troops. Mexico City leaders favored a quick settlement with the United States in order to prevent a widespread peasant uprising. As historian Leticia Reina summarized the issue: “The Mexican government preferred

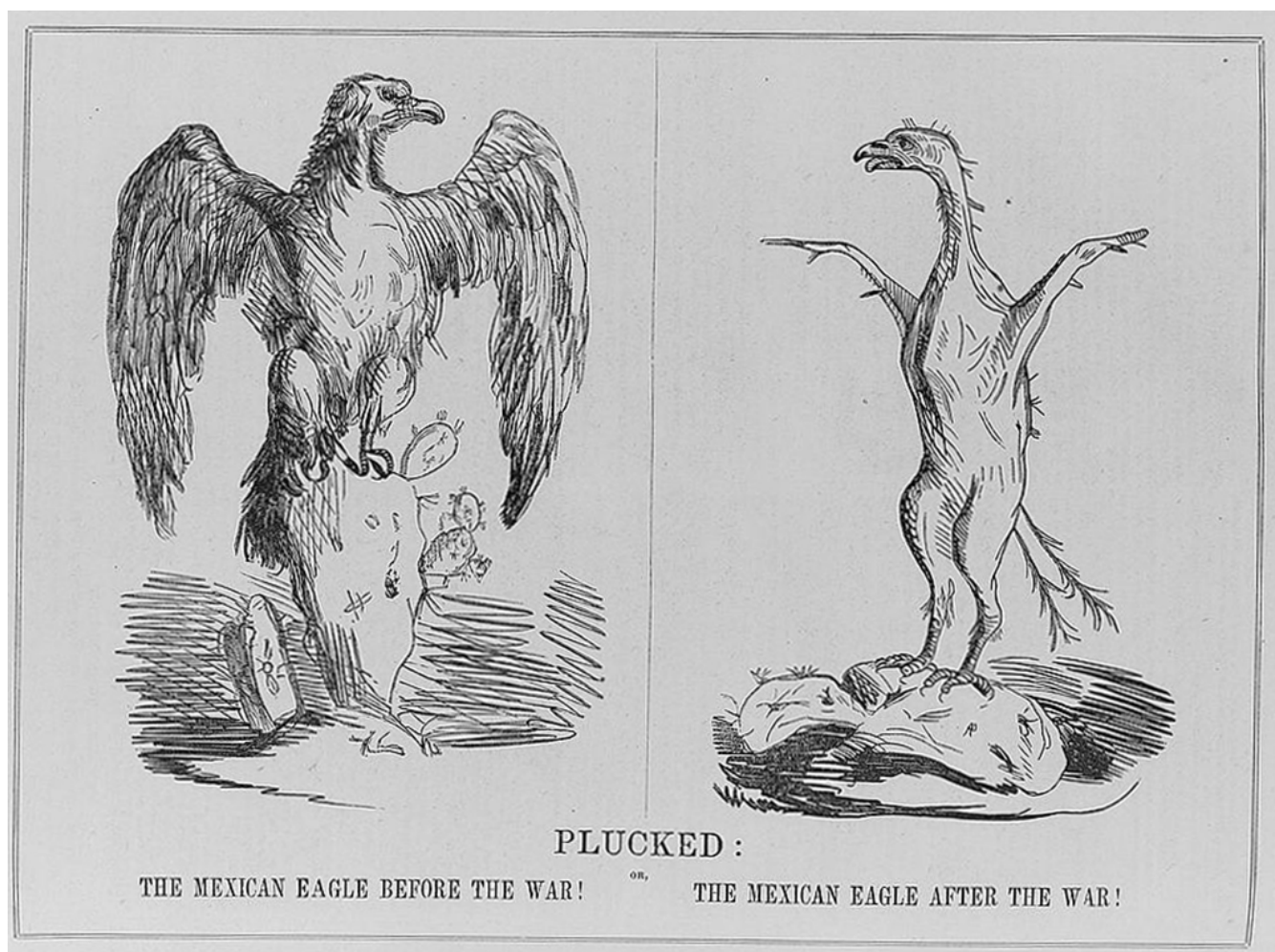
coming to terms with the United States rather than endanger the interests of the ruling class.”¹⁴

As a result, Mexico ceded California, New Mexico, and Texas under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, an area that represented nearly half of Mexico’s national territory. The treaty itself was the result of tense negotiations between American representative Nicholas Trist and Bernardo Couto, Miguel Atristain, and Luís Gonzaga Cuevas who were members of a special commission to represent Mexico’s interim government which had formed at Querétaro. Although President Polk pushed Trist at the eleventh hour to negotiate for all of Mexico’s territory and even attempted to recall him, the negotiations had already been completed and the document signed on February 2, 1848. In exchange for the ceded territory, the United States paid Mexico an indemnity of \$15 million.



Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Ratified in March of 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the U.S.-Mexico War at the cost of nearly half of Mexico’s national territory.

From the perspective of the Mexican commission, [Article VIII](#), [Article IX](#), and [Article X](#) were the most important elements of the treaty. They specifically addressed the rights of Mexican citizens living in the ceded territories. Although it appeared to some that the Mexican government had left those people to their own devices, the representatives sought to protect their rights as best they could through the treaty itself. Article VIII guaranteed Mexicans living in the ceded territory the right to retain their homes and property. They were given a period of one year to decide whether to retain Mexican citizenship or to become U.S. citizens. If they made no such declaration within the year, they would become American citizens by default. Either way, the article was designed to allow them the continued rights of full citizenship.



This 1847 cartoon entitled “Plucked” illustrates the Mexican nation’s loss of territory and national pride at the hands of U.S. forces.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Article IX stipulated that those who elected to become U.S. citizens would be “incorporated into the Union . . . and be admitted, at the proper time . . . to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States.”¹⁵ In the meantime, they would be allowed to practice the Catholic faith without interference, a major concern of the negotiators, and enjoy liberty and property rights. The Mexican commission’s original draft included clearer phrasing that specified all Mexicans to be treated as the equals of other American citizens at all times, but those stipulations were omitted by the U.S. Congress during the ratification process. Article X directly addressed Spanish and Mexican land grants in the ceded territories. It stipulated that all such grants remain intact as outlined by Spanish or Mexican law. The U.S. Congress, however, struck Article X from the treaty as one of the terms of ratification.



In his capacity as U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Clifford addressed Mexican officials’ questions about the ratifications made to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by the U.S. Congress. In the Querétaro Protocol, Clifford assured Mexican policymakers that that alterations in no way minimized the rights of former Mexican citizens in the ceded territories. Mexican officials were not so

Alterations in place, the U.S. Congress ratified the treaty on March 10, 1848. Although Mexican officials questioned [Nathan Clifford](#), the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, about the alterations, the Mexican Congress also ratified the treaty shortly thereafter on March 19, 1848. Ratification passed by the narrowest of margins: it was approved by one vote. A memorandum of understanding, titled the [Querétaro Protocol](#), arranged between Clifford and Mexican negotiators convinced many Mexican legislators that the interests of their fellow citizens in the ceded territories would be guaranteed despite the changes to the treaty. Others were not so sure. Ultimately, after the crushing defeat in the war, Mexican policymakers believed that they were in no position to challenge

sure.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

dealings concluded.

the treaty. As the detractors had feared, American officials ignored the Quéretaro Protocol once official

“The Border Crossed Us”

In the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), it seemed that disputes over land, resources, and the place of former Mexican citizens in the United States had been resolved. Such was not the case, however. Even the outwardly straightforward issue of surveying the new international border between the two nations presented a series of problems. In Texas and California, tejanos and californios were quickly outnumbered by [Anglo](#) American migrants and they lost much of their political and economic power.

Nuevomexicanos, on the other hand, continued to comprise the majority of New Mexico’s population well into the twentieth century. In order to prevent their full inclusion in national affairs, at least in part, Congress refused to approve New Mexico’s statehood for sixty-four years. Nuevomexicanos sought to maintain their unique cultural heritage and ties to friends and family members in Mexico despite continued legal schemes that robbed them of their rights as heirs of Spanish and Mexican land grants. They also fought a constant battle to defend their use of the Spanish language. Although some decided to accept the offer of the Mexican government to resettle south of the new border, most struggled to hold on to land and possessions that their families had claimed for hundreds of years.

Although their identification with the Mexican nation was gradual and transient, nuevomexicanos had not actively sought to exchange their ties to Mexico for U.S. citizenship—a status that gave them second class standing in their own homeland. As Chicano activists would remark much later, nuevomexicanos held that “the border crossed us.” Such sentiment has lasted to the present among Mexican-heritage peoples in New Mexico and the

Southwest.



U.S. and Mexico Borders in 1848 vs. Disturnell Map The Disturnell map was the most current map at the time of negotiations for the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#). In the early 1850s, members of the binational boundary commission learned of the map's inaccuracies, and they were forced to make decisions about how to delineate the border based on the text of the treaty.

In 1849, however, the border crossed Mexican residents of several northern Chihuahua towns in a far more literal way. In order to understand the events that transpired when the Rio Grande ([Rio Bravo del Norte](#)) changed course in 1849, we need to also consider the Mexican government's efforts to [repatriate](#) Mexican citizens in the ceded territories. During the treaty negotiations the question of whether or not the rights of citizens in the lost territories would be protected loomed large in Mexican officials' minds. As President [Manuel de la Peña y Peña](#) remarked, "their future has been the gravest difficulty I have had in the negotiations; and . . . had it been possible, the territorial cession would have been extended with the condition that the Mexican populations be set free."¹⁶

The preoccupation that Mexican people would not receive equal citizenship rights in the United States dated to the early 1800s. In 1822 Mexico's

Ambassador to the United States reported that Americans openly considered themselves racially superior to Mexican people. Coupled with the well-known American penchant for expansion, this news stoked fears of an eventual invasion. An 1839 story in *La Luna*, a Chihuahua newspaper, warned that if such an invasion occurred, Mexicans would be “sold as beasts” because “their color was not as white as that of their conquerors.”¹⁷ Indeed, Mexican commentators on racial attitudes in the United States justifiably feared that their compatriots would be counted with African Americans in such an event, and possibly subjected to slavery.

During New Mexico’s tenure as part of the Mexican Republic, nuevomexicanos forged a sense of Mexican identity based on symbols and rituals. As was the case in all emergent nation-states, flags, coins, seals, medals, and public performances allowed disparate peoples far from national seats of power to adopt a shared sense of belonging and purpose. This process began in Santa Fe when the Mexican flag was raised in the plaza at the first independence celebrations. Additionally, rituals, such as the requirement that land grantees chant verbatim the words “Long live the president and the Mexican nation” in order to take possession of their grants, constructed a sense of Mexican identity.¹⁸

In 1848, New Mexico was the most populous of the lost provinces. Non-indigenous inhabitants numbered nearly 60,000. Not long after ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Congress in Mexico City approved a measure to help the residents of its former territories relocate to Mexico. The law passed on June 14, 1848, set aside 200,000 pesos (taken from the U.S. indemnity payment) to help “diminish the disgrace” of Mexican nationals living in the ceded territories by offering them a means of repatriation. Although the term repatriation is defined as the process of returning displaced peoples to their home countries, historians have also applied it to the case of the people crossed by the new international boundary. In their case, however, they had to leave behind their homes in order to rejoin what many considered to be their nation of origin.

The Mexican legislature appointed three commissioners, one for each of the lost territories, to act as repatriation agents. The New Mexico commission was the anchor for the others because it was the most populous of the ceded regions. Father Ramón Ortiz, parish priest at [El Paso del Norte](#) (today's Ciudad Juárez) was the official representative for New Mexico. As outlined in the legislation, heads of household that emigrated to Mexico were to receive twenty-five pesos for each family member over the age of fourteen and twelve pesos for each minor. Such payments were intended to defray the costs of relocation.

Additionally, state governments, particularly along the newly established border, donated lands upon which the repatriates could settle. Governor Angel Trías of Chihuahua welcomed the opportunity to provide lands for the resettlement of nuevomexicanos in the northern part of his state. Like other northern governors, he believed that the increased population would guard against [filibusters](#) and the incursions of [indios bárbaros](#) alike. In January of 1849, he presented a plan to hasten repatriation efforts that the state legislature quickly approved. A land survey established a colony named Guadalupe on the south bank of the Rio Grande, to the south of El Paso del Norte.

FATHER RAMÓN ORTIZ

With the support of Governor Trías, Father Ortiz began his journey northward toward Santa Fe. Delayed by harsh winter snowstorms, Ortiz reached Santa Fe in March of 1849 to share information about the Mexican repatriation program and recruit potential emigrants. Despite the weather, Ortiz was quite optimistic. While he waited out the winter in his parish, he received twenty petitions for resettlement from nuevomexicanos living near El Paso del Norte. The unexpected success led him to estimate that between 2,000 and 4,000 families would relocate to Chihuahua.

Accompanied by associate Manuel Armendáriz, Ortiz met with territorial governor [John M. Washington](#) and



Washington served as territorial governor of New Mexico between October 1848 and October 1849. Among the most notable events of his tenure as governor were a campaign against the Navajo people in which respected headman [Narbona](#) was killed, and his opposition, along with Donaciano Vigil, to Father Ortiz's repatriation efforts. *Levin C. Handy (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 013116.*

repatriate. In his account of his work, Ortiz wrote that he had barely arrived in the town when its residents approached him to express their desire to relocate to Mexico. He recalled, "Although they knew they would lose all their property, notwithstanding the guarantees of the peace treaty, they preferred to lose all rather than belong to a government in which they had fewer guarantees and were treated with more disregard than the African race."[21](#)

territorial secretary (lieutenant governor) Donaciano Vigil when he reached Santa Fe. The territorial officials welcomed Ortiz and Armendáriz, promising to aid their efforts in whatever way possible, even offering transportation to facilitate the commissioners' travels in the territory. Municipal officials were less enthusiastic about Ortiz's presence, however, fearing that the offer of resettlement would intensify political and social conflicts that had abated since the [Taos Revolt](#), but that had not completely disappeared.

Only a couple of weeks after that initial meeting, Ortiz found that 900 of the approximately 1,000 families that resided at San Miguel del Vado, about 60 miles east of Santa Fe, wished to

“Ortiz found that 900 of the approximately 1,000 families that resided at San Miguel del Vado, about 60 miles east of Santa Fe, wished to repatriate.”

Energized by the encounter, Ortiz then traveled toward Taos. While at Pojoaque Pueblo, he received an order from Donaciano Vigil that he immediately abandon his registration campaign. Vigil claimed that Ortiz had created grave disturbances among the local population. Disheartened, the priest returned to Santa Fe where he learned that local authorities had also prohibited him from registering families for repatriation. Over the course of the next few days, Vigil vacillated. After a meeting with Ortiz he rescinded the order to cease and desist. Not long thereafter he once again demanded that the priest halt his activities. In the interim, Ortiz registered two hundred Santa Fe families for repatriation.

U.S. officials, including Vigil, at the territorial and municipal levels ultimately opposed the repatriation campaign because of its potential to depopulate the New Mexico territory and because they feared that it could further polarize its already divided inhabitants. At the time statehood seemed an attainable goal, but if the population diminished at all New Mexico would no longer meet the minimum requirements for joining the Union. According to Vigil’s final order, Ortiz could not register any other individuals or families until territorial officials obtained the signatures of those who wished to maintain their Mexican citizenship. By taking that step, Vigil tied the repatriation project to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo’s provision that residents of the ceded territories be allowed one year to declare their citizenship intentions. Despite the inclusion of such a provision in the treaty, no system for the declaration of citizenship existed because the territorial government repeatedly blocked the creation of such a mechanism.

Municipal officials employed the language of nationalism to discourage [nuevomexicano](#) emigration. In May 1849, the territory's official periodical, the *Santa Fe Republican*, cast Mexican authorities in a negative light with the assertion that the repatriation program was not in the potential repatriates' best interests. The editorial, written in Spanish, argued that meager funding was evidence that the Mexican government was not truly invested in the effort. In return for leaving behind all of their property and most of their possessions, the migrants would face the raids of nomadic peoples in the New Mexico-Chihuahua borderlands. Based on such information, the *Republican* admonished readers that the Mexican authorities "clearly do not wish you to return to the ranks of their family."²² Most *nuevomexicanos* recognized that they were to be relegated to second-class citizenship if they remained in their homes. The *Republican* and other repatriation opponents claimed that they would face the same fate if they relocated.

In reality, the Mexican government was never able to adequately fund the program or provide for the needs of the repatriates. Historians had long interpreted the Mexican government's efforts as benevolent and protective of its lost citizens. Based on archival research in little-consulted municipal archives throughout Chihuahua and New Mexico, historian José Angel Hernández has argued instead that the Mexican state was "an institution distantly attending to repatriation as if it were a colonial afterthought."²³ Despite the promise of subsidies, most who emigrated to Mexico did so voluntarily, on their own dime. This is not to say that the administrators involved were devoid of good intentions, but the divisions within Mexico following the U.S.-Mexico War meant that material support for repatriation was inadequate and rare.

Father Ortiz tenaciously worked to salvage the situation. Prohibited from registering potential repatriates in New Mexico, he returned to Chihuahua in an attempt to shore up resources. He hoped to secure from the state legislature and municipal governments funds, lands, seeds, tools, and materials to support resettlement, despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles. According to his best estimates, nearly 80,000 people were willing to relocate to Chihuahua.

Based on that number, at least \$1.6 million, 145,000 bushels of corn, and 39,000 bushels of beans were needed to support the repatriates as they worked to bring their own lands under cultivation.

In an effort to overcome the conflict with New Mexican authorities, Ortiz sent Manuel Armendáriz to Mexico City as his liaison. Armendáriz worked to persuade Mexican authorities to provide additional aid for repatriation, including diplomatic support in Washington, D.C. The Mexican ambassador to the United States attempted to intervene with the complaint that U.S. officials had mistreated Ortiz, an official emissary from Mexico. In response, U.S. officials claimed that they had no way of knowing if Ortiz acted in official capacity since no provision for repatriation was made in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. To address the conflict, the Mexican government appointed Armendáriz as [Consul](#) to New Mexico.

In the midst of such political wrangling, in late 1849 the Rio Grande shifted its course to a new channel. The event was no surprise to locals. The river typically changed course depending on seasonal snowpack and usage patterns. Indeed, the name used in Mexico and Latin America, Rio Bravo del Norte (Bravo meaning ferocious, bad-tempered, or stubborn), reflects this reality. The negotiations for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which had drawn the international boundary, occurred in central Mexico among officials without such local knowledge, and based on the inaccurate, although current, Disturnell map.

Based on the treaty, which used the Rio Grande as the border between the two nations, once the river shifted the Chihuahua towns of Socorro, Isleta, and San Elizario were technically on the American side of the boundary. American military forces hastily occupied the towns. Residents decided to leave their homes for the recently established civil colony of Guadalupe rather than run the risk of another armed conflict. Once in Guadalupe, they petitioned for aid under the auspices of the repatriation legislation of 1848. Little by little, resources in Chihuahua were made available for them.

“Due to the caprice of nature, its residents found themselves in the United States despite their allegiance to Mexico.”

The town of Doña Ana was also impacted by the shifting river. Due to the caprice of nature, its residents found themselves in the United States despite their allegiance to Mexico. Following General Kearny’s occupation of New Mexico in 1846, Colonel Alexander Doniphan led troops southward to pacify residents of New Mexico beyond the northern Rio Grande corridor. As a result, Doña Ana’s people felt the pressure of colonization for nearly three years before the river shifted channels. The alteration in natural geography provided them the needed catalyst to action.

In early 1850, in part due to the movement of the river and in part due to the occupation of Doña Ana by Doniphan’s troops, those who wished to retain Mexican citizenship—about 60 families led by Rafael Ruelas—relocated voluntarily to a site that was later recognized as the civil colony of La Mesilla. Their numbers gradually increased due to migrations of families from other areas in New Mexico. Scholars have argued that the claim of 2,000 residents by the end of 1850 was likely exaggerated, yet the civil colony of La Mesilla grew quickly under the oversight of Father Ortiz. The reason for the argument against that figure is one American observer’s report that La Mesilla was home to between 600 and 700 people as of March 1851. At about that time, a binational border commission passed through La Mesilla.

River Changes Course



Boundary surveyors from both nations met in El Paso del Norte in 1850 and learned that the border drawn by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, based on the Disturnell map, did not correspond to physical geography. Accordingly, these representatives of international diplomacy were required to make compromises based on what they found on the ground. On the American side, [John Russell Bartlett](#) and [William Emory](#) helped to negotiate the new boundary and [Pedro García Conde](#) represented Mexican interests. Because the Disturnell map suggested that El Paso del Norte was located near the actual location of present-day Roswell, New Mexico, the binational commission was forced to draw the international border as its members moved from El Paso del Norte toward the west.

The border commission's eventual agreement seemed in many ways to favor Mexico. It is no surprise, then, that the negotiations were never approved by the U.S. Congress. Subsequent disputes, such as that over the [Chamizal district in El Paso](#), also underscore the contentious nature of the agreements. Disagreement characterized relations between inhabitants of the new civil colonies as well. Most of the first residents of Guadalupe, for example, came

from the towns of Socorro, Isleta, and San Elizario. Because they had relocated when the river first changed course, they occupied the best lands for their own use. By April of 1850, however, about six hundred families from various sites in New Mexico had joined them. The newcomers felt slighted because they were unable to gain access to lands and resources already claimed by the earlier settlers.

Abundant harvests in 1851 and 1852 helped to alleviate the tension in Guadalupe, but deeper concerns plagued the civil colony of La Mesilla. Upon learning that the border commission had officially placed the colony in Chihuahua, its residents held a fiesta in the town square. Despite Father Ortiz's best efforts to organize the migrants from places including Albuquerque, Belen, Tomé, and Socorro, and even with the creation of a new colony—Santo Tomás de Yturbide—on the southern end of La Mesilla, local resources were not enough to support the settlements. The impulse for repatriation was much stronger than Mexican legislators ever hoped. Accordingly, insufficient resources for the large numbers of migrants characterized the early period of repatriation after the U.S.-Mexico War.



Map of Gadsden Purchase In 1853, U.S. Ambassador James Gadsden purchased the 29,670 square mile area known as the Mesilla Strip from the Santa Anna administration for \$10 million. The treaty, known as the Treaty of La Mesilla, also rescinded Article XI of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which had required U.S. officials to prevent native peoples' incursions into Mexico.

When [James Gadsden](#) finalized the [Treaty of La Mesilla](#) in 1853, La Mesilla was declared legally and officially within the territorial limits of the United States. Although Gadsden had hoped to acquire far more territory, including, perhaps, Chihuahua, Sonora, Nuevo León, and Coahuila, the treaty limited the newest territorial gain to a 29,670 square mile parcel, known as the La Mesilla strip. As fate had it, none other than Antonio López de Santa Ana was the Mexican president who negotiated the purchase. To this day, he is vilified as the person that twice lost large swaths of Mexican territory. Indeed, the inhabitants of La Mesilla have been called “los vendidos de Santa Ana” (those who Santa Ana sold out).

Although we might think that *mesilleros* would have been determined to

reassert their Mexican citizenship in 1853, such was not the case. The territorial governor of New Mexico, James S. Calhoun, tried to force claims to La Mesilla and other areas held by Chihuahua in early 1851 when he rejected the boundary commission's settlement. Eventually, those that had migrated to La Mesilla were willing to recognize the New Mexico, and by extension United States', claim when the Mexican government proved unable and unwilling to make good on the promises of the 1849 repatriation legislation. They realized that they were considered pawns in both nations' territorial ambitions, and, by 1853, they decided to throw in their lot with the United States.

As historian José Angel Hernández has suggested, "Repatriation, therefore, became a vehicle that trapped Nuevo Mexicanos within seesawing efforts to populate national peripheries."²⁴ Such was the reality for "los vendidos de Santa Anna." In 1853 they resigned to see what their place in the United States might be—despite earlier warnings that they would be afforded as few rights as slaves in the American South. The Mexican government's failings, both at the national level and at the state level (Ortiz began to work through the auspices of the Chihuahua government after New Mexico territorial officials denied him access to local populations), meant that nuevomexicanos who wished to assert their Mexican citizenship had to do so without any outside support whatsoever. Despite the promise of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, they sacrificed their own properties and resources to assert Mexican citizenship—if they chose to do so.



Native Lands Ceded to U.S. by Mexico This map shows the homelands claimed by various groups of indigenous peoples in the territory transferred from Mexico to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.

The case of Pueblo peoples and nomadic indigenous groups, such as Apaches, Navajos, Utes, and Comanches, was even less fortunate. The citizenship rights afforded them by the Mexican Republic disappeared under U.S. jurisdiction. Greed and desire for resources ostensibly unutilized by indigenous peoples provided a justification for the continuance of [Manifest Destiny](#) even after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had been signed and solemnized. Such was the basis for the period of “Indian Wars” that characterized much of New Mexico’s early territorial period, to which we will turn in the next chapter.

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Chapter 9: Territorial New Mexico

Territorial New Mexico

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The Navajo Long Walk

New Mexico as "Wild West"

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Territorial New Mexico



In 1859, the territorial legislature enacted a harsh slave code. One of the leading Republicans in the U.S. Congress, Representative John A. Bingham of Ohio, characterized the legislation as a statute that would have made even Caligula blush.¹ On its face, the slave code presents a seeming

How Long Did New Mexico's Slave Code Last?

The [1859 New Mexico slave code](#) was perceived in the territory as

historical paradox. Between 1848 and 1850, New Mexico's bid for statehood set it up to become a free state. Sectional strife, however, led instead to the narrow passage of the [Compromise of 1850](#)—a measure that preserved the Union for what proved to be a fleeting moment and that denied New Mexico's elevation to statehood.

New Mexico did not have a large population of black slaves. Very few American newcomers sought to expand the “peculiar institution” into the territory's desert landscapes because they could not sustain plantation agriculture. The slave code was the product of political wrangling in Washington D.C. between [Miguel A. Otero, Sr.](#), the territorial delegate to Congress, and Southern legislators. Recognizing the political significance of statehood, several Democratic Congressmen, including Representative Ruben Davis of Mississippi, approached Otero with the promise of their support in exchange for the creation of a slave code in New Mexico.

Otero was himself a Democrat, as were several key territorial leaders appointed during the administration of [James Buchanan](#). Governor [Abraham Rencher](#), territorial secretary Alexander M. Jackson, U.S. marshal Charles P. Clever, and editor James L. Collins of the *Santa Fe Gazette* were among them. Although

nothing more than a political concession made to Southern legislators in exchange for their support for statehood. The slave code only remained on the books for only two years.

36TH CONGRESS, } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. { REPORT
1st Session. } { No. 598.

SLAVERY IN THE TERRITORY OF NEW MEXICO.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 64.]

MAY 10, 1860.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. BINGHAM, from the Committee on the Judiciary, made the following

REPORT.

The Judiciary Committee, having had under consideration the bill referred to them entitled “A bill to repeal all acts of the legislature of New Mexico authorizing slavery or involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime,” report the same back to the House of Representatives, with an amendment that the same do pass, and that it be put upon its passage; that the committee further report that for the organization of said Territory of New Mexico by the act of September 9, 1850, (U. S. Statutes at Large, vol. 9, p. 443, sec. 7.) it is provided that “all the laws passed by the legislative assembly and governor shall be submitted to the Congress of the United States, and if disapproved shall be null and void.”

The territorial statutes referred to in the bill, and certain sections whereof are disapproved thereby and declared null and void, are as follows: “An act amendatory of the law relative to contracts between masters and servants,” approved by the territorial legislature of New Mexico January 26, 1850.

SECTION 1. When any servant shall run away from the service of his master he shall be considered as a fugitive from justice, and in such case it shall be the duty of all officers of the Territory, judicial or ministerial, on being informed that such persons are within the limits of their jurisdiction, to ascertain whether such persons are runaway servants or not, and if they ascertain that they are, said officers shall immediately arrest them and put them to work at public labor, or hire them out to any person so that they may be employed, with security, until their master shall be informed thereof, in order that they may demand them, and to whom they shall immediately be delivered.

SEC. 2. Every person of this Territory, either a contracted servant according to the law of contracts, or engaged on trips or as shepherds, shall be compelled to serve for the time stipulated for in the contract; and any servant so contracted who shall fail to serve by abandoning his master or property placed under his care, shall be held responsible

Courtesy of House Documents, Volumes 132-133, United States House of Representatives, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1860

Republicans used their knowledge of conversations between Otero and Democratic legislators in Washington to argue that the slave code was not favored by the people of the territory and instead the product of backroom deals, Otero consistently denied such charges. He repeated the well-worn justification that the slave code “will tend to elevate our own class of free laborers.”² His words echoed similar arguments made throughout the South in an effort to cast slavery as beneficial both socially and economically.

New Mexico’s socioeconomic system was quite a bit more complex than the dichotomy between Northern free labor and Southern slave labor that typically defined national political discourse. Many poor nuevomexicanos and Pueblos were subject to peonage, or forced labor required to pay off debts. Large landholders, predominantly the rico class prior to 1848, provided items necessary to agricultural production, like seeds, tools, and livestock, that their impoverished countrymen and women could not afford. Typically, peons were rarely able to repay their debts fully and they labored on the lands of their patrón indefinitely.

“Peones were rarely able to repay their debts fully and they labored on the lands of their patrón indefinitely.”

As New Mexico was drawn into the national conflict over slavery, many in the Eastern United States conflated the idea of peonage with [chattel slavery](#). From the perspective of Washington, D.C., the bid for statehood in the early territorial period became inextricably tied to the sectional strife that devolved into Civil War in 1861. Back in New Mexico, debate over the slave code was far more contentious and complex. The bill itself, solemnized in the territorial legislature in February 1859, was titled, “An Act for the Protection of Property

in Slaves in this Territory.” Prominent territorial policy makers, including Donaciano Vigil (San Miguel County), Juan José Sánchez (Valencia County), and Albino Chacón (Taos County) supported the measure’s passage. They also separated its provisions from legislation dealing with escaped peon servants in the territory. The law only applied to black slaves brought to New Mexico from outside the territory. It specifically excluded indigenous slaves, still a major component of New Mexican society, although a later iteration of the law added a provision “for the protection of Indian property.”³

Despite the seemingly high level of support for the measure among New Mexico’s powerbrokers, a large section of the local population opposed the law. Led in the territorial legislature by Samuel B. Watrous (Mora County) and Speaker of the House Levi J. Keithly (San Miguel County), opponents of the measure attempted to repeal the law in December 1859. Repeal supporters viewed the slave code as the attempt of outside interests to impose their will on New Mexico. As one supporter of repeal noted, “The subject was never discussed, nor even mooted before the people, but was got up near the close of the session and hurried through, when the country did not dream of anything of the kind.”⁴

New Mexico territory became a major component of debates over slavery that raged in the U.S. Congress in early 1860. Anti-slavery Republicans introduced a measure to strike down the slave code. Due to New Mexico’s territorial status, Congress retained veto power over legislation crafted in Santa Fe. In the end, attempts to quash the law at both the national and territorial levels failed. Following the outbreak of Civil War with the conflict over Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, in April 1861, New Mexico’s territorial legislature overwhelmingly affirmed the territory’s loyalty to the Union. To illustrate their resolve, representatives in both chambers almost unanimously voted to repeal the slave code in December 1861.

The New Mexico slave code remained on the books for a short two years, and its passage did not create a new influx of African American slaves to the territory. Its story, however, highlights three major trends in the territorial history of

New Mexico. First, the territory was much more tightly connected to the struggle between North and South than typically assumed. Second, the struggle for statehood depended on many distinct factors, foremost among them the whims of the U.S. Congress. Negative racial perceptions toward New Mexico's people and (unfounded) misgivings about their ability to participate effectively in representative government were among the others. Finally, the creation and dissolution of the slave code illustrates the types of ethnic tensions that ran hot in the territory.

During the early territorial period, New Mexico was the site of intense battles between Union and Confederate forces. Union forces effectively repelled Confederate troops from the territory in the 1862 Battle of Glorieta Pass, and [James H. Carleton](#), military commander of the department of New Mexico, turned his attention toward Native Americans. His desire to relocate Mescalero Apaches and Navajos to the doomed [Bosque Redondo](#) reservation was translated into horrific reality through the efforts of [Christopher "Kit" Carson](#). The [Treaty of 1868](#) ended the failed "Reconstruction experiment" at Bosque Redondo and returned the Navajo people to their homeland. Political corruption and lawlessness, evidenced in the Colfax and Lincoln County Wars a decade later, perpetuated the idea that New Mexico remained ill-prepared for statehood. From the perspective of Washington, D.C., the territory still lacked modernization and Americanization.



In 1862, Carleton arrived at the head of the California Column to take control of the military department of New Mexico. During a skirmish with his troops, [Mangas Coloradas](#) was gravely wounded.

Courtesy of Matt R. Baker

Civil War in New Mexico

Beginning with the arrival of the [Army of the West](#) in 1846, a large military force became a permanent fixture in the territory. At first, the strong military presence was to secure New Mexico as U.S. territory. Between 1848 and 1853 troops remained to guarantee the promise made in Article XI of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) that the U.S. military would prevent nomadic peoples from making incursions into Mexico. U.S. military leaders quickly realized, however, Article XI was virtually impossible to enforce. In the negotiations over the [Treaty of La Mesilla](#) in 1853, [James Gadsden](#) also achieved the annulment of Article XI along with the addition of the Mesilla strip to the United States.

As soon as the Army of the West arrived in New Mexico, Kearny guaranteed nuevomexicanos and Pueblos safety against Navajo, Apache, Ute, and Comanche raids. After 1853, the federal army erected forts and attempted to make good on the promise. Over the next several years, various military commanders and federal Indian Agents came and went. At times the same man filled both posts; at others the offices were separated. Governor [John M. Washington](#), for example, served as both Indian Agent and Military Governor in 1848 and 1849. His first priority was to wage war against the Navajo people in an attempt to settle long-standing conflicts between the [Diné](#) and nuevomexicanos.

Washington's campaign only served to erode dealings between Navajos and American leaders. Following one skirmish in 1849, six Navajos were killed during an attempt to negotiate peace. One was the esteemed headman [Narbona](#) who was scalped by a U.S. militiaman. Washington's successors followed their own distinct policies toward the territory's indigenous peoples. Some, like

Major [John Munroe](#) and Lieutenant Colonel [Edwin Vose Sumner](#), considered the barren New Mexico territory to be a waste of American military effort and resources. Others, like Indian Agents James S. Calhoun and [Michael Steck](#), recognized the diversity of peoples and interests in the territory and they forged positive relationships with several bands of Navajos and Apaches.

The lack of a stable and coherent “Indian Policy” at the federal level, however, stoked cultural misunderstandings and conflict. Although several bands of Chiricahua Apaches under the leadership of [Mangas Coloradas](#) struck friendly relations with Kearny in 1846, relations quickly eroded. In January 1852, U.S. forces established Fort Webster near the Santa Rita del Cobre mine (near present-day Silver City). Chiricahua warriors saw the new fort as an unsolicited and unwarranted infiltration of their homelands. Despite attempts to solve the conflict through diplomacy, a state of war existed between several Chiricahua headmen and U.S. forces throughout the early 1850s.

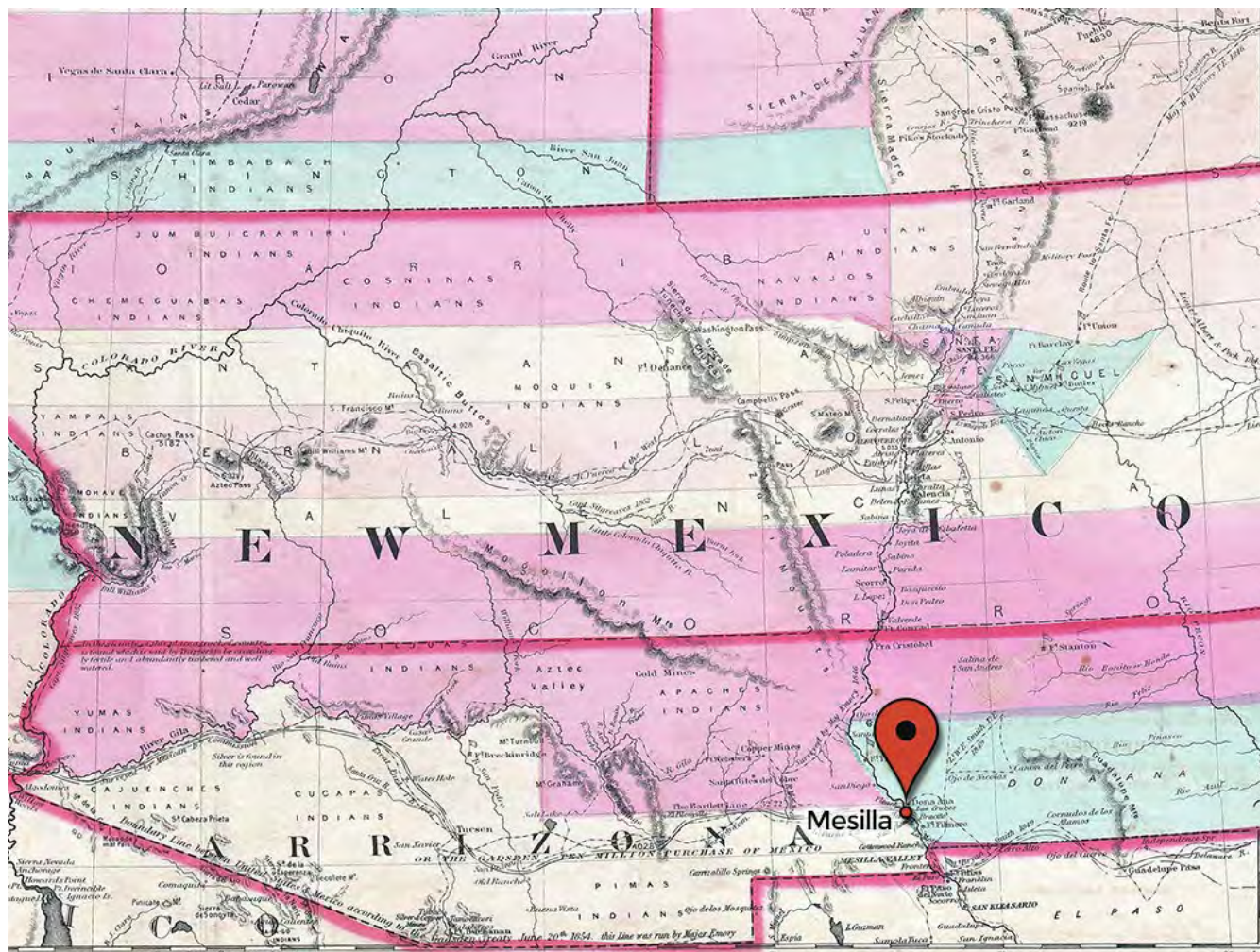
In the years immediately following the resolution of the U.S.-Mexico War, new forts sprang up throughout the territory. These included Fort Union on the lands of the Llaneros band of the Jicarilla Apache people, Fort Conrad to the south of Socorro, Fort Fillmore near Mesilla, Fort Stanton among the Mescaleros, and Fort Defiance in the Navajo heartland. The forts suggested Americans’ readiness to use violent force against nomadic peoples, and at times the threat of violence worked at counter purposes to Indian Agents’ overtures. Nearly 4,000 soldiers manned New Mexico’s military outposts by the close of the 1850s.

Portraits of Interest

When shots rang out at Fort Sumter in 1861 just over half of the soldiers stationed in the territory left to declare their loyalty to the Confederate cause. Fewer than 2,000 men, under the command of Colonel [Edward Richard Sprigg Canby](#), remained to defend New Mexico in the name of the Union. Fearing a Confederate invasion through the southern part of the territory, Canby directed the bulk of his men and resources to Forts Fillmore, Craig (which replaced Fort Conrad in 1854), and Stanton. Leaders from both sides of the conflict argued

that the majority of New Mexicans supported their side. Under the direction of Colonel [Henry Hopkins Sibley](#), Lieutenant Colonel John R. Baylor marched into the Mesilla Valley with 350 men in the fall of 1861. During Confederate control of the area, Mesilla was declared capital of a new territory called Arizona.

During a brief skirmish with Baylor's troops, Union Major [Isaac Lynde](#) abandoned Fort Fillmore and marched northward. Mesilleros certainly were not happy that yet another invading force had occupied their town. Despite Sibley's hopes to capitalize on disaffection with American control of Mesilla, his actions reaffirmed locals' fears that his was just another occupying force. In December 1861, he declared martial law, ostensibly to deter "desperadoes, gamblers, &c" that "incited innocent citizens of the valley to rebel against the proper authorities." [sic]⁵ His justification, however, suggests that mesilleros considered the Confederate troops as invaders, rather than liberators as Sibley liked to imagine.



Mesilla This map shows the location of La Mesilla and the proposed creation of Arizona Territory along an east-west dividing line during the first years of the Civil War.

Produced by Trillium Productions, LLC. Keith Dadley, Graphic Artist & Arizona Historical Society/Tucson, G4300 1863.J6.

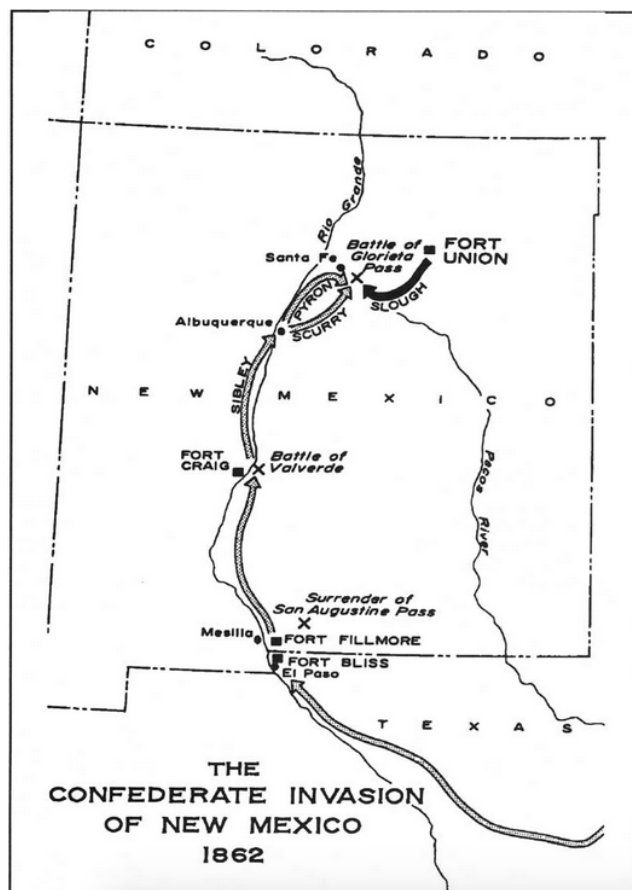
The Confederate leadership in southern New Mexico prohibited the enlistment of Mexican-heritage people except to fight against Apaches. Similarly, Colonel Canby declared that nuevomexicanos not join Union ranks because they carried “no affections for institutions of the United States.”⁶ Yet, following the shock of Baylor’s victory in Mesilla, pragmatism pushed Canby to encourage nuevomexicanos to join his forces. Despite the need, convincing nuevomexicanos to sign up was easier said than done. Many of them, like the mesilleros, felt ambivalence toward U.S. citizenship.

Governor [Henry Connelly](#), a Lincoln appointee, stepped in to help by reframing the conflict in regional terms. Rather than speak of patriotism or the chasm between North and South, he instead cast the struggle as one between Texans

and nuevomexicanos. Due to earlier events like the 1841 [Texan-Santa Fe Expedition](#), nuevomexicanos held deep animosities toward Texans. As Connelly recognized, many nuevomexicanos had associated the concept of American identity with the hated image of the Texan. As historian Anthony Mora has demonstrated, “Texan identity often implied a racial meaning for Mexicans”—including nuevomexicanos.⁷ Although [nuevomexicano](#) enrollment was never as widespread as Canby had hoped, the revision of the conflict’s significance persuaded many to join his ranks.

Canby decided to concentrate his men at Fort Craig in an effort to hold off an anticipated Confederate advance northward toward Santa Fe. He was correct that Sibley was planning a new offensive. The Confederate general had served with the U.S. army in Taos prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Due to his time in the territory, Sibley was able to convince Confederate President Jefferson Davis of the value of a New Mexico campaign. The Confederacy desperately hoped for a transcontinental rail connection to the Pacific to counter the rail supremacy of the North. Additionally, California offered the promise of gold and a silver lode had recently been unearthed in Colorado. New Mexico promised to be the ticket to all of that potential wealth.

As fate had it, however, such was not to be. In part, Sibley was not the man for the job (his own men considered him to be pretentious and overly preoccupied with luxury), and the concerted effort of Union forces—with or without



Confederate Invasion of New Mexico, 1862
Map illustrating the Confederate advance into New Mexico in 1861 and 1862, including major battles.
Courtesy of Robert M. Utley

nuevomexicano support—proved too much for his attempt to conquer New Mexico. Still, at first Sibley’s forces seemed to have the upper hand. At the [Battle of Valverde](#) in February 1862 they battled Canby’s forces to a draw. Canby refused to surrender Fort Craig and, rather than press the issue, Sibley bypassed it and continued northward to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Both proved to be [easy targets](#) for the Confederate army.

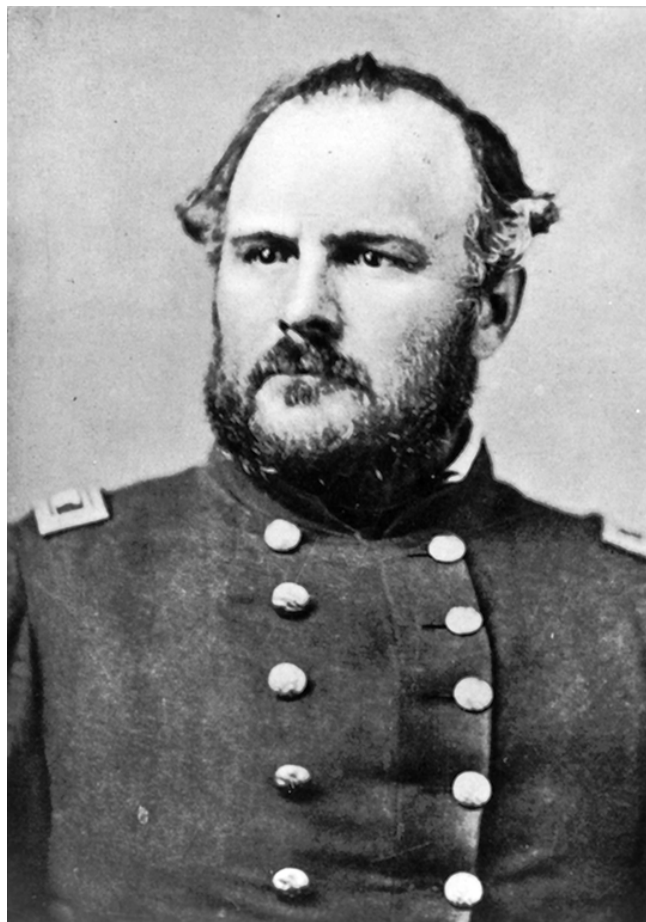


The Battle of Glorieta Pass has been referred to as the “Gettysburg of the West.” Colorado volunteers joined New Mexican Union troops at Glorieta to halt General Henry Hopkins Sibley’s Confederate advance in 1862. Painted by Roy Anderson.

Courtesy of Pecos National Historical Park

The situation for the Union seemed dire until reinforcements from Colorado arrived. Colonel [John P. Slough](#) led 1,300 Colorado Volunteers toward Santa Fe from Fort Union and engaged Sibley’s forces at the [Battle of Glorieta Pass](#), about twenty miles southeast of Santa Fe. The three-day battle is remembered as the “Gettysburg of the West.”⁸ Between March 26 and 28, 1862, about one-thousand Confederate soldiers under the command of Colonel [William R. Scurry](#) clashed in an intense and bloody conflict. At the end of the first day,

Slough's men retreated and Scurry believed that the Union offensive was over.



Commissioned by the U.S. Army as a major, Chivington played a key role in capturing Confederate supplies with the 1862 New Mexico Campaign. He also led the infamous Sand Creek Massacre in 1864.

Courtesy of The Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

Scurry, however, was unaware of the movements of four hundred Union forces under Major [John M. Chivington](#), a Methodist minister from Denver who later enacted the infamous [Sand Creek Massacre](#). With Lieutenant Major [Manuel Chávez](#) of the First New Mexico Volunteers as a guide, Chivington's party marched for five hours in an attempt to flank enemy forces. In the process, the group accidentally happened upon the Confederate supply train. Following a short skirmish, Chivington's men captured the provisions, which included eighty well-stocked wagons and nearly five-hundred horses. Due to the loss, Scurry retreated to Santa Fe and, having lost one-third of his troops and the bulk of his supplies, Sibley had no choice other than to abandon New Mexico. His men marched southward and returned to Texas.



“At the Sand Creek Massacre, 1874-1875” is a depiction of the Sand Creek Massacre by Cheyenne eyewitness and artist Howling Wolf.

Courtesy of Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College

Although Glorieta Pass marked the effective end of the Confederate invasion of New Mexico, Confederate troops remained in Mesilla until July 1862 when news of an impending Union attack spurred their retreat to Texas. On August 15, 1862, ten companies of the First California Infantry, under the command of General [James H. Carleton](#), arrived in the Mesilla Valley. Despite mesilleros' and other nuevomexicanos' general feeling of support for the Union, once again the California Infantry represented another occupying force. Over the next year, the troops sapped local resources at the expense of locals. In response, some mesilleros relocated south to towns in northern Chihuahua. Most, however, stuck it out.

1800s New Mexico: Battle of Glorieta & Territorial Events

Gain insight to Brig. Gen. Henry H. Sibley and the Mounted Volunteers, supporting artillery and supply units he established. See who proceeded Sibley and continued in the battle of Glorieta. Be sure to extend your knowledge of the territorial events of Military Forts and Arizona becoming a United States Territory.

- From Civil War Trust: “[The Battle of Glorieta: Union victory in the far west](#)“
- View a map of [Territorial Military Forts](#) from 1846-1924
- Arizona Becomes a United States Territory: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

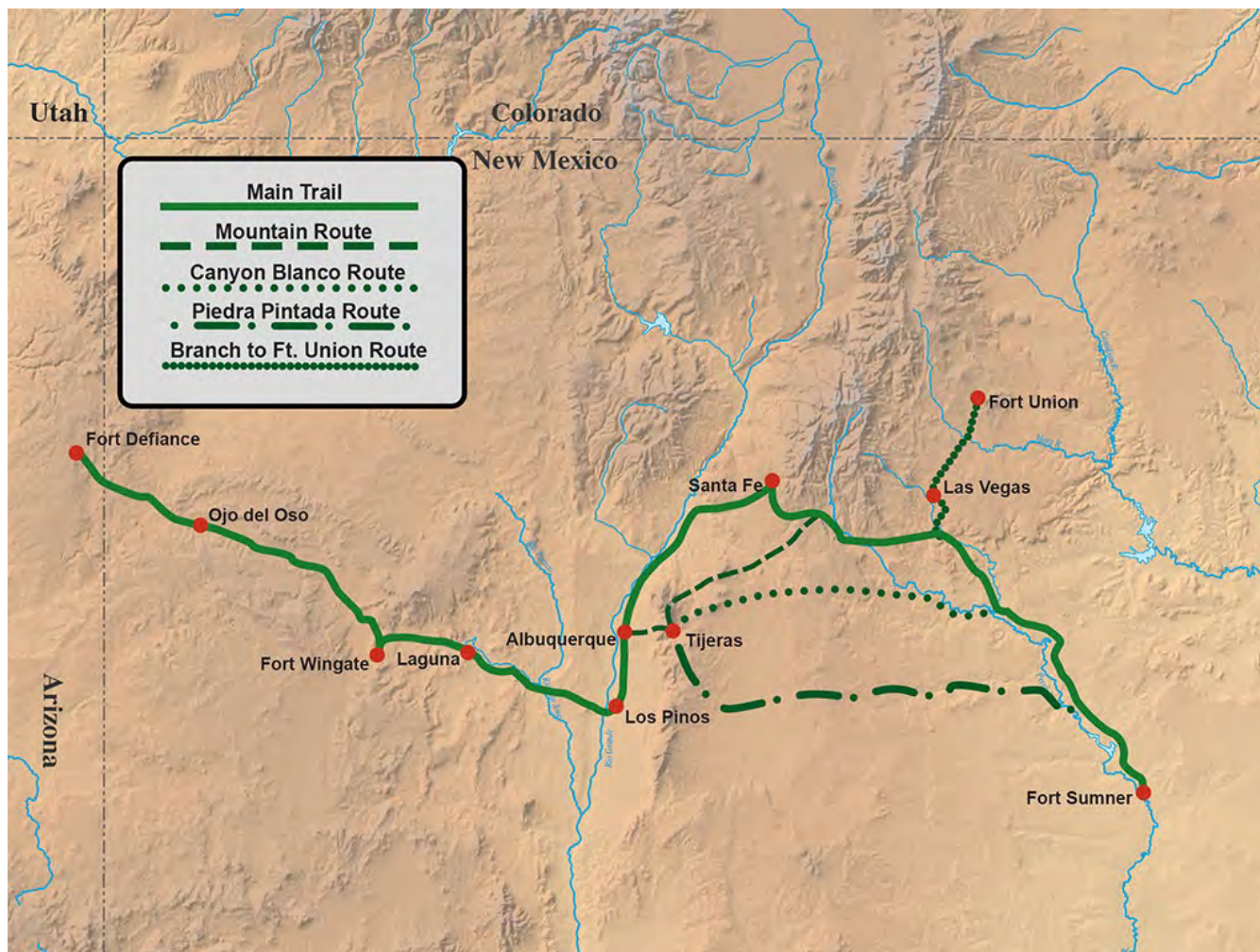
By the late 1862 the Confederate threat to New Mexico had ended. Union forces continued to maintain a strong presence in the territory in order to prevent another attempt to take it. Many nuevomexicanos, such as Manuel Chávez, distinguished themselves and asserted their loyalty to the United States through military service during the conflict. Despite their sacrifices, however, full citizenship rights in the Union were not their reward. New Mexico continued to be governed by presidential appointees from far outside the region and local nuevomexicanos struggled to maintain a voice in territorial policy making. In the northern part of the territory, hispanos resolved to further emphasize their American identities in an effort to gain a coveted place among the other states. People in southern New Mexican towns like Mesilla, however, harbored stronger resentment and emphasized ties across the border to Mexico.

The Navajo Long Walk

“This is why, this is why we are here,” Luci Tapahonso’s aunt told her. “Because our grandparents prayed and grieved for us.”⁹ As is the case for most, if not all Navajo people today, the Long Walk and the subsequent [Treaty of 1868](#) remain a present fixture of their tribal, and personal, identity—despite the fact that nearly 150 years have passed.

Tapahonso wrote poems based on the stories told her by family members in an effort to preserve the horrors that her people faced in 1864 as they were forced to take the Long Walk from their homeland, the [Dinétah](#), to the inhospitable [Bosque Redondo](#) on the Pecos River in east-central New Mexico. Between 1864, when over 8,500 Navajos arrived at Hwéeldi (their place of suffering), and 1868, when they were allowed to return home, about 2,500 of them died or were killed.

The Long Walk was the Navajo Trail of Tears—a tragic episode that illustrates the violence and cruelty of the U.S. conquest of the American West. The Treaty of 1868 was something of an anomaly in the history of relations between the U.S. government and Native American peoples. Unlike most other cases, the treaty guaranteed that the majority of the [Diné](#) homelands would remain under the purview of the tribe. Accordingly, Navajos still consider the Treaty of 1868 a moment of victory. Historian Peter Iverson has characterized the Long Walk as a “story of tears and triumph.”¹⁰



The Long Walk This map illustrates the various routes taken at various times during the Navajo Long Walk, between the fall of 1863 and late 1866.

To understand this bleak portion of Navajo history, we must also examine the actions of those who worked to ensure that New Mexico become part of the United States, not only in terms of territory but also in terms of culture—something that U.S emissaries could never quite attain, no matter how hard they tried. Once the threat of a Confederate invasion had faded into the background, the military commander of the New Mexico department, General [James H. Carleton](#), turned his attention toward dealings with Native Americans. Carleton arrived in the territory as the Brigadier General of the California Volunteers. He led the California Column, and in August of 1862 Carleton replaced Colonel Canby as commander of the district.

A career military man, Carleton wanted to see action in the fight against the Confederacy. His first commission had come at the age of twenty-five as a Lieutenant in the Maine Militia in 1838. In the early 1840s, he served at Fort

Leavenworth and he accompanied [Stephen Watts Kearny](#)'s expedition to South Pass in 1845. During the U.S.-Mexico War, he fought in the battle of Buena Vista. Carleton was highly principled and rigid in his outlook on military procedure and protocol. Yet his tenure in New Mexico meant that he would not see action in any of the major battles of the Civil War.

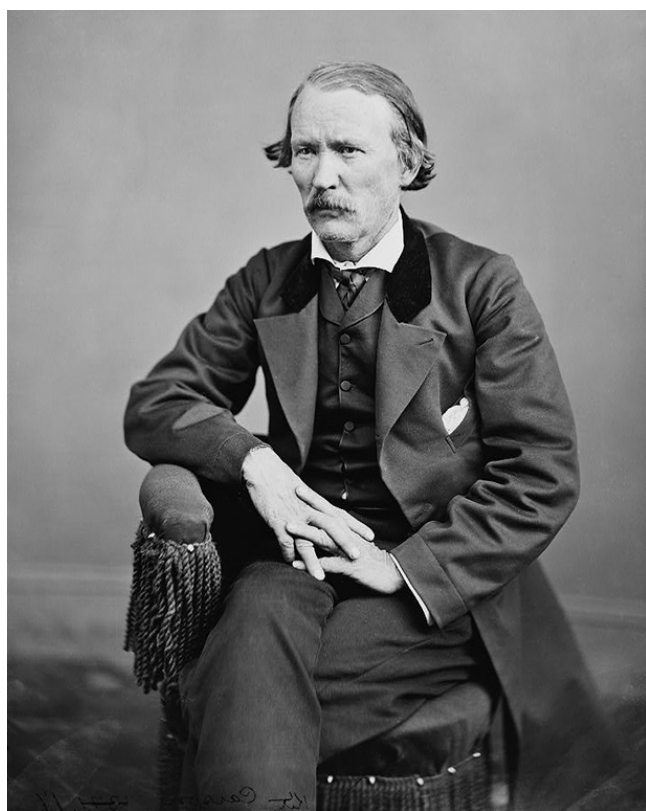
Disappointed, Carleton poured all of his energy into alleviating what he and other U.S. military officers considered to be New Mexico's "Indian problem." According to journalist and historian Hampton Sides, he presided "over New Mexico virtually as a dictator" during his four years as military commander.¹¹ Although he never took the title of military governor, Carleton instituted martial law throughout the territory and required residents to carry passports in an effort to locate Confederate sympathizers. Despite such efforts, his attempt to rid New Mexico of Confederates bore little, if any, fruit.

Concept of Presentism

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



Carleton left his mark on New Mexico in the form of his attitude toward and treatment of Native Americans, particularly the Mescalero Apaches and the Navajos. Longstanding interactions between nuevomexicanos, Navajos, and Apaches were quite complex, including periods of peace punctuated by bursts of violence. Carleton, and many of the officers under his command, refused to understand the sophisticated relationship of indigenous people to the territory. Indeed, he “had little respect for Indians and viewed them as the main obstacle to stability in New Mexico.”¹² Like so many other Americans of his time, Carleton was a proponent of [Manifest Destiny](#). From his perspective, all indigenous peoples were “savages,” little more than hurdles to be overcome.



During his lifetime, Christopher “Kit” Carson gained national renown for his efforts as a guide, trapper, and explorer in the North American West. Carson was a prominent U.S. trapper who married Josefa Jaramillo of Taos. During the U.S.-Mexico War, he served as guide to General Kearny as he advanced from New Mexico to California. Despite personal misgivings, Carson led the scorched earth campaign against the Navajo people in 1863 that forced them on the Long Walk to the Bosque Redondo.

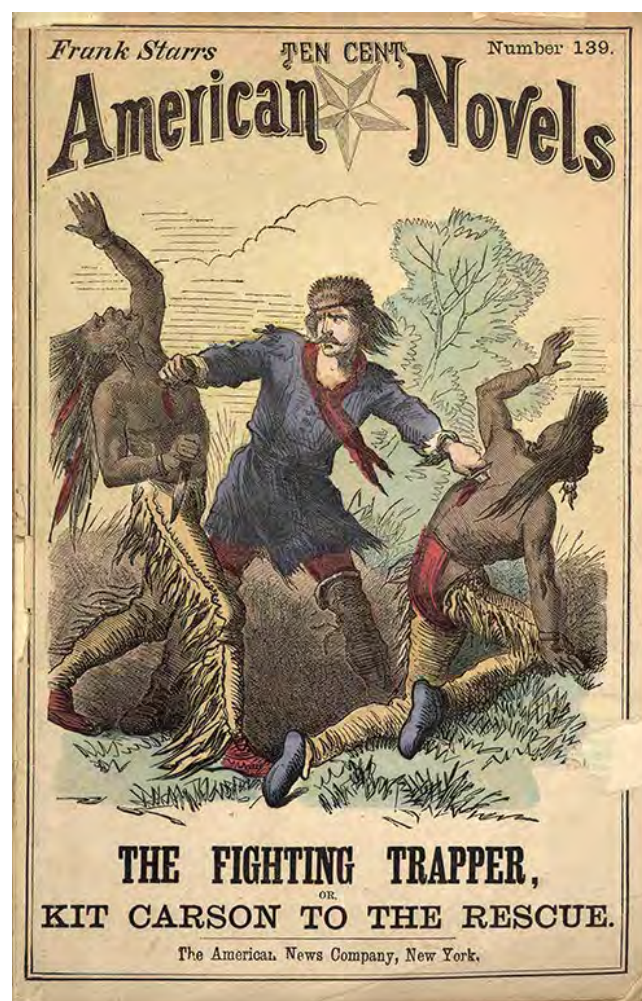
Courtesy of Library of Congress

[Christopher “Kit” Carson](#), on the other hand, understood well the complexities of social relations in New Mexico and the larger American West. Despite his legendary status, his life was in many ways typical of Americans who migrated to New Mexico between the early 1820s and the 1840s. At the age of fourteen, after an unfulfilling stint as a saddle apprentice in Old Franklin, Missouri, Carson struck out for new fortunes in the West. The year was 1826. David Workman, his master saddle maker, offered one penny for his return in the October 6 edition of the *Missouri Intelligencer*. Offering a reward for escaped apprentices was common practice at the time, but the low value placed on Carson’s return suggests that Workman supported his decision to strike out on his own.

Over the next several years, as Carson

came of age, he worked as a trapper in Taos, served as a Spanish interpreter in Chihuahua, learned the mining trade at Santa Rita, and then returned to beaver trapping in Arizona, California, and New Mexico. Contrary to what has become popular belief, he never vindictively targeted Native Americans. Instead, he was a product of his time and place. As historian Barton H. Barbour has shown, “If Carson once symbolized the positive aspects of America’s ‘great westward movement,’ he now epitomizes its negative aspects: the theft of Native Americans’ lands and usurpation of their sovereignty, the immoral American takeover of New Mexico, and so on.”¹³

Barton makes his case by invoking the concept of presentism. During Carson’s own lifetime, his role in expanding U.S. territory was applauded. Now, however, we have recognized the ways that the American conquest of North America destroyed native peoples and cultures. Although some today cast Carson as a “genocidal Indian Killer,” his relationships with Native Americans were far more nuanced.¹⁴ Like all peoples of the Mexican North (the American West after 1848), he understood that indigenous peoples harbored their own conflicts, took captives from other tribes, and either fought against or accommodated to the presence of people of European descent. Within that context, certain Native American bands were enemies, others were friends, and still others were neither. For [Anglo](#) Americans in the Mexican



This image graced the cover of a dime novel written by Edward S. Ellis about the adventures of Mountain Man Kit Carson. Although this particular dime novel was published in 1874, after Carson’s death, writings that romanticized and embellished Carson’s actions as a hunter, trapper, and soldier appeared during his lifetime. Myths about his

north, connections could be forged with hispanos while simultaneously maintaining a sense of American identity. Such was the milieu of Kit Carson.



Josefa Jaramillo was fourteen years old when she married Kit Carson in the spring of 1843. Carson converted to Catholicism in order to appease her father's misgivings about the marriage. Josefa died while giving birth to the couple's eighth child in early 1868.

Courtesy of SeeSpont Run

with indigenous cultures, he felt a deep-seated sense of duty to his superiors. Despite his verbal knowledge of English, Spanish, and several indigenous

activities developed while he was still alive, something that Carson himself found troubling and puzzling.

Courtesy of Meeting of Frontiers and Library of Congress

Indeed, over the course of his life Carson was married to two Native American women and one nuevamexicana, a woman from a prominent Taos family named [Josefa Jaramillo](#). Their union produced eight children. Carson also served as U.S. Indian Agent for northern New Mexico between 1854 and 1861 when he joined the New Mexico Volunteers. Due to his extensive interactions with various indigenous peoples, he was better prepared for the post than most who were appointed to serve as Indian Agents. He took issue with Carleton's characterization of all indigenous peoples as "savages." Contrary to Carleton's 1862 "shoot to kill policy" aimed at forcing Mescalero relocation to Bosque Redondo, Carson believed that the Apaches would instead make great allies of the Union in their battle against the Confederacy.

Still, Carson was a man of profound contradictions. Despite his experience

languages, Kit Carson was illiterate. Additionally, he realized that he owed his national renown (he was the subject of popular dime novels during his own lifetime) to his association with [John C. Frémont](#). Therefore, in 1862 when General Carleton called him up at the age of fifty-two to carry out a campaign against the Mescalero people, he could not say no.

By contrast, Navajo people understood their relationship to the United States in very different terms. Following the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), all of New Mexico transferred to U.S. jurisdiction, including the lands of the Navajos, Utes, Apaches, and Comanches. Yet no indigenous leaders attended the treaty negotiations or had any voice in the proceedings that ended the war. U.S. officials initiated a “process of dispossession” in New Mexico as soon as they occupied the territory in 1846.¹⁵ From the Navajo perspective, General Kearny’s promise to nuevomexicanos and Pueblos that the U.S. government would protect them from hostile nomads was akin to a declaration of war.

Kearny believed that a series of treaties could end long-standing conflict between Navajos and residents of the Rio Grande corridor. As was also the case with Mescalero and Chiricahua Apache bands, however, treaties actually compounded violence and resentment. Several factors contributed to that outcome. U.S. officials often assumed that when they made a treaty with one headman or band that they had made an agreement with the entirety of the tribe. Such was not the case. Additionally, many treaties were the result of duress. Military skirmishes such as the one that left chief [Narbona](#) dead in the fall of 1849 left Navajos no other choice than to sign proposed treaties.

The U.S. Senate ratified the treaty borne of that conflict, which allowed the U.S. government to establish military outposts on Navajo land, on September 9, 1850. Yet such an outcome was not typical. More often than not Congress refused to ratify documents that represented painstaking compromises between indigenous peoples and U.S. agents in the field. Following the murder of respected elder Narbona, his son-in-law [Manuelito](#) harbored anger and animosity toward the U.S. government. Along with [Barboncito](#), he led efforts to remove Fort Defiance from Diné lands, after General William Thomas

Harbaugh Brooks was appointed commander of the outpost in 1857 and following the failure of the Senate to ratify several proposed treaties. Brooks believed that the Navajos were too headstrong and that they “can only be prosperous when a strong arm, and one that they dread, is over them and ready to strike at any time.”¹⁶

In the early morning hours of April 30, 1860, one thousand Navajos followed Manuelito and Barboncito in a daring attack on Fort Defiance. Only the superior weaponry of the Third Infantry prevented the Navajos from taking control of the fort. Colonel Canby sought to force the removal of the Navajos from their homeland as punishment, but the Confederate threat forced him to turn his attention elsewhere. Instead, he signed a treaty with Barboncito, Manuelito, [Armijo](#), and [Ganado Mucho](#) that defined an eastern boundary intended to prevent Navajo raids on New Mexican settlements. Once again, the Senate failed to ratify the pact. This repeating pattern of broken promises and misunderstandings perpetuated violence between the U.S. military and New Mexico’s independent indigenous peoples.

Native American Leaders

In the late 1850s, the practice of forcing Native Americans onto reservations gained traction at the national level. Carleton and other architects of U.S. Indian policy in the West conceived of reservations as places of protection and refuge for indigenous peoples. He envisioned the Bosque Redondo Reservation as a place where Mescaleros and Navajos would become literate in English, convert to Protestant Christianity, and develop a peaceful temperament. There, “the old Indians will die off and carry with them the latent longings for murder and robbing: the young ones will take their places without these longings: and thus, little by little, they will become a happy and contented people.”¹⁷

Additionally, Carleton wished to remove Navajos because, “based on no particular evidence,” Carleton also believed Navajo country to be resource rich.¹⁸

Such notions about the value and purpose of reservations were built on highly inaccurate assumptions about Navajo culture. Carleton pictured the Diné as an inherently warlike people with no true sense of connection to the lands they inhabited. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Navajos believed that the creator had placed them in the center of four sacred mountains, Blanca Peak, Mount Taylor, San Francisco Peaks, and Mount Hesperus. Similarly, the Mescalero and Chiricahua peoples held that the creator had granted sacred homelands to them as well. The cultural and social identity of each tribe was based on their connection to the land. Indeed, disconnection from the land often meant disconnection from tribal identity. Navajos rarely allowed rescued captives to re-enter their society.

What was the Fearing Time?



Kit Carson's campaign to remove them from the Dinétah was therefore an affront on various levels. First, under direction from Carleton, he waged war on the Mescaleros from his base at Fort Stanton. In 1862 about 400 families arrived at their new home on the Bosque Redondo, on the Pecos River in the shadow of the newly erected [Fort Sumner](#). Driven by a sense of duty to Carleton, Carson remained deeply conflicted about the idea of forced relocation. Although privately he doubted the ability of Bosque Redondo to be a success, Carson was not one to voice such concerns.

In the early 1860s, Indian reservations were a new idea and those involved in their creation often referred to them as in the experimental stage. Looking to the earlier relocation of the Five Civilized Tribes as a precedent, Carleton singled out an area that he had visited in 1854 for the reservation site. As he traveled along the Pecos River, he encountered a region commonly referred to as Bosque Redondo. By his account, it was an ideal location for a fort because of its proximity to timber. He also described it as containing thousands of acres of arable land.



Photograph c. 1864 of Navajos after enduring the forced march to Hweeldi, or the Bosque Redondo. The Navajos remember the violent ordeal as The Long Walk.

Courtesy of Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico (William A.

Despite Carleton's recommendations, Bosque Redondo was none of those things. Even prior to the arrival of the Mescaleros and Navajos, a board of army officers tasked with finding a suitable reservation location issued a negative report. They found the site too remote from supply depots and too far removed from grazing lands. Virtually everything, including construction materials, food, fuel, and animals, would have to be shipped in at great expense. Also, their report stated that the water of the Pecos was not ideal for drinking and the valley was susceptible to seasonal flooding. In short, Bosque Redondo could not readily support a large population.

Carleton ignored such warnings and moved forward with his ill-conceived removal plan. Once Kit Carson had completed his campaign against the Mescaleros, he turned his attention to the Navajos. Realizing that the Diné would never leave the Dinétah willingly, he knew that he had to break their spirit as a people and attack the heart of their sacred homeland—[Canyon de Chelly](#). As historian Peter Iverson reminds us, “although Carson has garnered most of the attention devoted to the effort to force the Diné into exile, he did not act by himself.”¹⁹ Due to conflicts between Navajos and Utes, he enlisted Ute scouts. He also relied on Zunis and Hopis for their detailed knowledge of local landscapes.

Beginning in the summer of 1863, Carson and his troops initiated a scorched-earth policy to break the will of the Navajos and force their surrender. Led by Ute scouts, they destroyed Navajo orchards and fields, and they killed their sheep and cattle. After leaving the Diné no means of subsistence, they returned to Fort Wingate to await their surrender.

In spite of such harsh measures, or perhaps because of them, far fewer Navajos turned themselves in at Fort Wingate than Carson had anticipated. Stories of abuse and even murder at the hands of the troops, combined with Carson's indiscriminate tactics that targeted all Navajos, whether men, women, or children, whether hostile or willing to make peace, led most Diné to conclude that this was a campaign of extermination. Bi'ée Łichí'í (Red Shirt, the name

Navajos used for Kit Carson) seemed to offer no quarter.

Near the end of 1863 [Delgadito](#) became the first headman to lead his band of 187 people to Fort Wingate. After officially agreeing to Carson's terms of surrender (relocate to Bosque Redondo or face death), he and three others traveled throughout the Dinétah with a message from Carson that if they moved to the reservation, the Diné would be left to live in peace. By the end of January 1864 Delgadito returned to the fort with 680 more people.

Learn More about The Long Walk

- [“In 1864”](#) a poem by Luci Tapahonso, based on oral histories of her people
- Joe Brown's Grandparents' [Personal Stories about the Long Walk](#)
- Podcast: [The Long Walk](#)
- Podcast: [Bosque Redondo Reservation](#)

Although we speak of *the* Long Walk, in reality there were a series of forced marches that took place between August 1863 and late 1866. At times only a few people made the trek; in other instances hundreds did so. By one estimate, the largest single group numbered 2,400 people. Several different trails led from the Dinétah to Bosque Redondo, and the shortest among them covered a distance of 350 miles. The intense suffering endured along the trail and at Hwéeldi left an indelible mark on the collective and individual identities of Diné people. Given their options, however, most felt that they had no choice but to relocate. Over 8,000 people made the journey and nearly 2,500 died en route or in the squalid conditions of Bosque Redondo.



This group of Navajos and U.S. Soldiers gathered together near Fort Sumner during the Navajo internment at Bosque Redondo in 1866.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 001817

The Long Walk experience varied depending upon the size of the group and the whims and abilities of the officers in charge of the march. Some soldiers worked to protect those under their charge. Others took advantage of the Diné people. Those in the care of the largest groups often had no means of preventing attacks against the Navajos by nuevomexicanos and Pueblos. Nuevomexicanos and Pueblos along the Rio Grande corridor saw themselves as victims of Navajo raiding, and, to them, the Long Walk was a justified punishment. People across the territory targeted Navajos (and Apaches) for anything that went wrong.

“Several different trails led from Dinétah to Bosque Redondo, and the shortest among them covered a distance of 350 miles.”

In their oral traditions, some Diné admit that some among them frequently raided New Mexico settlements. Yet nuevomexicanos, Pueblos, and Anglo New Mexicans also participated in violent actions against the Navajos in their own country. Indeed, the countless campaigns in the Dinétah during the Mexican period highlight the long history of violence perpetrated by all sides. Still, with Carleton in charge of the New Mexico department and Kit Carson in the field, Navajos found themselves in an indefensible position. As they journeyed across the territory, most of them on foot and without sufficient provisions, they were defenseless against the retributive attacks waged against them.

If they survived attacks along the way, soldiers often added to the misery of leaving their sacred homeland by pushing them to travel at a faster pace than they were comfortably able. Certain officers gained reputations for marching them at a rate of about twenty miles per day. Many died under the stress. According to Curly Tso, “It was horrible the way they treated our people. Some old handicapped people, and children who couldn’t make the journey, were shot on the spot, and their bodies were left behind for the crows and coyotes to eat.” Others remember that some among them committed suicide rather than face death by starvation or freezing temperatures. Gus Bighorse told his children and grandchildren that “some families jump right down [tall cliffs] because they don’t want to be shot by the enemy. They commit suicide.”²⁰ For Bighorse, witnessing the suicides was more difficult to bear than seeing other members of his party shot down by [nuevomexicano](#) raiders or the soldiers.

Diné women confronted sexual violence perpetrated against them by some of the soldiers that had been charged with their protection. Despite Carleton’s

express order that the Navajos be safeguarded, the stark realities of a mission of expulsion and relocation meant that such could not be the case. Pregnancy and childbirth became an added burden. As Gus Bighorn remembered, “If a woman is in labor with a baby, she is killed.” Luci Tapahonso’s family memories recount the case of two women who were about to give birth and were thus unable to keep up with the group: “Some army men pulled them behind a huge rock, and we screamed out loud when we heard the gunshots. The women didn’t make a sound but we cried out loud for them and their babies.”²¹

Life in Hewéeldi provided no relief, despite Carson’s promise of peace in exchange for relocation. Carleton had anticipated 3,000 to 4,000 Navajos, but nearly 8,000 required support at Bosque Redondo. Problems abounded from the get-go. Traditionally, Mescaleros and Navajos had been enemies, something that Carleton apparently never considered. Tensions ran high as they attempted to live together in the 160-acre spread provided to them.

Inter-tribal tensions were eclipsed, however, by the poor living conditions at Hwéeldi. Army rations were not enough to support the nutritional needs of the people interned in the reservation, and, to make matters worse, Navajos were unaccustomed to cooking with items like white flour, beans, and coffee. The bacon they received was often rancid, creating conditions for disease to flourish and spread. Dysentery and other ailments spread among the population. As predicted by the army review board, the Pecos River contained highly alkaline water—under the best conditions it was undrinkable.

Despite Carleton’s assertion that Navajo people were “savage” or “barbaric,” in reality their lives in the Dinétah were far more “civilized” than those they were able to build in Hwéeldi. In November of 1865 Mescalero people fled into the surrounding mountains rather than face death in the reservation. Although most Navajo leaders, like Barboncito and Delgadito led the people to Hwéeldi, it is no wonder that others, like Manuelito, resisted. Recent research has shown that far more Navajos than previously thought stayed behind in the Dinétah.

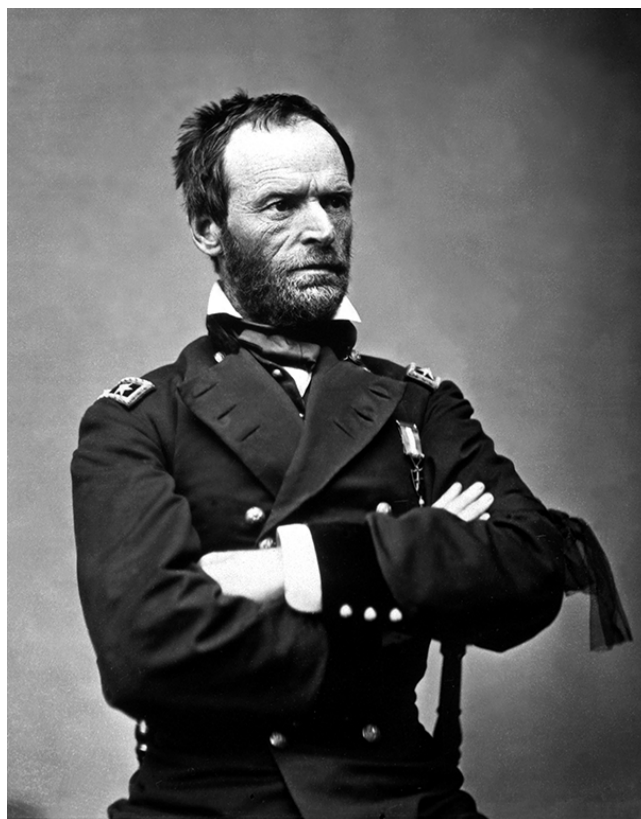
Despite Carson’s fall 1864 assault on the sacred stronghold of Canyon de Chelly,

Manuelito and hundreds of others fled to avoid capture. Historian Peter Iverson has shown that the percentage of Navajos removed to Bosque Redondo has been exaggerated. In the past, historians believed that virtually all Navajos made the trek to Bosque Redondo. Yet Manuelito and hundreds of others refused to submit. After years of resistance, lack of food and resources forced Manuelito to lead his band toward Hweeldi in 1866—one of the last Diné headmen to do so. A large number of other Navajos continued to resist. Although only about 1,000 or so in number, those who avoided relocation are remembered with pride by many Diné people. Oral traditions hold that those who remained in Monument Valley “conquered the United States.”²²

Almost as soon as they arrived at Bosque Redondo, Navajo people looked to the time when they would return to the Dinétah. The creator had ordained those lands specifically for them, so, to them, the restoration of their homeland was a foregone conclusion. Navajo elders performed a ceremony in which the sign of the coyote indicated their return if they would but endure at Hwéeldi.

In 1866, Carleton was replaced as military commander of New Mexico Territory. Criticism from locals and Washington, D.C., politicians combined against him. Among the most damning evidence of his failure in the territory was the Bosque Redondo. When General [William T. Sherman](#) visited the reservation at the head of a peace commission to investigate conditions there in 1868, he found that all of the accusations against Carleton were justified.

Barboncito stepped forward as the spokesperson for negotiations with Sherman. Upon examination of



This photograph of Sherman was taken in 1865 when he was a Major General in the Union Army. Following his Civil War service, he oversaw U.S. military campaigns in the West against various

Hwéeldi, Sherman sympathized with the plight of the Navajos, and he realized that the “experiment” at Bosque Redondo had to be abandoned.

In the discussions of what was to become of the Diné, Barboncito delivered a moving speech in which he implored Sherman to send him and his people “to no other country other than

my own.” In the end, they negotiated the Treaty of 1868 that provided for the return of the Diné to their homeland. Despite their pleas to guarantee to them the entire Dinétah, they instead received a large portion of their traditional homelands, a place they call the Diné Bikéyah. Despite the suffering that they endured, Navajos today take comfort in the reality that most indigenous peoples in the United States were completely removed from the lands endowed to them by their creators. The Treaty of 1868 placed the Diné in a position to rebuild a sense of tribal identity.

Native American tribes. Despite his willingness to negotiate with Barboncito in 1868, Sherman generally took a harder line toward Native peoples. After Custer’s defeat at Little Bighorn in 1876, for example, he commented that all indigenous peoples must be subjected to the U.S. Government by force. Still, he despised contractors and agents who took advantage of Natives.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration



General William T. Sherman and commissioners in Council with Native American chiefs at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, c. 1868.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

As a descendant of Mescaleros interned at Bosque Redondo recalled the significance of his ancestors' resistance to removal, he commented, "the only thing we were doing was fighting for what was ours."²³ Such was the general feeling among those who had been removed to the Bosque Redondo. The Mescaleros escaped from the reservation and maintained their place in south central New Mexico Territory for the next decade. In the end, however, they were confined to reservation lands, albeit lands more hospitable than those along the Pecos River. The Navajo people, by contrast, continue to define their strength and resilience as a people by looking to the Treaty of 1868. Barboncito's query to General Sherman says it all: they were returned to their sacred homelands, limited to a surprisingly small extent.

New Mexico as “Wild West”

Along with creating the conditions in which Navajos and Mescaleros were able to return to a portion of their respective homelands, the close of the Civil War created an influx of immigration to New Mexico from the east. Men who had served on both sides of the conflict either came alone or brought their families to the territory in search of the opportunity to start over and, hopefully, make a fortune by exploiting New Mexico’s lands, resources, and people.

New Mexico’s territorial status facilitated such ambitions. By keeping the area under the direct jurisdiction of Washington, D.C., longstanding New Mexico residents were allowed only second-tier U.S. citizenship. As voiced with much vitriol and racism by South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun regarding the addition of the Mexican cession to the United States, “Ours, sirs, is the Government of a white race. The greatest misfortunes of Spanish America are to be traced to the fatal error of placing these colored races on an equality with the white race.”²⁴ Despite vocal criticism of Calhoun’s position, notably from Representative Joseph M. Root of Ohio, a majority of U.S. Congressmen actively worked to ensure that the inclusion of nearly 100,000 former residents of Mexico would not end white Americans’ domination over those they referred to as the “colored races.”

Within such a context, [Anglo](#) newcomers to New Mexico, whether government appointees to territorial office or immigrants, manipulated territorial politics with ease. A string of presidential appointees to the governor’s office proved to be more concerned with their personal enrichment than with the needs of the territory. Under the territorial system, democracy was virtually non-existent. Nearly a century earlier, the [Northwest Ordinance of 1787](#) had established the

protocol for the governance of new lands, as well as the process by which they could enter the Union as full-fledged states. The Compromise of 1850 added certain stipulations for New Mexico's territorial system, including the presidential appointment of New Mexico's entire judicial branch.

Explore the History of the Palace of the Governors

The [Palace of the Governors](#) is the only building that has been occupied by people and has occupied the same space for over 400 years.



The Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe as it appeared in 1880.

Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 158579



No matter the dealings in Washington, D.C., New Mexicans, Pueblos, and the territory's indigenous peoples were coerced U.S. citizens—they did not choose to belong to the United States. However amiable their relations to U.S. officials might have been, from the arrival of Kearny's [Army of the West](#), they were forced at bayonet point to join the nation. Congress looked down on them, and believed that it was the steward of the people of the New Mexico Territory.

The territorial government was always a government of outsiders. The governor, territorial secretary, federal justices, attorney general, U.S. marshal, and commissioner of the land office were presidential appointees. Such officials came and went, depending on the whims of the electoral cycle and the administration itself. According to U.S. precedent, the only elected body was the territorial legislature. Territorial status greatly limited the potential for democracy and allowed unscrupulous people to take advantage. Tellingly, the position

of territorial delegate to Congress—effectively a representative that lacked the ability to vote on any measure taken up by the national legislature—garnered the most political prestige during the territorial period.

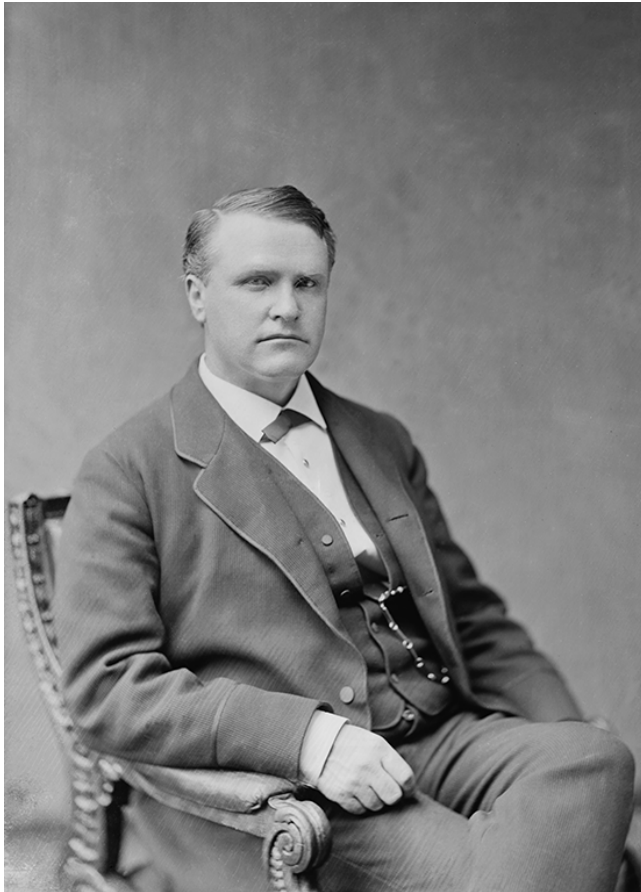
Territorial constraints, coupled with the rise of a [Gilded Age](#) in the United States at the national level, paved the way for the rise of a political machine known as the [Santa Fe Ring](#). Despite its ubiquitous appearance in territorial newspapers, existence of the Ring is a matter of dispute among modern historians. Of the very few books on the topic, only one, *Chasing the Santa Fe Ring*, by David L. Caffey, has been published recently (2014). As Caffey points out, part of the reason that doubts about its existence persist is the fact that adversaries of alleged Ring members conjured the term in an attempt to attack the actions of their political opponents. Indeed, territorial newspapers cast the Ring as either “a systematized organization of rascality” or as a body that advanced “individual interests at the expense of the general welfare.”²⁵ Neither depiction was particularly flattering.

As Caffey has also shown, academic historians have all too frequently taken at face value the partisan accusations levied in the territorial press. Although monographs on the Santa Fe Ring are few and far between, many historians of the territorial period mention the political machine as a powerful and negative force in nineteenth-century New Mexico. Of course, the Ring itself never published its minutes, never announced its incorporation. Neither did its alleged affiliates ever publicly acknowledge its existence. Its members were far too smart for that. Instead, we are left to infer the Ring’s



This photograph of Thomas B. Catron was taken in

actions from what we know of the American Gilded Age and of New Mexican politics in the late-nineteenth century. Similar political machines surfaced in the Utah, Colorado, and Arizona Territories, but none has garnered the romanticized legacy of the Santa Fe Ring.



Elkins served as Territorial Delegate from New Mexico to the U.S. Congress between 1872 and 1877. Despite his focus on statehood, a handshake that showed his support for civil rights legislation caused southern Congressmen to withdraw their support for New Mexico's bid.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

used his post as a means of acquiring power and wealth. In New Mexico, wealth was measured in land. In order to increase his control over lands, most of which were apportioned as Spanish or Mexican Land Grants protected under the provisions of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), Catron needed connections to

1911, just before he began service as one of the new state's Senators in 1912. During his lifetime, Catron amassed land, power, and wealth through his careful manipulation of territorial laws and politics.
Courtesy of Library of Congress

All of that is owed, at least in part, to [Thomas B. Catron](#)—recognized ringleader of the New Mexico political machinery. After fighting for the Confederacy, he relocated to Santa Fe based on favorable reports from his former college roommate, [Stephen B. Elkins](#). Not long after his arrival in Santa Fe, Catron opened a law practice and he immediately made important connections to key powerbrokers in the territorial government. In 1866 he was appointed to serve as District Attorney for the Third Judicial District in Mesilla, yet not until the following year was he admitted to the bar. This backwards series of events was suggestive of his future political and legal doings in the territory.

By 1872, Catron had received appointment as U.S. attorney, and he

powerful people in the territorial power structure. The shadowy Santa Fe Ring provided precisely the types of ties that he coveted.

In 1860 Congress established the legality of Spanish and Mexican Land Grants in its settlement with [Juan Bautista Vigil](#) and his claim to one such grant. To address the problem of overlapping claims and contested boundaries, Congress also established the Office of Surveyor General for the territory. The Surveyor General was to investigate disputes and offer solutions that would then require approval from the General Land Office and, finally, Congress itself. As with most other territorial offices, that of Surveyor General was an appointed position subject to the whims of patronage politics. Quite often, the Surveyor General was under the thumb of the Santa Fe Ring.

Thomas B. Catron

WITH BRYAN TURO



Under Spanish and Mexican administration, the grants had established a form of common-property [land tenure](#). Under U.S. law, however, land claims were

based on private-property forms of ownership. Despite the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#) and Congress' settlement of Vigil's claim, that key difference in legal recognitions of land tenure provided an opening for litigation that dispossessed New Mexican land grant heirs of their claims. When litigation against a particular grant was filed, the heirs typically did not have a strong enough command of the English language or the U.S. legal system to represent themselves in court. At that point, lawyers like Catron stepped in and promised to serve as counsel for the grantees. In a few noted cases, such as that of the Mora Grant, Catron disingenuously promised them that they needed to "temporarily" transfer their deeds to him in order for him to secure their grants. In other cases, land was the only means of payment available to the grantees.

By the end of his life, Catron acquired at least partial interest in no fewer than thirty-four different land grants. For a time, he owned more land than any other single person in the United States. His connection to the [Maxwell Land Grant](#) in north central New Mexico and the Carrizozo Ranch in Lincoln County highlight the ways that affiliates of the Santa Fe Ring promoted organized violence to acquire property and protect their interests. In the cases of the Colfax County (1875) and Lincoln County (1878) Wars, Catron, Elkins, and other prominent Ring affiliates did not directly commit acts of violence. In fact, they never did. Instead, others who hoped either to capitalize on their connection to the Ring or who stood in opposition to the political machine fought the battles.

Interestingly, the Santa Fe Ring, the Colfax County War, and the Lincoln County War were natural outgrowths of the attempt to establish American-style capitalism in New Mexico. The national and international press tended to paint the territory as a lawless place dominated in the 1870s and 1880s by bandits like [Billy the Kid](#). By most reports, the accused bandits on horseback bore the blame for perpetuating lawlessness and violence. Their actions certainly did nothing to alleviate the situation, but the reality was that those who were supposed to bring law and civilization to the territory actually intensified its violent and unsettled conditions. Modernization, manifested as capitalist, private ownership of land and resources, compounded corruption and violence.



Colfax County Location and boundaries of New Mexico's counties in 1880. The present-day boundaries of Colfax County encompass less territory than was the case at the time of the Colfax County War.

The Maxwell Land Grant was the linchpin of troubles in and around Colfax County. In 1864, Lucien B. Maxwell bought out all other heirs to the grant, most of whom were his in-laws, in order to become its sole owner. After only three years he decided to sell the tract and he requested a survey in order to determine its exact boundaries. Congress' 1860 decision in a claim against the

Ramón Vigil Grant upheld the provision of Mexico's 1824 Colonization Law that limited individual grants to 97,000 acres. The Maxwell Grant was therefore set at 97,000 acres in size.

None other than Catron served as Maxwell's legal advisor in 1869, and he persuaded the grant holder to sell to a group headed by Colorado politician [Jerome Chaffee](#). Subsequently, Chaffee's group created the Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Company to administer the grant, with Stephen Elkins as its president. With deed to the tract in hand, the Company hired W. W. Griffith, U.S. deputy surveyor, to conduct a new survey. Griffith's survey redrew the tract at 2 million acres—a claim more than ten times the size of the original survey's decision. Over the next few years, as the Company hoped to capitalize on the expansion of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, they attempted to sell the property at a large profit to English investors. By the time competing survey claims finally established the tract at 1.7 million acres, the British syndicate had collapsed. In the spring of 1879 Catron himself purchased the massive tract for a vastly reduced price.

As all of the wrangling over the size and ownership of the grant played out, homesteaders attempted to stake their own claims. In many cases, they built homes, barns, and fences on lands they believed to be adjacent to the Maxwell Grant. Jicarilla Apaches, nuevomexicanos, and Anglo miners had long inhabited the region. Most had amicable relations with [Lucien Maxwell](#). He understood the reciprocal responsibilities that a traditional patrón provided to those that lived on and near his lands. Inhabitants of the area were indebted to him for their place on the land, but they also relied on routines and norms that had never been guaranteed on paper.

Additional Information about Land Grants

- [Tierra Amarilla Grant & Thomas B. Catron](#)
- [Maxwell Land Grant](#)

The Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Company and the English syndicate,



Maxwell was the son-in-law to [Charles Beaubien](#). Eventually, Maxwell took control of the land grant that bears his name. During the U.S. territorial period, the grant sparked controversy due to various claims on its boundaries.

Courtesy of Philmont Museum-Seton Memorial Library, Cimarron, NM

Morley, William's wife, with mail fraud because she intercepted a letter that her mother had mailed at the Cimarron post office. Her mother, [Mary Tibbles McPherson](#), noticed the cycles of corruption that marked territorial dealings during a visit from her home in Iowa. The letter was a denunciation of such activities to Washington officials. Catron tenaciously pursued what most locals considered to be an unjust prosecution of Ada Morley.

In the process another opponent of the Ring, Reverend [Franklin J. Tolby](#), became increasingly more vocal. On the morning of September 14, 1875, as he traveled back to his home at Cimarron after completing worship services in

however, relied on deeds and other tangible evidence of their right to transform the patterns of life that had long existed on the grant. As a private property regime worked to replace communal systems, conflicts erupted that resulted in murders and patterns of vengeance. No longer could locals expect redress from their patrón. Absentee company officials made decisions that impacted their access to vital resources without their input. Additionally, dissenting members of the Company began to resent the influence of the Santa Fe Ring.

[William R. Morley](#) and [Frank Springer](#) emerged as the most prominent among them.

Palpable tensions erupted into violence over a seemingly petty matter in April of 1875. Catron charged Ada

Elizabethtown, an unknown attacker shot him twice in the back. His murder shocked the local community, and his friends and family members held partisans of the Santa Fe Ring responsible.

As the investigation played out, some of Tolby's friends vigorously questioned and then murdered Cruz Vega, the regular letter carrier between Elizabethtown and Cimarron, for his alleged complicity in the killing. From Vega, they learned of others who had been involved in the reverend's murder. Several were reportedly connected to the Santa Fe Ring. The last shots of the Colfax County War rang out in November after Manuel Cárdenas, an associate of Vega, testified that men with purported ties to the Ring had ordered Tolby's murder. As he was transported away from the courthouse, Cárdenas was killed from ambush.

In an attempt to calm the situation, Governor [Samuel Axtell](#) ordered troops from Fort Union to maintain order in Cimarron. Yet Axtell was a known friend of the Ring so his actions, as well as the decision early in 1876 to attach Colfax County to Taos County for judicial proceedings, indicated how pervasive the power of the political machine had become. To many locals, the killings indicated just how far the territorial political machine was willing to go in order to control wealth and power in Colfax County.

The events of the Lincoln County War are more widely known, and more heavily romanticized, due to the involvement of Billy the Kid. In the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, Lincoln County comprised nearly the entire southeastern quadrant of New Mexico Territory. Sheep-herding and cattle ranching dominated all other economic pursuits, and contracts to deliver cattle to reservations, such as [Bosque Redondo](#), proved quite lucrative.

Irish immigrants [Emil Fritz](#), [Lawrence G. Murphy](#), and [James J. Dolan](#) built a commercial empire in Lincoln based on the success of their government contracts at [Fort Sumner](#) and Fort Stanton (the Mescalero Agency after 1865), and Murphy and Dolan's L. G. Murphy & Company held a commercial monopoly over Lincoln County. With their stranglehold on the economy came

virtual control over the county's government and political systems. Indeed, their operation was known to locals simply as "the House," named for their imposing headquarters in Lincoln.

The mid-1870s brought perilous times for the House as several of its banking, mercantile, and ranching enterprises began to falter due to a nationwide economic downturn. In order to salvage the businesses, Murphy and Dolan secured loans from Catron. His loan of \$20,000 saved part of the Murphy-Dolan empire, but a few of their holdings reverted to Catron when they failed to return to profitability. The store in Lincoln, some tracts of land, horses, hay, grain, and cattle herds, along with a tract near Roswell, were among them.

Such business dealings convinced residents of Lincoln County of the close ties between the House and the Santa Fe Ring. Once again, evidence of the Ring's activities came through those who were most vocally opposed to it. In the case of Lincoln County, the opponents were [John H. Tunstall](#), a London native who arrived in the United States in 1872 looking to make a fortune, and [Alexander A. McSween](#). Tunstall made no secret of his ambition to grab as much land as possible in the West. He hoped to control a ring of his own. Indeed, Murphy and Dolan's grip on Lincoln County was something he envied.

Modernization in New Mexico



Governor Samuel Burch Atwell
 An Ohio native who had moved to California during the gold rush, Atwell gained political prominence in the West through his appointments as governor of Utah Territory (1874) and New Mexico Territory (1875-1876). During his administration, he worked to quell the Gila County War. Due to his association with the Santa Fe Ring, however, locals considered his efforts to be corrupt and illegitimate.

McSween was a lawyer who had worked as bill collector for the House before throwing his support behind Tunstall. Little of McSween's personal life prior to his move to Lincoln is known, but he and his wife Susan

The Tunstall Store

John Tunstall's Store was located in downtown Lincoln, New Mexico along Main Street. The

arrived in Lincoln in 1873. His ties to the House fell apart, however, following the death of Emil Fritz in June of 1874. Tasked with collecting Fritz's \$10,000 life insurance policy, he traveled to New York in the fall of 1876. After paying fees on the policy and subtracting his own expenses, only about \$3,000 remained. Rather than turn the money over to Murphy and Dolan, McSween deposited it in his personal account.

During McSween's trip back east, in February of 1877, Tunstall had arrived in Lincoln and acquired land on the Rio Feliz. The following summer he opened up a mercantile in town in direct competition with the House. Those actions alone were enough to gain the ire of Murphy and Dolan, yet Tunstall hired McSween to represent him in legal matters. In order to chip away at the brash Englishman's gains, Murphy and Dolan persuaded Fritz's heirs to charge McSween with embezzlement. As a result, McSween was arrested and he appeared before Judge Warren Brisol and District Attorney William L. Rynerson, both known associates of Catron.

Watson House was constructed in the site where the McSween home and Tunstall Store formerly stood.

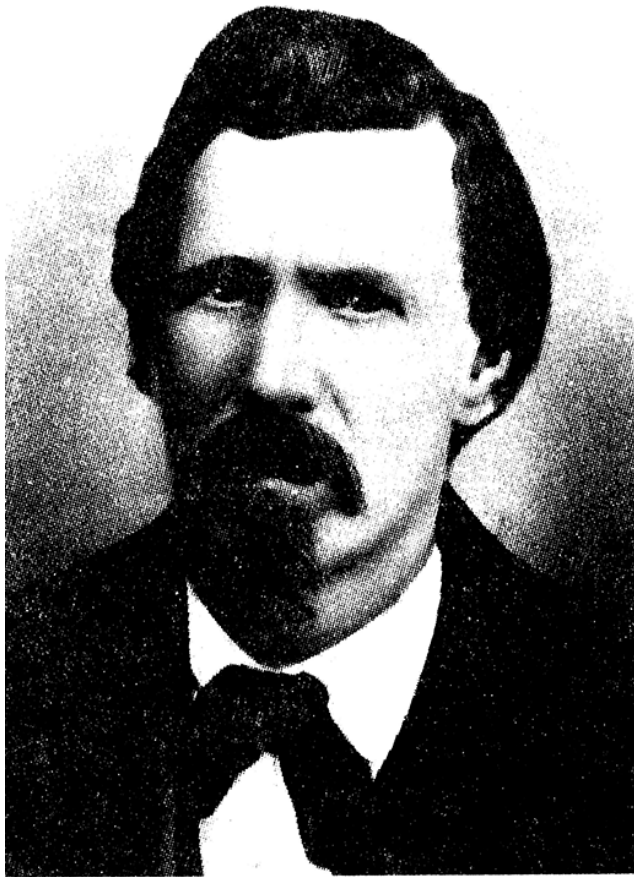


Interior of the Tunstall Store. *Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 089736*



Watson House. *Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 105473*

Legal proceedings against McSween carried on between February and April 1877. Sheriff [William Brady](#), a reliable associate of the House, carried out the



An associate of the House, Sheriff Brady used his position to whittle away at Tunstall and McSween's attempts to gain economic and political prominence in Lincoln. In February of 1878, Brady and his deputies killed Tunstall near the Rio Feliz. In retaliation, Billy the Kid killed Brady a few months later.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

differently than most locals, anyone not aligned with the House tended to like him because they hoped that he could bring down Murphy and Dolan.

Tunstall therefore hired ranch hands that were not only hard workers, but who could also fight and handle a pistol. In the fall of 1877 an eighteen-year-old known then as Billy Bonney joined his payroll. Billy was born Henry McCarty, probably in New York, although some writers have variously posited his birthplace as Ohio, Illinois, or Indiana. Some have said that his birthdate was November 23, 1859, but that point has not been verified either. It is known that he moved with his mother, Catherine McCarty, to New Mexico territory where

Bristol's decision to confiscate McSween's property to pay the \$8,000 bail. Like most Lincoln residents, Brady assumed that McSween and Tunstall were partners so he took control of the Tunstall store as well, the total far exceeding the \$8,000 figure. Then, he moved to confiscate the Englishman's cattle along the Rio Feliz.

McSween was a man who abhorred the House and wished to erode the power of Murphy and Dolan, but he equally abhorred violence. He never carried a gun, despite living in a time and place in which most people did. Tunstall, on the other hand, was not shy about the use of violence to achieve his ends.

Although he dressed and spoke

differently than most locals, anyone not aligned with the House tended to like him because they hoped that he could bring down Murphy and Dolan.

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she married William H. Antrim in 1873. Catherine died of tuberculosis in the fall of 1874 in the family's new hometown of Silver City.

After his mother's death, accounts differ about young Henry's stepfather. Some suggest that William Antrim was hardworking, but largely absent from his stepson's life. Others indicate that the stepfather abandoned Henry. Although he had seemingly loved his life in Silver City, attending fandangos with the town's Spanish-speaking residents and gaining a reputation for his charm, he fell into trouble and eventually made his way to Arizona and then to Lincoln County. By the time he found work with Tunstall, Billy was known by several aliases, including Kid Antrim and Billy Bonney. Not until his association with the violence of the Lincoln County War did he earn the moniker Billy the Kid.

Billy developed an intense level of respect and loyalty for Tunstall who, at the age of twenty-four, was just a few years his elder. After all, Tunstall was the first person to give Billy a legitimate chance to settle down and make a living. Billy joined others under the employ of Tunstall along the Rio Feliz in February 1878 to defend their employer's cattle, and over the course of several days the Tunstall faction had several gunfights with members of Sheriff Brady's posse. Then, on the evening of February 18, Brady's deputy Billy Matthews and a few others encountered Tunstall and shot him down.

Matthews and Brady claimed that Tunstall was killed because he resisted arrest.



The only known photograph of Billy the Kid (retouched).

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Given the ongoing conflict between the two sides and the shaky legal ground that Brady used to justify his actions, however, most historians agree that Tunstall was murdered in cold blood. Billy certainly felt that way. Tunstall's murder intensified the feud between the House and its enemies and initiated the Lincoln County War.

Billy The Kid

PAUL A. HUTTON, PH.D.



Over the course of the spring and summer of 1878, Billy led Tunstall's men, known as the Regulators, against associates of the House and Sheriff Brady. Based on McSween's experience with territorial and local authorities, the Regulators believed that there could be no justice in Lincoln County unless they made it for themselves behind a gun. Although Murphy and Dolan continued to back their network of gunslingers, their financial woes had worsened in early 1878. Strapped for cash, they mortgaged land and property, including the Carrizozo Ranch, to Catron for \$25,000. As fighting intensified, Dolan dissolved the House and Murphy fled Lincoln and subsequently died in October

of 1878 of alcohol-related complications.

Violence hit its crescendo in July. Between July 14 and 19, Regulators holed up in the Tunstall store, and then the McSween house, as open gunfire rattled the streets of Lincoln. In scenes that have been embellished and made legendary in films such as [Chisum](#) and [Young Guns](#) (among others), McSween ended up dead in the center of town and his house burned to the ground. During the “big killing,” as that week in July came to be known, Billy rose to prominence as the primary leader of the Regulators. Although the most intense fighting in Lincoln had come to a close, he helped the Regulators escape Dolan’s men, soldiers, and law officers for the next couple of years.



Appointed Sheriff of Lincoln County in late 1880, Garrett focused his attention on capturing Billy the Kid. After a lengthy period of pursuit, Garrett arrested Billy who then made a daring escape from the Lincoln County Jail by killing two deputies in April of 1881. On July 14, 1881, Garrett located and killed Billy the Kid at the Maxwell residence in Fort

New Sheriff [Pat Garrett](#) located Billy the Kid at the Maxwell residence at Fort Sumner in July of 1881, after the fugitive endured a broken promise of amnesty from the territorial governor, court appearances, and a bold escape from the Lincoln jail. Other Regulators had fled the territory, but Billy remained behind. Most researchers believe that he refused to flee because he was in love with [Paulita Maxwell](#), daughter of Lucien Maxwell. Her brother, Pete, did not approve of the relationship, and he alerted Garrett of Billy’s presence at Fort Sumner. In the dead of the night, Garrett took Billy by surprise as he went to cut himself a slab of beef on the Maxwell’s porch. Realizing that he was not alone, an alarmed Billy pulled his pistol and repeatedly asked “¿Quién es?” (“Who is it?”) in the dark. No answer came

Sumner.

Courtesy of Buckner/Garrett Photograph Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives (#55249)

except for the bullet from Garrett's gun that killed him.

Billy the Kid looms large as a legend of the Wild West, and he has come to mean many different things to different groups of people since his short lifetime. Numerous authors and filmmakers have alternatively sought to find the man behind the myth or to advance legends about the Kid. While he was still alive he became something of a hero to nuevomexicanos and Mescaleros in Lincoln County. He spoke fluent Spanish and he challenged a legal and economic system that threatened to dispossess both groups of people of their lands and resources.

Following his partner's death, Dolan continued the enterprise in Lincoln although the power of the House was forever diminished by the Lincoln County War. Susan McSween lost her husband, but was able to rebound and gain a reputation as the "[Cattle Queen of New Mexico](#)."²⁶ For his connections to the conflict that came to light during federal investigations of the events in Lincoln, Catron lost his position as U.S. Attorney. Yet he retained the land and property he had acquired from Murphy and Dolan, and his nefarious Santa Fe Ring remained intact.

Historian Kathleen P. Chamberlain has argued that Catron did not "truly represent the forces of modernization" because "his own interests often dominated to the detriment of the territory."²⁷ If we see modernization



Widow of Alexander McSween, Susan remained in New Mexico where she remarried and amassed land and wealth. Her extensive holdings gained her the nickname, "Cattle Queen of the Southwest."
Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 105450

as the events and trends that solidified the hold of capitalism, private property, and U.S. party politics on the territory, however, Catron was instrumental in the modernization of New Mexico. Although it is easy to take modern systems of economics and governance for granted, many scholars have emphasized the reality that various processes of “[creative destruction](#)” or “[original accumulation](#)” must destroy former ways of regarding things like land tenure or economic exchange to open space for their successors. Violent events like the Colfax and Lincoln County Wars were part and parcel of that process.

Territorial status structured all political, economic, racial, and social interactions in New Mexico between 1848 and 1912. Miguel A. Otero, Stephen B. Elkins, and other delegates to the U.S. Congress understood that their principal duty was to negotiate support for statehood. Before any real progress toward that end could be made, however, Congressmen and other powerful Easterners sought evidence that New Mexico territory was a modern, American place. Terms like “modernization” and “Americanization” lack precise and consistent definitions; they are largely subjective. Yet in the late nineteenth century, both were tied up in the notions of capitalist economic systems, the rule of U.S. legal precedents, speaking the English language, and adherence to the Christian faith.

Bishop Jean B. Lamy arrived in New Mexico for the express purpose of normalizing and Americanizing Catholic practices in the Territory. Yet as was the case in attempts to militarize the territory, remove its indigenous peoples, and assert new modes of land tenure, [nuevomexicano](#) Catholics pushed back. As in the earlier period of Spanish colonization, American colonization of New Mexico inspired much resistance. Measures intended to stamp out the territory’s dominant cultures were never fully successful. As we will see in the next few chapters, attempts to modernize and Americanize New Mexico Territory came in various cultural and entrepreneurial forms. In response, nuevomexicanos and indigenous groups found unique means of resistance and cultural resilience.

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Chapter 10: Americanizing & Modernizing Ethnic Identities

Americanizing & Modernizing Ethnic Identities

“Apache Wars” & The Border

Creating The Land of Enchantment

Spanish-American Ethnic Identity

References & Further Reading

Americanizing & Modernizing Ethnic Identities



In the early morning hours of January 18, 1863, U.S. soldiers at Fort McLane executed Chiricahua headman [Mangas Coloradas](#). Recognized as war chief of all four Chiricahua bands, Mangas Coloradas spent nearly two decades working to build peaceful ties with the U.S. military and American settlers in southern New Mexico. Yet his willingness to trust U.S. officials resulted in his brutal murder. Indeed, members of his band warned him not to attempt to negotiate with Brigadier General [Joseph Rodman West](#) on that winter day.

Earlier, in the fall of 1846, following the occupation of Santa Fe, General [Stephen Watts Kearny](#) led his forces



MANGAS.

Illustration of Mangas Coloradas created for The Century Magazine in 1880. Despite years spent trying to maintain his people's place in southwestern New Mexico, Mangas Coloradas was executed at the hands of the U.S. military in 1863.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors](#) Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 133701

Misunderstandings and broken promises characterized U.S.-indigenous relations during the period between the U.S.-Mexico War and the Civil War. Still, Mangas Coloradas made a favorable impression on most Americans who attempted to understand him. In 1851, during the boundary survey, [John Russell Bartlett](#) met Mangas Coloradas at the survey headquarters at Santa Rita. According to Bartlett, the Chiricahua headman possessed “strong common sense and discriminating judgment.”¹

Additionally, Mangas Coloradas maintained a respectful relationship with Agent [Michael Steck](#), appointed to the Chiricahua people in late 1854. At about that time, the Chiricahua leader decided that his advancing age

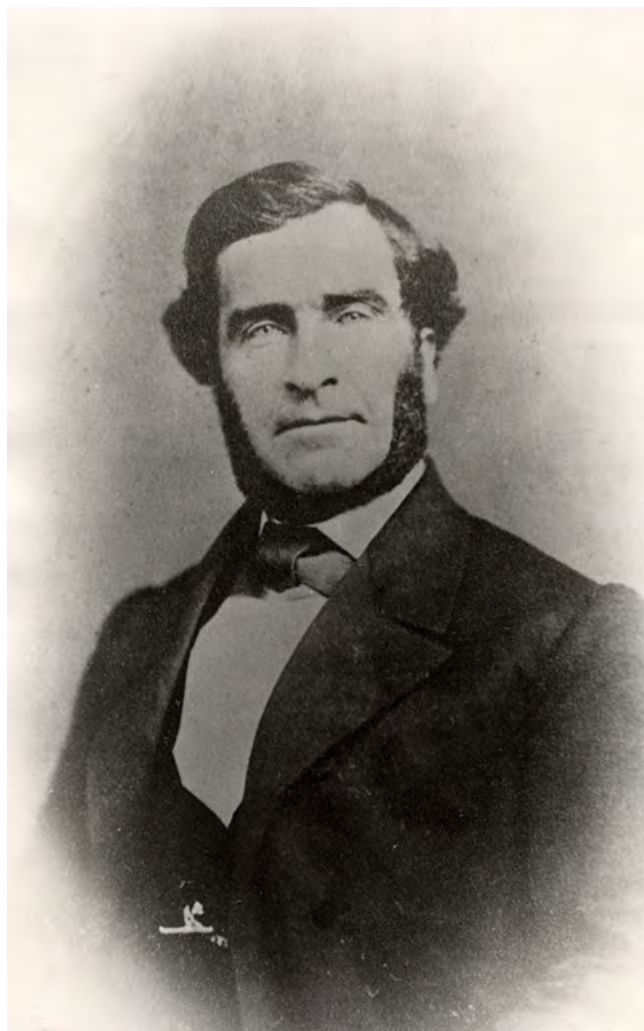
southward en route to California with Kit Carson as guide. Along the way, his party passed through Chiricahua lands where they encountered Mangas Coloradas. Kearny and the Chiricahua headman quickly recognized that they had a common enemy in Mexico. Mangas Coloradas was fully engaged in the [War of a Thousand Deserts](#), and he held a deep hatred of Mexican people due to wrongs that he believed they had committed against him and members of his band.

Despite common ground, forging alliances with U.S. military representatives was no easy task.

made raiding expeditions into Mexico quite burdensome. Much to Steck's surprise, he expressed his desire to settle into life on the reservation that the Indian Agency had proposed along the New Mexico-Arizona border.

Only two years earlier, Mangas Coloradas nearly torpedoed treaty negotiations with Colonel [Edwin Vose Sumner](#) over U.S. military attempts to enforce [Article XI of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#). Upon hearing that his people would no longer be permitted to conduct raids into Sonora and Chihuahua, Mangas Coloradas walked away from the talks. Only Sumner's tacit, off-the-record assurance that the raids could continue brought him back. Mangas Coloradas could not comprehend that a truce between the United States and Mexico could translate into a truce between his own people and Mexico. After all, no Apaches had ratified the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#).

Tensions between Chiricahuas and U.S. military figures compounded in the late 1850s and early 1860s as increasing numbers of Anglos migrated to the Apache homelands. Mangas Coloradas tolerated the creation of several [Butterfield Overland Mail Company](#) stations, and the influx of ranchers and farmers to the

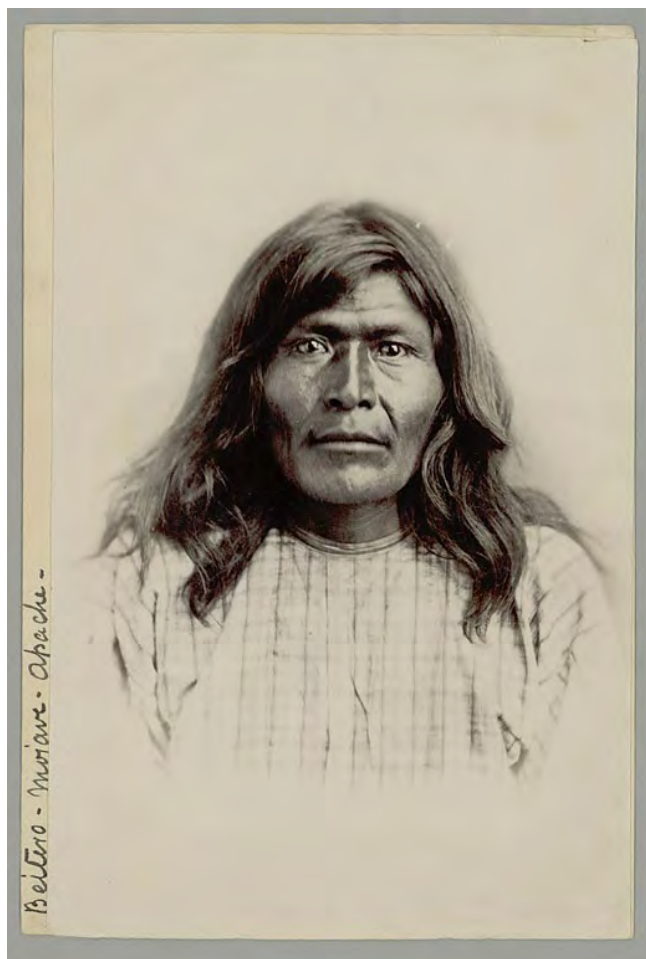


Appointed as Indian Agent for the [Chihenne](#) Apaches in 1853, Steck was one of the few who considered the Native Americans to be innately peaceful. During his time in New Mexico, he advocated for the Chihenne's right to permanently occupy Ojo Caliente.

Courtesy of Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico (William A. Keleher Collection)

Mimbres and Gila Rivers near the center of both [Bedonkohe](#) and Chihenne (two of the Chiricahua bands) homelands. Even after he lost two of his sons in a skirmish with Sonoran troops south of the border in 1858, the headman resolved to maintain peace.

As the Civil War began in the East, new assaults on his people forced Mangas Coloradas' hand, as he remembered it. Specifically, he was outraged when American miners from Pinos Altos attacked Chihenne Chief Elias' temporary encampment as he awaited an audience with Agent Steck. In the skirmish, Elias and three others lost their lives. Then, in February 1861 Lieutenant [George N. Bascom](#) led troops against [Cochise](#) (Mangas Coloradas' son-in-law) and his band in southeastern Arizona for a raid that had been committed, as it turned out, by a band of Pinal people. In what became known as the [Bascom Affair](#), Cochise narrowly escaped with his life after an invitation to negotiate. Bascom captured six of his companions, and the conflict devolved into a hostage standoff in which both leaders killed all of their captives.



Increasing conflicts convinced Mangas Coloradas to join with Cochise in waging war against U.S. forces. Their efforts, combined with the abandonment of garrisons in southern New Mexico as soldiers were reassigned to the conflict in the East, restored Chiricahua control of the region for a short period of time. Chiricahuas of all bands freely traversed their traditional homelands once again, and [Victorio](#) (another Chihenne headman) and [Juh](#) (a [Nednhi](#) chief) joined with Mangas Coloradas and Cochise in an effort to ensure their continued hold on the area.

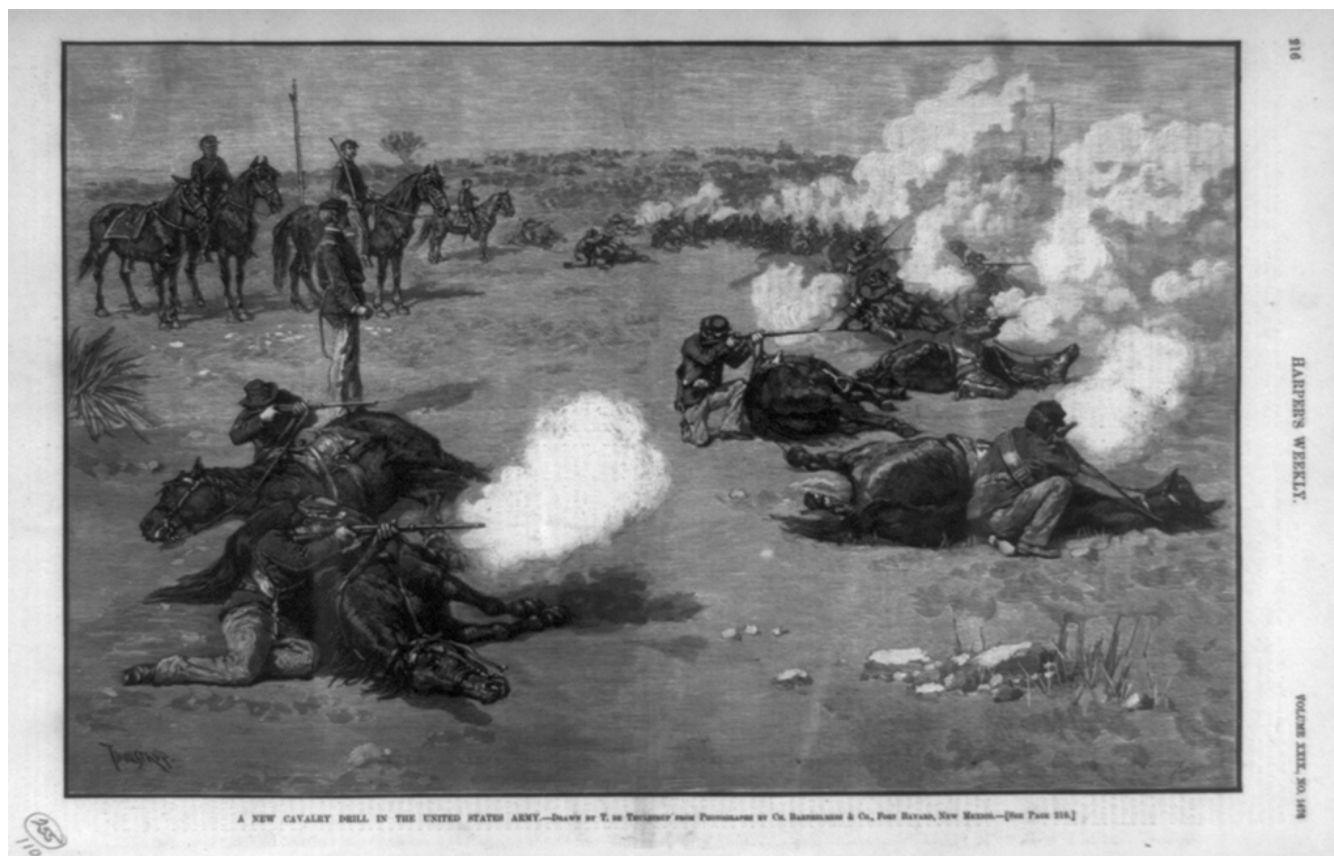
This is purportedly the only known photograph of Victorio, the Chihenne headman. It was taken at the Warm Springs Agency in about 1877 when Victorio would have been near fifty years old.

Courtesy of National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

In the summer of 1862, however, General [James H. Carleton](#) led the California Column through Chiricahua territory en route to relieve Colonel Edward R. S. Canby as commander of

the New Mexico department. As his own contemporary communications and his later actions with the [Bosque Redondo](#) illustrate, Carleton held no respect for indigenous peoples. The California Column engaged the Chiricahuas, and in late-July 1862 Mangas Coloradas lay gravely wounded.

Mangas Coloradas believed that he would be negotiating with leaders like Kearny or Sumner when he approached Pinos Altos to make peace on the afternoon of January 17, 1863. Instead, General West was of a similar mind as Carleton. After imprisoning Mangas Coloradas at Fort McLane, West privately informed his men that he did not want the Chiricahua headman alive the next morning. The guards tortured Mangas Coloradas by prodding him with their bayonets after heating them in the fire. After enduring an hour of this treatment, he told the sentinels in Spanish that “he was not a child to be played with.”² As soon as he uttered those words, two of the guards leveled their rifles and shot him. Another rushed over and fired an additional shot through the back of his head.



Wood engraving that depicts members of the Sixth Cavalry drilling near Fort Bayard, New Mexico. The image appeared in Harper's Weekly, April 4, 1885.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Contrary to the intentions of West and Carleton, the brutal murder and subsequent decapitation of the respected leader initiated a new cycle of hatred and retributive violence. Rather than breaking the Chiricahuas' will, Mangas Coloradas' execution heightened their resolve to resist American encroachments, especially because soldiers had defaced and decapitated the corpse. According to Apache belief, a person's body continues into the afterlife in the same condition that it left mortality. Victorio, Cochise, Juh, and [Geronimo](#) (a young Bedonkohe leader who rose to prominence in the 1860s) led the Chiricahuas for the next three decades in brokering war and peace with Americans and Mexicans in the border region. On that fateful night in January 1863, an opportunity for negotiation was squandered at the cost of near constant warfare until Geronimo's surrender in the Sierra Madres of Chihuahua in 1886.

The story of Mangas Coloradas' execution is a crucial part of New

https://mind.cnm.edu/miles/nmh/nmh_export/OPS/assets/widgets/slide

Mexico's histories, not only because it provides another indictment of the attitudes of military leaders like Carleton and West, but also because his life and death inspired resistance that later American observers referred to as the "Apache Wars." Geronimo's capitulation signaled an end to warfare in the West, and promoters and

entrepreneurs almost immediately began to broadcast New Mexico as the place where Eastern Americans could find a new beginning as farmers. Railroads and the territorial Bureau of Immigration furthered New Mexico's tourist image.

As a result, the same place and peoples defined by opponents of statehood as "backward" and "unprepared" were heralded by boosters as "the most American" of all others in the Union.³ Because those diametrically opposed claims were based on different interpretations of the same cultures and peoples, boosterism in New Mexico always had clear limits. Within this context of paradoxical interpretations of New Mexico and its peoples, nuevomexicanos recast themselves as "Spanish Americans" in an effort to appear eligible for statehood and gain full inclusion in the union as U.S. citizens.

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Photograph of General John Alexander Logan, several U.S. Army officers, U.S. Geological Survey artists, and wives and children at Zuni in the fall of 1882. Zuni pottery figures prominently in the foreground, and a Zuni man stands behind the group at the center.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Apache Wars” & The Border

Competing claims for land and resources in the New Mexico-Chihuahua borderlands inspired conflict in the 1870s and 1880s. The [Chihenne](#) band of the Chiricahua Apache people had dominated the region since the late 1300s or the early 1500s, depending on differing estimates. As we saw in Chapter 2, although scholars do not agree on the time of Athabaskans' arrival (including all Navajo and Apache bands and clan groups), the Chihenne people consider the region bounded by the Mimbres, Black, Sierra Negretta, San Mateo, and Florida mountain ranges their sacred homeland. [Ussen](#), the Chiricahua creator, placed them within the territory and entrusted them with its care.

As anthropologist Edward Spicer has pointed out, the Chihenne homeland became a “region of borders” by the late 1700s as numerous indigenous peoples worked to maintain their place in what had then been redefined as the far northern frontier of New Spain.⁴ Misunderstandings about Apache social and political organization plagued Spanish encounters with the various bands in and around the New Mexico colony. The Chihenne, also called the Mimbrenño, Mimbres, Ojo Caliente, or Warm Springs people, organized themselves into local groups which ranged in size from thirty-five to two-hundred members. The Spaniards referred to their home sites, at times semi-permanent, at others more temporary, as [rancherías](#). By the time the United States laid claim to their homelands, Apache peoples had endured various attacks on their place in the region. Even after [Mangas Coloradas](#)' execution, however, few of them realized that the American challenge would prove to be the most devastating of all.

Tensions between the Chihenne people and American miners, farmers, and soldiers persisted throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s. [Victorio](#) led his

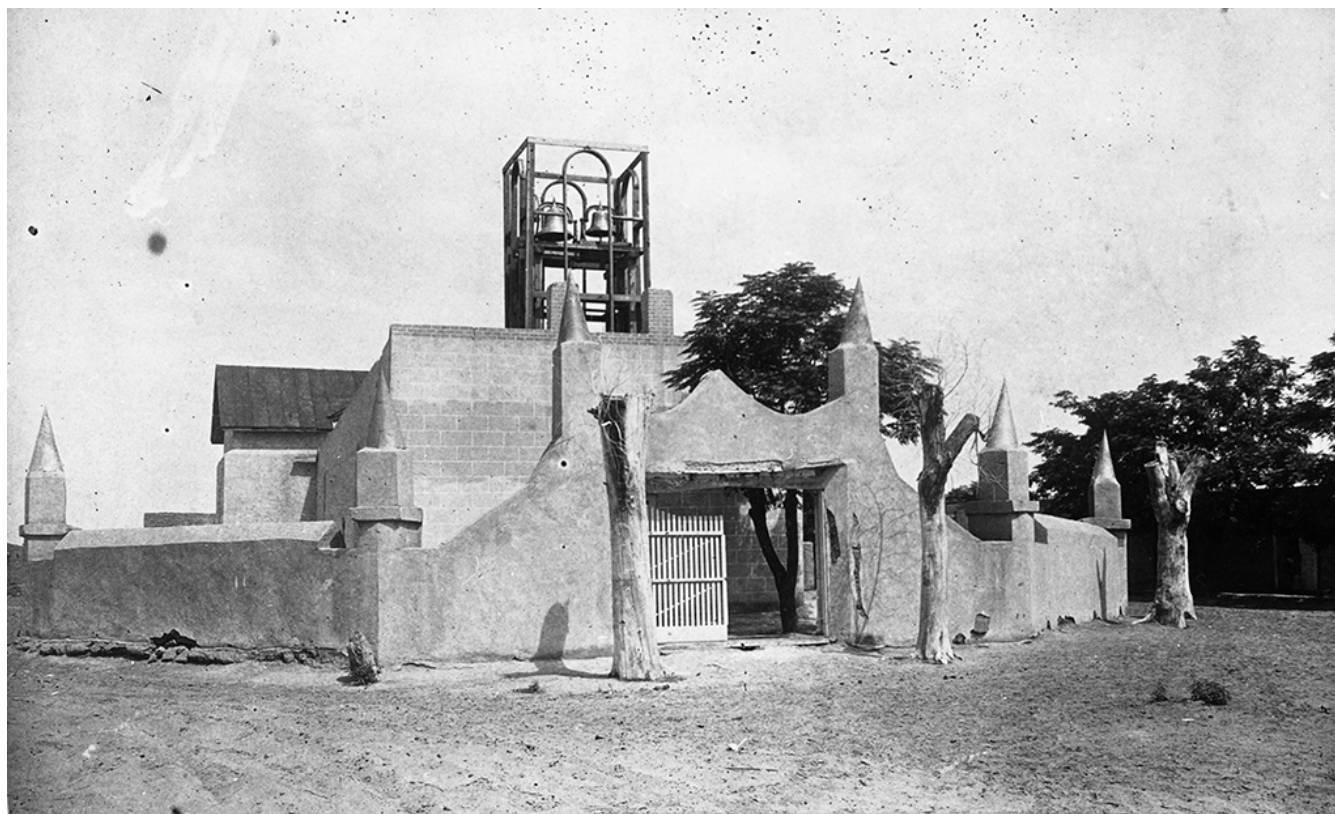
people far from their homeland at Ojo Caliente, now called Warm Springs in recognition of U.S. control over New Mexico. They ranged between the Blue, Florida, Black, and [Mogollon](#) Mountains, and Chihenne warriors led regular raids against settlements in the Chihuahua sierra. In the early 1870s Victorio grew weary of so much wandering and negotiated the return of his people to the Warm Springs Agency under agent [Charles Drew](#). According to historian Kathleen P. Chamberlain, Drew “was one of the best agents the Apaches ever had, second only to [Michael Steck](#).”⁵ Despite the ongoing problem of Congress’ failure to ratify agreements made between Indian Agents and Native peoples, Victorio settled his band once again in a limited version of their ancestral homeland with an agent that served as a strong advocate.

At about the same time, near the international border, mesilleros faced a new type of conflict in their community. Having settled into their lives as American citizens along the border, they actively participated in the religious and political culture of Doña Ana County. In August of 1871 campaign activities for an election between Democrat [José Manuel Gallegos](#) and Republican [José Francisco Chaves](#) inspired a bloody riot that left eight people dead and scores of others wounded.

In Mesilla, electoral politics merged religious and ethnic sympathies. Father [José Jesús Baca](#), the senior Catholic priest in town, publicly pronounced that Gallegos’ affiliation with the Democratic Party and his sympathetic stance toward the U.S. government presented a threat to Mexican Catholics. Baca had previously requested to retain his affiliation with the Diocese of Durango, despite the transfer of other New Mexican parishes to the Diocese of Santa Fe. In doing so, Baca manifested his continued devotion to the Mexican nation, and his ideas on the significance of the 1871 election brought mesilleros’ religious and political loyalties into sharp relief.

In the campaign for territorial delegate to U.S. Congress, both Gallegos and Chaves levied charges that the other had committed electoral fraud. On August 27, 1871, when their respective supporters held rallies on the Mesilla plaza, such accusations only served to fuel tensions. As was common in the culture of

nineteenth-century American politics, free whisky and live bands contributed to the charged atmosphere. Each party marched around the town square, chanting slogans that favored their candidate and disparaged the competitor. Violence erupted as the two groups came face to face in front of San Albino's church. As reported in the *New York Times*, "the Plaza has been literally drenched with human blood."⁶ Troops from Fort Selden arrived shortly after the carnage had transpired and attempted to quell the disorder.



Mesilla's San Albino Catholic Church was originally constructed in 1852. This photograph of the Church from the late 1880s shows restoration work that was then in process.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 122144

Once the dust had settled and Gallegos claimed victory in the election, a group of Republican mesilleros decided to abandon their homes in favor of a new start in northwestern Chihuahua. Although historians differ in terms of the reasons behind the relocation, the international border provided a barrier of refuge.⁷ Ninety-six families followed [Ignacio Orrantía](#), U.S. deputy marshal for Doña Ana County, and Fabián Gonzales, Doña Ana County Sheriff, to Chihuahua before the Mexican government had approved their petition for a land grant. In the process of seeking out new opportunities, this group of Mesilleros reasserted their Mexican citizenship status and sought to capitalize on the drive

for repatriation that was still current south of the border.

The following year, the migrants received official sanction for their new town of La Ascensión, Chihuahua. Their efforts to reinvent their community and alter their national status collided with Chihenne attempts to resist dependency on the U.S. government in the setting of the Warm Springs Agency. Despite their desire to remain in their homeland, and despite the best efforts of Agent Drew, Victorio and many of his warriors conducted raids into Chihuahua as a means of maintaining a sense of social and economic independence. They refused to submit passively to a system that required them to subsist on rations that were not always forthcoming.

As had been the case in the Mexican repatriation initiative of the 1850s, officials in Chihuahua hoped that the residents of La Ascensión would solidify their claims to lands adjacent to the international border. Chihuahua Governor [Luís Terrazas](#) supported the *ascensionenses*' (as residents of La Ascensión came to be known) petitions for legal title to the lands they had settled near the Ojo de Federico (Federico Spring) for precisely that reason. Just over two decades after the ratification of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), Mexican policy still held that settlement of the border region was the key to the conquest of the Apaches.

Whatever their feeling about a national policy that cast them as Apache fighters, or “part-time specialists in violence,”⁸ ascensionenses could not ignore that their new settlement was to be constructed within territory claimed by the



Scouting Expeditions A photograph of a black-and-white, hand-drawn map from 1880 showing Fort Davis and the Chinati Mountains. The map was used during military campaigns against the Apache Indians led by Victorio.

Courtesy of Special Collections of The University of Texas at Arlington Library

Chihenne and [Nednhi](#) bands. Indeed, the first exploring party from Mesilla was disbanded in late 1871 due to skirmishes with Apache bands along the Casas Grandes River.



La Ascención This map shows the location of La Ascención, Chihuahua. The town was settled in 1872 by former residents of Mesilla following the electoral violence that took place there in late 1871.

Asensionenses relied on legal surveys to stake their claims on the region. Of course, Chihenne and Nednhi people neither recognized nor accepted the conventions of modern law and boundary demarcation. During the first decade of town construction, conflicts with adjacent landowners and Chiricahuas impeded attempts to construct homesteads and canals. On two separate occasions in 1872, Apache people prevented settlers from building structures and digging canals.

In 1873 three young boys from La Ascención were surprised, but unharmed, by a group of Chiricahuas who scattered the sheep they attended. Reportedly, the

sheep were later sold on the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona. In 1878, as Victorio led his band in what proved to be their final campaign to preserve their autonomy against U.S. and Mexican military campaigns, a small group of Victorio's men assaulted a group of asensionenses led by Juan Zuloaga as they transported goods to Corralitos. After a short scuffle, the Chiricahuas made off with the merchandise and several asensionenses lay wounded. In this instance and several others, militias were hastily organized at La Ascensión to pursue the Apaches. Most of the time, militia members failed to engage the Chiricahuas.

Although repatriation to northwestern Chihuahua and U.S. reservation policy placed great stress on Chiricahua peoples, for a time they were able to use the border to their advantage. For them, the border became a barrier to military action because U.S. and Mexican forces were prohibited from crossing into the other nation's territory in pursuit of Apaches until 1882. Even then, their military activities were greatly limited when in the neighboring nation.

By the late 1870s, however, the border presented less of a refuge and Chiricahua dominance of their traditional homelands began to wane. As headmen like Victorio and [Juh](#) came to recognize, their methods of dominance were eclipsed by modern means of claiming lands imposed by both Mexico and the United States. Despite their longstanding supremacy in their traditional homelands, "the Apaches did not follow up their military domination with the creation of a formal boundary survey. Instead of maps and surveys, place names and patterns of movement demarcated the landscape of Apache authority."⁹ As more and more Chiricahua bands relocated to reservations in Arizona and New Mexico, they continued the practice of raiding northern Mexican settlements in order to supplement their rations and maintain a semblance of independence.

Despite Victorio's willingness in 1876 to promote peace by accepting reservation life at the Warm Springs Agency, a lack of consistent policy once again disrupted his best efforts. Indeed, Victorio's own actions seemed contradictory as he attempted to help his band adjust to their new reality through both violence and negotiation. Although Agent Drew provided

consistent support for the Chihennes' continued claim to their Warm Springs homeland, his successors, John P. Clum and John Shaw, supported a policy of concentration. Beginning in 1876 they initiated a plan to round up Chiricahuas of all four bands and force them to live together at the San Carlos Reservation in southeastern Arizona.

Military might was a necessary component of reservation policy. No Apache band would have left their homeland if not for the use of force. Victorio was hostile to the idea that his people abandon the lands that Ussen had ordained for them, but, like Mangas Coloradas before him, his desire to maintain peace won out. In the summer of 1877, he led his people to a site near Camp Goodwin on the designated San Carlos Reservation, a place that one U.S. officer had referred to as "Hell's forty acres."¹⁰ The arrival of most of the Apache bands at San Carlos signaled the emergence of the form of modernization that U.S. politicians and military leaders had envisioned. Now vast expanses of Chiricahua homelands were made available for homesteaders and capitalist development, at the expense of Apache peoples.

At San Carlos, Victorio's people endured sparse water, lack of vegetation, extreme temperatures, and hostilities with other bands. By September malaria had afflicted both young and old, and Victorio concluded that American officials consigned his people to the reservation "so that we will die."¹¹ On September 2, 1877, Victorio and the medicine man Loco stole horses from White Mountain Apaches also interned at San Carlos and made their escape with as many of their people as could travel. Despite their desire to return to Warm Springs, where they had cached weapons and supplies, they remained on the move in eastern New Mexico and northern Chihuahua in order to evade capture.

African Americans comprised a large portion of the troops in pursuit of the Chiricahuas. In southern New Mexico (and throughout the American West), African American men made up as much as half of the military force. African American soldiers serving in the U.S. army following the Civil War were widely known as "Buffalo Soldiers." In 1866, Congress passed legislation that

reorganized the army. In the process, they designated two regiments—the 9th and 10th—and four infantry units—the 38th through 41st—for black soldiers. Three years later, Congress formed the 24th Regiment from the former 38th and 41st and organized a new 25th from the 39th and 40th.

Who were the Bufalo Soldiers?



In the years between 1866 and 1900, nearly 3,600 black soldiers served in the New Mexico Territory. Accordingly, they saw action in most of the engagements with Chiricahua peoples. Despite their status as U.S. soldiers, the civilian population consistently opposed the presence of African American military men in both word and deed. Newspaper editors across the territory published derogatory statements against the 9th Cavalry, a black unit which was stationed at Fort Bayard to force Victorio's band back to reservation life. In one inflammatory rant, the editor of the *Thirty-Four* (Las Cruces, New Mexico) concluded: "Let the Ninth be dismounted or disbanded . . . [so that its members] might contribute to the nation's wealth as pickers of cotton and hoers of corn, or to its amusement as a travelling minstrel troupe. As soldiers

on the western frontier they are worse than useless—they are a fraud and a nuisance.”[12](#)

Even as they fought to further the U.S. military agenda of Americanizing New Mexico Territory through campaigns against Chiricahuas, African American soldiers faced constant discrimination. The prejudice of white settlers remained strong despite black soldiers’ acts of heroism. In 1877 a detachment of the 9th Cavalry engaged Victorio’s band in the Florida Mountains. One officer, six cavalymen, and two Navajo scouts had been dispatched to intercept the group of about fifty Apaches. As they attempted to negotiate with the Chiricahuas, the group was surrounded and attacked.



In 1877, Corporal Clinton Greaves successfully led his companions against an ambush by a group of Victorio’s men in the Florida Mountains. For his efforts, Greaves received the Congressional Medal of Honor. This bronze statue of Greaves is located at Fort Bayard, New Mexico.

Among the soldiers was Corporal [Clinton Greaves](#).[13](#) By one account, Greaves “fought like a cornered lion.” Through his tenacious combat efforts in which five Chihenne warriors lost their lives, Greaves led his companions to safety. He was recognized for his heroic actions with a Congressional Medal of Honor, as were eight other African American members of the 9th Cavalry for their efforts against Apaches between 1877 and 1881.

It seemed, however, that the dedicated service of the Buffalo Soldiers was never enough to prove their valor to [Anglo](#) American residents of southern New Mexico. In 1880 when the 9th Cavalry unexpectedly came upon a large body of Apaches that had killed two servicemen, a private was dispatched to bring reinforcements.

Courtesy of Pat Bennett

The African American soldier rode bareback all day and night because a white rancher had refused to lend him a saddle to help him perform his task. Although the rancher may have also refused aid had the soldier been white, settlers typically lent their support to white soldiers that worked to protect their lives and property. As one historian remarked, “the open and latent racism of the late nineteenth century had curious ways of expressing itself.”¹⁴

Pressure from the 9th Cavalry and the difficulties of supporting his band in lands that were not their own convinced Victorio to enter into negotiations with U.S. military officials at Fort Wingate in late 1877. The Chihenne headman made a deal that allowed his people to return to Warm Springs, but the arrangement did not last. After only a few months back in their homeland, officials in the Indian Department in Washington, D.C., ordered that all Apaches be sent back to San Carlos. Geronimo and [Pionsenay](#) continued raids into Chihuahua and Sonora, convincing those in charge of the bureau that no Apaches could remain outside of the forbidding Arizona reservation.



Photograph of Buffalo Soldiers of the 25th Infantry at Ft. Keogh, Montana, in 1890.

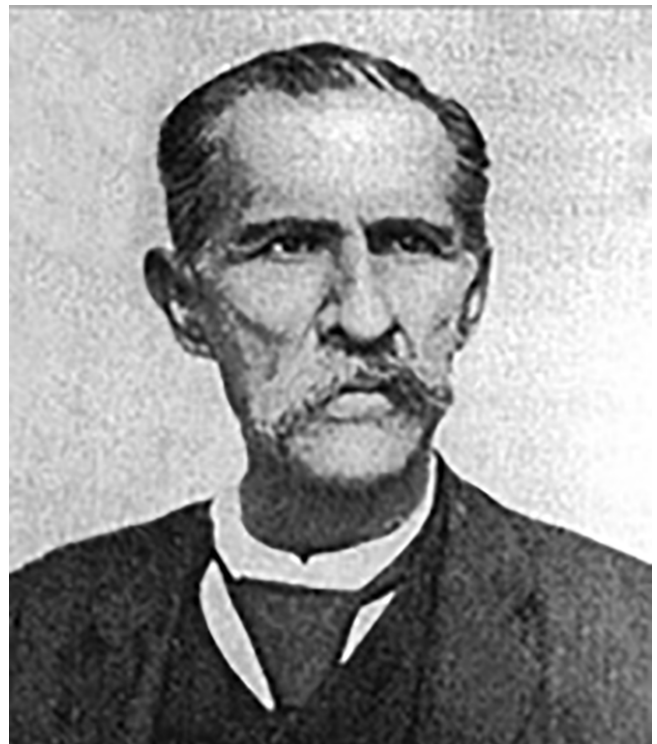
Courtesy of Library of Congress

Rather than face certain death at San Carlos, Victorio once again fled with his people. This time they headed southward into Chihuahua. Despite one final attempt to negotiate a return to Warm Springs in the summer of 1879, Victorio never again submitted to U.S. or Mexican authorities.

By the early fall of 1879, U.S. military officials had lost track of Victorio's band. From Chihuahua, governor Luís Terrazas complained that Chiricahua raiding intensified because they received supplies on the U.S. side of the border. The people of the New Mexican town of Monticello (formerly known as Cañada Alamosa, near the Warm Springs Agency) had a long history of cooperation with Victorio, and they continued to supply Chihenne messengers after their flight from the reservation system. At the same time, however, many southern New Mexican ranchers claimed that Apache raiding was sustained by Mexican traders.

Major [Albert P. Morrow](#) quickly realized that his forces were at a disadvantage against the Chihennes' intimate knowledge of southern New Mexican landscapes. Due to the headman's decision to travel in Mexico, the military campaign that led to his death at Tres Castillos was led by the aging Chihuahua Apache fighter, Colonel [Joaquín Terrazas](#).

Following reports that Victorio's men had perpetrated a double massacre in the Sierra de Candelaria north of [Villa Ahumada](#) in Chihuahua, Terrazas was called out of retirement by his cousin, Governor Luís Terrazas. With his second-in-command, Juan Mata Ortíz (jefe político of Janos), Colonel



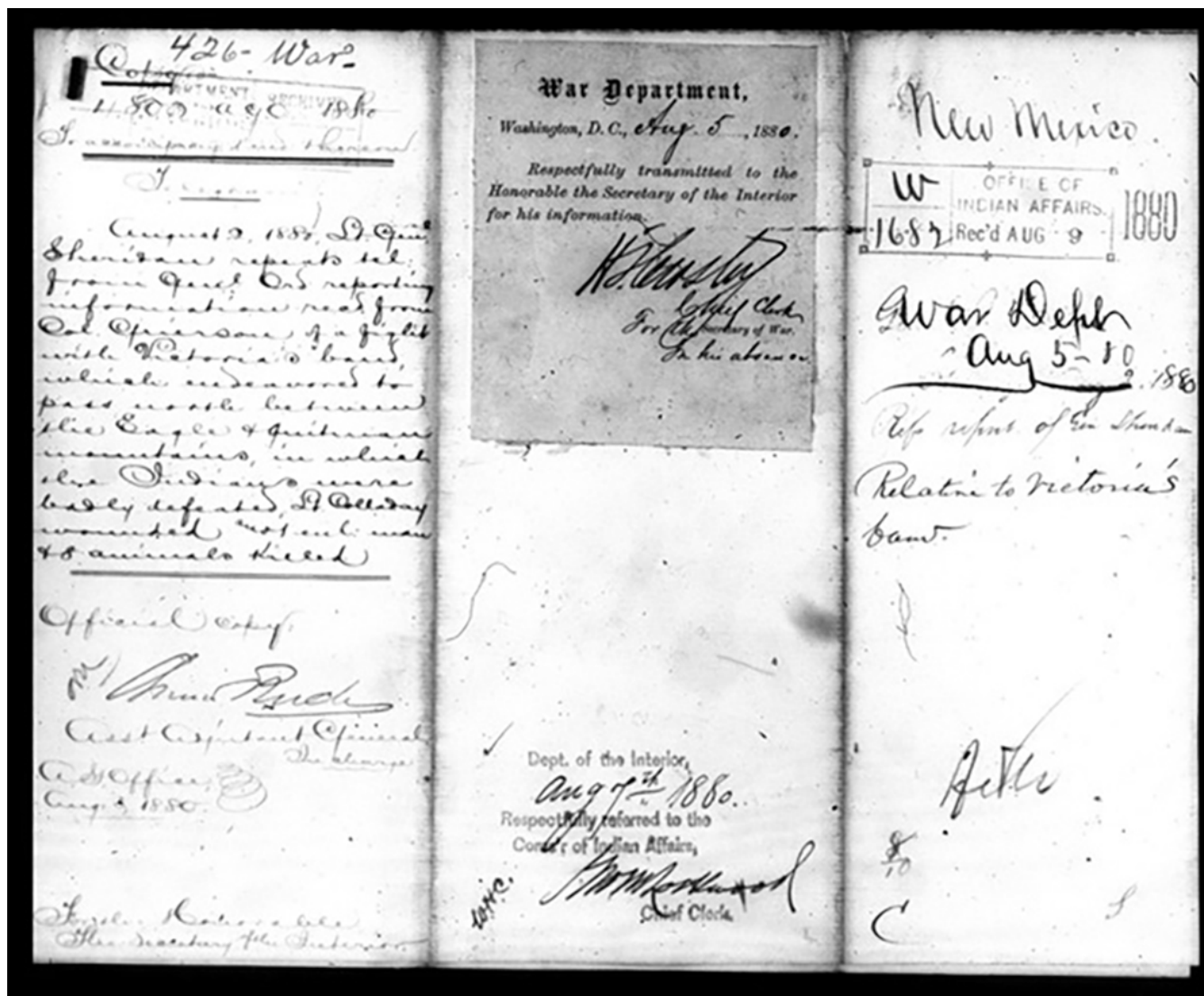
General Joaquín Terrazas and his second-in-command, Juan Mata Ortiz, confronted Apache War Chief Victorio with his band at Tres Castillos, Chihuahua, on October 14, 1880. Today a monument commemorating the last Mexican battle against the Apache headman sits on the corner of the [Cuauhtémoc](#) Avenue and Ernesto Talavera Street in [Ciudad Chihuahua](#).

Terrazas engaged in a campaign that lasted nearly a year, from November 1879 to October 1880.

Courtesy of Municipio de Chihuahua

Not long after they began to recruit men into service against the Chihenne, Terrazas and Mata Ortíz learned that Victorio's band had raided livestock from La Ascensión. Between the fall of 1879 and the spring of 1880 Victorio led his band back and forth across the border where he and his people took refuge in their sacred mountains and resupplied by calling on their allies in places like Monticello. For a time Victorio also split his forces, and one group of Chihennes, headed by [Nana](#), engaged Texas Rangers in the Big Bend region. Through it all, the border provided a means of escaping one army by passing into the neighboring nation.

By the hot, dry summer of 1880 pressure from all sides began to multiply. Most important, the [U.S. Consul](#) at Ciudad Chihuahua suggested that Governors Luis Terrazas and Lew Wallace create “a private arrangement . . . for a mutual crossing of the border in order to pursue and fight the Apaches, who, according to the general impression in northern Mexico, ‘have killed one hundred and fifty persons within the past six weeks.’”¹⁵ The governors took the [consul](#)'s advice, which proved devastating to Victorio. Just after the agreement was struck, Chihennes were forced to battle a combined force of Mexican and U.S. soldiers near Janos.



August 2, 1880, letter from [Colonel W. Grierson](#) that details the movements of Victorio's band about a month before the battle at Tres Castillos.

Courtesy of Jill M. D'Andrea

Not long after the border-crossing arrangement, Mexican forces under Terrazas and Mata Ortíz conducted what proved to be the final siege against Victorio in October of 1880. Although fall had arrived, conditions in northern Chihuahua continued to be unseasonably dry. Victorio's band and Terrazas' forces alike were forced to travel in highly difficult conditions, always in search of *tinajas* (watering holes).

After Victorio met in council with [Kaytennae](#), Nana, and Mangus, the group decided to seek temporary refuge at Tres Castillos, about ninety miles north of Ciudad Chihuahua along the thoroughfare that connected that city with Ciudad Juárez (still known at that time as [El Paso del Norte](#)). Victorio knew that the

three volcanic protrusions of Tres Castillos guarded a small lake and a supply of grass. After taking a short time to rest and recuperate, the plan was to join Juh's band in the Blue Mountains of the Sierra Madres.

https://mind.cnm.edu/miles/nmh/nmh_export/OPS/assets/widgets/slideshow/index_5640a314c54c458d933836dc43d7f14c.html?configFile=https%3A%2F%2Fmind.cnm.edu%2Fmiles%2Fnmh%2Fnmh_export%2FOPS%2Fassets%2Fwidget_data%2Fconfig%2F5640a314c54c458d933836dc43d7f14c.json

Terrazas' troops tracked the Chihennes to Tres Castillos, however. On the morning of October 15, 1880, Terrazas split his forces and surrounded Victorio's band in their place of refuge. Battle broke out that afternoon and lasted well into the night. At about 10:00 p.m., a few Chihennes set a brushfire in an attempt to distract the Mexican forces but their efforts were in vain.

The Apaches fought almost to the last man: sixty-two warriors lay dead along with sixteen women and children. In the aftermath, Terrazas rounded up sixty-eight prisoners and one-hundred-and-twenty horses. Not until he began to survey the carnage did the colonel realize that Victorio lay among the dead. The head of the [Tarahumara](#) detachment in Terrazas' forces, [Mauricio Corredor](#), received the credit for slaying the great Chiricahua headman.

The result of the massacre at Tres Castillos was that the Chiricahua people were forever wrested from the lands that the creator Ussen had granted them. In order to establish the sovereignty of the United States and Mexico on their respective sides of the international border, they dispossessed the Chiricahuas of their homelands, restricting the survivors to



Photograph of Geronimo, posed with a rifle, c. 1886.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

the desolate San Carlos Reservation. Survivors of Tres Castillos eventually joined the Mescaleros in south-central New Mexico, and those who decided to hold out with Juh and [Geronimo](#) (who eventually surrendered in 1886) were relocated first to Florida and then to a reservation at [Fort Sill](#), Oklahoma.

During the conflict between Juh's and Geronimo's bands and U.S. and Mexican soldiers, the Chiricahuas specifically targeted and brutally murdered Mata Ortíz in retaliation for his leading role in the dispossession of their people. Although small-scale raiding continued into the twentieth century, 1886 marked the final conquest of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands from the perspective of each nation's military. Much of our knowledge of Victorio's movements comes through Mexican and U.S. military records, as the above discussion indicates. Despite the bias of the records, it is possible to trace the ways in which Chiricahuas attempted to maintain their homelands.



Men, women, and children of Victorio's band just after their capture by Mexican forces under Colonel Terrazas at Tres Castillos.

Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton Archives, WCO64

Victorio's band and the first residents of La Ascensión pragmatically used the border to their advantage. Chihuahua officials considered asensionenses to be promoters of "civilization" in contrast to "savage" Chiricahuas. On the other hand, Apaches believed that the violence perpetrated against them was little more than a series of savage acts. As always, perspective is crucial to understanding past events. In the case of the "Apache Wars" the consideration of multiple perspectives is particularly important. The viewpoint of Victorio's people helps us to see the violence of the U.S. conquest of the American Southwest, a reality that is glossed over by more benign explanations based on notions of [Manifest Destiny](#). Ironically, some of the very soldiers that fought to "pacify" the Chiricahuas were themselves victims of racism and discrimination.

How do you tell a story the right way?

In 2007, Dan Davis of The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) produced a six minute video for the gallery *Our Peoples*. Davis set out on a mission to tell the story of the Chiricahua Apache prisoners of war [the right way](#).



The establishment of railroad towns like Deming also provide important evidence of the ways in which different groups of people understood the results of the campaign against Victorio's people. As the Chiricahuas sought to regroup and preserve their culture at the Mescalero agency in hopes of regaining their claim to the Warm Springs in the future (a hope that they have never relinquished), U.S. politicians and developers concluded that New Mexico was now safe for capitalist development. It was no accident that Deming, at the junction of the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe and Southern Pacific lines, was incorporated in 1881—just after Victorio's death. The ethnocentric actions of many American settlers, prospectors, railroaders, and investors reflected their belief that civilizing forces had created stability in New Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Commemorating the Final Battle at Tres Castillos

In 1880, General Joaquín Terrazas confronted Victorio and his band at Tres Castillos, a location north of Chihuahua City. It was at Tres Castillos where Victorio was killed. Today, [a monument stands](#) in Chihuahua City on the corner of Cuauhtémoc and Zarco avenues to commemorate the final battle against the Apaches.

Creating The Land of Enchantment

Despite the notion that New Mexico had effectively been secured for capitalist development through the dispossession of Apaches and Navajos, boosters commonly met with disappointment in the years between 1880 and 1920. Many of the people who came to New Mexico from the eastern United States did so in order to recuperate from tuberculosis—not because of the promise of economic opportunity in the territory. The Civil War had emphasized the value of railroads, but it was not until 1879 that the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad (later known as the Santa Fe Railroad) entered New Mexico.

Over a decade earlier, in 1862 the Union government had passed the [Pacific Railroad Act](#), which was expressly designed to establish a transcontinental rail route, roughly along the [Oregon Trail](#). In the years leading up to the Civil War, the future transcontinental rail line captured the imaginations of people throughout the nation. There was a virtual contest between New Orleans, St. Louis, and Chicago for the eastern terminus of the transcontinental route. Once the Civil War began, Chicago won the day because northern industry provided financial backing for rail construction that simply did not exist in the South.



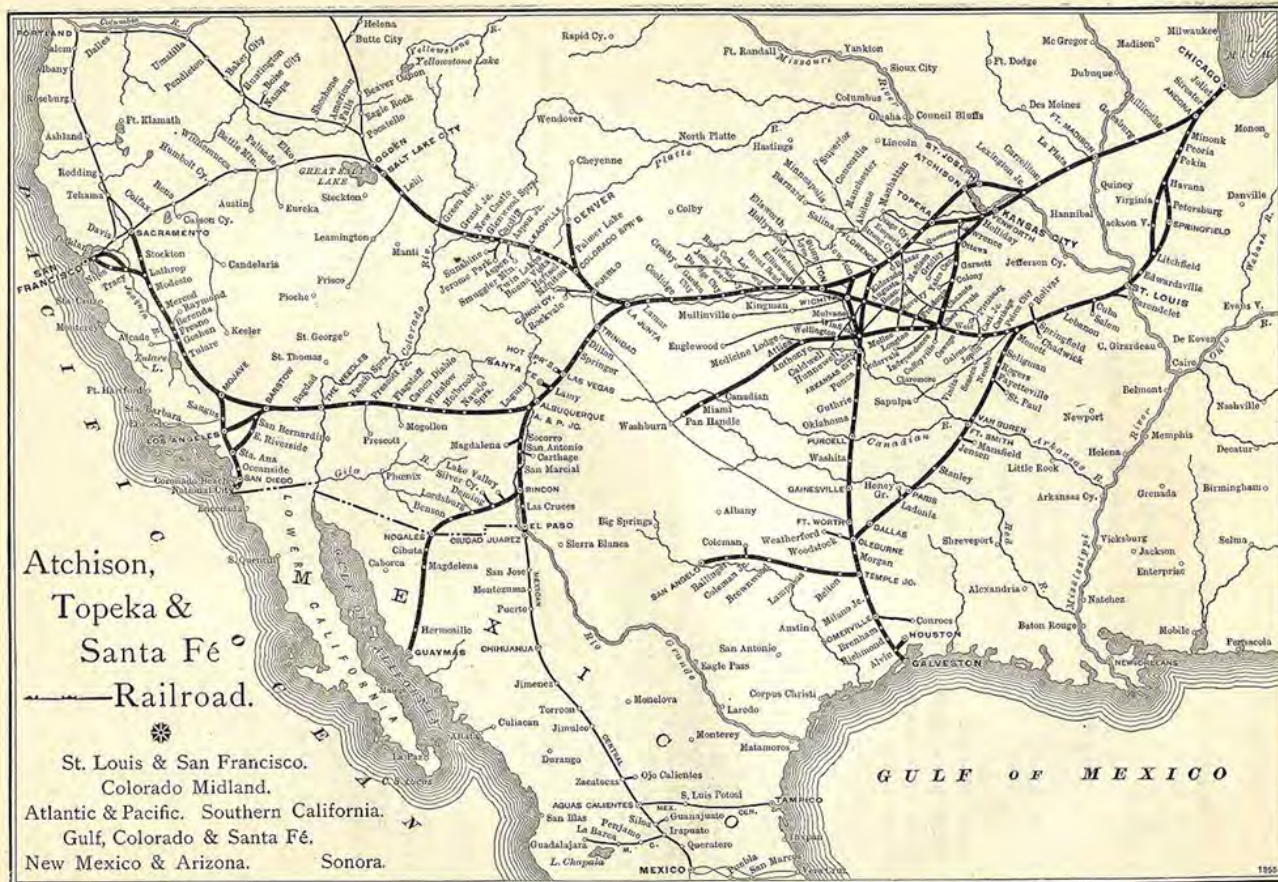
Editorial Party for the arrival of Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 143091

Despite a lack of resources for railroads, Southern politicians had long dreamed of completing a transcontinental line to benefit trade in their region. The 1853 Gadsden Purchase was made in part to provide a route for a transcontinental line that connected to New Orleans. By the mid-1870s, the Southern Pacific Company made good on that vision with a line between New Orleans and Los Angeles. In general, railroads made their mark on the Western United States due to the terms of the Railroad Act that provided large swaths of land to companies willing to construct rail conduits into the West.

As historian Robert H. Wiebe suggested, prior to the creation of railroads the United States was a disconnected nation of “island communities.”¹⁶ Seemingly overnight, rail lines promised to shorten time and space by making travel rapid and efficient between points across the

How was New Mexican fashion changed by the railroad?

country. New interconnectivity impacted daily life in numerous ways. Prior to railroads, few people traveled beyond their home communities. Items sold at local mercantile stores were expensive due to lack of stable transportation networks. Railroads improved prices and made it possible for more people to travel beyond their hometowns.



Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Route Map An Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Route Map from the 1891 “Grain Dealers and Shippers Gazetteer.”

Courtesy of Pam Rietsch, MARDOS Memorial On Line Library/Wikimedia Commons

Print culture expanded with railroads as well. Individual families generally had a copy of the bible, but few other books. Such was especially the case in outlying rural areas where magazines, newspapers, and books were hard to come by. As new rail lines extended into the rural West, telegraph lines followed the tracks. By the early 1880s, [Associated Press](#) dispatches meant that people in places as

distant from one another as Springer, New Mexico, and Chicago, Illinois, read the same accounts of national and international events. Local newspapers thrived, especially in places like New Mexico where a strong Spanish-language press had long existed.

Railroads also improved mail delivery, which had never been especially reliable. Along with bringing down the cost of sending mail, companies like [Montgomery Ward](#) and [Sears, Roebuck, & Co.](#) profited by circulating [mail order catalogs](#). These allowed people to purchase goods, including cloth, irons, sewing machines, magic lanterns, and some groceries, far more cheaply than had previously been the case. Railroads thus helped to create a national market that altered local cultures.

Heightened ability to travel gave rise to the tourism industry which quickly became an integral component of New Mexico's economy. National trends began to impact local consumption habits, and there was a shift from smaller-scale merchant capitalism to larger-scale industrial capitalism. Corporations began to push aside community mercantile agencies due to their ability to sell goods more cheaply. Despite such innovations, however, regional cultures persisted in places like New Mexico where unique languages and traditions defined the ways in which people interpreted national trends.



Indian women at the [Laguna](#), New Mexico, train depot c. 1902. Santa Fe Railroad officials encouraged the sale of Pueblo jewelry, crafts, and art at rail depots throughout the Southwest in an effort to attract tourists to the region.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

The first transcontinental connection came when the Union and Central Pacific lines met at Promontory Point, Utah (north of Ogden) in 1869. After that, it seemed every town in the West hoped to draw the railroad toward it. In 1880, the Southern Pacific line was completed. Ironically, the Santa Fe Railroad bypassed its namesake at the territorial capital, although a spur line was added between Lamy Junction and Santa Fe a few years later. In part, the engineers hoped to avoid the La Bajada pass. In terms of territorial politics, the Santa Fe Railroad Company hoped to avoid subjugation to the powerful [Santa Fe Ring](#) by building around the capital.

The Santa Fe and Southern Pacific were the two rail companies that made the

most indelible mark on New Mexico. Since the close of the U.S.-Mexico War, however, many Americans had considered New Mexico a place to get through—not a destination. Expansionists' goal had been to acquire California. New Mexico just happened to come along with it. By the 1880s, the primary goal of the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific rail companies was to transform New Mexico and the larger Southwest into tourist destinations.

The two different lines marketed distinct, romanticized images of New Mexico. The Santa Fe Railroad portrayed the area as dominated by red rock and adobe architecture, while the Southern Pacific promoted desert landscapes and Spanish missions. Both companies had been running trains through the territory for about a decade when the nationwide [Panic of 1893](#) set in. The Santa Fe Railroad Company filed for bankruptcy as a result, and the Southern Pacific focused on passenger travel between New Orleans and Los Angeles in an effort to rebound financially.

Following the bankruptcy, the new president of the Santa Fe Railroad recognized the need to transform the route through New Mexico into a touring line in order to help the company become profitable. The transformation from a shipping route to a touring route, however, was not as simple as placing different cars on the line. The public image of New Mexico Territory had to be altered. Corporate advertisers made the decision to promote the region as “Colorful Southwest Indian Country,” and New Mexico itself as the “Land of Enchantment.”¹⁷

Artists and indigenous peoples played a central role in the campaign to repackage the territory. As scholars of tourism have pointed out, places targeted by the industry are transformed in order to present visitors with the types of images and experiences that they expect to find. With the expansion of the capitalist economy into New Mexico, especially with the arrival of the railroad, indigenous peoples and rural nuevomexicanos sought out new means of making money to support themselves and their families. In order to do so, many of them took jobs with the Santa Fe Railroad, and [Anglo](#) entrepreneurs trained them as cultural performers to appeal to the sensibilities of tourists that arrived

at the depots in places like Las Vegas and Albuquerque.

Cultural Tourism

WITH MATTHEW MARTINEZ, PH.D.



In striking juxtaposition with the Apache Wars, Santa Fe Railroad magnates thus decided to make Native Americans themselves the destination for tourists to New Mexico. The ostensibly ancient lifeways of Navajos, Pueblos, and even nuevomexicanos resonated with a growing group of well-to-do Easterners who had become frustrated and disillusioned with the excesses of modern life. By taking a trip along the Santa Fe line, they were promised a journey into the past in which they would be greeted by people who had avoided such urban problems as pollution, overcrowding, poverty, and violence.

Travel literature emphasized the exoticism of New Mexico and the Southwest. Wealthy Americans had read about the experiences of their

European peers who traveled to the Middle East or to Egypt to tour lands and see peoples that still seemed marked by antiquity. Ironically, the tourists interpreted and reported on ways of life that were not their own without considering the perspective of the inhabitants of the lands they traversed. In an effort to build on the popularity of Middle Eastern travel narratives, American boosters began to argue that U.S. tourists “[See America First](#).”

In New Mexico this type of impulse resulted in an advertising campaign that touted Navajos as the “Bedouins of North America.” Such imagery underscored the nomadic lifeways of the [Diné](#) people, while overlooking elements of their lives that might be considered more modern, such as their agricultural production. The argument was that tourists need not travel across the Atlantic to find the wonders of antiquity; remnants of the pre-modern past were alive and well in New Mexico.

Although far less violent than the military campaigns that had targeted New Mexico’s indigenous peoples, the tourism industry became profitable by taking advantage of native customs and lifeways. In certain respects, native participants in heritage tourism found a way to support themselves economically while simultaneously preserving elements of their cultures. In other ways, they were forced to adhere to Anglo American characterizations of



“See America First” Centerfold in “Puck,” June 14, 1911, with an illustration by Gordon Ross. Images like this one helped to promote the notion that U.S. tourists should look no further than their own nation when seeking antiquity.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

their traditions.



The Fred Harvey Company created lunchrooms and hotels along the Santa Fe Railroad in the late nineteenth century. Harvey's efforts brought thousands of tourists to New Mexico and the Southwest in the late nineteenth century, and solidified the place of cultural tourism in local economies.

Courtesy of KansasMemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society

the Topeka depot on the Santa Fe line. Over the next twenty-five years, he built the country's first major chain organization. When he died in 1901, the Fred Harvey Company consisted of fifteen hotels, forty-seven restaurants, and thirty dining cars. His son Ford continued the operation after his father's death from the company's Kansas City, Missouri, headquarters.

Harvey was most famous for his Harvey Houses, which were either stand-alone dining establishments or combination restaurant and hotel establishments along the Santa Fe Railroad. Several of them were in New Mexico and Arizona

The person that was most clearly associated with remaking New Mexico for tourism was [Fred Harvey](#). Harvey was born in London in 1835, and he immigrated to the United States at age fifteen in 1850. In New York City he labored as a busboy and dishwasher in order to get on his feet. He worked in several other restaurant jobs before moving to New Orleans and then St. Louis. Eventually he secured a position as a mail clerk for the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad. He realized a great need for lodging and concessions along the railroads, and although he pitched his ideas to his bosses at the Burlington Railroad, it was Santa Fe Railroad president Charles F. Morse that agreed to give him his first break.

In 1876, with Morse's approval, Harvey opened his first dining room at

territories. His New Mexico locations included the La Fonda Hotel off the plaza in Santa Fe, the Ortiz Hotel in Lamy, the Alvarado Hotel in Albuquerque, and the Castañeda Hotel in Las Vegas, as well as lunchrooms in Las Vegas, Lamy, Albuquerque, Gallup, Belen, and Deming.

During his life, Harvey became one of the most prominent boosters of New Mexico and the Southwest at the national level. The Santa Fe Railroad was his partner in the creation of a romanticized Native American image for the region. In their repackaged rendition, Native peoples represented two sides of the same coin: modernity mixed with ancient traditions. As was the case for boosters and reformers around the turn of the twentieth century, despite idealized admiration for what they perceived as New Mexicans' pre-modern lifeways, the outsiders never wanted to give up the modern world completely. When push came to shove, they tended to favor the modern over the traditional. Indeed, the Santa Fe Railroad illustrated this tension by naming its newest locomotives things like "Super Chief."

The Grand Canyon became one of Fred Harvey's main attractions and all of the other elements of his enterprise revolved around it. The Santa Fe Railroad hired architect [Mary Colter](#) to design [Hopi House](#), a building that resembled the actual Hopi village of Old Oraibi. Colter employed a crew of Hopis to aid in construction and give the building the look and feel of authenticity. Inside, Colter designed a Harvey House hotel and lunchroom meant to appear as if they had been taken straight off of [First Mesa](#). Of course, the structure also boasted all of the modern amenities that tourists had come to expect.

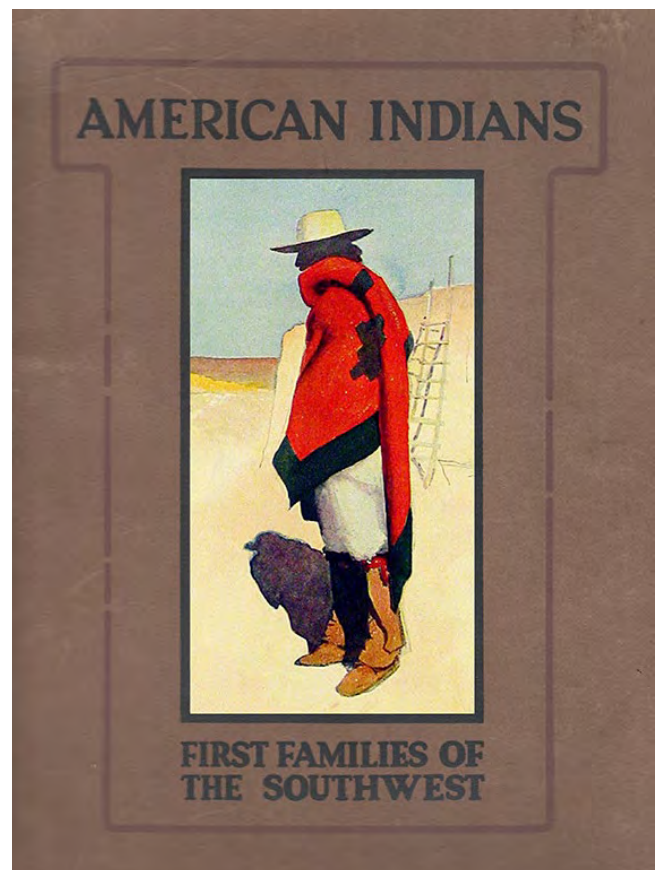
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Construction efforts included prehistoric-looking watchtowers set up at

intervals along the Grand Canyon's rim, suggesting that Native peoples had always used them to gaze upon the canyon's expanses. The reality was that they were made to seem that way in order to appeal to tourists. The Santa Fe Railroad and Fred Harvey Company employed Hopi people to live at Hopi House, where they also publicly practiced their trades of weaving and pottery. Tourists paid for the opportunity to witness them at their craft, and had the chance to purchase Hopi wares in the gift shop.

Hopi people did not historically inhabit the Grand Canyon itself, but company promoters considered them to be more "picturesque" than the Havasupai people whose homeland included the canyon. Havasupai men and women did get jobs and at the new tourist sites, but their work was typically done behind the scenes as janitors and maintenance laborers.

As is the case in the tourist industry, the Land of Enchantment created in New Mexico and Arizona by the Santa Fe Railroad was highly selective. Native peoples were presented to tourists in ways that would appeal to their tastes and sensibilities. And the railroad and Fred Harvey Company made a great deal of money in the process. A Fred Harvey Company pamphlet, titled "[*American Indians: First Families of the Southwest*](#)," was published in 1920 to illustrate the idea that Native families were essentially the same as Anglo American families in terms of gender roles, parent-child relationships, and family activities (including work and play). The reality, however, was that many Native peoples traditionally observed gender



This 1920 Fred Harvey Company pamphlet described the family lives and histories of Pueblo, Hopi, Apache, and Navajo peoples in the context of white Anglo American cultural norms.

Courtesy of Gaylon Emerzian

roles that assigned women to positions of power and influence. Many Pueblos were and are [matrilineal](#).

The emphasis on the proper role of “respectable” white women was also a major factor in the Harvey Company’s business model in the form of the [Harvey Girls](#). Fred Harvey worked hard to create an [elegant atmosphere](#) in his restaurants, complete with all the markers of Eastern and Midwestern dining respectability, including fine china, linens, silver, and flowers on each table. Young, white, single women worked as servers in this environment. The first Harvey Girls were hired to work at the Raton, New Mexico, Harvey House in 1883.



Photograph of a group of Harvey Girls that dates to the late nineteenth century.
Courtesy of Northern Arizona University, Cline Library

Newspapers throughout the Midwest and Eastern United States ran advertisements that sought “young women 18 to 30 years of age, of good character, attractive and intelligent, as waitresses in Harvey Eating Houses in the West.”¹⁸ Over 100,000 young ladies left their homes to seek out

opportunity in a time that offered very few prospects for women in the workplace. The Harvey Company paid \$17.50 per month—a generous wage for women in the late nineteenth century. In order to stabilize the labor force, Harvey Girls agreed to remain single for a period of at least one year after their date of hire. Despite that provision, many of them married when they got the chance. Following a period of intense training, the new employees were sent to a dormitory near their place of work. A matron presided over each home to maintain a set of strict rules that were intended to promote high moral standards among the women.

In their trademark black dresses and white aprons, [Harvey Girls](#) contrasted with the women of the red light districts of many Western cities and towns. The girls quickly became shorthand for the reputation of the Fred Harvey Company. By contrast, African American or Hispanic women worked behind the scenes as cooks, dishwashers, and maids. Along the Santa Fe Railroad and in Fred Harvey restaurants and hotels, complex notions of race and gender organized labor and promoted New Mexico and the Southwest to the rest of the nation.



Fred Harvey Company Indian Detour staff posed in front of the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe. *Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 053568*

Famously, the city of Santa Fe took cues from the success of the Santa Fe Railroad and Fred Harvey Company to remake its own image. Between the 1880s and the 1920s, Santa Fe boosters and politicians hired a series of architects, photographers, and anthropologists to create a unique style for the municipality that drew on Pueblo and Spanish-colonial era architectural designs. In the construction of the [La Fonda Hotel](#) the visions of city fathers and railroad magnates dovetailed. Although the building at the current hotel site on the edge of the Santa Fe Plaza was an inn during Spanish Colonial times, the current structure was erected in 1922 in the newly devised Pueblo Revival Style architecture. The Fred Harvey Company was once again on the leading edge of cultural tourism, and Santa Fe, touting itself as “the city different,” was one of the first culturally reimagined cities in the nation.

Fun Fact!

As automobiles began to displace rail travel, the Fred Harvey Company placed increasing emphasis on its “[Indian Detours](#)” to stay relevant. The Santa Fe Railroad and Harvey Company published a series of pamphlets to advertise the detours and to promote certain elements of indigenous cultures to tourists.

Santa Fe, a cultural icon?



Spanish-American Ethnic Identity

Along with forging new connections with the burgeoning national economy and creating a new tourist image of New Mexico, the railroad gave rise to new towns and caused existing ones to split in two. Raton, Gallup, Springer, and Deming were among the new settlements inspired by the railroad. All were inhabited by predominantly white populations. By comparison, established towns like Las Vegas and Albuquerque maintained their majority hispano populations.

The railroad drastically altered the existing demographic and urban landscape. Albuquerque, for example, split in two. New Town, the present-day downtown area, was constructed around the rail depot, primarily by whites. Hispano residents maintained Old Town a few miles to the west of the depot. Despite claims by some territorial officials, most notably Governor [L. Bradford Prince](#), that New Mexico was the site of tri-cultural harmony (cooperation between hispanos, Pueblos, and whites), such characterizations glossed over the tension, conflict, and segregation that also accompanied the developments of the late-nineteenth century.



In 1866 LeBaron Bradford Prince earned his law degree at Columbia University in New York City. In 1878 he was appointed as Chief Justice of the New Mexico Supreme Court, and he served as territorial governor from 1889 to 1893. Prince was a strident

In the midst of such changes, as well as protracted efforts to Americanize New Mexico's people, many nuevomexicanos began to describe

themselves as "Spanish American" when they spoke English. When speaking Spanish, they often used the term "Hispano-americano." By doing so, they attempted to push back against programs that targeted the Spanish language, and also to accommodate the prevailing power structures in the territory that promoted Americanization and modernization. As historian John Nieto-Phillips argues, the new mode of self-identification was a strategic decision that emphasized nuevomexicanos Spanish ethnicity and American nationality in order to distance them from "the 'Mexican' label that [Anglo](#)-Americans had used to disparage them."¹⁹

advocate of New Mexican statehood and he staunchly defended the loyalty of nuevomexicanos to the United States.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Influential ricos, such as [Eusebio Chacón](#), were the first proponents of the shift to identification as Spanish-American rather than [nuevomexicano](#), mexicano, or Mexican. Chacón was born in Peñasco in 1870. He attended the Jesuit College in Las Vegas, New Mexico, before going on to earn a law degree from Notre Dame University in 1889. Soon after, he moved to his parents' new hometown of Trinidad, Colorado, where he edited the Spanish-language *El Progreso* newspaper. His ideas influenced hispano communities from Las Vegas northward into southern Colorado.

Chacón was known for his eloquent and fiery speeches in defense of nuevomexicano society and identity. In order to emphasize that his people had a long heritage of education and civilization, he disassociated from his family's Mexican past in favor of their distant Spanish ancestors. In a 1901 speech delivered in Spanish in Las Vegas, for example, Chacón asserted, "I am Spanish American as are those



Chacón was one of the most prominent early advocates of the Spanish American Ethnic Identity. He used his position as a well-connected rico and prominent newspaperman to highlight nuevomexicanos' Spanish heritage as a means of emphasizing their white, European roots. *Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors](#) Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 050356*

who hear me. No other blood circulates through my veins but that which was brought by Don [Juan de Oñate](#) and by the illustrious ancestors of my name.”²⁰

As we have seen, New Mexico was a place of ethnic and cultural conflict and accommodation since its earliest history, not an “island of pure Spanishness” as Stanford folklorist and native New Mexican [Aurelio Espinosa](#) asserted. The pressing question, then, becomes why nuevomexicanos created and adopted a means of identifying themselves that erased other elements of their heritage.

Although a study of genealogical records fails to support Chacón’s claims, the construction of Spanish American identity was a significant element of nuevomexicano efforts to portray themselves as worthy of equal treatment within the United States. Spanish American identity was also a major component of the statehood struggle. Emphasis on their Spanish patrimony helped New Mexico’s hispanos to claim a clear connection to a white, European heritage. The nineteenth-century construction of Spanish American identity has a persistent legacy that continues within many northern New Mexico

communities to this day.

Ethnic Identification

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



A heated exchange in the *New York Times* in 1882 between a resident of Trinidad and L. Bradford Prince, then Chief Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court, illustrates the type of acrimony that many white Americans held toward New Mexico's people. The anonymous resident of Trinidad wrote a letter to the editor under the headline "Greasers as Citizens," in which he argued that New Mexico should never become a state because "about two-thirds the population of the Territory is the mongrel breed known as Mexicans—a mixture of the Apache, negro, Navajo, white horse-thief, Pueblo Indian, and old-time frontiersman with the original Mexican stock." Prince responded that no African American heritage existed in the territory, and that Pueblo and Spanish intermixture never took place because the two "races . . . are as separate in such respects as if a Chinese wall ran between."

Prince emphasized both the Spanish heritage of New Mexico's people as well as their loyalty to the United States—something that always seemed to be in question. He reminded the readers of the *New York Times* that nuevomexicanos had volunteered to serve the Union during the Civil War and that they had accepted nearly 20,000 white newcomers to their territory in the few years that Prince had served there. To bolster his argument that New Mexicans were civilized, loyal, educated, law-abiding, and hospitable, Prince presented them as having a white, European heritage by characterizing them as “the worthy sons of the Conquistadores.”²¹

As people of white, European descent, Prince also asserted their right to speak and write in the Spanish language. Some other observers referred to New Mexicans' “refusal” to speak English as an act of treason. Prince instead touted the regular publication of over forty newspapers in the territory, “part are printed in English, part in Spanish, and part in both languages.”²² Indeed, New Mexico's print history dated back to Father Antonio José Martínez who promoted various forms of publishing following the arrival of the first printing press via the [Santa Fe Trail](#) in 1834. From Prince's perspective, the preponderance of newspapers illustrated New Mexicans' preparedness to govern themselves and to join the union as a full-fledged state. Prince's arguments, while pro-nuevomexicano, misrepresented the level of ethnic intermixture that characterized the territory. He also incorrectly denied the place of African Americans in New Mexico.



Nuevomexicanos, such as Maximiliano Luna, comprised a significant portion of [Theodore Roosevelt's](#) Rough Riders during the Spanish-Cuban-American War. This 1898 photograph shows Roosevelt and the Rough Riders at the top of the hill they captured during the Battle of San Juan.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Eusebio Chacón's generation was the first to come of age in the crucible of competing interests that simultaneously forced nuevomexicanos to accommodate to white Americans' expectations of them and pushed them to create innovative means of preserving their unique heritage, language, and history. Figures like [Jesús María Hilario Alarid](#), [Eleuterio Baca](#), and [Enrique H. Salazar](#), among many others, edited Spanish-language and bilingual newspapers in the territory. Many other nuevomexicanos wrote down oral traditions that had been passed down in their families and submitted them for publication in the periodicals.

New Mexico's strong Spanish-language print culture served as a vehicle to preserve nuevomexicano history and perspectives, while simultaneously emphasizing New Mexicans' Spanish American heritage. Others also picked up the line of reasoning that legitimized New Mexico as a Spanish American territory. In the early twentieth century, scholars like Aurelio Espinoza and historian [Herbert Eugene Bolton](#) asserted the value of understanding the Spanish past in New Mexico and the Southwest. Literary figures in northern New Mexico, including José de Cena, [Cleofas Jaramillo](#), [Adelina "Nina" Otero-Warren](#), and [Fabiola Cabeza de Baca-Gilbert](#) published novels, fliers, and cookbooks to preserve nuevomexicanos' Spanish language, folklore, genealogy, clothing, music, and food.

During the [Spanish-Cuban-American War](#) of 1895-1898 the claim to Spanish American identity became more complicated because Spain was an enemy of the United States. To negotiate that new reality, New Mexicans emphasized the "American" element of their chosen identity by volunteering in large numbers for service in the conflict. About 350 men served with Theodore Roosevelt's famed [Rough Riders](#) in Cuba, and nearly 400 others in other regiments.

[Maximiliano Luna](#) and [George Washington Armijo](#) were among the most decorated and celebrated New Mexicans to serve in the war. Luna came from a prominent Rio Abajo family and he had served as sheriff of Valencia County prior to his service in the war. He demanded to fight on the front lines of the conflict as a "man of pure Spanish blood" in order to show not only his individual dedication and loyalty to the United States, but also that of all nuevomexicanos.²³ Luna served honorably with the Rough Riders in Cuba, and was then assigned



Capt. Maximiliano Luna, First U. S. Vol. Cavalry

Luna served alongside other nuevomexicanos during the Spanish-Cuban-American War. After fighting with the Rough Riders in Cuba, he was assigned to the Philippines where he was killed in combat.

Courtesy of Donald Deesen Collection, Southwest Center for Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico

others who fought in the Spanish-Cuban-American War hoped that their efforts would hasten the statehood process. Indeed, some saw Luna as a martyr for the cause of statehood. Of course, many New Mexicans understood statehood as the signal that their full citizenship rights would finally be guaranteed.

The assertion of Spanish American ethnic identity countered the racial hierarchy that placed white Americans at the top. Rico New Mexicans asserted their place as leaders in the territory by asserting their Spanish American heritage, and they also presented an image of New Mexico's history and peoples that challenged the racist notions of those opposed to statehood. In sum,

to the Philippine theater where he was killed in combat.

Armijo's given names emphasized his parents' desire to showcase their dedication to the United States. Unlike Luna, he survived the war and built a career in the military. Both of these men and many of the hundreds of

Spanish American ethnic identity was an effort to create an ideal whose cultural roots were white and European, thus allowing New Mexicans to claim a heritage that they believed was on par with that of white Americans.

The reputed gains of Spanish American ethnic identity, however, came at a cost. Nieto-Phillips also reminds us that despite prominent nuevomexicanos' adoption of their new identity, there is little evidence of how poorer nuevomexicanos reacted. Many, it appears, supported their patrones' political ambitions and views, but few lower-status New Mexicans left records of their perceptions of claims to pure Spanish heritage.

By the first years of the twentieth century, Prince, Chacón, and others emphasized a concept that has since become known as the tri-cultural myth: the idea that people of Spanish, Anglo, and Pueblo descent lived in harmony in New Mexico.²⁴ Such notions overemphasized cooperation and negated a history of conflict and resistance that accompanied efforts to Americanize and modernize New Mexicans' sense of ethnic heritage. The myth also ignored the presence of African Americans, Asian Americans, and people of other ethnicities in New Mexico.

The conclusion of long years of war against Native Americans (including campaigns against the Navajos and various Apache bands) in 1886 signaled that the territory was safe for capitalist development. The Santa Fe Railroad and [Fred Harvey](#) Company rushed to monopolize the tourism industry in New Mexico, and, as they did, each corporation reinvented and reproduced New Mexican peoples and cultures. Within the context of Americanization and

Dive into Ethnic Identity

Compare and contrast these letters to the editor of *The New York Times*:

- (Feb. 28, 1882) [People of New Mexico & Their Territory](#) by L. Brandford Prince
- (Feb. 6, 1882) [Greasers as Citizens](#) by a Trinidad resident

modernization, many nuevomexicanos constructed a Spanish American ethnic identity for themselves.

Despite the harmony suggested in the tri-cultural myth, other segments of New Mexican society employed militancy and violence to resist the changes wrought in the territory in the late nineteenth century. Among them were Las Gorras Blancas, or the White Caps. Additionally, many poor nuevomexicanos simply sought to eke out a living for themselves and their families within the burgeoning capitalist economy. Their methods of resistance and accommodation are the subject of the next chapter.

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Chapter 11: Resistance & Resilience in Territorial New Mexico

[Resistance & Resilience in Territorial New Mexico](#)

[Las Gorras Blancas: Militant Resistance](#)

[Conflict over Language in Schools](#)

[Blackdom: African American Settler Communities](#)

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Resistance & Resilience in Territorial New Mexico



On October 30-31, 1884, nineteen-year-old, self-appointed deputy sheriff [Elfego Baca](#) hunkered down in a *jacal*, or shack, in the town of Frisco (now Reserve) as a group of nearly eighty cowboys connected with the cattle enterprise of [John and William Slaughter](#) in west-central New Mexico Territory riddled his shelter with bullets. Despite being so vastly



Immortalized in his autobiography and mid-twentieth century Disney series, Elfego Baca gained renown as a Wild West legend. In Socorro County, his efforts as sheriff protected the legal rights of poor [nuevomexicano](#) partidarios. During this later career as a lawyer, Baca's alleged role in a Mexican Revolutionary's jailbreak from an Albuquerque prison in the 1910s resulted in his disbarment.

Courtesy of The Albuquerque Museum Photoarchives

personal history. In his autobiography, he recounted that his mother gave birth to him in 1865 as she caught a fly-ball during a game of softball in Socorro. He also claimed that [Billy the Kid](#) taught him to fire a six-shooter in Albuquerque in the early 1880s, an assertion that historians have proven untrue.

Through the promotion of both legends and actual events, Baca built a reputation as a peace officer, and later as a lawyer, with a habit of operating on both sides of the law. Most importantly for other [nuevomexicanos](#), by the end of his life and career he had emerged as a highly visible advocate of legal and

outnumbered, Baca managed to survive the onslaught. As he exchanged fire with his assailants from his position on the sunken, dusty floor of the jacal, several of the bullets that he shot through the door found their marks. Baca reportedly emerged without a scratch though he had killed or wounded several of his attackers.

The events of that thirty-hour period in Frisco launched Elfego Baca into the realm of Wild Western legends. In his later life, Baca actively promoted larger-than-life myths about his

extralegal actions to protect hispano lands, resources, and political rights from near-constant dispossession efforts.

The life of Elfego Baca provides an interesting backdrop for the story of New Mexico as a site of ongoing resistance, accommodation, and hope to distinct groups of people between 1880 and 1910. His life was characterized by an unswerving determination to integrate himself into the territorial political and economic system while also taking a stand in favor of nuevomexicano rights. During his tenure as Sheriff of Socorro County, Baca spearheaded an initiative that reversed a debtors' law instituted at the behest of sheep and cattle interests. When he returned from a trip to find the Socorro jail overrun with people imprisoned for failure to pay off their debts, he promptly released them and eventually worked to strike the law from the books. Despite issues that prevented him from attaining public office (including his role in an Albuquerque jailbreak and his alcoholism), Baca stood as an advocate for the interests of lower-status New Mexicans.

The Frisco shootout was linked to a range war between nuevomexicano shepherders and cattle ranchers from Texas. Both groups migrated to New Mexico's central plains following the many conflicts that dispossessed native peoples of the lands in the mid-1800s. Prominent families, such as the Luna, Baca, Otero, and Chaves clans from Valencia and Socorro Counties, dominated the sheep industry in New Mexico, and they stood at the head of the [partido system](#) that defined New Mexico's rural economy well into the twentieth century. Figures like the Slaughters used barbed wire fences to stake claims to watering holes and grazing lands that New Mexican shepherders asserted as communal property.

In a region devoid of a cash economy, the partido system provided a means for aspiring shepherders to make a living of their own by building up small herds. By the late nineteenth century, partidarios also sold wool to generate a small amount of cash. [Nuevomexicano](#) patrons typically received the largest portion of the profits and augmented their own flocks. Additionally, hispano patrons were linked to partidarios and their families through ties of [compadrazgo](#) (or

god-parentage). Paternalism was therefore a significant part of the system, as patrons provided for partidarios in times of emergency or need. However benign it seemed to the parties involved, the relationship was always unequal. A cycle of indebtedness characterized the partidario's connection to the patron.

Cattle ranchers complicated partido sheepherding arrangements in the late nineteenth century as they worked to dominate water and grazing resources. In the case of legal efforts to break up Spanish and Mexican land grants and on the open range, violence emerged as a mode of resistance. In certain instances, such as Baca's Frisco shootout or in the case of litigation over the Las Vegas land grant, nuevomexicano interests won out. Such victories tended to be short-lived, however.

In the case of the Las Vegas land grant, despite a legal victory for the [mercedarios](#) (land grant heirs), [Anglo](#)-American homesteaders built fences, houses, and barns on the grant prior to the court decision. In response, a clandestine group known as Las Gorras Blancas (The White Caps) tore down fences, burned barns and homes, and destroyed railroad tracks to protest illegal encroachments on the grant's communal resources. In the end, their militant resistance asserted mercedarios' right to the grant and many of the Gorras transitioned into new roles as agitators in labor movements and politics.

Public education was also a source of conflict in the late nineteenth century. Supporters of Las Gorras Blancas and ricos alike actively promoted the continued use of the Spanish-language in the classroom. Their efforts countered Anglo Americans' push for New Mexico's children to receive their schooling in English only. Navajo and Pueblo families were not included in the debates over which language to use in the classroom, and their children faced a more radical program of assimilation into modern American life in [boarding schools](#). Some sent their children to the schools in hopes that their education would allow them to be economically and politically successful later in life. Other native parents, however, resisted the education program by refusing to let their children participate.

In the midst of New Mexicans' resistance and accommodations to land grant transformations and education programs, a handful of African American migrants viewed southern New Mexico as a place of hope. [Francis Boyer](#) led friends and family from Georgia to Blackdom in Chaves County (which had been carved out of the eastern section of Lincoln County in 1889) in the late 1890s. In Blackdom, Boyer and others created a self-sustaining agricultural community comprised almost entirely of African Americans. They escaped [Jim Crow discrimination](#) in Blackdom and attempted to assert their rights to American citizenship that had been guaranteed to them in the [Constitutional Amendments](#) (13th-15th Amendments) of the Reconstruction Era.

Late territorial episodes of resistance and accommodations are a vital element of New Mexico's recent history. Although social movements like Las Gorras Blancas failed to secure full title to the land grant commons of the Las Vegas Land Grant, for example, their activities redefined the political and economic machinery in northern New Mexico and helped to maintain nuevomexicanos' voices in subsequent political debates about crucial issues like primary education and resource rights as New Mexico inched closer to achieving statehood in 1912.

Las Gorras Blancas: Militant Resistance

On the heels of railroad development and the arrival of an increasing number of [Anglo](#) American migrants from the East, Las Vegas, seat of San Miguel County, rivaled Santa Fe and Albuquerque for the title of the territory's economic center. As tourists flocked to the Castañeda Hotel and other [Fred Harvey](#) Company attractions, speculators also arrived. They hoped to make a fortune by capitalizing on the lands of the Las Vegas Land Grant. In an effort to transfer the communally held land and resources of the grant to private property, they erected barbed wire fences and filed litigation with the Office of the Land Surveyor.

Under the U.S. legal regime, community or corporate land holding held little weight. Time and time again, lawyers and speculators (sometimes one and the same, as in the case of [Thomas B. Catron](#)) utilized their knowledge of American jurisprudence to whittle away at the land grants. Despite the guarantees of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), by the late 1880s [mercedarios](#) faced an increasingly uphill battle. As San Miguel County gained political, social, and economic prominence in the territory, it also led other counties in terms of stock raising.

Many homesteaders and speculators arrived in San Miguel County with the intention of staking out claims of their own based on the [1862 Homestead Act](#). Despite the Act's guarantee of 160 acres to those who settled unimproved lands and remained on them for a period of five years, the unresolved status of the Las Vegas Land Grant complicated matters. As it stood at the time of the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#), the grant included nearly 500,000 acres, and nearly three decades later court cases had yet to resolve its status.

Unwilling to wait for a resolution of its legal boundaries, speculators erected fences, homes, and barns on lands within the grant. Lush grasslands, timber, and a central location amenable to rail connections attracted them to the area. In a dramatic turn of events, in 1887 mercedarios led by the [Padilla brothers](#) erected fences of their own in order to protect lands that, from their perspective, should have remained a commons for all land grant heirs. Shortly thereafter, the Las Vegas Land and Cattle Company filed a lawsuit against the Padillas to challenge their claims to communal access to land and resources within the grant.



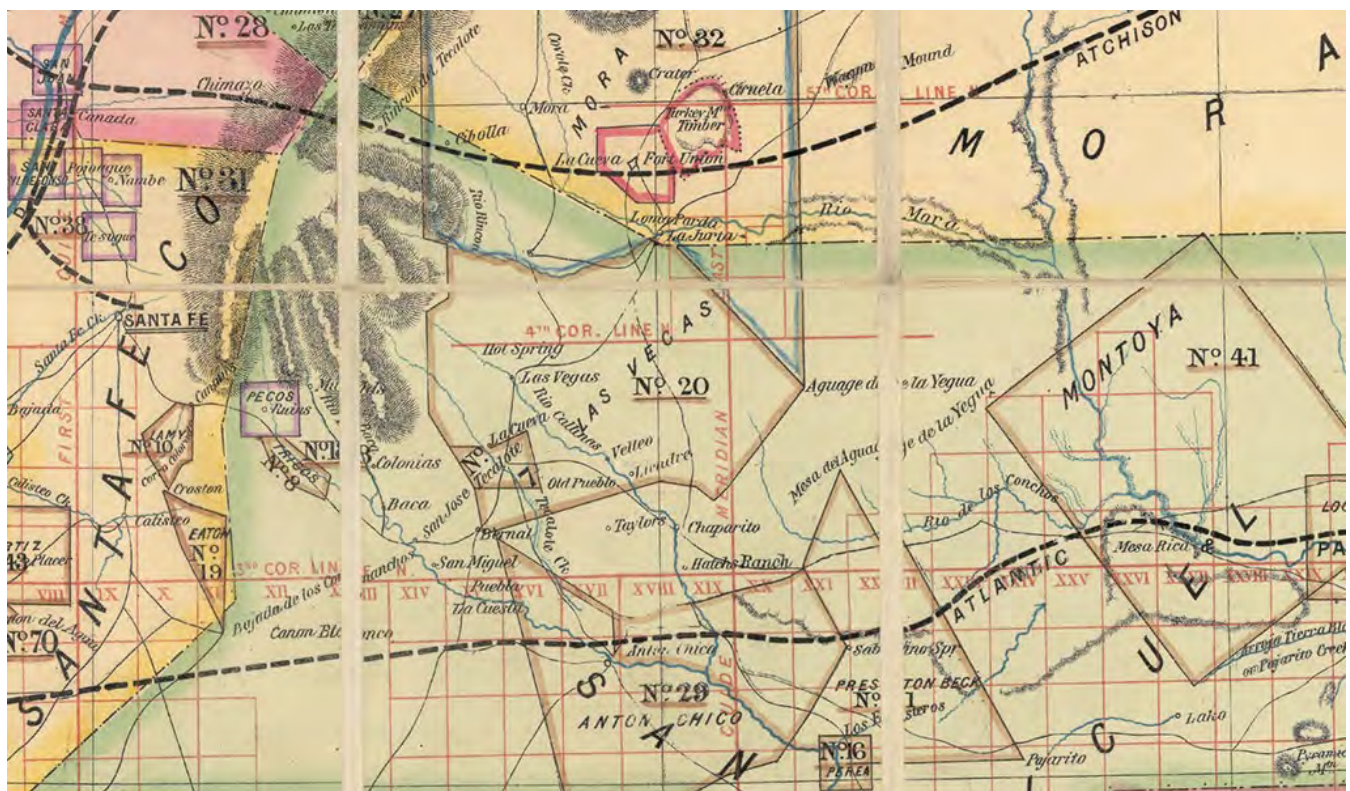
This photo was staged to reenact the audacious actions of Las Gorras Blancas. Actual participants in the group cut barbed wire fences during the night—not in broad daylight, as was the case in this photo. Still, the photograph helps to capture the type of activity that Las Gorras carried out to protest their dispossession of lands and resources.

Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society

Chief Justice of the New Mexico Supreme Court, [Elisha Long](#), heard the case,

titled [Milhiser v. Padilla](#). The usual suspects were represented in the courtroom: representatives of a powerful American corporation against the heirs of a Mexican land grant. To better understand the issues of the case, Long appointed a special agent to act as an arbitrator. When the arbitrator found Padilla's actions to be justified, Long failed to act immediately. The case remained in limbo for over a year before Long finally issued a decision in favor of the mercedarios in November of 1889.

The Las Vegas Land Grant case came to a head within the context of systematic political and economic fraud. As a result of the activities of speculators and the machinations of members of the [Santa Fe Ring](#), homesteading protocols were routinely violated in San Miguel County. An 1885 investigation under Democratic Governor [Edmund G. Ross](#), an avowed enemy of the Ring, discovered collusion between the district attorney in San Miguel County, Miguel Salazar, and Max Frost, registrar of the Santa Fe Land Office. With the aid of Salazar and Frost, speculators and cattle ranchers rapidly gained access to the best grazing lands, watering holes, and timber resources. A tax assessment completed in 1890 showed that two small groups of Anglo newcomers controlled about half of San Miguel County's total cattle operations.



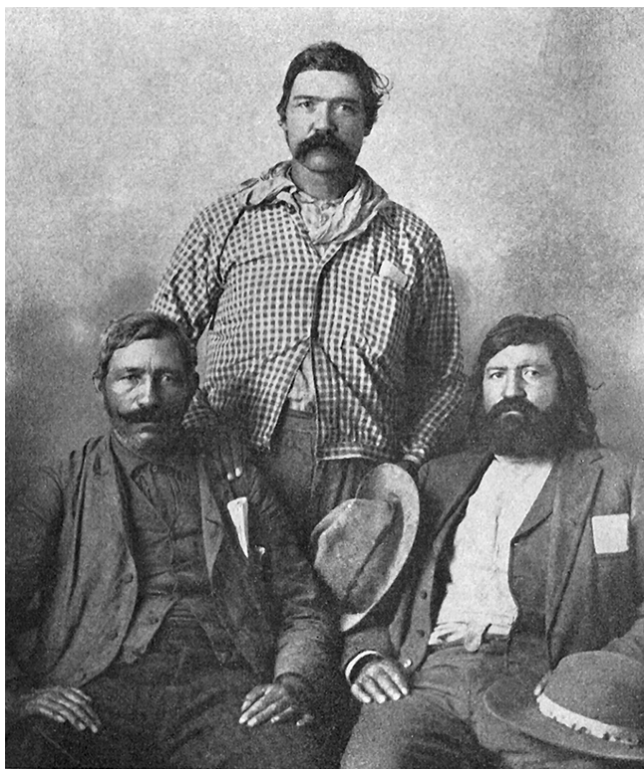
Las Vegas Land Grant This close-up of an 1873 map of the New Mexico Territory shows the Las Vegas Land Grant in San Miguel County.

Courtesy of Fray Angélico Chávez History Library

Chief Justice Long's delay in deciding the Las Vegas Land Grant case created an opportunity for speculators to erect fences and make improvements on plots of land that they claimed as their private property under the provisions of the Homestead Act. In the spring of 1889, in response to unauthorized speculation, Las Gorras Blancas emerged. Riding at night, they cut fences that speculators had erected. Their efforts targeted the markers of dispossession: barbed wire, barns, and railroad ties.

Members of Las Gorras Blancas wore white hoods to protect their identities, taking their cues from previous vigilante White Cap movements that had developed in Indiana and other places in the Midwest. Officials in Santa Fe and Las Vegas believed that [Juan José Herrera](#) and his brothers, **Pablo and Nicanor**, spearheaded the group's organization in rural communities like El Salitre, El Burro, Ojitos Fríos, and San Gerónimo. Juan José was deeply involved with labor organization in San Miguel County. He had traveled to Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and Kansas where he began to work in unionization movements. He supported several local chapters of the [Knights of Labor](#) which were composed primarily of Spanish-speaking people. Accordingly, those chapters used the Spanish translation of the Union's name, Caballeros del Trabajo.

Herrera emphatically denied any involvement with Las Gorras Blancas, although his alleged participation later became a point of pride for members of his family. In an oral history interview late in her life, his daughter Rosa Herrera de McAdams proudly confirmed that Juan José Herrera had, in fact, organized Las Gorras Blancas. Whatever the actual circumstances of



Researchers believe that this photograph of the Herrera brothers, alleged organizers of Las Gorras Blancas, was taken during the period of their union organizing efforts in New Mexico. From left to right: Juan José, Pablo, and Nicanor.

Courtesy of Charles A. Siringo

of newly erected fence line that belonged to two British ranchers near San Gerónimo. They not only took the fences down, they reduced the fence posts to splinters and cut barbed wire into small pieces, rendering the material unusable. Additionally, the group targeted [rico nuevomexicano](#) and Anglo squatters alike. At San Ignacio, for example, riders relentlessly attacked José Ignacio Luján's sawmill in June and July of 1889.

San Miguel County and Santa Fe officials scrambled to investigate the Gorras' destructive actions, although they were unwilling to address any of the political or land issues that the masked night riders hoped to alleviate. In August, Las Gorras Blancas destroyed miles of fencing and crops

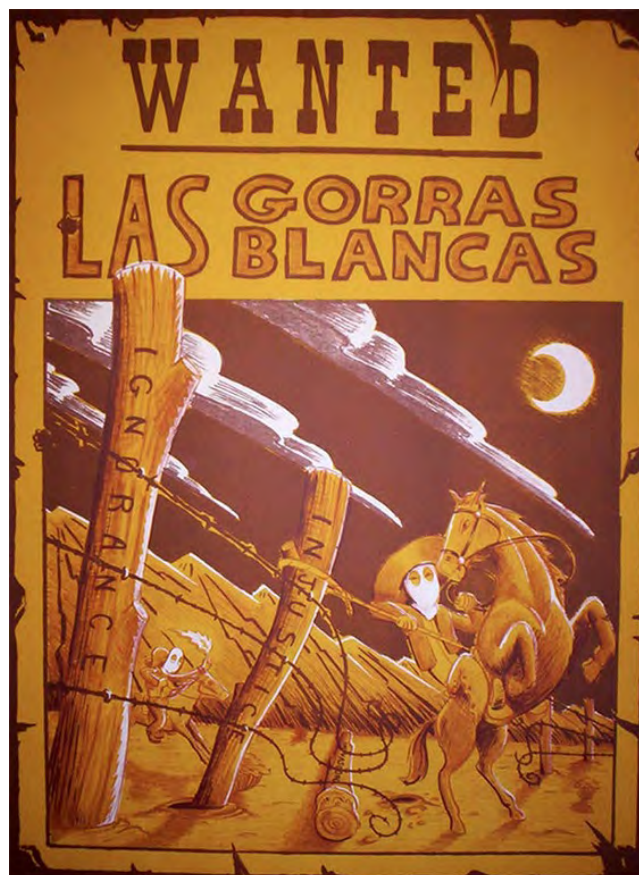
the group's organization, the masked night riders directly addressed the [nuevomexicano](#) community's most pressing problems in San Miguel County.

Near the end of April of 1889, Las Gorras Blancas took their first public action when they uprooted four miles

that belonged to Sheriff Lorenzo López. Much to the chagrin of local officials, the sheriff bowed to the demand that he remove remaining sections of fence himself. As historian Anselmo Arellano has shown, extended family ties existed between the Herreras and López.¹ Their kinship illustrates the practice of [compadrazgo](#) and helps to explain López's compliance with, and later support of, Las Gorras Blancas.

Las Gorras Blancas generally avoided direct attacks on individuals. Their primary targets were the symbols of legal corruption and land dispossession. Yet, in a few cases, their actions nearly resulted in direct physical harm to their targets. In November of 1889, the railroad agent at Rowe determined to prevent the destruction of rail property and he confronted a group of Gorras with a loaded shotgun in hand. The result was a brief gun battle that forced him to flee "into his house to save his life."² In another instance, Las Gorras Blancas set the homes of the surveyor general and militia captain ablaze. All narrowly escaped with their lives.

At about the same time that Chief Justice Long issued his decision in the Las Vegas Land Grant case, Los Caballeros del Trabajo and Las Gorras Blancas



In this creative rendition of a wanted poster for Las Gorras Blancas, the words "ignorance" and "injustice" appear on the fence posts that the masked rider is tearing down. The group hoped to root out the injustice of land dispossession in New Mexico through their campaign to destroy fences, railroad tracks, and barns on grant lands in San Miguel County.

Courtesy of Eric J. Garcia

dominated the political conversation in San Miguel County. In an effort to rein in both groups' increasing popularity, District Attorney Salazar ramped up efforts to discover and prosecute members of the clandestine organization. Based on thin evidence, Salazar attempted to bring accused members of Las Gorras Blancas to trial. On November 1, 1889, as the date of the first trials neared, a group of sixty-three Gorras surrounded the Las Vegas Courthouse and then journeyed to the jail in a show of solidarity with those who had been imprisoned.

Although figures like Salazar and probate judge [Manuel C. de Baca](#) feared open hostilities from Las Gorras Blancas, no attacks materialized. Instead, the jury in the case returned a verdict of not guilty. As historian Anselmo Arellano characterized the case, “the defendants had successfully argued in court that the charges were not related to Gorras Blancas activities; their problem had stemmed from a land dispute.”³ Still, the final day of district court saw twenty-six more indictments against accused Gorras. This time, Juan José and Nicanor Herrera were included in the group that was charged with the destruction of fences.

Perhaps connected to his positive decision for Las Vegas mercedarios, Chief Justice Long reduced bail for the group from \$500 to \$250. All of those indicted were able to post bond with the support of community members favorable to the activities of Las Gorras Blancas. When district court reconvened in the spring of 1890, all of the defendants presented themselves to honor their bonds. Once again, the Herreras and all others were cleared of any wrongdoing.

In early March of 1890, just prior to the trial, a group of nearly 300 Gorras posted copies of what they called the group's “[Platform and Principles](#).” The manifesto was quite lengthy, and was distributed in the form of handbills and published in the *Las Vegas Optic* and *La Voz del Pueblo* in both English and Spanish. The Gorras made it clear that they did not oppose lawyers or economic development. Nuevomexicanos, Native Americans, and Anglo Americans alike considered modernization to be an unstoppable, and even welcome, force.

Instead, Las Gorras Blancas wished to promote the rights of all to access their living from the land. Among the group's proclamations:

Our purpose is to protect the rights and interests of the people in general; especially those of the helpless classes.

We want the Las Vegas Grant settled to the benefit of all concerned, and this we hold is the entire community within the grant. . . .

We are down on race issues, and will watch race agitators. We are all human brethren, under the same glorious flag.

We favor irrigation enterprises, but will fight any scheme that tends to monopolize the supply of water courses to the detriment of residents living on lands watered by the same streams. . . .

We do not care how much you get so long as you do so fairly and honestly. . . .

Las Gorras Blancas, 1,500 Strong and Growing Daily⁴

As also indicated in the final section of the declaration, members of Las Gorras Blancas initiated their militant actions as a response to speculators' and politicians' efforts to intimidate them into giving up their rights to common land and resource usage.

In repeated shows of solidarity with local communities in San Miguel County, as well as in the Gorras' political and social agenda, Las Gorras Blancas emerged as a broad social movement that stood in direct opposition to the burgeoning economic and political order. Local power brokers and officials in Santa Fe considered their activities to be a significant threat. Miguel Salazar and Manuel C. de Baca derisively characterized them as "anarchical, revolutionary, and communistic" in communications to Governor [L. Bradford Prince](#).⁵

Las Gorras Blancas

WITH DAVID CORREIA, PH.D.



The most intense period of fence cutting activities spanned the period between March and November of 1890. No major ranching or land development corporation in San Miguel County escaped the attention of Las Gorras Blancas. In the spring of 1890, the Gorras expanded their activities from fence cutting to the destruction of railroad tracks, telegraph lines, and some buildings. In August, railroad workers arrived at the job to find a notice that read, “you are advised to leave here at once otherwise you will not be able to do so.”⁶ Attacks on the railroad also included actions that prevented local teamsters from delivering new materials for reconstruction.

As they prohibited them from delivering rails and ties, Las Gorras Blancas also demanded that the teamsters protest for higher wages. To further prevent new rail construction, as well as the further depredation of local timber resources, Gorras posted notices in strategic locations at the edge of forests that advised people to abstain from harvesting trees for lumber or railroad ties unless the price was preapproved by Las Gorras Blancas. The handbills also advised locals

against contracting work unless the wages were approved by members of the group. At the bottom, each notice was signed, “White Caps, Fence Cutters, and Death.”⁷

Support for Las Gorras Blancas remained strong among mercedarios and poorer inhabitants of San Miguel County. The Spanish-language *La Voz del Pueblo* and the bilingual *Las Vegas Daily Optic* both declared their support for the group as well. Editor [Enrique H. Salazar](#) explained that he relocated *La Voz del Pueblo* to Las Vegas in order to publish reports in support of nuevomexicanos struggles to maintain their land grants in the face of corrupt dealings. In the summer of 1890, *La Voz* reported that the accusations against alleged Gorras were clearly unjust because they were dismissed time and again in the courts.

The *Las Vegas Daily Optic* also issued favorable, although non-incendiary, reports on Las Gorras Blancas. The paper’s editors did not go so far as to condone fence cutting and other destruction, “yet we do not wholly condemn their course.” The editors encouraged residents of San Miguel County to unite to “preserve and protect this great property [the Las Vegas Land Grant] from all further depredation, that it may be kept intact and held for the common benefit of all our citizens.”⁸

For his part, Governor L. Bradford Prince maintained a cautious approach toward the developments in San Miguel County. He received numerous letters from land speculators and Las Vegas officials that condemned Las Gorras Blancas for committing “outrages” and “depredations” against private property. Prior to his affiliation with the Gorras, Sheriff López requested rifles and ammunition from the governor in order to combat potential violence. His request for weapons from Santa Fe was one of many.

Secretary of the Interior James Noble also pressured Prince to “enforce private rights” as Las Gorras Blancas increased their activities in 1890.⁹ In turn, members of the U.S. Congress and Benjamin F. Butler, a Washington, D.C., lawyer who owned land in New Mexico, constantly lobbied Noble to take some

sort of action. Butler hired his own agent to investigate the situation in San Miguel County, and he made his appeals for the suppression of Las Gorras Blancas based on what scholar David Correia has characterized as “racialized arguments to suggest that only labor agitators could be responsible for the campaign.” Butler advised Noble to remember “that these are Mexicans; that the Mexicans in New Mexico, with the exception of perhaps five per cent, are the most ignorant people on the face of the earth.”¹⁰

The governor received just as many letters in favor of Las Gorras Blancas. Many residents of San Miguel County reported that the real root of the problem were the large-scale ranching enterprises that encroached on communal lands, timber, and water. Several correspondents told Governor Prince that ranchers prevented mercedarios and others from gaining access to grazing lands and water sources that family members had used for generations. Even the district judge who dismissed charges against accused Gorras reported that unrest was due to dispossession of lands and resources by large ranching interests. Based on such reports, Prince concluded that “there is much exaggeration about the matter and that every kind of wrongdoing however committed is now very naturally attributed to the so-called *White Caps*.”¹¹

Perceived ties between Las Gorras Blancas, Los Caballeros del Trabajo, and a new third political party, El Partido del Pueblo Unido (the United People’s Party), also served to bring the situation in San Miguel County to national attention. Juan José Herrera vigorously promoted Los Caballeros del Trabajo to help poor farmers and ranchers, many of whom were partidarios (recipients of partido arrangements) or wage laborers on the lands of others. [Nuevomexicano](#) members of Los Caballeros tended to stand behind Las Gorras Blancas, but the national-level Knights of Labor and local Anglo-dominated chapters did not. To resolve the conflict between chapters, Herrera met with national union leaders and reiterated his claim that Los Caballeros del Trabajo and Las Gorras Blancas were in no way connected.

As tensions between the local chapters and the national Knights of Labor continued, Los Caballeros del Trabajo maintained a high political profile in Las

Vegas. For the July 4 celebrations in 1890, Los Caballeros prepared a series of processions, speeches, and other festivities. On the night of July 3, about 1,000 men on horseback paraded through town to celebrate vespers. The next day, the horsemen once again rode through town, this time led by Sheriff López. The riders and others carried banners and slogans in Spanish that declared their goals as members of the organization. Among the messages on the banners: “Free schools for our children,” “He who touches one of us answers to all,” and “We seek protection for the worker against the monopolist.”¹²

Among the speakers at the Old Town Plaza that day were Nestor Montoya, a Caballero and editor of *La Voz del Pueblo*. Mayor Edward Henry from Las Vegas’ New Town also offered a speech in which he commended the Caballeros’ successful organization campaigns. Juan José, Pablo, and Nicanor Herrera led a group of speakers that explained the mission and goals of the organization, and Governor Prince also made a short speech to mark the occasion.

Following the July 4 celebrations, the rising prominence of the Caballeros and the increasing activities of Las Gorras Blancas seemed to have a positive correlation. Increasing pressure from all sides led Governor Prince to personally investigate charges levied against the Gorras in August 1890. Again, a group of Caballeros, led by Nestor Montoya, asserted the claim that their organization was in no way associated with the fence cutters. Following his inquiries, Prince concluded that at least half of the county supported Las Gorras Blancas and he issued a proclamation that warned all guilty parties to cease and desist the destruction of property.

In many ways the governor’s words only fanned the flames of conflict. An editorial in *La Voz del Pueblo*, for example, argued that Prince should have also issued a proclamation against illegal land and resource speculation. At his

PBS: New Mexico & Las Gorras Blancas

This clip from [Latino Americans](#) looks at Las Gorras Blancas in New Mexico.

behest, county commissioners initiated their own efforts to bring community members together to resolve the conflict. An open meeting led by the district judge only seemed to promote the idea that efforts to find a solution were decidedly one-sided. A large group of those present at the meeting abruptly left in a rage when the judge appointed a committee to create a plan to resolve land and resource disputes. Many of the townspeople believed that the committee should have been elected rather than appointed.

Leaders of Los Caballeros del Trabajo also tried to resolve their estrangement from the Knights of Labor by sending a lengthy letter to the organization's national leader, [Terence V. Powderly](#). In addition to repeated assurances that local chapters were not affiliated with Las Gorras Blancas, the letter laid out the reasons for which Caballeros opposed the actions of men like Thomas B. Catron and Benjamin F. Butler. The authors of the message characterized them as architects of political and economic intrigues that dispossessed laborers.

Their message was offset by letters that English-speaking Knights of Labor from San Miguel County also sent to Powderly. In racialized terms, they made the case that “ignorant Mexicans” fomented violence and destruction in the county. By August of 1890 even the *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, often sympathetic to mercedarios' claims, levied the same types of racialized charges against Las Gorras Blancas.

The clandestine activities of Las Gorras Blancas decreased markedly by the late fall of 1890 as figures like Juan José Herrera focused their attention on expanding the Partido del Pueblo Unido, a third party connected to the rise of the [Populist Party](#) in the Midwest. Because Herrera's work with the Partido coincided with the end of Las Gorras Blancas, the idea that he was behind the clandestine group gained further credence. As Correia points out, however, “by the fall of 1890 every single fence that had enclosed the Las Vegas Land Grant had been cut, and none had survived reconstruction.”¹³ Perhaps Las Gorras Blancas had simply completed their work by that time.

In November 1890, Partido del Pueblo Unido candidates made a strong

showing at the ballot box in San Miguel County. Their entire ticket won election to territorial- and county-level posts. As the new year dawned in 1891, it seemed that the activities of Las Gorras Blancas had translated into an effective political movement.

By February 1891, however, the Partido del Pueblo Unido suffered serious setbacks that prevented the realization of lasting political change. As the first territorial legislative session came to a close that month, Pablo Herrera resigned from the territorial legislature and the party itself. After one session in Santa Fe, he reported that “there is more honesty in the halls of the Territorial prison than in the halls of the legislature.”¹⁴ He returned to San Miguel County to resume his labor organization efforts, but territorial officials feared that his work might lead to the resurgence of Las Gorras Blancas. Shortly after he returned to Las Vegas, a sheriff’s deputy shot him down as he walked unarmed down the street in front of the courthouse. The deputy was never indicted.

Not long thereafter, unidentified shooters targeted the offices of Thomas B. Catron. Governor Prince responded by hiring Pinkerton detectives to investigate the Partido del Pueblo and Los Caballeros del Trabajo. Detective [Charles Siringo](#) made his sensationalized findings public knowledge, much to the governor’s chagrin. Siringo claimed to have infiltrated the ranks of Las Gorras Blancas, forged a friendship with Nicanor Herrera, and located evidence that Las Gorras Blancas, Los Caballeros del Trabajo, and the Partido del Pueblo Unido were actually closely tied together. His stories created a strong reaction against the Partido, but Prince refused to take legal action due to Siringo’s flimsy evidence.

The United Protection Association in San Miguel County succeeded in dismantling resistance efforts at all levels, however. In print and on the street its members, which included prominent merchants and ranchers, denounced anyone that spoke against commercial interests. The territorial press picked up on their activities, and by the mid-1890s barbed wire fences once again marked off the commons of the Las Vegas Land Grant.

Despite such setbacks, mercedarios and other poor nuevomexicanos in San Miguel County maintained their political activism. Former Sheriff Lorenzo López gained the title “*el amo de los pobres*” (“the overseer of the poor”) due to his generosity and support of the county’s poorer classes. Félix Martínez, who purchased *La Voz del Pueblo*, continued to promote the Partido del Pueblo Unido and he won election to the territorial legislature on the third-party ticket in 1892. Resistance and an appeal to the political system thus remained an essential part of nuevomexicano efforts to maintain the commons in San Miguel County.

Conflict over Language in Schools

One of the primary concerns of the supporters of groups like Los Caballeros del Labor was the education of their children. Among the banners held up at the July 4 procession in Las Vegas was one that read, “Free schools for our children.” Although researchers have translated slogans such as this one into English, we must remember that the actual signs held up that day contained messages in Spanish.

Despite claims made by opponents of statehood and proponents of English-only policies, nuevomexicanos considered the education of their children one of the most important issues of the late nineteenth century. The same was true of Pueblo and Navajo parents. In striking contrast to the situation for [Anglo](#) Americans during the same time frame, New Mexican parents faced the troubling question of whether or not [compulsory education programs](#) would challenge, and even possibly destroy, their cultural traditions. Language was a central component of indigenous and [nuevomexicano](#) cultures.

One of the legacies of New Mexico’s multiple periods of colonialism is that indigenous peoples were continuously left out of important political and social deliberations. Public debates about what languages would be allowed for use in New Mexico’s schools focused on Spanish and English. Many Navajos and Pueblos spoke either English or Spanish by the late nineteenth century. Yet they also continued to preserve their own languages as a means of maintaining their cultural identities in the face of colonization efforts that had been at play in one form or another for almost three centuries.



These students, probably from the North Public School in Las Vegas, New Mexico, were photographed during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 070248

Following the intense violence and devastation of the Long Walk, English language education became a controversial subject among Navajos. The [Treaty of 1868](#) included provisions for compulsory education for their children. Despite the support of some headmen, such as [Manuelito](#), most Navajos ignored the sections of the treaty dealing with education. Based on his commitment to education in the English language and reluctant embrace of Anglo-American ideals, Manuelito sent all three of his sons to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Tragically, all three of them died in connection to their travels to and from the school.

In fact, the longer that [boarding schools](#) for native children operated, Navajos became more and more resistant to their methods of eradicating [Diné](#) traditions in favor of assimilation into Anglo American modes of thinking. During the 1925 academic year, for example, only 35% of Navajo children were enrolled in school. The percentage further declined by 1948 when just 25% of

eligible students enrolled in classes.

Pueblo children were also targets of efforts to place them in boarding schools by the late-nineteenth century. In contrast to the great distances traveled by Navajo children to reach boarding schools far from their family homes in the [Dinétaah](#), however, Pueblo students generally attended schools that were much closer to home. Several schools were established on Pueblo lands, such as the one at Santa Clara Pueblo, and the Albuquerque and Santa Fe Indian Schools were relatively close to New Mexico's nineteen Pueblo communities.

Despite the relative advantages offered by proximity and close-knit communities, Pueblo students still faced efforts to eradicate their cultural traditions in the Indian Schools. As historian Margaret Connell Szasz has argued, the experiences of Native American children in boarding school settings were strikingly similar across time and space. The case of a five-year-old San Juan Pueblo girl is illustrative of the humiliation that most students endured. On her first day at the Santa Fe Indian School, the principal indicated a clock on the wall and asked her to tell other students the time. As she recounted, "I just looked at it and I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to tell time, so I just covered my face [with my shawl] and the students laughed."¹⁵



W. H. Cobb photographed this group of students at the Albuquerque Indian School sometime in the 1890s.

W.H. Cobb (Photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 136390

The methods of cultural assimilation employed at boarding schools have been widely documented. As Captain Richard H. Pratt, founder of the infamous [Carlisle Indian School](#) in Pennsylvania, stated, the goal of



These Chiricahua students were taken to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania not long after the surrender of headman [Geronimo](#) in 1886. The Chiricahua people were interned in Florida following Geronimo's surrender and their children placed in the boarding school system.

J.H. Choate (Photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 002113

boarding schools was to “[kill the Indian and save the man.](#)” Pratt meant that indigenous peoples should assimilate to white American ways of dressing, speaking, thinking, and acting. In so doing, they were to completely set aside their former traditions, ideals, and languages. [Boarding schools](#) were intended as workshops of assimilation.

For young native students, life at boarding schools was a traumatizing experience. Mortification, such as that experienced by the young San Juan Pueblo girl, stemmed not only from ignorance of white American ways of doing things. Pueblo children were [forced to cut their long hair](#), dress in modern styles of clothing worn by white children, answer to new names, and, at times, to participate in drills reminiscent of military routines. They were expressly forbidden to speak their native languages, typically at the risk of corporal punishment.

As adults, many of those who had attended boarding schools worked tirelessly to bring better educational facilities to their home communities on their various reservations. Suzy Marmon of [Laguna Pueblo](#), for example, attended both the [Menaul School](#) in Albuquerque (where her

indigenous name was changed to Suzy) and Carlisle. After completing her education in the boarding school system, she worked as a teacher at Isleta Pueblo and then in her own community, “because I felt it was my duty to help my people if I could.”¹⁶



Another photograph of Chiricahua students at the Carlisle Indian School c. 1886, four months after their arrival.

J.H. Choate (Photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 002112

Although the schools' assimilation project was never fully realized, boarding schools had an impact on indigenous languages. The use of Pueblo and Navajo languages was not an option in school settings, and many former students failed to pass along their knowledge of their native language to their children. The eradication of indigenous languages was never up for public debate, in contrast with the use of Spanish in educational settings. Spanish-language usage in New Mexican schools was a point of contention in the years leading up to and following the turn of the twentieth century. The drive to protect the use of Spanish in primary education united nuevomexicanos that had opposed one another in the struggle for social and economic justice led by Las Gorras Blancas, Los Caballeros del Trabajo, and el Partido del Pueblo Unido.

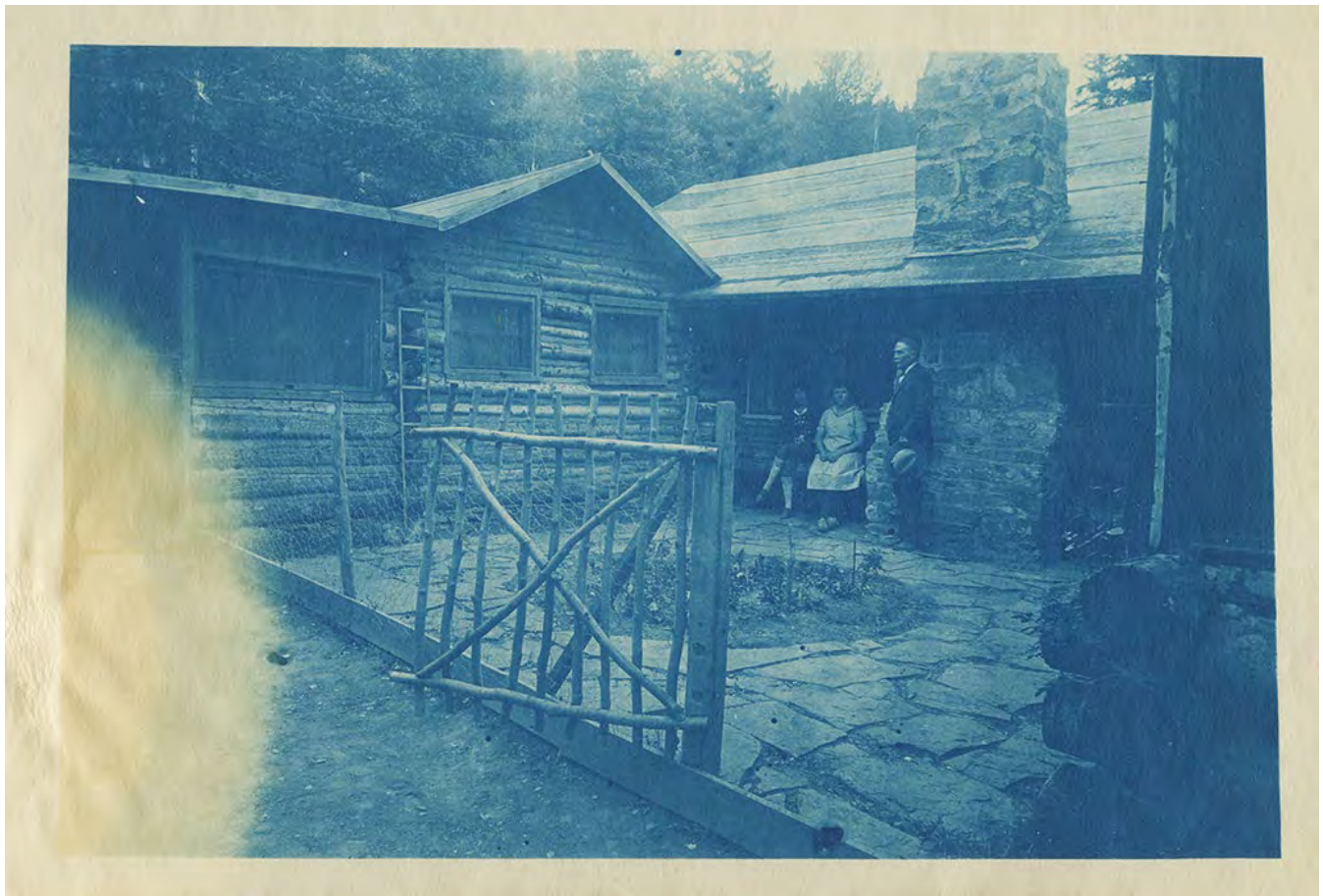
Keeping Pueblo Languages Alive

WITH VINA LENO



[Manuel C. de Baca](#), who had vehemently opposed the activities of Las Gorras Blancas in his capacity as probate judge, used his position as a member of the territorial Public Education department in the later 1890s to advocate for Spanish in the schools. [Amado Chaves](#) led the charge as Superintendent of Public Education in the same time frame. Both men publicly argued against the prevalent notion among Anglo Americans that their use of Spanish made nuevomexicanos unfit for American citizenship.

The pair framed their arguments in two different ways. First, they focused on the beauty of Spanish speech and prose. According to Chaves, Spanish was a “highly important, interesting and sonorous language, and that our territorial institutions should require their graduates to attend a complete course of the same.”¹⁷ Much of the Spanish-language press throughout New Mexico supported his arguments with their regular installments of poetry and stories that reflected the elegance of Spanish prose and also helped to preserve local histories and folklore.



Writer and photographer Charles F. Lummis captured this photograph of Amado Chaves and his daughter outside the family's Santa Fe home sometime between 1910 and 1920.

Charles F. Lummis (Photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 065718

Second, proponents of Spanish-language education defended the use of their native tongue based on its functional value. As Chaves also noted, “it is a crime against nature and humanity to try and rob the children of New Mexico of this right, their natural advantage, of the language which is theirs by birthright, to deprive them unjustly of the advantages, great and numerous, which those have who command two languages.”¹⁸

When C. de Baca followed up on the utilitarian line of reasoning in the 1899 Territorial Superintendent's Annual Report, it became clear that claims about the usefulness of Spanish had become more prominent than those focused on its inherent beauty. C. de Baca refuted claims that Spanish usage disqualified nuevomexicanos from citizenship with the idea that New Mexico was unique due to the necessity of bilingualism. He asserted that, “the arguments and declamations of theorists concerning the patriotism manifested by an exclusive

use of the English language have little weight when placed beside the fact that a busy world is making an urgent and increasing demand for more young men and young women competent to use fluently both English and Spanish.”[19](#)

Special Education

WITH EMMETT GARCIA



During the first decade of the twentieth century, the office of *Territorial Superintendent of Public Education* was filled by an Anglo American, Hiram Hadley, rather than a nuevomexicano. The department’s focus was decidedly different, illustrating the reality that the battle for language usage in the classroom was drawn along ethnic lines. Hadley and his supporters deemphasized the validity of the Spanish language for New Mexican students and offered a line of reasoning paralleling the [Progressive Era](#) school of thought. By 1907, Hadley’s education department issued a statement that explicitly stated the importance of training all students in English to help nuevomexicano students discontinue their reliance on Spanish.

In 1910, when the [Enabling Act](#) for New Mexico's statehood finally passed through Congress, the issue of language in the classroom became even more contentious. In the end, through creative writing of the state constitution and careful readings of national-level legislation, nuevomexicano politicians ensured the presence of Spanish in the new state's primary classrooms. It bears repeating that the concerns of Pueblo and Navajo parents for the preservation of their own languages and traditions were not considered at either the territorial (then state after 1912) or national levels.

Although most New Mexicans were willing to accept almost any terms in order to finally gain statehood by 1910, Article 21 of the Enabling Act was particularly onerous to Spanish-speaking residents. It read: “[the] ability to read, write, speak, and understand English sufficiently without the aid of an interpreter shall be a necessary qualification for all State officers and members of the State legislature.”²⁰ The article did not preclude Spanish in the classroom, but it did threaten to limit political participation to only those who spoke English.

As was so often the case in this time period, the Spanish-language press immediately responded, publishing articles and opinion pieces that refuted the logic of Article 21. As [Aurora Lucero](#) wrote in the *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican*, the idea held by most Anglo Americans in Congress was that nuevomexicanos' continued use of Spanish illustrated that they were ill-prepared for citizenship. On the contrary, she argued, “the Spanish-Americans of New Mexico have never been bad citizens. They have more than once proved their loyalty to the government and their love for the ‘Stars and Stripes,’ as their conduct in the Civil and Spanish-American wars, and in many of the Indian wars, abundantly testifies.”²¹

Those involved in the drafting of the state constitution struck out the offensive clause contained in Article 21, “in what was no less than a coup against the national [mandate](#),” according to historian Erlinda Gonzales-Berry.²² In its place, they inserted a provision that called for the use of both Spanish and English in the state legislature and in the publication of legal notices. In this regard, nuevomexicano legislators scored a victory. Their article was in effect

for twenty years, then renewed in 1931 and again in 1943. Eventually, the provision dropped from the state constitution because the English language became so pervasive by the mid-twentieth century.

The legislature also protected the voting rights of nuevomexicanos who spoke Spanish as their primary language. Harkening back to the promises of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), they asserted that nuevomexicanos had been guaranteed full citizenship rights in the U.S. nation—a provision that included the right to vote.

Despite such assertions, New Mexican lawmakers gave in to the demands of the U.S. Congress on the specific point of which language would be used in primary education. In so doing, however, they drafted vague legislation akin to the final wording of the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#). In creating a relatively vague education provision, nuevomexicano lawmakers “meant to create a space, albeit an ambiguous one, for the inclusion of Spanish in the classroom[.]”²³ They understood the harsh reality that many Eastern politicians would not support New Mexico’s statehood unless the English-only educational statute remained in place.

By creating room for the continuance of Spanish in the classroom, nuevomexicano legislators refused to capitulate in the face of political pressure. They did not want to do anything that might prevent statehood—especially after Congress had approved an Enabling Act for the first time—so they had few other options besides political slight-of-hand. In Article 12, section 8, of [New Mexico’s state constitution](#), ambiguous language allowed for Spanish-language instruction in classrooms where the texts were written in English. That article read:

The legislature shall provide for the training of teachers in the normal schools or otherwise so that they may become proficient in both the English and Spanish languages to qualify them to teach Spanish speaking pupils and students in the public schools and educational institutions of the State, and shall provide proper means and methods to facilitate the teaching of the

English language and other branches of learning to such pupils and students.

As New Mexico achieved statehood in 1912, Americans were preoccupied to at least some extent with the acquisition of the Panama Canal. Due to the economic importance of the canal, some Eastern-U.S. lawmakers echoed earlier nuevomexicano arguments about the utility of the Spanish language. Some argued that Spanish should be studied by U.S. students in order to prepare them for business relations with Latin American nations afforded by the canal.

Acceptance of Spanish as a subject for primary education was highly conditional. Congressmen made a strong distinction between the idea of native-English speakers taking classes in Spanish and native-Spanish speakers continuing to receive instruction in their native language. The result was the continued categorization of Spanish as a foreign language.

The debate over Spanish language instruction in New Mexico's classrooms sheds light on the struggle for statehood (the subject of the next chapter) and the inclination of some nuevomexicanos to resist assimilation impulses. Elites who adopted the Spanish-American Ethnic Identity argued that Spanish was on par with English due to its roots as a language of European conquerors. Poorer nuevomexicanos also benefitted from such claims because their children were also able to receive instruction in Spanish in their classrooms.

Although the provision that struck Article 21 from the Enabling Act ceased to be part of the state constitution after the 1940s, scholars and other residents of New Mexico continue to hold it up as evidence of the state's genesis as a bilingual entity. Despite the important gains achieved through the push for Spanish-language instruction in New Mexico's schools, deeper issues of colonialism and poverty were not addressed. Most nuevomexicanos remained impoverished and the cultural legacies of indigenous peoples were given no attention at the political and legal levels. Anglo politicians viewed Spanish-speaking New Mexicans as inferior to themselves, while those who spoke Spanish continued to tout their superiority to indigenous peoples. Such was—and is—an unfortunate consequence of New Mexico's legacy of multiple

conquests.

Blackdom: African American Settler Communities

Problematic racial relations persisted throughout New Mexico at the turn of the twentieth century, but for a small group of African American migrants from Georgia, southern New Mexico became a place of hope and refuge. In a region that had recently been characterized by conflicts between Texas cattlemen and [nuevomexicano](#) shepherders, the town of Blackdom was established as a community in which black Americans could build their lives without having to endure Jim Crow segregation.

After his service in the U.S.-Mexican War as a member of Alexander Doniphan's Missouri Volunteers, Henry Boyer returned home to Pelham, Georgia, where he told his family that New Mexico was a place where discrimination was far less pronounced than in the Deep South. Although he never returned to the lower Pecos Valley, his son, Francis Boyer, led several other families from Georgia to southern New Mexico where he created Blackdom as the first settlement in the New Mexico territory exclusively for African Americans.

[Francis Boyer](#) was a well-educated man who had graduated from [Morehouse College](#) in Atlanta. His wife [Ella Boyer](#) also graduated from college, having attended [Atlanta University](#). Sometime in the late 1890s, Francis witnessed the murder of a black barber who was executed in cold blood because he nicked a white patron's cheek as he gave him a shave. The murder convinced Boyer of the injustice of the Jim Crow South, and in 1900 he departed on foot with his brother-in-law Daniel Keyes in search of the better conditions in southern New Mexico that his father had so often talked about.

Boyer's dream of creating a utopian community in the southern New Mexico plains was not unprecedented. Other such towns had been established in places like Dearfield, Colorado; Boley, Oklahoma; and Nicodemus, Kansas. By some estimates, over two-hundred African American colonies were established in the West and Midwest in the late-nineteenth century. Other blacks attempted to settle in Mexico or Africa, building on migratory patterns that began prior to the Civil War.

In October of 1900, after walking the entire distance from Georgia to the Pecos River Valley—a journey of nearly two-thousand miles, Boyer and Keyes drilled the artesian well that formed the basis for the community at Blackdom. Prior to that time, the pair worked various odd jobs, including as cooks and ranch hands, in the town of Roswell. Ella Boyer and the couple's first seven children (they eventually had eleven) arrived at about the same time that Blackdom started to take shape.

What was Blackdom?

Blackdom, while it later became a [ghost settlement](#), was a modest [town of African Americans](#) who arrived in the West after the passage of the Federal Homestead Act of 1862. The following video from *Colores* by KUNM Public Television tells the story of Blackdom in detail.



The first crops planted at Blackdom were alfalfa and apple trees. Plentiful harvests indicated that the site would be a prime location for a community. As was the pattern for most townships in the American West at the time, Boyer promoted his burgeoning community in publications throughout the South. In contrast with white townships, Boyer focused his attention on African American communities. He and Keyes personally promoted their venture in Texas and Oklahoma in hopes of attracting other African Americans to Blackdom.

People from Ohio, Mississippi, Texas, and Oklahoma saw the photographs that Boyer and Keyes published and decided to cast their lot with Blackdom. Although promotion efforts began in the early years of the twentieth century, not until 1911 did Boyer and several other prominent residents of the community sign the official articles of incorporation for their township. Blackdom, as defined in the incorporation documents, comprised an area of about forty acres about twenty miles south of present-day Roswell.



This photograph of a Sunday school class at the Blackdom Baptist Church was taken in 1925, near the end of the town's heyday. Blackdom provided refuge from Jim Crow segregation for the African Americans who made it their home in the first decades of the twentieth century. By the late 1920s, drought conditions forced the town's abandonment. Most of its residents resettled at Vado, New Mexico, near Las Cruces.

Courtesy of Historical Society for Southeastern New Mexico

Those who considered themselves residents of the community lived in a much larger area on farms homesteaded by both blacks and whites. As stated by the Blackdom Townsite Company, their goal was to “maintain a colony of Negroes by means of cultivation of crops, the growing of town and settlements and the general improvements of the colony; to build, erect and equip schoolhouses, colleges, churches, and various education and religious institutions for the improvement and up building of the moral and mental condition of the colony.”²⁴

Including both Blackdom and the neighboring town of Dexter, both townships grew to the size of about 15,000 acres with between twenty and twenty-five families farming the lands. Plentiful rain during the first decade of the 1900s supported the communities, and residents of Blackdom raised plentiful crops of lettuce, tomatoes, and apples. They also took jobs on others' lands as laborers or as railroad workers to support the farming income.

Not long after the town's incorporation, James Eubanks opened a small mercantile store, and two churches, a primary school, a post office, and a small newspaper took root in Blackdom. The community produced New Mexico's first African American lawyer, W. T. Malone, who passed the bar in 1914. At its peak, Blackdom was home to 300 people. The first decade of the twentieth century was characterized by above average rain, but by 1911 or so normal precipitation patterns set in. By 1915, drought set in.

Despite such successes, the lack of water devastated Blackdom just a few short years later. The Pecos River lay too far to the west to be of relief and by the mid-nineteen-teens artesian wells were no longer an option for local farmers. So many wells had been drilled that water ceased to flow from them by 1920. Also, worms destroyed the apple crop and a law passed in the early 1920s banned further drilling for water. Not long thereafter, the Boyers and many other settlers left Blackdom in search of new opportunities. They found what they were seeking at the town of Vado, about fifteen miles south of Las Cruces.



Early twentieth century photograph of David Proffitt's house and buggy in Blackdom.
Courtesy of Historical Society for Southeastern New Mexico

Blackdom was a short-lived experiment, but an important one in the history of

New Mexico. The Boyer family found freedom to build a community there, and the initiative of Francis Boyer led many other African American families to participate. Although the desert proved more than the community could handle, its members migrated to other settlements in the West, including Vado, where they maintained their right to an economic livelihood. Descendants of Francis Boyer are still proud of his efforts to overcome discrimination and create a place for their family that allowed them to make a living.

By 1912 the hopes of nuevomexicanos, Pueblos, Navajos, African Americans, and Anglos became a reality when New Mexico was granted admission to the United States as a full-fledged state. With the achievement of statehood, it seemed that the promises of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) would finally be fulfilled. Yet land grants remained contested and much of New Mexico's population remained in crippling poverty. Such problems have plagued the fledgling state from its entrance into the Union to the present day. The next chapter examines the achievement of statehood and its residents' efforts to address the problems that continued even after that goal was attained.

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Chapter 12: Statehood Achieved & Loyalty Questioned: the World War I Era

Statehood Achieved & Loyalty Questioned: the World War I Era

Statehood Finally Arrives

“Loyalty Questioned”: Revolution & War

References & Further Reading

Statehood Achieved & Loyalty Questioned: the World War I Era



At sundown on the evening of March 1, 1916, Maud Wright rushed outside of her ranch home about thirty miles distant from the American-dominated town of Pearson, Chihuahua, in the Sierra Madres. She had expected to see her husband, Ed, and his business-partner Frank Hayden. Instead, she found a group of nearly fifty Mexican soldiers associated with the infamous General [Francisco “Pancho” Villa](#). The [Mexican Revolution](#), a decade-long civil war that reconfigured political leadership and social relations, was at high pitch, so she may not have been surprised. Still, the band of soldiers was disconcerting.



This 1913 photograph shows [Villa](#) with members of his staff. Most notable are Candelario Cervantes and Pablo López, pictured on Villa's right, and Francisco Beltrán and Martín López, pictured on Villa's left. *Courtesy of Library of Congress*

Just a few years earlier, Maud had left her family's ranch at Pinos Altos, New Mexico—located in the heart of Chiricahua ancestral homelands—with Ed. Lacking her father's blessing, the pair eloped to El Paso and were married on January 10, 1910. They made their home at Pearson (today the village of Juan Mata Ortíz), where Ed operated a ranch. With Hayden and a large number of local *chihuahuense* (residents of Chihuahua) laborers, he opened a sawmill.

Due to the violence of the Mexican Revolution, which had begun in November 1910 with the most intense fighting near the border with the United States, the Wrights and over 1,000 other Americans (mostly Mormon colonists who also lived in the Sierra Madres) fled across the border in the summer of 1912. Ed found work on sawmills and cattle ranches in southern New Mexico for the period of a little over a year. During their self-imposed exile, in the spring of 1914, Maud gave birth to a son, Jonnie. That fall, the family returned to their

lands in Chihuahua, as did a small group of the Mormon colonists.

Violence between various revolutionary factions continued as the Wrights attempted to reestablish their ranch and mill. By early 1916, Villa retreated to Chihuahua in response to a series of devastating defeats at the hands of erstwhile revolutionary ally, [Alvaro Obregón](#) who led the forces of de-facto President [Venustiano Carranza](#). The previous November had marked Villa's most devastating defeat yet at the [Battle of Agua Prieta](#) on the Arizona-Sonora border. On that occasion, President [Woodrow Wilson](#) had allowed *carrancista* troops (those allied with Carranza) to travel between El Paso, Texas, and Douglas, Arizona, on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Wilson had previously made positive overtures to Villa, and the battered general considered his actions a calculated betrayal.



Clifford Berryman's editorial cartoon published in U.S. newspapers following Villa's raid on Columbus in March 1916. The cartoon illustrates the Wilson administration's decision to dispatch troops into Mexico in pursuit of Villa. *Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration*

The *villista* (forces under Pancho Villa) unit that congregated outside of the Wright's home on March 1, therefore, had been tempered by their general's call to kill all Americans. Maud tried to pacify the hungry soldiers by offering them food, but when her husband and Hayden returned with loaded pack mules the villistas looted and sacked the house. After forcing Maud to hand her toddler son over to a Mexican domestic servant, she mounted a horse and followed the party, along with her husband and Hayden, as a captive.

After two days of marching, soldiers took Ed Wright and Frank Hayden aside, out of Maud's view, where they were executed. Despite the compounded hardships of her husband's murder and traveling with the villistas who scarcely had enough food for themselves, much less a captive, Maud remained resilient. Shortly after the party of soldiers joined the main body of villistas, which included a total of nearly five hundred men, General Villa ordered one of his captains to keep watch over Maud. He gave the captain specific instructions that she not be harmed. Her guard, Juan Ramón Ruíz, spoke fluent English and abided by Villa's command. Ruíz even reprimanded and threatened to report any men who so much as swore in Maud's presence.

Over the next several days, Maud silently endured the loss of her husband and the separation from her son, as well as her hunger pains. The villistas rode continuously. From her observations, most of the men seemed to fear Villa. Their conversations immediately hushed any time that he rode near. Since Villa's string of defeats in 1915, many of his famed Dorados (the Golden Ones, his elite fighting unit), had either been killed or abandoned his cause. Now, those under his command, with the exception of a few captains, had been forced into service at the threat of physical harm to themselves or members of their families.

As the group passed through lands controlled by the Palomas Land and Cattle Company, less than fifty miles south of the New Mexico-Chihuahua border, they happened upon a group of cowboys who were engaged in a cattle roundup. Two of them were captured, and Maud witnessed their torture and execution by hanging. She often wondered why Villa had not killed her, and she asked him as

much in one of the few occasions that he spoke with her. He told her that if she survived the march to their next offensive, he would set her free. By the tone of his voice, she could tell that he did not expect her to withstand the long advance on horseback with little food or water.

She did survive, however, and she witnessed the villistas' infamous raid on the sleeping town of Columbus, New Mexico, in the early hours of March 9. Although the attack was a strategic victory for Villa, it was a tactical blunder. Based on faulty intelligence, his men fired on the stables rather than the barracks at the U.S. Military camp that housed the 13th Cavalry. Members of the 13th awoke to the sound of the villistas' weapons and they scrambled to mount a defense. The advantage of darkness was lost when a group of villistas set fire to the Commercial Hotel in the Columbus business district. After only a couple hours of fighting in the streets, Villa and his men were forced to retreat into Chihuahua. Nearly one hundred villistas were killed, compared to eighteen Americans.¹



Photograph from March of 1916 that shows the destruction of Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico.
Courtesy of Tatehuari

Maud Wright's harrowing experience and Villa's attack on the tiny border town of Columbus were part of an era in which residents of the newly minted state still struggled to prove their loyalty as American citizens, and most New Mexicans battled ongoing poverty. The Columbus raid projected New Mexico onto the national stage once again only four years after it gained brief notoriety for finally receiving admittance to the Union as a state.

Statehood was achieved through a series of political dealings in Congress, and residents of New Mexico were left to confront problems that had long-characterized their daily lives, including poverty, discrimination, lack of educational resources, and governmental corruption. In March 1916, New Mexico became a source of national outrage for Americans across the country due to Villa's brazen attack on U.S. soil. Still, nuevomexicanos themselves remained suspect. Units of the New Mexico National Guard organized and relocated to the border in response to President Wilson's mobilization of U.S. forces to pursue Pancho Villa into Chihuahua. They were joined by National Guard and regular U.S. Army units from around the nation. At that time, the New Mexico National Guard was about sixty-percent hispano.

The campaign was led by General [John J. "Black Jack" Pershing](#), and has been historically remembered as the Pershing Punitive Expedition. Although Pershing's forces failed to apprehend Villa, their experiences comprised what historians later characterized as a "dress rehearsal" for U.S. participation in World War I. During the Punitive Expedition, it became clear that the U.S. Army was ill-prepared for war, and Pershing (who led the [American Expeditionary Force](#) in 1917 and 1918) initiated an extensive training campaign before he

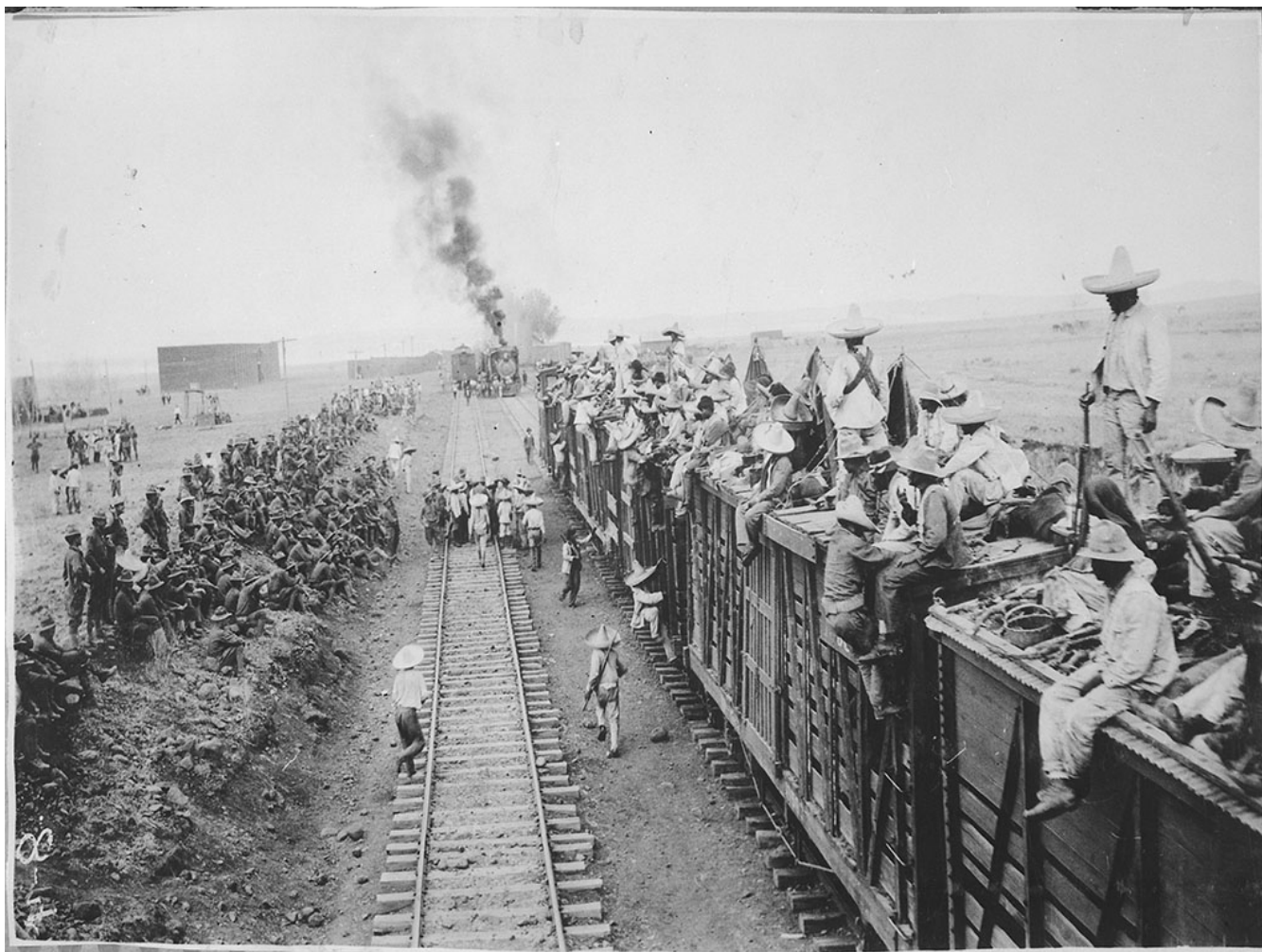


committed any American forces to the conflict in Europe.

Despite their willingness to serve in the conflict precipitated by the Mexican Revolution, New Mexican National Guard units faced discrimination and disparagement as they supported the U.S. military effort on the border and in Chihuahua. Participation in the World War I effort was once again a means for [nuevomexicano](#) recruits to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States, as had been the case in earlier conflicts like the [Spanish-Cuban-American War](#) and the Civil War. New Mexico's first years as a full-fledged state were tempered by the paradox that it was still marked as not yet on par with the rest of the nation in terms of culture, religion, language, and modern capitalist modes of labor and production.

General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing led the Punitive Expedition in pursuit of Pancho Villa in Chihuahua between March 1916 and February 1917. Although the expedition failed to locate Villa, its maneuvers provided important military preparation for subsequent U.S. involvement in World War I. Pershing commanded the American Expeditionary Force in Europe in 1918.

Courtesy of Library of Congress



Members of General Pershing's Punitive Expedition worked at times with the support of forces loyal to Venustiano Carranza (de facto President of Mexico), and other times at odds with them. This 1916 photo shows the Sixth Infantry and Carrancista troops together near San Antonio, Mexico, during the campaign to locate Pancho Villa.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Statehood Finally Arrives

This chapter provides a culmination of the discussions in Chapters 9, 10, and 11 regarding territorial struggles with an eye toward statehood. Although many of the various social, economic, and political movements of the territorial period can (and should) be considered independently of the push for statehood, the desire to realize the prospect of full citizenship rights in the Union through statehood was the overarching political concern of the period between 1848 and 1912.

On its face, the statehood struggle was a painful, sixty-four year process that was tightly connected to the themes of modernization and Americanization, as well as the development of Spanish American ethnic identity and debates over the role of the Spanish language in New Mexico. Political intrigues and ethnic prejudices were the principal reasons for the delay in New Mexico's statehood. Statehood was postponed for a variety of reasons, but the fact remains that one of the easiest ways for U.S. politicians in the East to prevent former Mexican citizens from full inclusion in the United States was to maintain New Mexico's territorial status.

Early in the statehood struggle Major John Monroe, who served as New Mexico Territorial Governor in 1850, wrote to his superiors in Washington, D.C., that nuevomexicanos' loyalties lay with the Mexican government. Claims like his signaled to the federal government that New Mexicans posed a threat to U.S. sovereignty in the Southwest. Following Monroe's line of reasoning, not until New Mexicans proved their loyalty to United States would the territory be admitted into the Union.

In fact, a pro-statehood movement began almost immediately after the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) solemnized New Mexico's transfer to the United States. As the situation stood in the early 1850s, New Mexico already met the population requirement for statehood that dated back to the [Northwest Ordinance of 1787](#). President [Zachary Taylor](#), who gained a reputation for unswerving military discipline through his leadership during the U.S.-Mexican War, wanted to bring New Mexico and California into the Union as free states as quickly as possible in order to avoid sectional conflicts in Congress that promised to pit Northern and Southern legislators against one another.

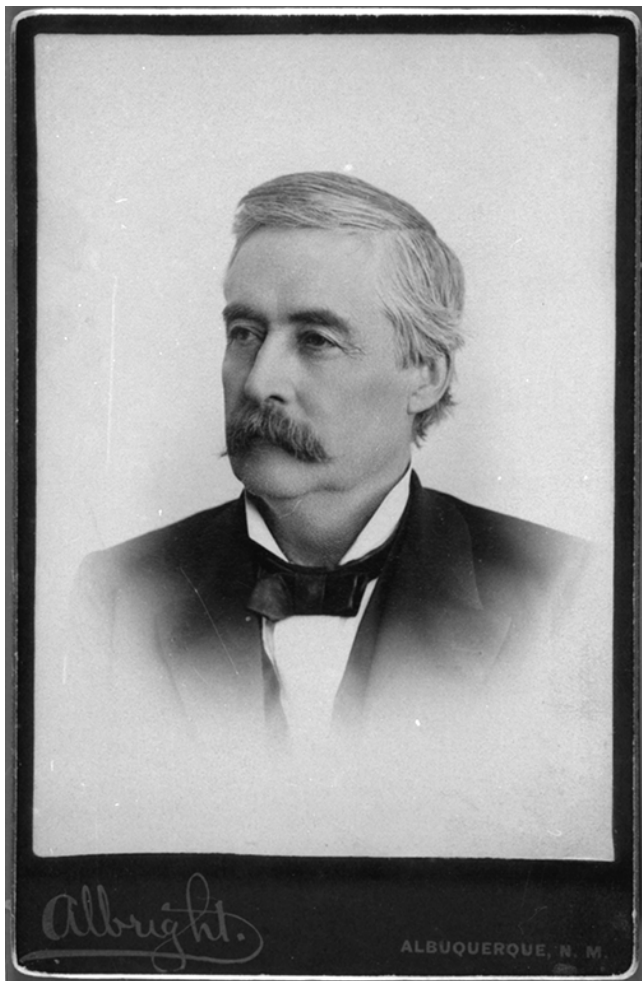
To that end, Taylor dispatched Major [George McCall](#) to the territory with instructions to help local politicians organize a statehood convention and draft a constitution. McCall was successful on both counts by early 1850, but the politics of slavery intervened to kill New Mexico's first statehood initiative. Southern politicians vocally opposed New Mexico's entry as a free state, and they threatened to derail statehood for California as well until the Compromise of 1850 narrowly averted that outcome. Under the terms of the deal, New Mexico's bid for statehood was tabled.

New Mexico's various delegates to Congress, including Miguel A. Otero and [Stephen B. Elkins](#) (a close friend of [Thomas B. Catron](#)), clearly understood that the most pressing issue on their agenda was the promotion of statehood. The three principal requirements for a territory to become a state were a minimum population threshold (which ranged between 60,000 and 90,000 as congressional stipulations changed over the last half of the nineteenth century), the creation of a constitution at a statewide convention, and the approval of both houses of the U.S. Congress by a simple majority vote. New Mexico's delegates knew well that congressional approval was the only element that prevented their territory from becoming a state.

Otero and Elkins worked tirelessly during their respective tenures in Washington, D.C., to amass support among as many congressmen as possible. The controversy over Otero's support of New Mexico's 1859 Slave Code was tied to his desire to garner statehood votes from Southern lawmakers. In 1876

Elkins unwittingly committed a faux pas that illustrated just how fickle political support could be. During one particularly heated debate, Michigan Representative [Julius C. Burrows](#) gave a fiery oration in support of a civil rights bill geared toward African Americans. Following the speech, Elkins shook hands with Burrows in congratulations for his remarks. Several Southern Representatives noticed the gesture and pulled their support for New Mexico's statehood as a result.

During the 1870s and 1880s, the political chicanery of the [Santa Fe Ring](#) and Wild West reputation of [Billy the Kid](#) marked New Mexico as ill-prepared for statehood. Governor [L. Bradford Prince](#)'s editorials in the *New York Times* mentioned in Chapter 10 were intended to undo the negative press that regularly circulated regarding the territory.



As territorial Governor, Ross attempted to break the power of the Santa Fe Ring. His attempts to gerrymander New Mexican voting districts, however, resulted in gridlock and spread the idea

Prince's tenure as governor followed Democrat [Edmund G. Ross](#), who dedicated his governorship to limiting the power of the Santa Fe Ring. Despite his best efforts, including a plan to [gerrymander](#) territorial voting districts, Ross' tenure resulted in legislative gridlock as the Ring asserted its political power. In 1889, Republican President [Benjamin Harrison](#) appointed Prince as the replacement for Ross. Although there are no strong indications that Prince was in the pocket of the Ring, his politics were more acceptable for their intense focus on capitalist development and business interests.

Due to his visibility in the national press, Prince served as an important

that the territory was ill-prepared for statehood due to rampant political corruption.

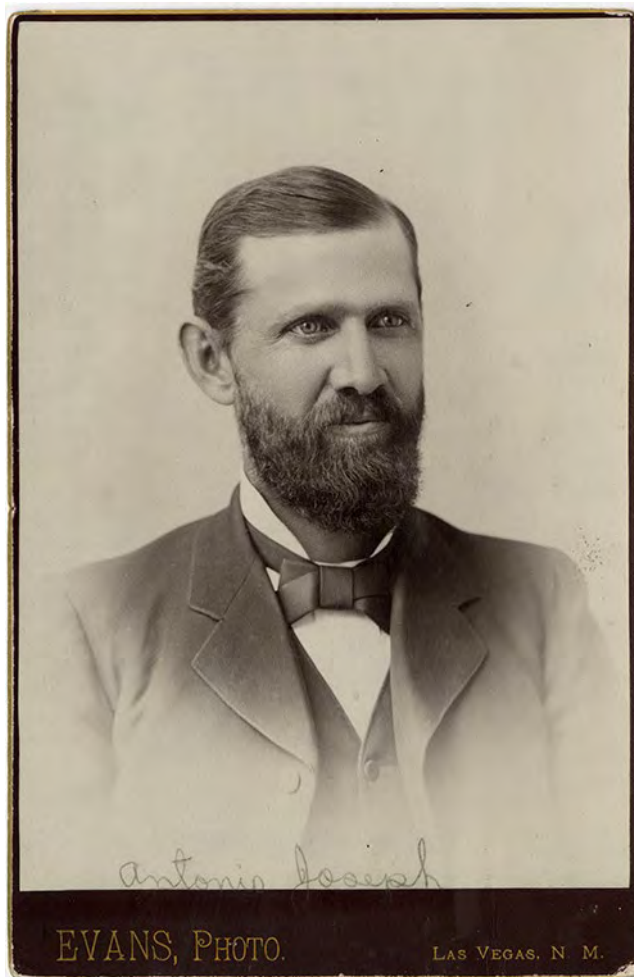
Albright Art Parlors (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives](#) (NMHM/DCA), No. 049253.

delegates tied to the Ring and the group drafted a highly conservative constitution. Among its provisions were extremely low property taxes (never to exceed one percent), state funding for secular schools (at the expense of Catholic-run parochial schools), and an article that required all court proceedings to be carried out in English. All of those measures promised to promote Catron's control over territorial lands and resources.

Residents of the territory opposed the proposed constitution when it was put to a vote. Despite Governor Prince's dedication and his close association with congressional delegate [Antonio Joseph](#) to advocate for statehood at the national level, Congress generally maintained the belief that New Mexicans were anything but unified in their support of statehood. Residents of the territory were divided along partisan and ethnic lines over the terms under which New Mexico would become a state. Among the most prominent sticking points was a provision in the 1889 constitution that prohibited the use of Spanish in official matters, including court cases, primary schooling, and voting.

[Anglo](#) Americans, particularly large landholders in southeastern New

statehood advocate. In 1889 he supported a new constitutional convention that was held in Santa Fe. As had so often been the case, the convention was dominated by



Joseph served as Territorial Delegate to Congress for a full decade between 1885 and 1895. Despite his consistent support of statehood, the 1889 Constitution met defeat when put to a vote in the territory. Joseph died in 1910 in Ojo Caliente, New Mexico, two years before statehood was finally

Mexico, refused to accept a state constitution unless it specified the exclusive use of English in state political and legal business. Most of them were supporters of the Democratic Party, whose platform reflected their views. Republicans, on the other hand, countered that no such provision was needed because statehood would naturally bring new immigrants from the Eastern United States and the widespread use of English would eventually develop on its own.

achieved.

Evans (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 009915.

Territorial Republican officials might have secured the votes of nuevomexicanos (only men were permitted to vote at the time) for a constitution without the language stipulations, but their views on public education prevented such an outcome. Republicans supported an initiative to teach [nuevomexicano](#) children to speak English through the proposed state-run primary education system. Catholic officials, who had presided over education in the region since Spanish-colonial times, opposed any such measure and most devout hispanos sided with them. When the 1889 was put to a territorial vote, then, it was handily defeated 16,180 votes to 7,493.²

Delegate Joseph spearheaded several different attempts at statehood during the 1890s, but the idea that nuevomexicanos were incapable of self-government persisted among many congressmen. In an effort to revise their understanding of New Mexico and its peoples, *La Voz del Pueblo* (Las Vegas) published a series of Spanish-language articles penned by hispano men and women across the territory and in southern Colorado who held a very different understanding of New Mexico's readiness for full inclusion in the United States.

Colorado legislator [Casmiro Barela](#) and Santa Fe constitutional delegate [José D. Sena](#) led the editorial charge. In response to the claim that nuevomexicanos were “easily manipulated” and “ignorant” by virtue



Sena served in various territorial capacities, including as Clerk of the New Mexico Supreme Court, Indian Agency Interpreter, member of the Territorial House of Representatives, and Mayor of Santa Fe. In the 1890s and first decade of the 1900s, he published editorials in the *Voz del Pueblo* that emphasized nuevomexicanos' preparedness for statehood.

Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 050461.

Mexican independence to show that nuevomexicanos were no strangers to systems of representative government. Sena argued, "It is an insult to the descendants of [Hidalgo](#), Morelos, and Iturbide when the opponents of statehood say 'we' are not fit to govern ourselves." As he and other nuevomexicanos knew well, their forebears had a long tradition of independent local governance through [ayuntamientos](#). The often-cited idea that they were incapable of self-governance, therefore, made no sense.

In Washington, D.C., delegate Antonio Joseph attempted to draw the

of their mixed ethnic background, Barela wrote, "I reject that accusation with disdain." He continued, "Since 1848, the Mexican population has advanced in education, in independence, in mental vigor, and in firm loyalty to the American government."³ To further his arguments, Barela emphasized the territory's 2,000 miles of railroads, various mines, large-scale agricultural production, and educational advances.

Similarly, Sena touted the ways in which New Mexico had embraced the project of modernization. Taking a unique approach in the era of Spanish-American Ethnic Identity, he also drew upon the precedents of the history of

distinction that nuevomexicanos were ethnically “Spanish” in an effort to diminish the widely held belief that New Mexicans were unfit for republican governance. Such notions can be traced back to the comments made by Senator John C. Calhoun, as mentioned in Chapter 8, but also to the remarks of [Daniel Webster](#). Although a staunch opponent of slavery, like most other Northerners Webster was convinced that Mexicans were racially inferior to Anglo Americans. By adding them to the Union, he feared that the foundations of representative government would be eroded.

Accordingly, historian David V. Holtby frames his recent study of New Mexico’s statehood struggle in terms of the larger political and economic context of the United States.⁴ Such an approach is particularly valid because, in the end, the concerns of territorial officials and residents were eclipsed by the agenda of the U.S. Congress. In other words, no matter what New Mexicans did to promote statehood, ultimately the decision to admit the territory to the union lay with Congress and the President.

Holtby’s analysis does not minimize the very real battles waged in the territory over issues such as Spanish-language instruction in primary schools, a continued political role for nuevomexicanos, and competing images of New Mexico as the center of the Wild West and a burgeoning site of modern enterprise. Such conflicts shaped the type of constitution that was finally accepted by Congress in 1910, and they influenced the ways in which New Mexicans understood their place in the United States. Yet the reality was that without the approval of the federal government, territorial debates over the shape that the state would take were meaningless.

47th Star

WITH DAVID HOLTBY, PH.D.



By the first decade of the twentieth century, the reality that statehood was the purview of Congress was indelibly etched in the minds of New Mexican powerbrokers. At the national level, political divisions were rife. Advocates of federal power competed against those who promoted states' rights, Progressives sought to root out political corruption and rise above political mudslinging, and the emergence of competing forms of capitalism (including mercantile—or small-scale, finance, and corporate capitalism) altered the terms by which New Mexico became a state. Indeed, statehood was finally achieved in smoky rooms behind closed doors in an anticlimactic way, especially to those who had dedicated so much of their blood and sweat to the cause at the regional level.

Between 1900 and 1912, New Mexico's policy makers made the final, successful push for statehood. The separate campaigns for New Mexico's and Arizona's inclusion in the Union were the longest in U.S. history. As Holtby, Robert W. Larson,⁵ and many others have illustrated, the political scene in the first decade of the twentieth century further complicated matters. On the heels of the [Spanish-Cuban-American War](#), Eastern politicians often conflated New Mexico and Arizona with the newly acquired territory of Puerto Rico. All were considered foreign and ill-prepared for inclusion in U.S. governance at best, and potentially traitorous at worst.

Despite the prevailing attitudes in the Eastern United States,

What was the cowboy

nuevomexicanos like [Aurora Lucero](#), quoted in Chapter 11, continued to advance the argument that New Mexico's people had always been loyal citizens. New Mexicans had indeed proven their loyalty to the United States in various conflicts dating back to the Civil War. Hundreds of nuevomexicanos had enlisted with Teddy Roosevelt's [Rough Riders](#). Still, the loyalties of nuevomexicanos remained suspect.

calvary?



New Mexico's final push for statehood came at the height of the [Progressive Era](#) in U.S. national politics. Progressives advocated for diverse political, social, and economic concerns, and figures who considered themselves part of the movement belonged to both political parties and generally hailed from the middle-class. "Reform" was the Progressive mantra, and its supporters believed that principles of science and efficiency would bring about the correction of the greatest excesses of the [Gilded Age](#). Among Progressives' varied projects were the eradication of graft and corruption in politics, conservation of forests and natural resources, and the regulation of monopolized industries. As far as where immigrants were concerned, Progressives generally supported Americanization and assimilation measures.



From the perspective of many Progressives, including Indiana Senator [Albert J. Beveridge](#) who headed the Committee on Territories, New Mexico's peoples and politics disqualified it from statehood.⁶ Despite a very active period which saw the introduction of more than twenty different statehood bills between 1890

A highly educated author and senator from Indiana, Beveridge chaired the Committee on Territories throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. He made a reputation for himself as an ardent imperialist, and he consistently opposed New Mexico's statehood on the grounds that its Spanish-speaking population was not prepared for U.S.-style representative government. This photograph was taken in 1900.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

and 1903, New Mexico still remained a territory. One of the most intense periods of congressional debates over statehood thus developed during the final decade before statehood was actually achieved. Senator Beveridge emerged as one of the most strident and vocal opponents of statehood for both New Mexico and Arizona.

Beveridge was a talented orator, dedicated imperialist, and highly active member of the American Historical Association. Following his tenure in the Senate, he wrote a series of well-regarded biographies. During the Spanish-Cuban-American War, he vocally disparaged Spain and its colonies to justify the expansion of U.S. influence abroad. In the process, he promoted Anglo-American nativism at the expense of any who spoke the Spanish language or who had descended from areas formerly dominated by Spanish colonialism. He equated New Mexico's majority hispano population with what he considered to be the most negative aspects of Spanish society.

As chairman of the Committee on Territories he stalled an omnibus statehood bill that the powerful Pennsylvania Senator [Matthew S. Quay](#) had prepared for what promised to be easy passage in 1902. Concerned that the Democratic Party would gain ground in the fledgling states of Arizona and New Mexico, Republican Beveridge tirelessly argued against the readiness of New Mexico's largely Spanish-speaking populace for full inclusion in the United States.

Beveridge made no attempt to hide his conviction that nuevomexicanos were ill-equipped to participate as U.S. citizens because they were unfamiliar with the nation's laws, illiterate, and ignorant. The persistence of the Spanish language was also perplexing to him. As he stated in 1910, proposed amendments in the Enabling Bill, including Article 21, were intended to end "the curious continuance of the solidarity of the Spanish-speaking people" in New Mexico. He also characterized nuevomexicanos' "refusal" to speak English

as treason.⁷



This photograph shows L. Bradford Prince's 1910 speech in Las Vegas, New Mexico, in support of statehood. Luis [Armijo](#) translated the speech into Spanish.

Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 158257.

As part of his campaign to prevent the entry of New Mexico and Arizona into the Union, Beveridge proposed a personal investigation of the two territories. With three other Republican Senators, he began his tour of New Mexico in mid-November of 1902. With much fanfare and publicity, his subcommittee conducted various hearings throughout the territories within a period of about three weeks. In Las Cruces, local resident Martinez Amador testified that “his fellow Spanish-Americans were too poor and uneducated for the responsibilities of statehood.”⁸

Most of the testimony reflected similar ideas. Beveridge's own correspondence

just prior to his tour of the territories shows that he purposely selected witnesses who would support his line of thinking. In a letter to his close friend Albert Shaw, he admitted that he hesitated to call anyone “before his Committee, unless he knew beforehand what their testimony would be.”⁹ Additionally, all of the hearings were conducted privately—none were open to the public. Beveridge’s questions were disproportionately directed toward issues of literacy, Spanish-language usage, and racial composition of the territory. Such evidence challenged the Senator’s repeated claims of impartiality toward New Mexico.

As usual, nuevomexicanos did not take lightly the accusation that they were not fit for statehood. In the territorial press, statehood proponents retorted that Beveridge’s inquiry was slanted toward painting an unfavorable picture of New Mexico and its people rather than attempting to learn the real state of affairs on the ground.

Back in Washington, D.C., Beveridge published the majority report of his series of hearings and continued to push the argument that New Mexico and Arizona were ill-prepared for statehood. Although he never directly defeated Senator Quay’s attempt to bring Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona into the Union, Beveridge’s efforts were enough to delay statehood in seemingly endless Congressional debates.

Just before his death in late May of 1904, Quay helped to orchestrate a compromise measure by which Arizona and New Mexico would be welcomed into the Union as one large state rather than two separate ones. The proposal was known as [jointure](#), and it gained the support of few people in either territory. [Jointure](#) was considered a great compromise in Congress, however. Quay believed that by offering to bring the two territories into the Union as one large state, Beveridge would be forced to end his opposition to statehood.

When Quay issued the jointure compromise, Beveridge was in the middle of a [filibuster](#) to prevent a vote on the earlier measure to bring Arizona and New Mexico into the Union as separate states. Although Beveridge was entrenched

in his resolve not to compromise on the issue, he also realized that the filibuster could prove a political liability by painting him as intransigent. He also understood that jointure would resolve his central reasons for opposing individual statehood. “Greater Arizona,” as he called the proposed state, would have diminished hispano influence in political matters and all but guarantee a Republican majority there for the foreseeable future.

For the first time since 1848 it seemed that Congress would approve statehood for Arizona and New Mexico. Quay and his supporters believed that jointure would not be overly problematic for people in the territories because they had been a single entity prior to 1862. Yet Arizona’s Congressional delegate, Democrat [Mark Smith](#), rallied in opposition to the proposal. According to his declaration, residents of Arizona would prefer territorial status for another fifty years to statehood joined with New Mexico.

Smith’s efforts killed the bill in the Senate for the time being as a weary Quay conceded defeat rather than endure the filibuster threatened by Democratic senators. Over the next few years, new bills were introduced and considered in Beveridge’s Committee on Territories, and in 1906 jointure was once again the proposed solution. As a compromise supported by President [Theodore Roosevelt](#) and Senate Democrats, the question of jointure was to be put to a vote in each territory. Along with the [government initiative](#) and [recall](#), the [referendum](#) was a hallmark of Progressive-Era electoral reform. Within the



Marcus Aurelius “Mark” Smith served as Arizona Territorial Delegate to Congress in the early years of the twentieth century. He staunchly opposed the jointure proposal that came to a vote in Arizona and New Mexico territories in 1906.

Neale, Walter (1899). “Autobiographies and portraits of the President, Cabinet, Supreme Court, and Fifty-fifth Congress”, Volume 2. Washington D.C.:The Neale Company. p. 532.

context of the times, support was strong for the idea that jointure go to the voters.

In a clear illustration of his willingness to set Progressive ideals aside for political ends, Beveridge opposed the referendum. In a two-and-a-half hour speech before the Senate, he argued that statehood involved the general welfare of the nation as a whole. For that reason, the desires of the residents of the respective territories were unimportant. What mattered most was that jointure would be best for the nation at large. Still making no secret of his disdain for New Mexicans, Beveridge backed up his arguments with the claim that the territory's people were “not of the blood and speech that is common to the rest of us.”¹⁰ The population of Arizona was too sparse, by his count, to warrant statehood. The only reasonable solution was jointure—no matter the opinions of Arizonans or New Mexicans.



Albuquerque crowd that turned out for Roosevelt's 1903 visit to New Mexico in support of statehood. *Underwood and Underwood* (photographer). *Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 133280.*

Beveridge was unable to stop the referendum despite his best efforts, but he used other avenues to ensure a favorable outcome. He persuaded President Roosevelt to replace New Mexico's governor, [Miguel A. Otero, Jr.](#), with someone favorable to jointure. In January 1906, Roosevelt complied when he

appointed [Herbert J. Hagerman](#) as governor. After only a year in office, Hagerman became entangled in accusations of electoral irregularities and land fraud; Roosevelt then replaced him with [George Curry](#), another ally of jointure. Fraud accusations surfaced throughout the first decade of the twentieth century and they painted New Mexico as a place rife with political corruption and, as such, unfit for statehood.

Despite the continued vocal opposition to the proposal by key territorial figures like Miguel A. Otero and Thomas B. Catron (who typically were opposed to each other), Governor Hagerman, delegate William H. “Bull” Andrews, and Holm O. Bursum united New Mexico’s Republicans in support of the measure. Even L. Bradford Prince, still a vital voice in the territory, decided that joint statehood was better than none.



Political Cartoon showing Governor Hagerman steering the “Ship of State.” President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him as territorial governor in 1906 in an effort to foster support for jointure in New Mexico. Due to accusations of corruption and

President Theodore Roosevelt also exerted a great deal of influence on the shift in public opinion in New Mexico toward support for jointure. Roosevelt had pledged his aid for statehood to many of the nuevomexicano Rough Riders a decade earlier, and he continued to participate in regular [Rough Riders reunions](#) in the territory. Many nuevomexicanos saw him as one of their strongest allies and advocates, so when he publicly argued that jointure was their best option, his opinion carried great weight.

Arizona continued to present the strongest opposition to jointure, based heavily on racist feeling toward the idea of including New Mexico’s hispanos and Pueblos among their

fraud, Hagerman served for about one year before Roosevelt replaced him with Governor George Curry.

Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 002309.

“their sober second thought.” He also emphasized the reality that if they passed this opportunity by, “they will have to wait very many years before the chance again offers itself, and even then it will very probably be only upon the present terms—that is upon the condition of being joined with New Mexico.”¹¹

Although New Mexicans supported jointure in the November 1906 vote with 26,195 in favor and 14,735 against, the measure was soundly defeated in Arizona, 3,141 for and 16,265 against. As Holtby notes, Arizonans believed that a resounding defeat was necessary because Congress might decide to ignore a narrow defeat of jointure. Interestingly, if the votes of both territories were combined, the jointure measure still narrowly failed by a margin of 1,664 votes. Much to the relief of Arizonans, the idea of joint statehood was dead, never again to be revived in Congress.¹²

ranks. To help turn the tide, President Roosevelt wrote an open letter to Arizonans that was distributed widely in both territories. He asked that those who stood against jointure give it



Photograph of delegates at the 1910 New Mexico Constitutional Convention held in Santa Fe. *William Walton (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 008119.*

After so many heated battles on the floor of Congress, in the backrooms of Washington, D.C. and Santa Fe, across the pages of the territorial press, and throughout New Mexico, the actual arrival of statehood in 1912 came as something of an anticlimax. None of the key disputes changed or were definitively resolved. Jointure had been defeated, but it was the waning political influence of Senator Beveridge combined with the campaign promises of new President [William Howard Taft](#) that resulted in the [Enabling Act](#) that passed Congress in 1910.

On October 3, 1910, a group of 100 delegates from across the territory met in Santa Fe for the purpose of drafting a new state constitution. They were a diverse group with myriad competing interests: seventy-nine Republicans and twenty-one Democrats reflecting the strength of the Grand Old Party in the territory. Regardless of party, one-third were nuevomexicanos and two-thirds Anglo Americans. Reportedly, several delegates kept guns in their desks at the

convention, highlighting the extremely tense atmosphere of the negotiations.

Democrat [Green Barry Patterson](#) represented Chaves County at the convention and he wielded great power and influence in his sector of the territory. He walked out of the convention when delegate [Albert B. Fall](#) (who later became one of the new state's first senators along with Thomas B. Catron) refused to retract a statement that Patterson found offensive. Additionally, Patterson signed his name to the completed constitution, and then carefully crossed it out in a demonstration of his opposition to the convention's work.

In many ways, the [constitution drafted in 1910](#) resembled the one penned at the 1889 convention, despite Democrats' efforts to include Progressive measures, such as initiative, recall, and referendum. Although such measures were not included in the final draft, the constitution did include some vaguely Progressive elements. For example, it allowed women to participate in school-board elections without fully granting them the right to vote. Democrats sought to empower citizens' role in governance through the constitution. Yet as Holtby has shown, "Republicans, who were in the majority on all the committees, generally opposed such efforts and heeded President Taft's advice to eschew citizen-driven reforms."¹³

On January 21, 1911, New Mexican voters approved the constitution and it was passed on for the approval of Congress and the President. Both took issue with only one passage, Article 19, which made future amendments virtually impossible. A revision titled the Smith-Flood resolution made amendments possible, but still quite difficult. Taft accepted New Mexico's constitution after the change was made. Arizona's highly progressive constitution met with more resistance from the conservative Taft. Although territorial officials there altered the document to appease the President, the state's residents amended their constitution within a year to allow for provisions such as female suffrage, referendum, recall, anti-lobbying clauses, and anti-child labor measures.

Just less than a year after the territorial vote, on January 6, 1912, President Taft was joined by thirteen guests from New Mexico to formally acknowledge

statehood. With no fanfare or ceremony, Taft signed the document that welcomed New Mexico into the Union. After signing, he uttered only two sentences: “Well, it is all over, I am glad to give you life. I hope you will be healthy.”¹⁴



On January 6, 1912, President William H. Taft signed the New Mexico statehood bill, officially elevating the territory to the status of state.

Harris and Ewing (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 089760.

What Taft said is noteworthy, not only for its patronizing tone but also for what his comments omitted. Even today, statehood is often heralded as the culminating event of New Mexico’s past. That viewpoint, however, negates the centuries-long histories of the peoples who have inhabited the area and built their lives in New Mexico. Celebratory photographs that show the thirteen citizens invited to the White House on that cold January day only depict Anglo-

Americans, and of that group only three women were present.



Late nineteenth century political cartoon depicting the status of Chinese migrants to the United States following the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Despite exclusion, many Chinese immigrants continued to arrive in the Southwest via Mexico. The last part of the cartoon's title, "me no sabee," hints at Chinese migrants' efforts to pass as immigrants from Mexico.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

and troubled than national debates suggested. Despite the benefits of statehood, including the end of second-class citizenship for New Mexicans, it was not a cure-all for ongoing issues. The new state had to confront difficult problems, such as endemic poverty and illiteracy. Corruption in politics continued and outside corporations still exploited New Mexico's natural resources at the expense of local residents.

As Holtby emphasizes, missing are representatives of four groups enumerated in the 1910 Census: nuevomexicanos (155,155), Native Americans (20,575), African Americans (1,628), and Asian Americans (504). Many of the Asian residents of New Mexico had migrated stealthily across the U.S.-Mexico border because the [1882 Chinese Exclusion Act](#) expressly forbade their entry into the nation. Additionally, the group of invitees does not reflect the gender composition of New Mexico at the time: of those age fourteen and older, 114,295 were men and 92,257 were women.¹⁵

Holtby's demographic analysis is important because it reminds us that, despite Taft's wish that the new state "be healthy," it remained more diverse

“Loyalty Questioned”: Revolution & War

As the final stages of the statehood battle made their way through Washington D.C. channels, revolution erupted in Mexico. From exile in San Antonio, Texas, *hacendado* (large landholder) [Francisco I. Madero](#) led opposition to the continuance of the Porfiriato (the name for President Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship which began in 1876). Madero’s [Plan de San Lu s Potos ](#) called for the initiation of revolution against the aging dictator on November 20, 1910. By early 1911 battles between revolutionary forces and Mexican *federales* regularly occurred along the border with the United States.



Mexican Borders This map shows Mexican border states at the time of the [Mexican Revolution](#).

Part of the reason for the revolution's concentration along the international border was that the states of Chihuahua, Sonora, Nuevo León, and [Tamaulipas](#) had been impacted most directly by U.S. investment and economic control. Peasants lost their communal rights to land and vital resources as the Díaz administration made concession after concession to foreign enterprises in an effort to bring Mexico into the modern, capitalist world. Indeed, the pattern of modernization in Mexico began with the liberal reforms of the 1850s that resulted in the adoption of that nation's [Constitution of 1857](#). By the early 1900s the stress that modernization placed on Mexican peasants and indigenous peoples had pushed them to the breaking point.

Wealthy and middle-class Americans initially considered the revolution to be something of a spectator sport. In

one iconic photo, [Anglo](#)-Americans congregated at the top of an El Paso hotel to get a view of the civil war that was taking place just across the Rio Grande in Ciudad Juárez. The April 1911 [Battle of Ciudad Juárez](#) was a major defeat for the forces of Porfirio Díaz and he shortly thereafter fled into exile. Despite hopes that the Madero's government would restore order and create balance for Mexico, such was not the case. Madero and his vice president, José María Pino Suárez, were assassinated in February 1913 by reactionary forces who had the support of U.S. Ambassador, [Henry Lane Wilson](#).

Just prior to the assassination, editors of the *Las Cruces Citizen* noted, "Even El Pasoans are becoming nauseated with what they once considered so amusing." ¹⁷ The violence of the Mexican Revolution potentially ran counter to the message that New Mexican boosters wished to project: that the new state presented a prime opportunity for settlers to establish family farms in the Southwest. For example, promoters in Columbus claimed that their small, dusty border town might one day exceed El Paso as the principal port of entry between the United States and Mexico.



Wilson was the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico in 1913 when General Victoriano Huerta led a coup against President Francisco Madero. In the infamous "Pact of the Embassy," Wilson lent his support to Huerta and Félix Díaz against the democratically elected Madero administration. After the successful coup, Madero and his vice president were both executed. *Courtesy of Library of Congress*



This photograph from 1911 shows Mexican revolutionaries in Ciudad Juárez with a homemade cannon and other arms they were able to secure. Through 1912, many Americans considered the Mexican Revolution to be something of a “spectator sport.” They watched battles and movements in Juárez from locations near the Rio Grande or atop buildings in El Paso, Texas.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Such was never to be the case, but the dreams of Columbus boosters illustrate the ongoing tensions between the hopes of statehood and the desire to maintain trade with Mexico. New Mexico Senator [Albert B. Fall](#), as one example, possessed vast interests in Mexico. Unlike other Americans, he was in the unique position to petition the U.S government to take action to protect his Mexican holdings in the face of the revolution. Fall issued countless petitions and conducted a public series of hearings in 1920 to protect his investments.

McDonald served as governor between 1912 and 1917. During the Mexican



Revolution, residents in the southern section of the state petitioned him for arms and reinforcements to protect against potential violence. This photograph shows him in his State Capitol office, Santa Fe, New Mexico. *Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors](#)*

Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 152652.

In contrast with the senator's position, which was geared toward protecting economic gains, other New Mexicans understood their relationship with Mexico during the decade of the 1910s on social, rather than economic, terms. In 1914, residents of Rodeo, New Mexico—a tiny community in the state's "boot heel," petitioned Governor [William C. McDonald](#) for troops and arms to guarantee protection from Mexican revolutionary violence. The small community was concerned not only that revolutionaries might cross the border to wreak havoc on their town, but also feared "the Mexicans at and around the Mining Camps in Arizona northwest of us that might want to return to Mexico and would probably take this route on account of it being rough and unsettled, and that they would rob and murder on their way, not only for revenge but also to get outfits together."¹⁸

Ironically, in 1913 and 1914 residents of southern New Mexico looked to General Pancho [Villa](#) as the revolutionary leader who could restore order along the border and in Mexico generally. Even President [Woodrow Wilson](#) believed that Villa could be the best hope for American-style democracy in Mexico. During 1913, Villa's success gained him control of the state of Chihuahua, and he briefly served as its governor.

During the general's dominion over Chihuahua, Villa kept an office in Columbus. Although it is unclear how often he visited the office, the presence of his officers there seemed to provide many Columbus residents with a sense of

calm in the middle of the revolutionary storm. As Daniel J. “Buck” Chadborn recalled, “To show how cooperative Villa was, he gave me a safe conduct pass for my protection though I didn’t ask for it. It was presented to me in Villa’s Columbus office by two of his right-hand men, Leoncio J. Figueroa and Antonio Moreno.”¹⁹ Chadborn’s work as a line rider for the U.S. Customs Service, as well as his personal interest in a local cattle enterprise, meant that the gesture was important for building peaceful border relations between villista forces at Palomas and citizens of Columbus.

In August of 1914, Villa himself passed through southern New Mexico with his erstwhile ally General [Alvaro Obregón](#). After meeting with General John J. Pershing at Fort Bliss in El Paso, the rail entourage proceeded along the Southern Pacific en route to Sonora, where Villa and Obregón were to meet with Governor [José María Maytorena](#). The group stopped in Deming for breakfast on the morning of August 27 and residents of the town rushed to see Villa. In accordance with his established tactic of constantly working to build his own reputation, Villa addressed the crowd in Spanish from the deck of his private railcar. He assured the New Mexicans that the violence in Mexico would soon come to an end, and he made a direct appeal to the community’s Mexican residents, most of whom lived in a section of town called “Little Chihuahua.” Villa told them that he wanted “to see the Mexican people united in one solid nation, living in peace and happiness,” and that he forgave any who had formerly been his enemies. He invited them to return to Mexico where he would treat them as members of his own family.²⁰



In August 1914, Generals Villa and Obregón met General Pershing at Fort Bliss as they traveled along the Southern Pacific en route to Sonora. Both Obregón and Pershing later fought against Villa. During this particular trip, Villa's entourage also stopped in Deming where they were met by throngs of local residents. *The Robert Runyon Photograph Collection [00196], The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin*

Less than two years later, Villa's forces were decimated by Obregón's use of modern war tactics that were also employed in World War I, such as barbed wire, trenches, and machine guns. Villa failed to adjust his battle tactics accordingly, and by the spring of 1916 was in a desperate struggle to maintain a semblance of his former fame and reputation on the battlefield.

Historians have debated the various reasons for which Villa decided to raid Columbus on March 9, 1916. Although there is no agreement on the particulars, most scholars believe that Villa's main goal was to provoke a U.S. military expedition into Mexico. From that perspective, Villa gained his objective. Over the next two years, willing recruits joined his forces to fight against Pershing's Punitive Expedition and in reaction to the notion that the opposing

revolutionary forces led by self-proclaimed First Chief [Venustiano Carranza](#) had sold Mexico out to the United States in economic and political terms.

The story from the perspective of Columbus residents, New Mexicans, and Americans was quite different. The central business district of the small town lay in shambles, as did the lives of most of its inhabitants. Episodes of violence, loss, and heroism emerged during the battle. William T. Ritchie, who operated the Commercial Hotel with his wife Laura, refused to back down when a group of villistas stormed into the hotel. After attempting to protect his wife and girls, the soldiers forced him out onto the street where he was gunned down along with several other male guests.

Archibald Frost, who operated a furniture store in town, was gravely wounded as he attempted to escape the center of town with his wife and newborn son. On the bumpy road between Columbus and Deming, Mary Alice took the wheel from her husband because he was unable to drive due to bullet wounds. The family arrived at Deming where they received medical attention and recovered.

Nineteen-year-old telephone operator Susan Parks hunkered down at the switchboard and called military officials at Fort Bliss to inform them of the attack as it was in progress. She hid her baby girl, Gwen, under the bed in an attempt to keep her quiet because a group of villistas stood across the street.

Lieutenants John P. Lucas, James P. Castelman, and Colonel Frank Tompkins led the charge that forced the villistas to end the raid and retreat across the border into Chihuahua. Lucas and Castleman organized other soldiers in the Thirteenth Cavalry behind machine guns in town, and Tompkins pursued retreating villistas into Chihuahua as they fled. Villa himself lived, although nearly one

hundred of the men he had forced into service perished.

In the months following the raid, Columbus ballooned in size due to the near-constant arrival of National Guard units from across the United States to support the Punitive Expedition that had entered Chihuahua in mid-March. Columbus was the expedition's supply base, and General Pershing established his headquarters near the Mormon town of Colonia Dublán, Chihuahua.

Mexican President Venustiano Carranza could not prevent the Punitive Expedition from entering his nation. Despite Woodrow Wilson's reassurance that Mexico's sovereignty would be honored, Carranza found himself in an untenable position. In order to publicly refute Villa's unfounded accusation that he was in collusion with the United States, Carranza refused to support the Pershing expedition. Throughout the expedition time spent in Chihuahua between March 1916 and early February 1917, Carranza's forces actively opposed U.S. forces, most notably at the [battle of Carrizal](#) in southern Chihuahua in June 1916.



Colonel Tompkins led members of the 13th Cavalry in pursuit of villista forces following the raid on Columbus. Despite a policy that prevented them from crossing the border, Tompkins and his men entered Chihuahua in an attempt to capture the raiders. For his efforts, Tompkins received a Distinguished Service Cross.

Courtesy of TonyZ/U.S. War Department

The Punitive Expedition illustrated the U.S. Army's state of unpreparedness for a sustained campaign. Despite the relatively rapid amassment of supplies and men in Columbus, the military did not possess enough trucks to transport the needed ammunition, food, and other items to the Colonia Dublán headquarters. Regular cavalry and infantry units were supplemented with National Guard contingents that were often insufficiently trained for reconnaissance and combat missions.



Colonia Dublán Founded as a Mormon colony in 1889, Colonia Dublán, Chihuahua, was the site of General Pershing's headquarters during the Punitive Expedition of 1916-1917.

General Pershing directed efforts to correct the problems endured during the Punitive Expedition. Although U.S. forces failed to capture Pancho Villa, they field tested new technologies such as tanks and Curtis JN-4 biplanes, known as "Jennies." The planes allowed surveillance from the air that had not been imaginable in prior conflicts, but the Jennies had difficulty gaining enough

altitude to traverse the mountainous regions of western Chihuahua.

Support was enthusiastic for the hunt for Pancho Villa, but the loyalties of nuevomexicanos remained suspect to many Anglo Americans. The idea that New Mexico's hispano population more closely related with the Mexican nation than the United States had not completely abated, despite statehood a few years earlier. Also, the very public efforts of some New Mexican attorneys to represent Mexican revolutionaries accused of breaking neutrality laws did little to help matters. [Elfego Baca](#), for example, represented Mexican General [José Inez Salazar](#), accused of breaking neutrality laws by retreating across the border into south Texas to avoid an attack by villista forces in 1913. Baca allegedly participated in Salazar's escape from an Albuquerque jail. Despite never being convicted on the allegations, Baca was disbarred for his efforts to evade the investigation into his actions.

Nuevomexicanos refuted claims of their disloyalty in rallies in the state's cities and towns. They emphasized the reality that the state's National Guard units that aided the Punitive Expedition were comprised of hispanos. At a rally in Santa Fe, local nuevomexicanos chastised the national press for promoting prejudice "in the minds of the unadvised and thoughtless against a large proportion of our people who are not of the so-called Anglo Saxon descent."²¹ As scholars argued by Phillip Gonzales and Ann Massmann, "In truth, the border hostilities heightened nuevomexicanos' loyalty to the United States."²²

Interestingly, while much of the nation was engulfed in calls for "100 percent Americanism" and the end of "hyphenism" (i.e., the visual and vocalized methods of group identification that emphasized an ethnic group's origins, such as the term "Spanish-American"), nuevomexicanos found that the World War I era provided them the opportunity to show their loyalty to the United States without abandoning their ethnic identification. Nuevomexicanos' experiences at war and on the homefront during the Great War (as World War I was known prior to the Second World War) illustrate the harsh reality that the issue of full inclusion in the Union had not been resolved by statehood.



Photograph of New Mexican WWI recruits on Palace Avenue in Santa Fe as they prepared to leave for training camp in 1917.

William H. Roberts (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 149995.

Like Americans across the nation, nuevomexicanos answered the call to service and sacrifice. They intensified their cultural sensibilities even as they did so. Once again, the Spanish-language press in New Mexico led the way in expressing the connections between [nuevomexicano](#) culture and American loyalty. Newspapers like *La Voz del Pueblo* published poetry in Spanish that emphasized elements of nuevomexicanos' Iberian heritage, and that were geared to inspire honorable service during the conflict.

Additionally, a cartoon image created by [Jesuasa Alfau](#), an artist born in Madrid who lived in New York City during the second decade of the twentieth century, resonated with New Mexico's people. Alfau's drawing presented Queen Isabella giving her

La Voz del Pueblo

jewels to a portrayal of Columbia, a female personification of the United States. The image, published in the national and New Mexico press with Spanish captions, reminded its viewers that Spain had been responsible for European arrival in the Americas. By extension, it accentuated the idea that those who claimed Spanish blood could both emphasize their unique cultural heritage and their loyalty to the United States in a time of war.

In stark contrast to earlier accusations levied by Senator [Albert J. Beveridge](#), during the war New Mexico's Spanish-language press was recognized for its dedication to the American war effort. Nearly every hispano community in the northern part of the state boasted a Spanish-language weekly. Some examples included *La Voz del Pueblo* (Las Vegas), *La Revista de Taos*, *Albuquerque Bandera Americana*, and the *Las Cruces Estrella*. Other papers, like the *Deming Graphic* and the *Santa Fe New Mexican* were bilingual.

The importance of the Spanish language press on the issue of



La voz del pueblo. (Santa Fe, Nuevo México), 26 April 1919. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. pg.3. Courtesy of the Library of Congress and University of New Mexico

This image created by the Madrid-born artist Jesusa Alfau portrays Queen Isabella (who donated her jewels to fund the “discovery” of America) lending support to the Dame Columbia—a female personification of America. The implication is that Spanish-heritage Americans should purchase Liberty Bonds to support the war effort in Europe and once again demonstrate their willingness to sacrifice for the good of America.

nuevomexicanos' loyalty is illustrated in responses to the [Zimmermann Telegram](#) just prior to the U.S. declaration of war against Germany in February of 1917. The telegram was an intercepted communication between German Foreign Minister [Arthur Zimmermann](#) and the German Minister to Mexico, [Heinrich von Eckhardt](#). British intelligence agents decoded the message, which was a call for Mexico to join the Great War as a German ally. In exchange for Mexican support German envoys promised to help the Mexican government recapture the American Southwest, which had been transferred to the United States under the terms of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#).

The Zimmermann Telegram heightened tensions in the United States, and placed intensified scrutiny on hispanos in California, New Mexico, and Texas. The telegram helped generate popular support for U.S. involvement in the European conflict, and the press in New Mexico mocked [Zimmermann's message](#). José Jordi, editor of *La Voz del Pueblo* and a recent immigrant from Spain, charged that the proposal was flatly crazy. The passing of time has substantiated Jordi's comments that, "the biggest proof of their dementia is to think that . . . President Carranza would attempt the reconquest of the Southern United States." [23](#)



This March 1917 political cartoon by Clifford Berryman illustrates the threat outlined in the Zimmerman Telegram. In that intercepted communication, German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmerman petitioned the Mexican government to support the German effort in World War I. In return, he indicated that Mexico would be able to regain the territories lost during the U.S. Mexico War.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Jordi continued by reaffirming New Mexican support for President Wilson's move toward committing U.S. forces to the Great War. In reports written in Spanish, the nuevomexicano press worked to enforce complete loyalty to the American war effort, even as it also emphasized the continued value of nuevomexicano use of the Spanish language and the reaffirmation of their traditions and customs.

In their research on nuevomexicano support for World War I, Gonzales and Massmann argue that "cultural citizenship," or a type of citizenship that

emphasized a unique ethnic background and loyalty to the United States, solidified in New Mexico. Collective actions, such as rallies and community gatherings to express solidarity with the war effort, marked nuevomexicanos' assertions of cultural citizenship. At the Spanish American Normal School (today's Northern New Mexico College) students dressed in military attire and sung patriotic songs in Spanish. In Taos, L. Pascuál Martínez, editor of the *Taos Valley News* and *El Crepúsculo*, led a Decoration Day (the precursor to Memorial Day) rally in support of U.S. participation in the Great War.

Nuevomexicanas manifested support of the war by advocating for women's suffrage. [Adelina "Nina" Otero-Warren](#), one of the leading figures of New Mexico's hispana literary scene, was identified by [Alice Paul](#), leader of the Congressional Union (CU)—a national women's suffrage organization, as a key figure who could promote New Mexican women. In 1917, Otero-Warren took the helm of the New Mexico chapter of the CU. Otero-Warren and other notable members of the nuevomexicana elite, including [Aurora Lucero](#), lobbied state legislators for women's right to vote at the close of the nineteen-teens.

For women, in New Mexico and elsewhere, support of war loyalty campaigns was a means of also fighting for the passage of the [Nineteenth Amendment](#). Having passed through Congress in 1919, the amendment that granted women the right to vote could not be added to the Constitution until the requisite three-fourths of states had ratified it. Women's groups, like the one headed by Otero-Warren, played instrumental roles in securing the amendment's ratification. At the national level, women's suffrage leaders encouraged nuevomexicanas to support the war effort as a means of also promoting their own cause.

The movement for women's suffrage in New Mexico was not controlled by national interests. Along with Otero-Warren, who also headed the auxiliary of the First Judicial District and chaired the state-level Red Cross, other women joined the battle for the right to vote. Across the state, they contributed their efforts to simultaneously illustrate their loyalty to the United States and their dedication to the idea of political equality.

Unfortunately, during this time period newspapers and other sources of information identified women in conjunction with their husbands rather than reporting their own names. Accordingly, “Mrs. J. M. Díaz” was listed as the woman who led efforts to produce food, plant victory gardens, and collect Liberty Bonds among northern New Mexicans. In Taos County, Juanita G. Mares and Juanita Saavedra de Martínez headed efforts to collect Liberty Bonds. Women field agents, including Gertrudes Espinoza, served as experts on the preservation of meats, fruits, and vegetables. As we will see in Chapter 13, most of the field agents assigned to rural New Mexico in the World War I era were Anglo American, and their biases shaped the types of reforms that were recommended and eventually carried out under New Deal agencies.

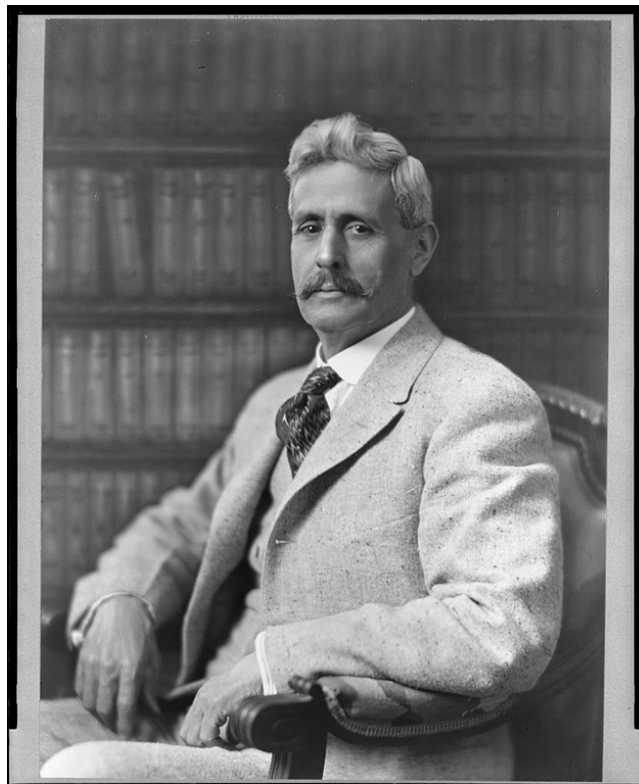
Following the war, Otero-Warren’s experiences put her in a unique position to influence the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in New Mexico. According to Gonzales and Massmann, she “single-handedly convinced wavering U.S. Congressman William Walton to support woman suffrage, and she successfully pressured the Hispanic members of the state house of representatives to vote in favor of it.”²⁴ Other women’s rights advocates, principally those connected to Otero-Warren’s Republican political circles, also petitioned the New Mexico legislature.

Governor [Octaviano Larrazolo](#) called a special session to consider ratification in 1920. At the end of that session, New Mexico became the thirty-second state to support the Nineteenth Amendment. Nuevomexicanas took advantage of the new political rights that came with voting, and lobbied subsequent legislative sessions in 1921 that opened the way for women to hold office. Otero-Warren narrowly lost her bid for Congress in 1921, but several other women successfully campaigned

for state-level positions, principally as secretary of state. Several women held that post during the 1920s and 1930s, including [Soledád Chávez de Chacón](#), [Jesusita Perrault](#) and [Marguerite Baca](#).

During the short period of U.S. involvement in the war, Governor Larrazolo had emerged in New Mexico as a symbol of resistance to the racist notion that disloyalty and treason ran rampant in the state. New Mexican legislators debated whether or not to petition for a segregated nuevomexicano unit as young men went off to service, both through volunteerism and the conscription required by the Selective Service Act of 1917.

To some, including Benigno



Larrazolo served as Governor of New Mexico from 1919 to 1921 and then in the U.S. Senate in 1928 and 1929. A native of Chihuahua, Larrazolo built a successful law practice in the Southwest prior to his political career. In 1920, he called the special legislative session that ratified the Nineteenth Amendment which granted women's suffrage. *Courtesy of Library of Congress*



1928. When campaigning for Secretary of State

Hernández, a native of [Rio Arriba](#) County and member of the wartime New Mexico Council of Defense, the fact that conscription far exceeded volunteer service among nuevomexicanos indicated their ignorance and lack of patriotism.

Hernández added the caveat that local hispanos were strong citizens, “when [they] understand things, but those living in the remote villages, or upon stock ranches, have not the reading matter at hand.”²⁵ Taking the accusations much further, a letter published in the *North American Review* claimed that a treasonous conspiracy against the United States was in motion in New Mexico. The populace’s continued use of Spanish was the supposed evidence for the alleged plot, and the letter’s author claimed that the [Penitente brotherhood](#) was a secret society that dictated political, economic and social affairs in New Mexico.

Along with Nina Otero-Warren, Jesuita Perrault, Soledád Chávez de Chacón, and Marguerite Baca led the charge for women’s suffrage rights in New Mexico. This photograph was taken in 1928 during Perrault’s successful campaign for election as New Mexico Secretary of State.

Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. HP.2010.42.2.

In response to such sentiment, New Mexicans staged demonstrations in Albuquerque and Las Cruces, and members of the state’s congressional delegation, including Albert B. Fall, demanded the letter’s retraction. In the state legislature, Larrazolo, then speaking as a prominent Las Vegas lawyer, argued that a separate regiment for nuevomexicanos was necessary that segregated units would provide comfort to New Mexican servicemen. Hernández also supported the separate regiments, but on the grounds that nuevomexicano young men were not sufficiently assimilated into American culture to thrive in integrated units.

Ultimately, policymakers decided that the proposed separate regiments took the concept of cultural citizenship too far. President Wilson and Secretary of War [Newton Baker](#) promised to provide special sensitivity to nuevomexicanos in the service, and many nuevomexicano newspaper editors responded with gratitude. In addition, some, like editor L. Pascual Martínez, continued to advocate for cultural citizenship on the home front. He specifically argued that the federal government also support state-level improvements in educational

and economic opportunities.

As New Mexico looked toward the new decade in 1920, the achievement of statehood after a hard-fought, sixty-four year struggle gave its residents a certain sense of accomplishment. Although the implication was that entry into the Union would bring full U.S. citizenship rights to the state's hispano, indigenous, African American, and Asian residents, such was not the case. Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus and U.S. participation in World War I proved to many nuevomexicanos that such hopes were in vain. Within a decade of statehood, perceptions of New Mexico's people as ignorant, backward, and un-American persisted in many sectors of the nation.

The statehood struggle, Punitive Expedition, and World War I underscored the crucial role of political participation. During the war, nuevomexicanas successfully advocated for suffrage and shortly thereafter achieved the right to serve in public office. Hispano politicians also maintained a strong role in state politics as advocates for the rights of New Mexicans. Governor Octaviano Larrazolo was one of many "native sons" to whom New Mexicans appealed when they felt that their citizenship rights had not been properly protected.

During the 1920s, problems of poverty and insufficient educational resources continued in New Mexico to the extent that some observers suggested that residents of the state were not impacted by the economic collapse in 1929. Such claims were based on the idea that poverty was an accepted cultural way of life for the supposedly pre-industrial peoples of New Mexico. Paradoxically, members of the famed artist colonies of Taos and Santa Fe, as well as rural reformers, simultaneously promoted the idea of New Mexico's peoples as embodying the notions of purity and simplicity that could cure the ills of the modern age, and also as peoples in need of modern models of efficiency. Their perceptions of New Mexico furthered the incorrect notion that the Great Depression did not greatly impact the state's people, but the New Deal provided artists and reformers with resources they needed to record, preserve, and reproduce cultural goods among Pueblos, Navajos, and hispanos. The Depression era will be addressed in the next chapter.

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Chapter 13: The Great Depression & The New Deal

The Great Depression & The New Deal

Artist Colonies & Rural Reformers

Depression Comes to New Mexico

Dennis Chávez & The Hispanic New Deal

Indian New Deal & Navajos

References & Further Reading

The Great Depression & The New Deal



In late-1937 Procopio Carabajo, a forty-six-year-old father of eight children who lived in Bernalillo, learned that the Works Progress Administration (WPA) would no longer allow him to work on federal projects geared toward alleviating the economic stress of the Great Depression. WPA administrators terminated him from the relief rolls due to his status as an “alien,” illegally present in the United States.

As Carabajo reported to the *Albuquerque Journal*, he had no idea that he was not recognized as a legal resident of New Mexico. Originally from Chihuahua, he crossed the border with his father in 1900 when he was nine years old. At that time the Border Patrol did not exist and authorities lightly regulated travel across the international boundary. Customs officials were primarily concerned

with the international movement of cattle and goods, not people—with the exception of Asians who had been denied access to the United States under the [Exclusion Act of 1882](#).

Beginning in 1912, Carabajo actively participated in electoral politics by voting. He also married and started a family. All of his eight children had been born in the United States and enjoyed U.S. citizenship. His oldest son, Robert, had enrolled with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in New Mexico. His youngest son was only four months old when Procopio learned the news that he would no longer be eligible for New Deal relief programs. Without the aid of the WPA, it would be very difficult for a man like Carabajo to find work at all.

According to WPA administrators interviewed by the *Albuquerque Journal*, a new federal law passed in June of 1937 required them to ascertain the citizenship status of all who worked on New Deal programs.

Pete Rose, the WPA Employment Manager for New Mexico, reported that he had no idea how many non-citizens were currently on the bureau's rolls because applicants had not been required to identify themselves by citizenship status prior to 1937. Carabajo and another man not identified by name in the report learned of their denial on the basis of non-citizenship when they reported to the County Clerk's Office to re-register for benefits.



WPA Road workers near El Cerrito, San Miguel County, New Mexico. Men from surrounding villages sought out WPA work to gain an income to support themselves and their families during the Great Depression. Although many [Anglo](#) reformers did not realize it at the time, such work was necessary even after the Depression to supplement [nuevomexicano](#) incomes.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised a “New Deal for the American People” during his 1932 campaign. Once elected, he put the promise to action in a comprehensive package of legislation known as the New Deal which provided jobs, training, and infrastructure, among other things, to combat the Great Depression.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

aliens” in the common speech of the time could be traced back to a 1933 Department of Labor effort to “voluntarily [repatriate](#)” Mexican nationals to their country of origin as a means of freeing up relief funds for white American citizens. Such repatriation programs were disingenuous at best, targeting all people of Mexican heritage, whether U.S. citizens or not, through a campaign based on fear. Deportation raids, the requirement that all Mexican-heritage people carry identification papers at all times, and concentrated radio campaigns instilled fear amongst the Mexican American populace. The result was the forced relocation to Mexico of thousands of people from places ranging from Gary, Indiana, to Los Angeles, California.

In New Mexico, the general atmosphere that inspired the repatriation campaigns also impacted nuevomexicanos who once again found that the legal

Carabajo’s case illustrates the unforeseen issues created by federal initiatives to “clean up” New Deal relief rolls in the late 1930s. Even President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#), remembered for creating the Welfare State in the United States, had reservations about deficit spending to support his [New Deal economic recovery programs](#). When he urged Congress to pull back from such spending in 1937, the country entered a new recession, dubbed the “Roosevelt Recession” by contemporary observers and historians alike.

Agencies like the WPA sought to pare down their spending through a purge of non-citizens from federal programs. The focus on people called “illegal

promise of U.S. citizenship held little meaning in daily life. The cases of Carabajo and others like him also illustrate the continued arrival of new immigrants to New Mexico, despite the fact that the vast majority of Mexican-heritage people in the state were descended from those who lived in the area at the time of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#).



Between 1931 and 1935, the U.S. Department of Labor conducted a campaign that included intimidating radio messaging, deportation raids, and a heightened police presence in Mexican American communities. Such efforts were geared toward the “voluntary” repatriation of undocumented Mexican laborers. Many Mexican Americans, who enjoyed U.S. citizenship, were also caught in the dragnet.

Courtesy of Herald-Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

According to Pete Rose, Carabajo and any other Mexican-heritage people in New Mexico illegally could pay a fee of \$20 to register as residents. Although Procopio Carabajo never again appears in the historical record, we can assume that if he was unable to pay the fee, his son’s participation with the CCC would have been the family’s economic support. Others in similar situations, however,

were not so lucky.

Just a few days after reporting on Carabajo's situation, on November 28, 1937, the Albuquerque Journal ran a story that outlined the burden placed on women due to the WPA focus on eliminating undocumented people from its rolls. In addressing women's status, WPA administrators looked to a 1922 law that addressed the citizenship of those who married "aliens." Under that law, any woman who married a non-citizen prior to 1922 lost her citizenship status and was classified as an "alien" along with her husband. Men who married non-citizen women were not subject to the loss of their U.S. citizenship.

The WPA used the same standard to decide which women qualified for participation in its programs. According to an article in the *Albuquerque Journal*, women who married non-citizens prior to 1922 lost their citizenship by virtue of their marriage. The paper's editors made the tongue-in-cheek assessment that the "only 'sensible' thing for a woman" in such circumstances to do was to get a divorce. In making such an analysis, the *Albuquerque Journal* cast the WPA measures as unjust.

Labor struggles also became a vehicle for political debate in New Mexico during the Great Depression, often at the expense of laborers. As reported in the July 18, 1936, edition of *The Nation*, New Deal liberals and others used racism to root out those who attempted to organize unions in New Mexico and the Southwest. A man named Jesús Pallares was deported for his efforts to unionize laborers in the coal mines of Madrid, New Mexico.

According to a report in *The Nation*, Pallares was "a skilled miner and an accomplished musician."¹ Like Carabajo, he arrived in New Mexico from Chihuahua during an era in which border enforcement focused on customs concerns rather than the migration of certain categories of people. Unlike Carabajo, he worked as a miner following his participation in the [Mexican Revolution](#). He worked first in a mine in Dawson, and then in Gallup, New Mexico. During his tenure with the Gallup-American Coal Company, a subsidiary of Kennecott Copper, he attempted to organize his fellow workers for

better wages and conditions. As a result, company officials fired him.



This photograph of an American Coal Company facility near Gallup, New Mexico, illustrates the continued value of extractive industries to the state's economy even during the Depression Era.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 089521.

Struggling to support himself, his wife, and their four children, he finally found employment in the Madrid coal mines after many months without an income. As was the case in many mining towns throughout the American West, Madrid was a company town. Despite the guaranteed right to collective bargaining, included in provisions of [Section 7-a of the National Industrial Recovery Act](#) (NIRA), the union in Madrid catered to the owners' interests at the expense of the workers.

A veteran of unionization due to his experiences in Gallup, Pallares took steps to create an alternate union that would represent the demands of laborers in Madrid. Organization there was much more difficult than had been the case in Gallup. Although the coal company created a union to nominally comply with

Section 7-a, Pallares quickly learned the “union” was more concerned with the bosses’ issues than those of the workers.

Pallares’ efforts to create a meaningful workers’ union at Madrid led him to association with the *Liga Obrera de Habla Española* (Spanish-Speaking Workers’ League). The league was the most prominent promoter of working nuevomexicano and Mexican nationals’ rights in New Mexico. Officials labeled it an anarchist, or radical, organization in an attempt to strip it of legitimacy. Ultimately, Pallares’ tireless work to advocate for workers’ rights came to naught when he was deported in the summer of 1936.

The experiences of Carabajo, women married to “aliens,” and Pallares are all connected. Despite initial analyses, New Mexico’s peoples’ were disproportionately impacted by the Great Depression. The state was a place where migration from Mexico impacted the demographic makeup of local communities. Additionally, artists and reformers applied their idealized observations of Mexico in the 1920s to the day-to-day situation of nuevomexicanos and Native Americans in New Mexico. Based on their observation of Mexican efforts to bring indigenous peoples into the nation after the Mexican Revolution, reformers in New Mexico similarly patterned their educational and social reforms.

Their romanticized characterizations of New Mexico’s peoples as examples of an earlier, pre-industrial way of life subsequently skewed federal officials’ responses to the crisis of the Great Depression. Reformers, such as [Mary Austin](#), [Mabel Dodge Luhan](#), and [John Collier](#), applied their conceptions of New Mexico as outsiders to address the crises faced in the state due to the Depression. Reformers’ understandings, however, missed the key issues facing New Mexico’s peoples. Despite the best efforts of reformers who hoped to reverse cultural and economic loss, the Great Depression negatively impacted New Mexico, just as it did most other locales throughout the nation. Reformers often misunderstood the key economic, social, and cultural problems in New Mexico, and therefore failed to address the needs of the people they most hoped to touch through New Deal programs.

Artist Colonies & Rural Reformers

The growth of tourism and artist colonies—especially in Taos and Santa Fe—during the first decade of the twentieth century emphasized the staggering economic disparity between the wealthy and the poor in New Mexico. In part, the attitudes of [Anglo](#) artists, writers, and cultural reformers served to perpetuate the economic and ethnic divides that troubled the new state. The outsiders saw New Mexico’s “indigenous peoples” (they applied the term to nuevomexicanos and Native Americans alike) as adherents of a “primitive,” pre-industrial way of life. It was precisely that element of their lifeways that drew the artists to them, as had been the case with the rise of the tourism industry. The creation of artwork that portrayed New Mexico’s peoples and landscapes were a key element of the tourism project promoted by the Santa Fe Railroad and the [Fred Harvey](#) Company.



An example of Pueblo Revival Style architecture, the Museum of Fine Arts building was constructed in Santa Fe in 1917.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors](#) Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 006711.

Museum of New Mexico.

As the [jointure](#) battle raged in the Senate in 1906, another important piece of legislation for New Mexico was also passed: the [Antiquities Act](#). [Edgar Lee Hewett](#) provided key funding and support through his political and economic connections in the East. Hewett was an archeologist by training, and he was instrumental in the formation of Santa Fe’s unique Pueblo Revival architectural style and he spearheaded the creation of the

EDGAR LEE HEWETT

As Santa Fe remade itself along cultural lines, a group of wealthy Eastern artists and reformers arrived in northern New Mexico. In an attempt to alleviate the excesses of modern America, they looked to the native peoples of New Mexico as an example of what it meant to be American. Certainly, the irony of such assertions was not lost on New Mexicans who had been consistently denigrated as un-American since 1848. Reformers' misconceptions of New Mexico's problems, coupled with the racism, romanticism, and cultural initiatives of the 1930s, resulted in momentary relief for New Mexico's economic woes that did not address larger structural issues that might have allowed the state's peoples to finally enjoy both full U.S. citizenship and economic autonomy.

How did Santa Fe rebrand itself?



In 1917, a young woman named Mabel

Sterne arrived in New Mexico for the first time. She was the [epitome](#) of the early twentieth century [New Woman](#), and she was well connected to artistic and literary movements in Greenwich Village and Europe. Her husband, Maurice Sterne, told her that a visit to New Mexico would change her life. He was right. As Mabel herself characterized the experience: “My life broke in two right then, and I entered into the second half, a new world that had replaced all the ways I had known with others.”² Not long thereafter, she sent her husband away and began an affair with Taos Pueblo artist Tony Lujan. She is known to history by her last married name, [Mabel Dodge Luhan](#).

Luhan and other artists, writers, and reformers belonged to a generation that was discontented with modern life and technologies, especially in the form of munitions and weapons used to kill millions of young men in European trenches during World War I. Anti-modernists believed that modern innovations had morally bankrupted Western societies. Urban problems, including pollution, overcrowding, and poor working conditions, further convinced them that modern life was deeply troubled. Yet they only took their criticisms so far. Elements of modernity that they did not deem destructive, such as transportation innovations, electricity, running water, and so on, were acceptable.



Luhan was an example of the New Woman of the early twentieth century. She moved to Taos in 1917 after spending time in Europe and New York’s Greenwich Village. In New Mexico, she promoted the notion that Pueblo and [nuevomexicano](#) people lived a pure, pre-modern existence that should be studied by artists and emulated by people throughout the United States.

Courtesy of Library of Congress



Founding members of the Taos Society of Artists, c. 1915: Left to right starting in front, J.H. Sharp, Ernest L. Blumenschein, E. Martin Hemmings, Bert G. Phillips, E. Irving Couse, O.E. Berninghaus, Walter Ufer, W. Herbert Dunton, Victor Higgins and Kenneth Adams.

Charles E. Lord (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 028817.

In New Mexico Mabel Dodge Luhan found a place that appeared not to have been touched by the advances of modernity. She and others, such as the [Taos Society of Artists](#), [Mary Austin](#), and [John Collier](#), believed that nuevomexicano villages and Native American communities represented the “lost soul of America.” They believed that Americans living in other areas of the United States had much to learn from New Mexican villagers.

Taos Artist Colony WITH ANDREW CONNORS



Their perceptions of New Mexico and its peoples were based on four notions that were widely held during their lifetime. First, was the idea that humans in preindustrial villages lived in harmony with the environment and their neighbors in a type of simple equity. Second, people who lived agricultural lifestyles were supposedly inherently “honest, virtuous, industrious, frugal, pious, and incorruptible.”³ Such beliefs dated back to Thomas Jefferson’s idealization of the United States as a nation of yeoman farmers.

Third, people who lived close to nature were considered closer to God, “who was embodied in nature.”⁴ And, fourth, artists, writers, and reformers, viewed New Mexico through the lens of the melting pot, an idea that is still discussed in present-day American society, although scholars have heavily critiqued it. When early twentieth-century observers framed the United States as a melting pot, they declared it to be a place where people of various ethnic and cultural background came together to become “Americans”—a term whose meaning is quite slippery and continuously debated.

The caveat held by adherents of the melting pot ideal was that “ethnic and national differences enriched the nation culturally as long as they were not

allowed to impede it economically or politically.”⁵ As our study of the territorial period suggests, U.S. politicians consistently characterized nuevomexicanos and Native Americans as two groups of people whose cultural backgrounds threatened to hold the nation back in terms of economic and political progress.

Luhan and her contemporaries, however, saw in New Mexico’s peoples and cultures a means of restoring elements of American culture and morality that were lost to modernization. Their highly romanticized notions of New Mexican villages drew clear distinctions between what they considered to be the good and the bad aspects of village life. Cooperative, communitarian values, which were often overstated by the outside observers, were considered positive attributes in need of preservation against the onslaught of modern life.

Modernism in New Mexico

WITH ANDREW CONNORS



At the same time, artists, writers, and reformers found some elements of village life to be evidence of inefficiency and waste. Like [Protestant missionary women](#)

who worked among nuevomexicanas in the first two decades of the twentieth century, they believed that outmoded agricultural practices, Catholic “superstition,” lack of ambition, and general ignorance plagued nuevomexicanos. Such problems needed to be addressed through education on the latest farming techniques and technologies, new methods of food preservation, and homemaking and child rearing advice. The missionaries actively worked to alter nuevomexicano traditions, yet, ironically, the reformers who claimed they were working to preserve the villages also attempted to update elements of village life along similar lines.

What landmarks did Georgia O’Keeffe paint?



Mabel Dodge Luhan’s relationship with her husband Tony serves as a microcosm of the ways in which her cultural initiatives had both positive and negative impacts on New Mexicans. In order to marry Mabel, Tony divorced his wife and violated tribal custom by marrying a white woman. Their relationship was troubled, as each strong personality attempted to promote his or her own interests. Tony gained wealth, power, and a reputation as an Indian sage

through his association with Mabel, but he burned bridges with his own people in the process.



The subject of this postcard photograph was identified as Tony Lujan by a Palace of the Governors Archivist in 1987, but archivists continue to debate whether or not this is actually Lujan or another Taos artist named Albert Looking Elk Martínez.

Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 134744.

political activism of Luhan's group of Anglo writers, artists, and reformers. She introduced British author D. H. Lawrence, and painters Andrew Dashburg, Ward Lockwood, Cady Wells, and Louis Ribak to New Mexico. Each of them found that New Mexico's peoples and landscapes filled voids in their individual work. Despite their enchantment with New Mexico, Luhan's domineering presence alienated them as well. To escape her attempts to shape his writing,

Mabel's description of her marriage to her Anglo American friends is also telling. She took Tony's name, but changed the spelling of Lujan to "Luhan" in order to prevent pronunciation errors among her elite Eastern American friends and family. In her own memoirs, she presented herself as an example of the decline of modern American civilization and Tony "and the Pueblo Indians as the vehicle for rebirth offered by the Indian Southwest."⁶ Much like the way she altered her married name, her efforts to preserve Pueblo and hispano cultures through art and writing reproduced those cultures in an altered form in order to satisfy Anglo American sensibilities. By inviting a seemingly endless influx of writers and artists to her Taos home, however, Luhan "put Taos on the map."⁷

Over time, Tony regained the respect of some within his Pueblo due to the

Lawrence moved away from her lavish and spacious Taos home to a remote location in the mountains to the north.

Luhan also forged ties with reformers Mary Austin and John Collier. Like the artists and writers who were drawn to New Mexico, Austin and Collier felt a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the excesses of modern society. In the Native American and hispano villages of New Mexico they found communal values and cooperation that they believed could stand as an example for urban communities elsewhere in the United States and Europe. Their admiration for nuevomexicanos and Pueblos translated into a form of mimicry that historians, like Phillip J. Deloria, have termed “playing Indian.”⁸

“Playing Indian”

[Frank Hamilton Cushing](#), a pioneer ethnologist, was accused of “playing Indian” among the Zuni during his fieldwork in the early 1880s.



Likeness of John Collier hung in effigy near the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe. Although Collier intended to further Native American sovereignty—not only in New Mexico but throughout the United States—this photograph underscores the contested nature of his initiatives from the Native American

perspective.

T. Harmon Parkhurst (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 118455.

In Mary Austin's case, her fascination with New Mexico led her to "play villager." Prior to her arrival in Taos in 1919, Austin was already a nationally known writer and activist. In the context of the [post-World War I Red Scare](#), she sought alternatives to both U.S. capitalism and Russian communism. Indigenous and hispano villages operated on a type of localized socialism that she found appealing. Indeed, in 1925, she wrote that the community and egalitarian values of people in the Southwest "would fill the self-constituted prophets of all Utopias with unmixed satisfaction."⁹



Writer Mary Austin promoted and supported the preservation of hispano culture throughout the Southwest. In 1918 she first arrived in Santa Fe where she helped to establish the Community Theater to promote nuevomexicano live plays. Her book, "Taos Pueblo," contained the photographs of Ansel Adams.

Photograph by Charles Fletcher Lummis

Austin and many other reformers interested in New Mexican villages had also spent time in Mexico in the 1920s as that nation attempted to recreate itself following the violent phase of the [Mexican Revolution](#). Philosopher José Vasconcelos used his position as head of the Department of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública) to initiate a series of cultural missions that focused on improving education in rural areas. Under the motto of "educar es redimir" (to educate is to redeem), the new education system fostered literacy as well as a sense of Mexican nationalism based on indigenous peoples and their lifeways.¹⁰

Teachers not only had the responsibility of helping rural Mexicans learn to read and improve their skills, they also taught the history of the revolution in a way that supported the

legitimacy of President [Alvaro Obregón](#)'s administration. Vasconcelos posited the idea of the [Cosmic Race](#) (la raza cósmica) to counter international racist assumptions that Mexico's people were somehow backward in intellectual and physical terms due to the high level of mestizaje in the nation's history. Instead, Vasconcelos and rural teachers expressed an alternative characterization that stressed the strength of people with mixed heritage. Through the cultural missions, Mexican administrators sought to create their own distinct meaning of Mexican citizenship that centered on the vitality of indigenous and [mestizo](#) culture, as well as the purported gains of the revolution.

A series of intellectuals, including D.H. Lawrence, Katherine Anne Porter, Waldo Frank and John Dewey visited Mexico to observe and evaluate the Mexican educational system's attempt at cultural engineering. Based on their observations, Mary Austin and her associate [Lloyd Tireman](#) attempted to adapt the concept of the Mexican cultural missions to fit the needs of New Mexican villages.

Following up on her work in association with Edgar Lee Hewett and [Frank Applegate](#) to create the Indian Arts Fund and the Spanish-Colonial Arts Society in 1925, Austin supported Tireman, professor of elementary education at the University of New Mexico (UNM), in the creation of the [San José Experimental School](#). Located in Albuquerque's South Valley, the school was to serve the dual purpose of studying "the educational potential of Spanish-speaking school children under controlled conditions, and to train teachers for the rural elementary schools of the state." Austin believed that nuevomexicano



children held a great capacity for learning until age fifteen, when “the racial inheritance rises to bind them to patterns of an older habit of thinking.”¹¹

Author Frank Applegate supported the cultural initiatives supported by people like Mary Austin and Mabel Dodge Luhan in New Mexico. *Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 185034.*

The San José Experimental School took cues from the Mexican system of cultural missions, but from a different angle. Whereas Vasconcelos focused on integrating indigenous and rural communities into mainstream Mexican life, Austin and Tireman—along with other Anglo American artists, writers, and reformers—sought to create boundaries around New Mexican villages to protect them from mainstream, modern culture. By their estimation, villages should stand apart as role models to the rest of the nation.

In the process, however, the rural teachers trained at the San José Experimental School prepared to teach villagers how to adopt modern techniques of food preservation—canning rather than drying fruits and vegetables—and forms of hygiene and child rearing that were practiced in the Eastern United States. Much like Protestant missionary women and [agents of assimilation programs that targeted Mexican immigrant mothers throughout the Southwest](#), Austin’s fascination with nuevomexicano villages was tempered by the desire to further the benefits of modernization while simultaneously critiquing modernization’s excesses.



Collier served as the Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the New Deal, between 1933 and 1945. Previous experience at Taos Pueblo helped him to understand and sympathize with the

John Collier’s activities among Pueblo peoples was also defined by the same paradox. Much like Mabel Dodge Luhan, Collier experienced a life-changing transformation when he spent time among the people of Taos Pueblo in 1920. In particular, he noted the ways in which Taos people balanced the needs of individuals against that of the community. They

situation of Native American peoples, yet his policies drew opposition from many Natives, including the Navajos.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

also seemed to live in harmony with animals and the natural environment in ways that Collier had never before observed. During the 1920s, he vocally opposed federal policies of Indian assimilation, and during the New Deal era he became head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In that capacity, his advocacy for Native American people took a back seat to his desire to simultaneously modernize indigenous lifeways, as will be discussed below.

In certain respects the actions of artists, writers, and reformers had a positive impact on nuevomexicanos and Native Americans. Figures like Luhan, Austin, and Collier promoted an understanding of New Mexico and its peoples beyond the racist notions that had characterized the territorial period. Their initiatives boosted literacy in the state and helped to preserve cultural practices that were threatened by the onslaught of the modern, capitalist economy.

Reformers and artists also problematically characterized New Mexico as a place that remained untouched by the national capitalist economy. In creating their works, they exploited the extremely cheap labor provided by Pueblos and nuevomexicanos who worked for them as models, maids, and servants. In putting New Mexico “on the map,” they increased the value and costs of the very lands and resources that they idealized. Their admiration for New Mexican cultures promoted and facilitated their commodification.

Ironically, by the 1930s Anglo

also seemed to live in harmony with animals and the natural environment in ways that Collier had never before observed. During the 1920s, he vocally opposed federal policies of Indian



[The burning of Zozobra](#), or Old Man Gloom, has become the headline event at the Santa Fe Fiesta. In 1924, artist Will Schuster created the first Zozobra that was burned in effigy in order to help

reformers inserted themselves in nuevomexicano and Native American communities as caretakers of cultural authenticity. As outsiders, they more typically *created* the cultural ideals that they were ostensibly there to *preserve*. One striking example involves reformers' efforts to restore authenticity to Navajo weaving practices. New Deal agents realized that Navajo weavers used synthetic fibers and artificially produced dyes instead of wool and dyes extracted from local plants.

the people of Santa Fe put the misfortunes and shortcomings of the past year behind them.
Steve Northup (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 010909.



This photograph of Navajo women spinning wool dates to about 1930, and originally it appeared on postcards. During the Great Depression, New Deal reformers in New Mexico focused on the preservation of traditional Native American and nuevomexicano craft and artistic production.

Fraser (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 074988.

Under the auspices of the WPA, agents “retaught” Navajos to use “authentic” materials in weaving. Navajos had turned to synthetic materials because they were cheaper and they made weaving more efficient. Indigenous and nuevomexicano communities were far more integrated into the national capitalist economy than reformers wished to realize. The reformers did not comprehend the extent to which their actions among Native Americans and

nuevomexicanos were selective and highly arbitrary.

Depression Comes to New Mexico

Although the assertion that the Great Depression did not greatly impact New Mexico was overstated, the state was no stranger to poverty. The decade of the 1920s was characterized by the disenchantment embodied by writers, artists, and reformers. It was also defined by new economic prosperity and wealth for some Americans. That prosperity, however, was unevenly distributed across the nation. While some people drove new automobiles, others continued to walk or use draft animals. Some enjoyed the benefits of electricity and new household technologies, as others continued their day-to-day lives without.

The Great Depression in New Mexico

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



Most nuevomexicanos did not benefit from the benefits of the 1920s economic upturn. New Mexico reported one of the highest rates of poverty in the nation, as well as high figures for infant mortality during the decade. *Partido* agriculture continued to dominate rural areas, especially in the north. On the eve of the stock-market crash in October 1929, the average rural family had only six acres of land under cultivation from which they typically made about \$100 per year. At that rate, most families barely met subsistence standards.

Increased property taxes and debts required of *partidarios* combined to trap nuevomexicanos in a cycle of indebtedness. In exchange for new loans, they were forced to promise the next supply of wool from their sheep or the next agricultural harvest. In response, the men of many northern New Mexican communities became migratory laborers in an attempt to raise funds to pay their families' debts. Across the Southwest, by traveling to pick sugar beets, work on railroad construction, or labor in mines and on cattle ranches, [nuevomexicano](#) families created what historian Sarah Deutsch has termed "regional communities."¹²

Nuevomexicanas generally maintained the family lands while their husbands and sons worked migratory jobs. Reformers targeted the women not only because they wanted to modernize processes that were typically viewed as women's work, but also because women had taken on larger roles in their home communities due to the seasonal labor required of men to support their families' village lifeways. Despite the continued perception that nuevomexicano villages remained pre-industrial, the need for migratory labor highlighted



Many desperate depression-era migrants passed through New Mexico en route to the promise of opportunities in California. This mother and

the ways in which local communities were actually incorporated into the national economy.

children were part of a family of nine from Iowa who left their home in 1932 due to their husband and father's ill-health. When this photograph was taken, they were preparing to sell their belongings and trailer in order to buy food.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

When the Great Depression began, nuevomexicanos' seasonal jobs evaporated and their families were devastated. In some cases, the ranchers, farmers, or railroad companies simply cut back production. More typically, white men were given preference in the fields that Southwestern hispanos and Mexican migrants had formerly worked. During the 1930s, calls for the return of "alien" Mexican laborers to their home country limited job opportunities across the nation. Despite their U.S. citizenship, administrators in the U.S. Department of Labor, farm owners, and business proprietors drew no distinction between nuevomexicano men and Mexican migrants.

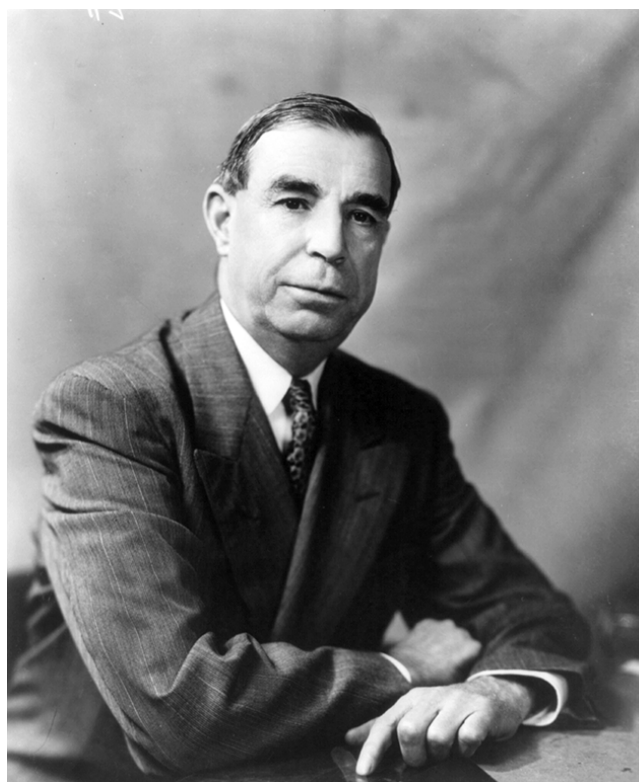
As a result, the northern New Mexican villages revered by artists and reformers faced extinction. During the first few years of the Great Depression, nuevomexicanos accounted for 80% of the state's relief load. Also, those nuevomexicanos who attempted to maintain their seasonal jobs faced the specter of deportation to Mexico as programs to [repatriate](#) undocumented Mexican laborers intensified.

Depression conditions might have forced nuevomexicano villagers off of their lands, as was the case with the impoverished "Okies" and "Arkies." Due to reformers' ongoing fascination with the village, the state's hispano populations instead received relief in the form of a unique Hispanic New Deal. Additionally, unlike californios and tejanos who had lost access to their respective states' political systems in the nineteenth century, nuevomexicanos preserved a tradition of political participation and access that was further solidified following statehood.

Nuevomexicanos believed that they could turn to their elected officials to gain recourse for their problems. The

Otero and Chávez families had maintained a place in the territorial government, and Governor [Octaviano Larrazolo](#) and Senator [Dennis Chávez](#) stand out as examples of hispano politicians in New Mexico in the three decades following statehood. Nuevomexicanos appealed to their elected officials in letters, meetings, and at the ballot box, whereas many hispanos in other parts of the Southwest did not.

[Anglo](#)-American officials, such as Governor [Clyde Tingley](#), also often stood as advocates of the state's hispano populations. In an effort to prevent people who he termed "alien migratory workers" from entering his state, Colorado Governor [Edwin Johnson](#) declared martial law along the state line with New Mexico. The Colorado National Guard prevented nuevomexicanos and Mexican migrants from traveling to work in the state. Within a few months, however, nuevomexicano laborers petitioned Governor Tingley to take action and he threatened to boycott goods from Colorado. The threat was enough to convince Governor Johnson to back down.



A native son of New Mexico, Dennis Chávez served as a Senator from New Mexico from 1935 until his death in 1962. He was the first hispano to serve a full term in the U.S. Senate. During the Great Depression and World War II eras, he worked tirelessly to bring initiatives to New Mexico that directly benefitted the state's nuevomexicano population.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Dennis Chávez & The Hispanic New Deal

During his campaign for the presidency in 1932, [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) promised that he would provide a New Deal for the American People. Once he took office in March of 1933, his campaign promise began to take shape in the form of a bank holiday and a slate of new legislation designed to improve the U.S. economy. Roosevelt's program, called the New Deal, included job creation programs and spending initiatives. In an effort to find creative solutions to the nation's grave economic problems, the [New Deal](#) created an "alphabet soup" of agencies known by their acronyms. The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps), NYA (National Youth Administration), and WPA (Works Progress Administration, renamed the Works Projects Administration in 1939) are just a few examples.



This photograph taken in April of 1940 documents CCC enrollees building a canal on the Carlsbad Project in southern New Mexico.

Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration

In the landslide election that brought Roosevelt into office, many other Democrats also received the support of their local constituencies. New Mexico was no exception. The Depression era broke the long dominance of the Republican Party on state politics. Representative, then Senator, [Dennis Chávez](#) rose to prominence as a strong supporter of the New Deal who had a knack for bringing its benefits to New Mexico's people.

Chávez was one of New Mexico's native sons. He was born Dionisio Chávez on April 8, 1888, in rural Valencia County. After completing the eighth grade, he dropped out of school to support his family economically as a grocery delivery boy. Despite his lack of formal education, Chávez always loved history and had an intense interest in politics. In that regard, he followed in the footsteps of his father who was active in the local Republican Party. Although he gained his father's affinity for politics, when he made his own career Chávez did so as a

Democrat.

As he worked his delivery job, he also found time to read extensively and to attend night school. When he was seventeen years old, he was hired to work at the Albuquerque engineering department and he moved to the city. In Albuquerque, Chávez participated in the local movement for statehood and after an unsuccessful campaign for the county clerk's office, he earned a position with Democratic Senator Andreius A. Jones' staff in Washington, D.C. While there, he attended Georgetown Law School.

Upon his return to Albuquerque he established a law office and once again set his sights on state politics. During the 1920s, he served in the state legislature and in 1930 he won election to the U.S. House of Representatives. In the 1934 election, he unsuccessfully challenged Republican Senator Bronson Cutting. Following his narrow loss, Chávez alleged that Cutting had committed voter fraud. As he returned from Washington to address the charges, Cutting was killed in a plane crash. Governor Tingley subsequently appointed Chávez to fill the senate seat vacated by Cutting's tragic death.

As historian María E. Montoya has recounted, Dennis Chávez was snubbed by his Senate colleagues on his first day of service in Washington. When Vice President [John Nance Garner](#) called on Chávez to receive the oath of office, Oregon Senator [Charles I. McNary](#) raised the issue that a full quorum was not present. The objection seemed strange because the chamber was full; accordingly, the vice president proceeded with the oath. During roll call, however, six senators stood and turned their backs on Chávez as he walked to the front of the room and they then left the chamber.

Montoya has pointed out that the senators' treatment of Chávez may have been based on any combination of several factors. They may have disapproved of the way he had benefited from the death of their former associate. Their protest may have also been a signal that they believed a Mexican American was unfit for service in the elite congressional body.

Interestingly, the story was only mentioned briefly in Chávez's personal papers, not in the Congressional Record. Whether or not it is entirely based on fact, the story has been retold as an emblematic example of "how poorly New Mexicans, particularly Mexican Americans and Native American citizens, had been treated by the federal government and eastern lawmakers." Indeed, Chávez himself once quipped, "If they [Mexican Americans] go to war, they're Americans; if they run for office, they're Spanish Americans; but if they're looking for a job, they're damned Mexicans."¹³

Between 1934 and 1962, when he died of cancer, Chávez overcame such preconceived notions to build a strong reputation for New Mexico and its people in the Senate. As an advocate for New Mexico's hispano population, he constructed what has been referred to as the Hispanic New Deal—a specific subset of policies and programs that were geared toward nuevomexicanos. Chávez understood the need for New Mexico's people to gain education and experience in modern vocations that would allow them to increase their skills and provide for their communities long after the depression.

Still, much of the Hispanic New Deal funding was channeled into the types of programs that earlier reformers hoped to enact to preserve their notions of the pre-industrial New Mexican village. Agencies like the CCC, WPA, and NYA were not unique to New Mexico, but they were adapted to the specific needs of nuevomexicanos, at least from the perspective of program administrators. Often times, nuevomexicanos, and even Senator Chávez, realized that New Mexicans' needs were unfulfilled by New Deal agencies.

Senator Chávez, state legislators, and reformers made a concerted effort to keep young [nuevomexicano](#) men in CCC camps within the state in order to keep potential conflicts and discrimination to a minimum. The CCC employed men between the ages of 18 and 25 on conservation projects. CCC enrollees built trails and facilities in National Forests and National Parks, participated in soil conservation projects, worked with the grazing service, and aided in the construction of dams under the purview of the national Bureau of Reclamation.

CCC camps were organized following the pattern of the U.S. military. Participants slept in barracks and were expected to go to bed and wake up at specified times. They did not typically run military-style drills, but they were organized into regimented groups to complete their work. Each enrollee received \$30 per month, but they only received \$5 of that amount for personal use. The other \$25 went to their families, enabling many to withdraw from relief rolls.

Educational opportunities were often provided in CCC camps to combat illiteracy, promote vocational skills, and, in New Mexico, to promote nuevomexicano customs. Each camp had an educational advisor, and teachers came from nearby public schools or from among the enrollees themselves. The educational experience varied greatly from camp to camp. At the Redlands, New Mexico, camp, enrollees formed their own school where they shared whatever skills and knowledge they had with one another. The camp near Las Cruces offered high school diplomas, and the educational program associated with the camp at Santa Fe later became a trade school. Classes were typically held in the evenings once the work day had ended, and participation was voluntary. Many enrollees took advantage of the training, and attendance was often as high as seventy percent.

One of the tasks that CCC enrollees performed in New Mexico was to instruct nuevomexicano farmers in modern methods of soil conservation, including the practice of terracing and contour plowing. Because the camps in northern New Mexico tended to be between ninety and ninety-five percent hispano, young nuevomexicanos were the ones to work with other hispanos on farming techniques. Although there were some conflicts in the nuevomexicano-dominated CCC camps, they were relatively free from racial tensions.

Such was not the case in southern New Mexico's integrated camps. Out-of-state [Anglo](#) American CCC enrollees complained that they had to share tents with "greasers." On one occasion a boxing match turned into a riot and an Anglo enrollee was beaten to death in the melee. In Chaves County, enrollees levied complaints that they had not received the pay that was due to them. They also

charged that medical facilities were lacking, theft and fighting were commonplace among enrollees, and that nuevomexicanos experienced racial discrimination from Texan and eastern New Mexican Anglo enrollees. Anglo Americans were reportedly upset “when the native New Mexicans spoke in Spanish among themselves.”¹⁴

Those nuevomexicanos who worked in CCC camps outside of New Mexico tended to be more vocal about discrimination than other hispano-American enrollees. At the camp in Duncan, Arizona, a group of “Spanish-speaking boys” from New Mexico reported that they had been denied underwear and harassed by camp officers. They sent their grievance to the national CCC director in Washington, D.C., who subsequently ordered an investigation. When other hispanos in the camp declared that they were “extremely satisfied” with conditions there, the investigator concluded that the nuevomexicanos were “unduly sensitive.”¹⁵

Historian Suzanne Forrest has shown, however, that nuevomexicanos were more likely to report discrimination than their hispano counterparts from other parts of the country due to their long tradition of political participation. Unlike political officials in Texas or California, New Mexican officials clearly understood the need to work with the state’s nuevomexicano majority. New Mexico hispanos saw the political system as a possible avenue to redress their problems—including discrimination—whereas other hispanos often did not.

As was the case throughout the United States, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) oversaw a number of programs that created work for New Mexican artisans, writers, educators, and artists. WPA projects included cultural initiatives to catalog and preserve oral histories from people of various backgrounds across the state. They also provided funds to improve infrastructure in New Mexico’s cities and towns, including works of art in public spaces. In concert with the Emergency Education Act (EEA), the WPA funded salaries for teachers. The programs also provided money for the construction of schools in rural areas. In northern New Mexico, as had been common since the Spanish colonial era, women often worked as plasterers on

the school-houses.



This passage north of the La Bajada hill between Albuquerque and Santa Fe represents one of the most challenging engineering achievements of road builders in New Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century.

Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 155221.

The unique drive of the Hispanic New Deal focused education efforts on literacy and traditional craft production to a greater extent than on vocational programs, despite Senator Chávez's efforts to reverse that trend. Such programs emphasized the production of items like [santero](#) artwork, woven goods, and furniture. Along with reviving the creation of hispano and Native American craft goods, WPA agents taught New Mexicans how to market their items and support themselves.

The small town of Chupadero stood as a case study in the success of such programs. Unfortunately, it was the exception rather than the rule. With the help of rural education teams, residents who had formerly transported wood on burros for sale in Santa Fe produced rawhide and wood furniture, as well as saddles and harnesses. The sale of such goods allowed nearly all of the small town's families to end their reliance on the relief rolls and support themselves

economically by the end of 1933.

Similarly, residents of Taos successfully turned craft production into a successful economic venture. The town's first vocational school opened its doors in September of 1933 and paved the way for the creation and sale of hispano and Pueblo craft items. There, Brice Sewell, supervisor of Industrial Education and Rehabilitation for the State of New Mexico, devised programs with a very narrow focus and purpose. In order for Taos hispanos' products to compete with machine-produced goods, he believed their crafts needed to be both aesthetically pleasing and long lasting. They also had to appear authentic to appeal to tourists. Although Sewell truly believed that craft production would alleviate northern New Mexico's economic woes, Forrest has also illustrated that his programs "also severely limited their options."¹⁶ In other states, vocational programs also included training in trades such as auto mechanics and welding, as well as education in finance and commerce.



This WPA photo illustrates one of the cultural projects of that administration during the New Deal. WPA agents often helped Native weavers and artisans create their traditional crafts with federal funding to aid economic recovery during the Depression era.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Literacy programs made a marked impact in the lives of nuevomexicanos in rural areas throughout the northern part of the state. In Nambé, a 78-year old man (he remained anonymous in the WPA study) who had never previously had any formal schooling remarked, “We *viejos* (elderly) in this class tonight, we have a chance which we never had before . . . to learn things which we have needed for so long.”¹⁷ At the same community meeting, another elderly community member who remained illiterate encouraged those present to take advantage of the programs that were offered to them so that they could create a brighter future for their descendants.

New Deal educational initiatives also included women’s work programs, designed to pick up where underfunded cultural initiatives of the 19-teens and 1920s had left off. [County Home Demonstration Agents](#), who were typically Anglo American women, traveled to rural villages to help nuevomexicanas modernize their means of food preservation, child rearing, hygiene, and sewing practices.

As had been the case in 1920s efforts to assimilate immigrant women, such programs highlighted the tension between reformers’ desire to preserve the perceived purity of native cultural practices and their drive to improve elements of hispano culture that they deemed outdated. Indeed, one of the central aims of an initiative in 1940 that specifically focused on women who had just given birth was to overcome “native superstitions” associated with birth. Health administrators wanted to end the “fear attached to bathing a mother during the first forty days after childbirth or exposing them to fresh air and sunshine.”¹⁸

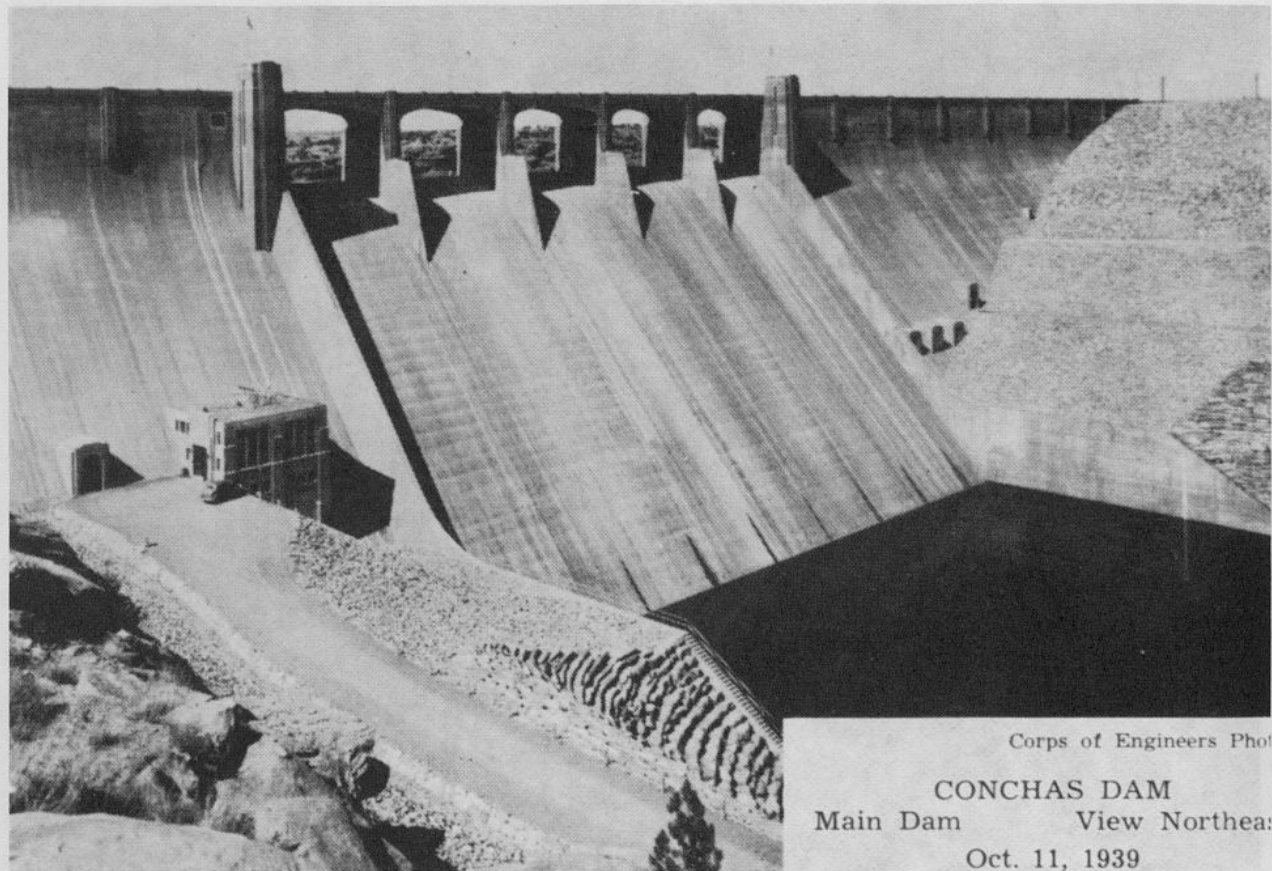
WPA Federal Writers and Civil Works of Art projects served the dual purpose of providing work to writers and artists while simultaneously preserving regional histories and art techniques. Many of the writers employed by the WPA were Anglos who traveled across New Mexico to meet with hispanos, Pueblos, and

Navajos of various social and economic backgrounds to record their oral histories. Due to language barriers, nuevomexicano writers also found jobs as interpreters with the project which produced a plethora of documentation on the state's folklore and history, primarily in English and Spanish.

One of the most widely remembered aspects of the [Federal Writers Project](#) was the [American Guide Series](#). Writers in every state produced a guidebook that described each city and town, as well as essays that described local history, sites of interest, and a series of photographs. The Federal Writers Project was most active between 1936 and 1940, and manuscripts based on its interviews are scattered throughout New Mexico's various archives, including the [Center for Southwest Research](#) at the University of New Mexico, the [State Records Center and Archives](#), and the [Fray Angélico Chávez Library](#) in the Palace of the Governors. A large portion of the manuscripts have been [digitized](#) through the U.S. Library of Congress.

Likewise, local artists of all ethnic backgrounds were commissioned under the auspices of the [WPA Public Works of Art](#) project to create paintings and sculptures that reflected local styles. Musicians also compiled traditional songs and dances for historical preservation.

Many of the New Deal projects that most impacted New Mexico came to the state in the form that they did through the efforts of Senator Dennis Chávez. He worked tirelessly to bring federal dollars to the state in the 1930s, and he focused his attention on projects that would allow nuevomexicanos to develop vocational skills that would help them succeed in the modern economy. He also backed water projects and initiatives to investigate land reform. The Conchas Dam project and the creation of new irrigation canals from the Rio Grande were among his pet projects.



Corps of Engineers Photo
CONCHAS DAM
 Main Dam View Northeast
 Oct. 11, 1939

Conchas Dam, a corps of engineers flood prevention project also used for supplying water for irrigation to the Arch Hurley Conservancy District. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.)

Senator Dennis Chávez supported the creation of the Conchas Dam to provide irrigation water to the Arch Hurley Conservancy District. The dam blocks the flow of the Canadian River in San Miguel County, creating Conchas Lake. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed the dam in 1939.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

In the archive of [Senator Chávez's congressional and personal papers](#) held at the Center for Southwest Research are numerous personal appeals from New Mexicans for relief during the depression. Similar to the countless letters written to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor, nuevomexicanos felt that Senator Chávez stood as their personal advocate in Congress. Indeed, Chávez's advocacy for nuevomexicano issues during the New Deal often came at the expense of, or at least without consideration for, other groups of people in New Mexico.

When Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934, Chávez worked to ensure that its provisions applied only to Navajos and Pueblos—not to

nuevomexicanos. Senator Chávez also spearheaded a study of land grant titles in northern New Mexico. The result was that the terms of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) ensured nuevomexicano rights to Spanish and Mexican Grants. As we will see in Chapter 15, such Congressional initiatives held little value.



This photo was originally reproduced for postcards. It shows a Navajo woman and her child during the Depression era, taken c. 1930.

W.T. Mullarky (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 075000.

villagers received plots of land and loans to enable agricultural activity. The problem was that small-scale farming was no longer economically viable by the late 1930s, due to the rise of agribusiness. Without supplements, like seasonal, migratory wage labor, nuevomexicano villagers could no longer support

Chávez's efforts shielded nuevomexicanos from the federal impetus toward livestock reduction. He recognized that animals equaled livelihood for most of the residents of the state. Yet his actions brought him into direct conflict with the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, [John Collier](#), who staunchly supported the conclusion that an overabundance of livestock wrought ecological damage across the Southwest. Despite Navajos' reliance on mustangs, cattle, goats, and especially sheep, Collier pushed the livestock reduction program among them and other Native American peoples, as will be discussed in detail below.

During the New Deal era, other measures were taken to eliminate the [partido system](#) which, for all intents and purposes, was a form of [debt peonage](#). As a result, New Mexico

themselves financially.

Despite some reformers' realization that the Great Depression had impacted nuevomexicanos and Native Peoples, they still failed to dissociate their romanticized notion of pre-industrial lifeways from New Mexico's diverse peoples. Their ways of thinking informed later efforts to address both cultural issues and the problem of poverty in the state. Although they did not realize it, they had framed the problems of New Mexico in a way that did not help nuevomexicanos or indigenous peoples as they attempted to face the economic, social, and political realities of the twentieth century.

Although political officials and reformers realized the impact of the Great Depression on New Mexico's diverse peoples by the mid-1930s, they still failed to comprehend the extent to which New Mexico had been integrated into the national economy. Following decades of attempts to aid nuevomexicanos, by the end of the 1980s, five of the six poorest counties in New Mexico were between sixty-nine and eighty-seven percent hispano. The other was sixty-six percent Native American. Within those counties, thirty-two percent of the overall population lived beneath the federal poverty line.

As far as most of the people in such communities were concerned, food stamps and other forms of federal relief were "as little enough compensation for the loss of their old grant lands and no more than their due."¹⁹ Historian Suzanne Forrest cites reports in the July and November 1937 *Albuquerque Journal* as the foundation for such attitudes, and other scholars and observers have continued to argue that an overemphasis on cultural preservation and a lack of work ethic explain the continuance of poverty in northern New Mexico.

Such explanations are problematic, however, because they fail to take into account the economic, political, and social structures that have taken root in New Mexico over the course of hundreds of years and three colonization projects. Colonialism has a strong legacy among nuevomexicanos and Native Americans in the area. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 14, racism and a lack of educational and economic opportunities cannot simply be written off as

cultural issues. Economic and political contexts also play a role.

The Hispanic New Deal made important contributions to the livelihood of northern New Mexicans and it provided a framework for preserving the area's rural villages. Success stories like that of Chupadero and Taos illustrate that the WPA alleviated the suffering occasioned by the Great Depression. Yet vocational programs that focused on small-scale agricultural pursuits and the sale of craft items did not create a vital economy and many of the core issues that contributed to the area's poverty were not addressed by New Deal programs.



Dorothea Lange's 1935 photograph titled "A New Start." This man was part of the Bosque Farms project in central New Mexico.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

After the New Deal and World War II, money for schools, literacy programs, job assistance, and cultural production was no longer available to the extent that it had been. By the late twentieth century, produce from family farms was barely enough to provide for basic subsistence. Few village industries developed as a result of earlier vocational initiatives, with the exception of the weavers of Chimayó. Locations, like Chimayó, Chupadero, or Taos, with proximity to tourist traffic, fared better in terms of marketing locally produced goods than other villages located off of the main highways. Senator Chávez recognized the need for more training in vocations, technologies, and skills that already seemed to be displacing things like craft production and agriculture during the 1930s and 1940s. Despite his ability to bring federal funds to New Mexico, such programs were generally the exception rather than the rule during the Depression era.

Indian New Deal & Navajos

The Hispanic New Deal left a mixed record in New Mexico, as did the New Deal at the national level. Native Americans were another segment of the population that reformers designated for special attention during the Great Depression. President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) chose [John Collier](#) to head the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) during his first administration due to his previous work among various Native peoples in New Mexico and the West.

As head of the BIA, Collier formulated plans for a national Indian New Deal. His experiences among the peoples of New Mexico convinced him that the Great Depression had impacted Native Americans particularly forcefully due to existing federal policies geared toward cultural assimilation. In 1934, he proposed the [Indian Reorganization Act](#) which dramatically reversed federal policies on Native land ownership and political rights that had been in place since the 1887 [Dawes Severalty Act](#).



This 1935 photograph marked the first time that Secretary of the Interior Ickes issued the first Native American constitution approved under the Indian Reorganization Act. Representatives of the Confederated Bitterroot Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreilles peoples of Montana's Flathead Reservation met with Ickes to mark the occasion to honor their new self-determination.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

The Indian Reorganization Act was the piece of legislation that provided for the [Indian New Deal](#). The act terminated the federal assimilation program that included support for Native American [boarding schools](#) and the effort to break up communal lands in favor of individual ownership. Instead, it established a structure that would allow for native peoples to maintain their lands communally, if they wished, and have some political autonomy. [Felix S. Cohen](#), a leading figure in federal Indian legal philosophy, drafted the law.

Under the Reorganization Act, Native tribes were able to create their own governments and constitutions. Their constitutions had to be approved by Congress, representing the limitations of indigenous self-determination. Only a

decade earlier, on June 2, 1924, Congress had passed the [Indian Citizenship Act](#). Prior to that time, Native Americans were not granted U.S. citizenship. The 1934 act was an attempt to further extend the promise of citizenship to Native peoples, and to return some of the lands that had been stripped from tribes under the provisions of the Dawes Severalty Act. About two-thirds of the 138 million acres held by Native Americans prior to the Dawes Act had been taken from them under its provisions.

In addition to the realignment of federal policy toward Native Americans, Collier and Secretary of the Interior [Harold Ickes](#) created a series of work and relief programs tailored specifically for reservations. The Indian CCC, for example, was segregated to include only Native American enrollees and camps were located on Native American lands.

Participants in the Indian CCC were assigned to deal with problems that stemmed from what many experts considered to be the outmoded agricultural practices of Native Americans. Based on the recommendations of New Deal analysts and scientists, issues such as overgrazing and livestock overpopulation were considered endemic on reservations. Indian CCC enrollees therefore implemented measures to reduce livestock on reservations, improve grazing practices, and address the problem of soil deficiency due to years of drought. To address that last issue, enrollees used traps to eradicate rodents. They also drilled wells, built dams, and reseeded grasslands.



This photograph from 1915 shows a Native American woman watching over her flock of sheep and goats. By the time of the New Deal, BIA agents failed to understand that many indigenous women tended to and held ownership of large herds.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

One of the largest undertakings of the Indian CCC was a project to remove wild mustangs from native lands in the Southwest. The initiative primarily targeted the Navajo reservation, although some other Apache lands were impacted as well. New Deal scientists believed that mustangs were responsible for the loss of grass that kept the topsoil in place. By the mid-1930s, one of their central concerns was to prevent another [Dust Bowl](#).

John Collier supported the mustang removal, as well as a larger initiative to reduce the number of livestock on Navajo lands. Despite their best efforts, Collier and New Deal experts failed to comprehend all of the various factors that impacted animal rearing among Navajo people. In part, the

misunderstanding was the result of the persistence of stereotypical depictions of Navajo people, despite Collier and his associates' dedication to the cause of Native self-determination.

Prior to the reservation era that began in 1868 for the Navajos, they had grazed their sheep and cattle over a much wider area than was allotted to them thereafter. Their [pastoral](#) life patterns were altered by the geography of the reservation. Rather than deal with the problem from the perspective of available space for pastoral migrations, the BIA instead decided that Navajos should part ways with a large proportion of their livestock. The New Dealers did not attempt to understand the value of sheep and cattle to Navajo people; from their perspective, Navajos simply could not utilize the number of livestock that they possessed.

Navajo people saw the situation in a completely different way. To them, the issue of soil erosion was not connected to their livestock. During the harsh winter of 1932-1933 over 150,000 sheep perished across the reservation. Prior to the Great Depression, the federal government had both subsidized new herds and listened to Navajo demands for the return of certain sections of their traditional lands in order to provide more acreage for grazing. Even John Collier seemed inclined to help the [Diné](#) recoup their losses in the spring of 1933. Later that year, however, he reversed his decision and expressed his support for livestock reduction measures.

Navajos failed to understand the reasoning of the BIA, and they were not consulted about proposed reduction of their herds. In the early 1930s, Navajo families owned between thirty and forty sheep on average, in addition to a few goats and horses. Sheep were a means of economic well-being for the Diné people. They provided food and clothing, as well as cash when the family needed it. Among the Navajos, the prevailing feeling was that the government should repeat past precedents and expand the reservation boundaries in order to prevent overgrazing.

The historical knowledge of the Diné people was that reduced herds prevented

seasonal rains that helped the grass to grow. By limiting the number of sheep on the land, they believed, erosion intensified due to drought. Navajos also noted the regular wet and dry cycles of their local climate, and the reality that gentle rains were necessary to sustain vegetation; not all rain was connected to erosion.



Taken in the spring of 1940, this photograph shows gullies that have developed in a pasture in the mountains of Bernalillo County. In the late 1930s, New Deal scientists declared Navajo grazing practices to be the cause of similar patterns on their lands. As a result, the BIA under John Collier initiated its livestock reduction program.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

New Deal ecologists based calculations for the carrying capacity of the land on average rainfall figures and measures of vegetation growth. Using averages and estimates, they arrived at a figure for the number of sheep and other livestock that the land would sustain. Their procedure was overly static, in certain regards, compared to Navajo ways of understanding the environment. The Diné approach accounted for the cyclical and changing nature of climatic conditions.

Based on their ideas, many Navajos increased the size of their herds during wet seasons in order to prepare for dry seasons when they would need to slaughter more sheep than usual.

The federal government, through John Collier, blatantly ignored input on the issue from the Diné themselves. New gullies on Navajo lands seemed to present evidence that outmoded grazing practices and an overabundance of livestock devastated the environment. Scientific knowledge at the time held that gullying was primarily the result of a loss of grass and topsoil that allowed rates of erosion to increase. Now, scientists have found that overgrazing is only one of many factors that may lead to an increase in gullies in a given landscape. During the 1930s, however, Navajo grazing practices were singled out as the cause of environmental degradation.

The BIA, in conjunction with the Indian CCC, sought to reduce the loss of topsoil and the creation of new gullies through the agricultural education programs and livestock reduction geared to update Navajo conceptions of environmental management. In many ways, however, the actual problem was the result of many variables and beyond human control.

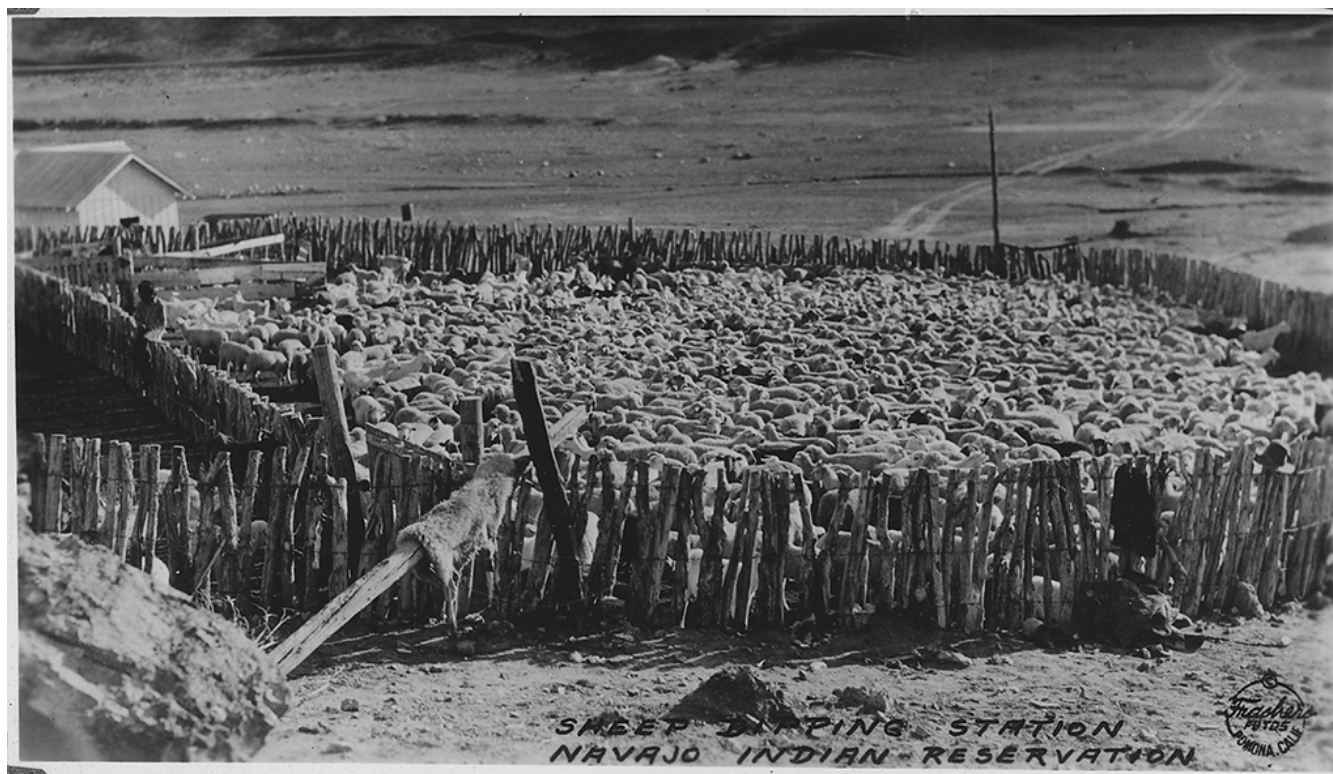
Another piece of the puzzle was the rise of large-scale agriculture in California's Imperial Valley. The [Hoover Dam](#) in the southern corner of Nevada had been constructed to control irrigation and flooding in the Imperial Valley, and also to maintain the supply of water to Los Angeles. Without the dam, unpredictable flooding devastated farmers' attempts to raise crops in the Imperial Valley. The dam, constructed in 1931, promised to address the issue. Within a few short years, however, silt had begun to pile up behind the dam, threatening its viability.

New Deal-era analysts in the Bureau of Reclamation believed that the rapid accrual of silt was the direct result of Navajo grazing practices upstream along the Colorado River. In 1929, prior to the construction of the dam, hydrologists with the Bureau of Reclamation noted high silt levels along the Colorado River and its tributaries, the San Juan and Little Colorado rivers. According to their

findings, Navajo livestock and agricultural practices were to blame.

John Collier found himself in a difficult position. On one hand, he hoped to promote tribal autonomy among all Native American peoples through the BIA and legislation like the Indian Reorganization Act. On the other hand, New Deal scientists and agriculturalists in the Imperial Valley targeted Navajo relations to their land and animals as backward and destructive. In the case of the Diné, Collier decided that the demands of New Dealers and farmers carried more weight than Navajo self-determination.

In 1934, Navajos relinquished 148,000 goats and 50,000 sheep under the provisions of the livestock reduction program. The government set prices for the animals far below market value, and some of the sheep and goats could not be delivered to the railhead for shipping so they were killed on the spot. Not only was this considered a tragic waste of livestock among the Navajos, but the reduced numbers of sheep and goats took a major economic and nutritional toll. Families relied on goat milk, cheese, and mutton as vital sources of food.



1933 photograph of Navajo sheep herds that were raised for the production of wool used in Diné weaving. Outside observers did not realize the deep cultural connections that Navajo people had to their sheep. New Deal livestock reduction programs were an affront to the Diné.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Additionally, BIA agents did not comprehend, nor try to comprehend, Diné conceptions of herd ownership. The agents designated male family heads as the sole owner of all of a given family's stock without inquiring about the actual ownership of the animals. Women tended to own and control very large herds, but they found that government agents had stripped them of that status by instead asserting that their husbands owned them. In the end, BIA livestock reduction agents forcibly took a set number of livestock from each family, each year between 1935 and 1945.

Navajo resistance to BIA policies swelled, and demonstrations organized across the reservation. In 1936, a group of 250 people came together at Kayenta, Arizona, to oppose the livestock reduction practice. Although most were men, Denehotso Hattie, a woman nearly blind due to trachoma, stood at the head of the group which addressed the new BIA superintendent in charge of the reservation. Hattie pointed her finger directly at the superintendent and decried the forced confiscation and destruction of Navajo animals. Such demonstrations only heightened the resolve of the BIA, however. As historian Peter Iverson has noted, "Navajo resistance prompted violation of Diné civil rights."[20](#)

Diné leaders like [Jacob C. Morgan](#) voiced staunch opposition to Collier and BIA intervention in Navajo affairs, and he challenged members of the tribal council that had accepted the livestock reduction proposal. In the summer of 1935, the Navajo people voted not to accept the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act. Their decision meant that the autonomy promised by the act did not come to the [Dinétaah](#). Yet the vote was seen locally as an important [referendum](#) on the livestock reduction program.

The Secretary of the Interior refused to approve the proposed tribal constitution the following year, citing concerns over political factionalism among Navajo leadership. Morgan had organized a group called the [Navajo Progressive League](#) in opposition to the tribal council that had provided support to BIA policies. In 1937, BIA agents handpicked a new tribal council

that would be supportive of federal measures. Most Navajos recognized the 1937 council as a direct violation of their democratic rights as both U.S. citizens and members of the Navajo tribe. After a hard-fought campaign two years later, Morgan was elected as tribal chairman.

BIA enforcement of livestock reduction continued, however, without the support of the Diné leadership. In 1940 and 1941, Navajos openly refused to hand over their livestock in the towns of Navajo Mountain, Shiprock, Aneth, and Toadlena. Shiprock proved to be the most militant center of resistance in January of 1940 when several prominent members of the community, including Fred Begay, Kitty Blackhorse, Short Hair Begay, Frenk Todecheeny, Clizzie Clonie Bega, and Delewoshie, were arrested for refusing to allow their horses to be branded.

Ultimately, Collier and the BIA imposed generally unwanted policies on the Navajo people. Most Navajos remember the central point of contention not as the push to reduce the number of their livestock, but the heavy-handed way in which the federal government forced them to comply with policies in which they had no say.

In October of 1938, Dr. John Provinse, head of Resource and Research for the Navajo Reservation, and an [Anglo](#)-American, gave a speech that illustrated the government's continued disregard for the Navajo perspective on the issue. In an attempt to highlight the strides that ecologists had made on the reservation, he asserted that "practically nothing was known" about the Navajo reservation, "a stretch of country half as large as New England."²¹ Although he meant that no scientific data was previously collected about Navajo lands, his words underscored scientists' unwillingness to recognize the knowledge acquired by Diné people themselves.

In an oral history interview, Marilyn Help later characterized the tremendous negative impact of the program:

I think my people really got hurt by the livestock reduction program because

they are really close to their animals. . . . The government came and took the cattle and the sheep and they just shot them. They threw them into a pit and burned them. They burned the carcasses. Our people cried. My people, they cried. They thought that this act was another Hwééldi, Long Walk. They asked the government, “Why are you doing this to us? What are you doing? You gave the animals for us to use, and now you are turning around and killing our livestock.”²²

She went on to explain that younger generations of Navajos are no longer so closely connected to their animals due to the livestock reduction of the 1930s and 1940s.

John Collier’s record among Native Americans has been tarnished by his decision to force livestock reduction on the Diné people. Despite his desire to reverse existing U.S. Indian Policies by providing self-governance for the nation’s indigenous peoples through the Indian Reorganization Act, his willingness to deny Navajo civil rights in the 1930s and 1940s indicated that the federal government’s initiative to recognize Native self-determination had clear limits. In the case of the Navajos, Collier utilized methods of compulsion that he had staunchly criticized during the 1920s.

The contradictions in Collier’s desired policies and those he implemented reflect the mixed results of the New Deal in New Mexico. By the 1950s, scientists determined that [livestock reduction](#) did not improve erosion to the extent that they had projected. Despite that realization, the damage had been done. The cultural importance of sheep and livestock had been eroded, and the economy on the Navajo reservation damaged.

The Hispanic New Deal similarly failed to improve conditions of poverty among nuevomexicanos, although it did provide relief during the Great Depression. Senator Chávez led the effort to provide New Mexicans with cutting-edge job training, but many New Deal programs instead focused on cultural preservation. Such initiatives provided some relief during the decade of the Depression, but they did not provide a foundation for continued economic

growth in northern New Mexico in subsequent years.

During World War II, the [colonial relationship](#) between New Mexico and the U.S. federal government intensified when the Manhattan Project created the atomic age. Federal funds supported nuclear research and development, including the creation of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Sandia National Laboratory in Albuquerque. Although such institutions were an economic boon to the scientists and engineers involved in them, they did little to alleviate poverty among nuevomexicanos and Native Americans employed there. World War II ultimately intensified the federal presence and state of colonialism in New Mexico, as we will see in the next chapter.

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Chapter 14: World War II Era: Manhattan Project & Growing Federal Presence in New Mexico

World War II Era: Manhattan Project & Growing Federal Presence in New Mexico

World War II

Manhattan Project

Site Y

Testing the Bomb

Impact on Local Communities

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World War II Era: Manhattan Project & Growing Federal Presence in New Mexico



One evening in their home at the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, then referred to by the codename “Site Y,” Phyllis Fisher jokingly suggested a name to her husband, Leon, for the baby that the couple was expecting. In a playful tone, she quipped that the name “Uranium Fisher” would be perfect. In response, Leon became visibly agitated and yelled at her to never again mention that word. She protested, “I only said ‘Ur-,”” but she was unable to finish the word before he clapped his hand over her mouth.¹

Somewhat perplexed by her husband’s response, Phyllis looked up the term “uranium fission” in a dictionary later that evening and learned that it was a

process that could potentially produce an extremely powerful explosion. Although she must have had some clues about her husband's work at Site Y, he and other participants of the Manhattan Project had been prohibited from sharing details—or even cursory information—about their work with anyone, including their spouses.

As historian Jon Hunner has explained, life at Site Y was defined by the requirement of secrecy. Scientists and their wives dealt with the nature of their assignment in various ways. Anger, resentment, humor, and defiance were among the responses to the strict censorship that was prevalent in wartime Los Alamos.



Physicist Richard Feynman faces the camera in this photograph from the early days of the Manhattan project at Site Y. Robert Oppenheimer appears to the viewer's right of Feynman.

Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

[Richard Feynman](#), a physicist on the project, made a personal crusade out of challenging the censors. When his wife Arline contracted tuberculosis and underwent treatment at an Albuquerque hospital, the couple used code in their letters to one another. Code was strictly forbidden and it occasioned Feynman's

frequent arguments with the censors assigned to the project. Over time, he learned what types of information the censors would allow and he “won bets with fellow workers by phrasing forbidden subjects in such a way that the censors had to allow the offending letter to pass.”²

More typically, secrecy and confinement at Site Y inspired participation in community and social events. Residents organized clubs for hiking, skiing, square dancing, and theater, among other activities. One of the prominent rumors that circulated in Santa Fe was that the facility on the Hill was a hospital for pregnant members of the [Women’s Army Corps](#) (WAC). That rumor was likely fueled by the more intimate way in which many couples dealt with the situation at Site Y. Medical facilities were overwhelmed by the high rate of pregnancies and births.

The young children of the physicists, engineers, military personnel, and other project participants made sense of the situation as best as they could. Later in life, Claire Ulam Weiner recalled attending parties as a girl where men huddled in the corners engaged in hushed conversations. She grew up thinking that such behavior was typical of all fathers.

What did Los Alamos look like during its time in secrecy?



As Hunner points out in his study of family life in Los Alamos, “Children and silence, like secrecy and families, are antithetical.”³ The situation of five-year-old Ellen Wilder Reid underscores the impact of the atmosphere on young children. Not long after their arrival at Site Y, Ellen’s brother accidentally smashed her thumb while they were throwing rocks into a nearby stream. Due to a lack of housing, her family had been living in a tent just outside the facility’s gates.

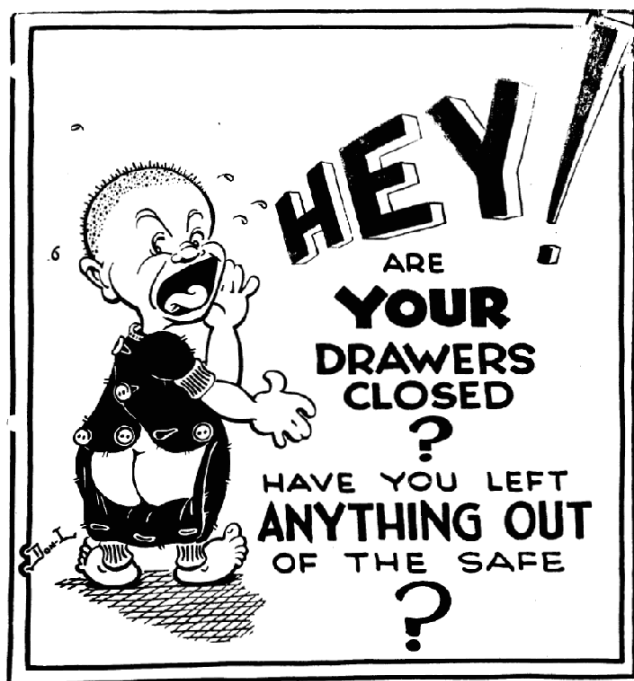
When her father attempted to rush her to the hospital inside the gates, the sentry refused to allow her entry because she did not possess the proper security clearance. Only after an argument with the guard and a phone call to officials inside the facility were they permitted to enter. Based on the experience, young Ellen learned that something intensely secret was taking place inside the fences. As she attempted to figure out what the secret was, she “saw only ugly buildings” at Site Y.⁴ Her efforts to make sense of the situation led her to believe that ducks on Ashley Pond were the reason for the secrecy. After all, the ducks seemed much more interesting and worthy of protection than the buildings by the reasoning of a five-year-old.



This photograph shows the type of housing that was initially constructed for the scientists and their families at Site Y.

Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

Secrecy and enforced silence shaped the community at Los Alamos. Such measures were intended to prevent the Axis Powers from gaining access to



Posters like this one hung in the laboratory at Site Y to remind scientists of their commitment to maintain the secrecy of the Manhattan Project in order to support the war effort.

Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

nuclear technology and to prevent the proliferation of atomic weaponry across the globe. Yet such was not to be the case. Years after the war had ended, director [J. Robert Oppenheimer](#) concluded that secrecy during the Manhattan Project was part of the problem. He felt that history might have played out differently “if we had acted wisely” and not been swayed by “the delusions of the effect of secrecy.”⁵

Immediately after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the laboratory and community of Los Alamos was thrust into the limelight. [The following December](#), to celebrate, physicists and their families traveled a short distance to San Ildefonso Pueblo to witness the Pueblo’s traditional deer dance, an annual occasion. Unlike most deer dances, this one combined square dancing with traditional Pueblo music, dances, and foods. In the midst of the festivities, the governor of the Pueblo shouted “this is the atomic age, this is the atomic age.”⁶

Beyond wartime tourism and the postwar celebration, however, residents of the atomic community of Los Alamos wished to maintain separation from the surrounding area. Although many of the fences around the nuclear facilities at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Hanford, Washington, came down within a few years of the war’s end, residents of Los Alamos demanded that the fences be maintained, and they remained in place until 1957.

The people of San Ildefonso and Santa Clara Pueblos had little choice in the initial decision to locate the secret nuclear facility in the isolation of northern

New Mexico. The federal government, upon recommendation of Oppenheimer and General Leslie R. Groves, appropriated about forty-three square miles of lands that had belonged to San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, and the Spanish land grant of Ramón Vigil. By some estimates, there are at least 2,400 different sites in the surrounding canyons and forests that have been contaminated since Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) opened. Radioactive pollutants, such as strontium-90, uranium, plutonium, and tritium, as well as industrial waste, including lead and mercury, were emitted into local landscapes.⁷

Without their knowledge, much less their permission, the people at San Ildefonso and Santa Clara were subjected to radioactive fallout from the initial experiments at Site Y, as well as later research at LANL. Despite the shared celebrations in 1945, officials from Los Alamos did not meet formally with representatives of any of the local Pueblos until the 1990s to discuss the impact of the labs on tribal lands. Due to proximity, however, much of the environmental effects of work at the labs has been felt by the Pueblos. A zone called Area G, for example, borders San Ildefonso lands and about 380,000 cubic-feet of radioactive waste has been located there since the early 1970s.

The work at Los Alamos altered the trajectory of the entire world. Following the development of atomic technology, nature itself was transformed and global politics shifted. Radioactive elements, such as tritium and strontium-90, can be found in trace amounts in landscapes and wildlife species around the world. Such was not the case prior to 1945.

Los Alamos National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratory formed an integral part of New Mexico's economy, a reality that continues today. Both facilities expanded the role of the federal government in the state and boosted its economic growth. At the same time, however, LANL and Sandia provide examples of continued colonial relationships between New Mexico's peoples and the U.S. central government. Los Alamos was imposed on the state as a necessity of the race to victory in World War II.

Despite the prosperity and social stability evident in majority-[Anglo](#) Los

Alamos, neighboring [nuevomexicano](#) communities have not shared in the wealth. Poverty continues to plague the northern part of the state. Various observers suggest that nuevomexicano and Pueblo cultural traditions are to blame. However, [Father Casimiro Roca](#), priest at the [Santuario de Chimayó since 1959](#), explained the situation in a different way: “People are poor here not because they are trying to hold onto the past but because they are paid too little, receive a poor education, and have few options.”⁸ Military spending during World War II ended the Great Depression, but the rise of the military-industrial complex in New Mexico has done little to alleviate the economic and social trends that had been current since the decade of the 1930s.

World War II

Although historians and others have debated the overall impact of the New Deal on the U.S. economy, nearly all agree that it did not bring an end to the Great Depression. American involvement in World War II brought an unprecedented level of spending and technological development that finally pulled the nation out of the depression.

New Mexico's economy followed the national trend. New Deal programs alleviated families' immediate suffering but they did not rejuvenate the economy to the point that it was able to function without subsidies. The New Deal initiated a process of increasing federal intervention in New Mexico and throughout the Western United States. During World War II, the federal presence in the West shifted from economic relief to the fortification of the military-industrial complex.



Boeing B-50 Superfortress bombers, such as this one photographed at Kirtland Air Force Base in the late 1940s, were used in nuclear tests in the years following World War II as the United States and Soviet Union descended into the Cold War.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

New Mexico, like many places in the American West, boasted warm seasonal temperatures and an abundance of public land. The federal government located new Air Force Bases, including [Kirtland Air Force Base](#) and [Cannon Air Force Base](#), as well as proving grounds, like the [Alamogordo Bombing Range](#), in the state. As had been the case in U.S. war efforts since the Civil War, nuevomexicanos and Native Americans supported the war effort on the homefront and in combat roles throughout Europe and the South Pacific.

The war effort touched New Mexico in many different ways. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps based on the unfounded suspicion that they supported the Japanese war effort. In all, about 112,000 people of Japanese descent were interned; nearly two-thirds were Nisei, or second-generation Americans, and the other one-third were Issei, or first-generation Americans. Nisei had been

born in the United States and enjoyed American citizenship.

Many of those interned reported a feeling of complete betrayal and despair when “E-day,” or evacuation day, arrived. Families were forced to sell their homes, possessions, and businesses for pennies on the dollar. They were loaded onto busses and transported to makeshift facilities, which included converted animal stalls, before receiving an assignment to a specific [internment camp](#), most of which were located in remote locations around the Western United States.

In recent years, historians who study the violation of Japanese Americans’ civil liberties have scrutinized the language used to describe their imprisonment. Government officials used terms like “internment” and “evacuation” to suggest the legality of the action and to imply that the “relocation” of Japanese Americans was for their own good—to protect their safety. Many scholars now prefer to use the term “imprisonment” to emphasize the injustice of President [Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066](#). Not until 1983 did a Congressional Committee recognize that the mass removal of Japanese Americans from their homes was not a “military necessity,” as had been argued at the time. Instead, the committee attributed the imprisonment to “race war, mass hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.”⁹ For most survivors of internment, however, federal attempts to recuperate their personal losses were too little, too late.

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The injustice of Japanese American imprisonment has become public knowledge since the hearings of the early 1980s. Less well known were the internment facilities located near Santa Fe and Lordsburg, in the southwestern

corner of the state. Italians and Germans suspected of disloyalty to the United States were imprisoned at the New Mexico facilities, along with Japanese American prisoners. At the Santa Fe camp, 4,555 men of Japanese heritage were imprisoned between March 1942 and April 1946. Far fewer Japanese Americans were sent to the Lordsburg facility, which primarily functioned as a camp for prisoners of war.

What is the story of Japanese Internment in Santa Fe?



Located on a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp, 826 Japanese American prisoners entered the Santa Fe facility in March 14, 1942. Of that number, 303 were determined to be “undesirable alien enemies” following a series of hearings between March and September. The others were allowed to join their families in internment camps in other areas of the Southwest. The camps in New Mexico, then, were reserved for those who the federal government deemed to be a direct threat to the security of the United States. Other Japanese



Internment Camps in New Mexico Although not well known, Internment camps to hold Japanese, German, and Italian Americans accused

American prisoners later entered the camp between 1943 and 1945. The last group was released in April 1946.

of supporting their respective nations in World War II existed in New Mexico in Santa Fe, Fort Stanton, and Lordsburg.

In terms of direct participation in the war effort, New Mexican servicemen actively participated in combat roles during World War II. A group of them suffered at the hands of Japanese captors in the Philippines in what became known as the [Bataan Death March](#). In the summer of 1941, 1,800 New Mexicans attached to the 111th National Guard Cavalry were transferred to the 200th Coast Artillery Regiment for training as the United States prepared for the possibility of entry into World War II. The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor took place while the 200th and the 515th trained at Fort Stotsenburg, 75 miles north of Manila.



This photograph shows U.S. servicemen during the Bataan Death March in April of 1942. With their hands tied behind their backs, they endured harsh treatment and difficult conditions at the hands of their Japanese captors. The march from Bataan to the Cabanatuan prison camp covered a distance of about sixty

miles.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

On December 8, 1941, the day following Pearl Harbor, Japanese planes attacked Manila. The members of the 200th and 515th made their best effort to employ the anti-aircraft maneuvers that they had been training to perfect, but the Japanese onslaught proved too powerful. A combined U.S. and Filipino force of nearly 80,000 men retreated to a more defensible position on the Bataan Peninsula.



General MacArthur led the combined U.S. and Filipino force that retreated to the Bataan Peninsula following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although he made good on his promise to return to the peninsula after securing supplies and reinforcements, Japanese soldiers captured those who remained at Bataan and forced them on the infamous death march before MacArthur was able to come back two years later.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

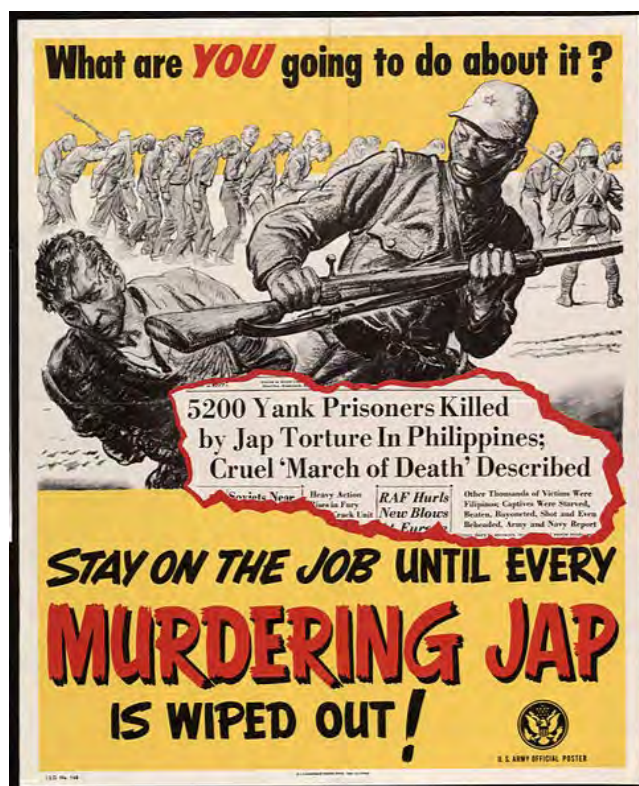
Over the next four months, they struggled to hold off the Japanese. General [Douglas MacArthur](#) initially believed that the men would be able to maintain their position for at least six months without additional supplies or reinforcements. On March 11, 1942, as food and medical supplies dwindled, [MacArthur fled Bataan](#) in order to secure aid. He stood by his famous parting words, “I shall return,” but he was delayed for a period of two years.

The combined U.S. and Filipino contingent surrendered on April 9. Along with about 20,000 Filipino civilians, the captives were forced to march a distance of sixty miles to the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in sweltering heat. Many were wounded or weakened from the prior months of combat and shortage of food and supplies. The Japanese had horribly underestimated the number of men

who had held out on the Bataan peninsula, and they were unprepared to

evacuate all of them. Those who were unable to keep the pace, or who collapsed along the way, were summarily executed by their captors.

News of Japanese brutality at Bataan created outrage back in the United States. In all, about 10,000 men (1,000 Americans and 9,000 Filipinos) were either killed or died on the march. A propaganda campaign in the United States focused on the atrocities of the death march to call on Americans to support the war effort. Not until the late summer of 1945 were the surviving prisoners of war liberated. All were emaciated and some were unable to walk.



Nearly one-third of those rescued died of complications from the poor conditions in which they were held. About half of the 1,800 New Mexicans who served in the 200th died at Bataan. Memorials to the 987 survivors have been constructed in New Mexican towns across the state, and each March a [Bataan Death March Memorial](#) takes place at the White Sands Missile Range.

Navajo Code Talkers' experience in the Pacific theater was markedly different. Even as Navajo people coped with federal livestock reduction programs on their lands, hundreds of them served with dignity in the U.S. military, as did [thousands of other Native Americans](#) across the country. Although not publicly known at the time, Navajos created an unbreakable code using their own language that facilitated communications and intelligence gathering. The Code Talkers' crucial service was not made known until years after the fact because military officials believed that their services might be needed again as relations broke down between the United States and the Soviet Union in the years immediately following the war.

During World War I, a company of Choctaw men became the first to use their own language as a code for wartime radio communications. In 1940, prior to U.S. entry into the Second World War, the War Department approached the Bureau of Indian Affairs about the possibility of recruiting Native Americans for service in the Signal Corps. The Army program was somewhat small in scale. About fifty Comanche men served in the 4th Signal Company, but their services were only used sporadically. Most of their time was spent in regular combat operations.



Navajo Code Talkers accompanied and supported the U.S. offensive on the island of Saipan, the site of this photograph, and in campaigns throughout the entire Pacific Theater.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

The Navajo Code Talkers recruited by the Marines played a far more significant role in the Pacific theater. Although not all Marine commanders were initially convinced of the wisdom of the program, the first thirty Navajo recruits entered

boot camp at Camp Elliott, California, in May of 1942.¹⁰ Their first assignment was [Guadalcanal](#), where their test transmissions initially caused American radio operators, unaware of the Navajos' mission, to believe that Japanese soldiers had taken control of U.S. radio equipment.

Once the confusion was resolved, the Code Talkers took the lead in the transmission of both mundane and highly sensitive communications. Unlike African American soldiers who served in segregated units, Navajo marines (and all Native American servicemen) were integrated into existing units. Still, some Marines initially mistook them for Japanese soldiers. In one case, [William McCabe](#) was detained by a sentry when attempting to eat with other members of his platoon. The provost marshal nearly ordered him shot, but finally realized that he was indeed an American citizen. After a few such experiences, bodyguards were assigned to the Code Talkers. They were ordered "to never leave their sides."¹¹

In the present age of encryption technology, the voice code employed by the Code Talkers seems somewhat antiquated. During World War II, however, the Navajo Code Talkers boasted the only unbroken communications system in the Pacific theater. Their efforts greatly aided the war effort, but they were not recognized for their service for over a quarter-century. Security measures remained in place to ensure that the Navajo code would not become public knowledge.

Navajo Code Talkers

WITH DAVID PATTERSON, SR.



As a result of continued secrecy, many Navajo servicemen felt abandoned by the military following their years of service. By the close of the war, 420 Navajo men had been trained by the Marines as Code Talkers. Upon returning home, many suffered the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in silence because they were unable to share the details of their wartime missions with family or friends. Ritual dances, such as the [Nidaa' or Enemy Way Ceremony](#), helped some to overcome their strife.

Code Talkers also faced difficulties rejoining civilian life due to its limitations on their civil rights. Despite equal treatment during their tenure in the Marines, members of the Navajo Nation were prohibited from voting in either Arizona or New Mexico and the continued restrictions on grazing meant that veterans were unable to reestablish their former herds.



Code Talker Carl Gorman at his observation post in support of the Marines' offensive against the city of Garapan on Saipan in June of 1944. Like so many of his people, he received harsh treatment in [boarding schools](#) when he was younger. He recalled being chained to an iron pipe for an entire week as punishment for speaking his native language. During World War II, that language was the basis of the unbreakable code devised by Navajo servicemen.

Courtesy of U.S. Department of Defense

In other ways, the war provided the Code Talkers with new avenues for personal and economic growth. They led [Diné](#) efforts to address economic, political, and social inequity. Several, including [Carl Gorman](#), obtained advanced degrees. They also supported lawsuits against the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the states of New Mexico and Arizona, and local municipalities, to gain rights they were denied. By the mid-1950s, Navajos had asserted their right to vote in all elections, from the local to the federal level.

At the 1969 reunion of the Fourth Marine Division held in Chicago, the organizers of the event decided to honor the Code Talkers. Despite the

continuation of secrecy measures at higher levels of the military, for the first time their crucial contribution to the war effort became public knowledge. Over the next two decades, oral history projects and official ceremonies publicized the Code Talkers' service. In 1981, for example, the Marines formed another Navajo platoon with twenty-nine members in honor of the original group of Code Talkers. The following year, Congress declared August 14 to be National Navajo Code Talkers Day. In 1993 an exhibit to honor the Code Talkers opened at the Pentagon.

During the early 2000s, the small group of surviving members of the original group of Code Talkers recounted their histories to biographers and conducted lectures in various places around the Southwest. On June 4, 2014, at age 93, [Chester Nez](#) was the last of that original group to [pass away](#). A few of the Code Talkers who belonged to subsequent recruitment cycles are still alive, and they receive public honors from time-to-time, like those discussed by David Patterson in his video interview.

Manhattan Project

New Mexico's most famous connection to World War II was the location of the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos. At first glance, New Mexico seems an unlikely place to house the project that successfully created the first atomic weapons. Prior to the arrival of the Manhattan Project in 1943, the state had almost no scientific infrastructure besides limited laboratory space at the University of New Mexico. As the decade of the 1940s began, New Mexico remained primarily rural. Residents were just as likely to see people traveling by horses and wagons as by automobiles in regions outside of Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Yet the development of nuclear technology in New Mexico was not quite as improbable as it may have seemed on the surface. Since the early Spanish-colonial period, through the Mexican period, and into the U.S. territorial period, the military played a central role in New Mexican society. During World War II, the U.S. military increased its presence in the state in a clandestine way. New Mexico's isolation from national urban centers was the basis of its appeal.

At the outset of Adolf Hitler's expansionist campaigns, nuclear physics was in its infancy. In 1938 German and Swedish scientists discovered [fission](#)—the ability to split a uranium atom. The next year, on January 27, 1939, [Niels Bohr](#) announced their findings at a physics conference held at the George



The team of scientists who conducted the Chicago Pile test that produced the first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction. The group posed for this photograph in 1946 at the University of Chicago to mark the fourth anniversary of their successful experiment. Enrico Fermi stands at the bottom left; Leó Szilárd is at the far right of the middle row.
Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

Washington University in Washington, D.C. Following the conference, physicists throughout the world replicated uranium fission. Their work suggested that an awesome source of energy from the atom was now available to humankind. Early scientific estimates indicated that uranium 235 could potentially produce as much energy as fifteen tons of TNT.

Physicists were excited by the new findings, but the question of how the technology would be used remained unanswered. Scientists also realized that much work was yet to be done in order to produce a self-sustaining fission chain reaction. In other words, the early experiments proved that a single uranium atom could be split. To realize the energy potential of fission, multiple atoms would need to split in succession. For atomic scientists around the world, the next step was to produce a fission chain reaction.

In the context of Nazi Germany's aggression in Europe, thousands of scientists and academics fled the continent for Great Britain and the United States. Some of those that composed the exodus known as the "Brain Drain" were Jewish, and others realized that Nazis had little patience for anyone who might challenge their program of German expansion and ethnic cleansing. Nazi

officials were highly suspicious of professors due to the critical nature of academic work.

Physicists of the Manhattan Project

https://mind.cnm.edu/miles/nmh/nmh_export/OPS/assets/widgets/slideshow/index_dd296a3946cf42b9bd691ebe96b6efbc.html?configFile=https%3A%2F%2Fmind.cnm.edu%2Fmiles%2Fnmh%2Fnmh_export%2FOPS%2Fassets%2Fwidget_data%2Fconfig%2Fdd296a3946cf42b9bd691ebe96b6efbc.json

Among the academic emigrants from Europe were the Hungarian physicist [Edward Teller](#) (who later developed the hydrogen bomb) and his friend and associate [Albert Einstein](#). By that time, Einstein and a few other European scientists had earned international renown for their work. Teller considered scientific knowledge of fission among scientists who remained in Nazi Germany to be one of the most troubling threats that humankind had yet faced, as did his associates Leo Szilard and Eugene P. Wigner. The trio convinced Einstein [send a letter](#) to President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) that expressed such concerns.

The letter was personally delivered to Roosevelt by physicist [Alexander Sachs](#) who helped to explain the details of the situation to the president. Prior to that time, the U.S. federal government had shown little interest in the development of fission. In stark contrast to Europe where theoretical physicists were popular figures and where scientific work was closely monitored by national governments, scientific experimentation in the United States transpired in the seclusion of universities that had looser connections to the federal government.

Einstein's letter convinced Roosevelt to organize the [Advisory Committee on Uranium](#). The commission united politicians and scientists to study the issue in the context of the brewing European conflict. Based on their findings, the committee concluded that uranium fission would not have an important impact on the war effort. As of yet, no breakthrough had been made on the question of creating a [sustained nuclear chain reaction](#) and, based on the current state of experiments in progress, one did not seem to be forthcoming.

Members of the academic scientific community, especially those who had fled Europe, were not so sure. They understood more clearly the potential for uranium fission to create a horribly destructive weapon, and they began to work in U.S. universities in an effort to produce a nuclear chain reaction before German scientists could do so. Physicists in the United States agreed to suspend the publication of their findings in order to prevent advances in their research from benefiting scientists in Nazi Germany.



This squash court at the University of Chicago was the site of the successful Chicago Pile-1 test. Enrico Fermi chose the location due to the high ceilings that allowed for the construction of the latticed structure that housed the Uranium 235 used in the experiment.

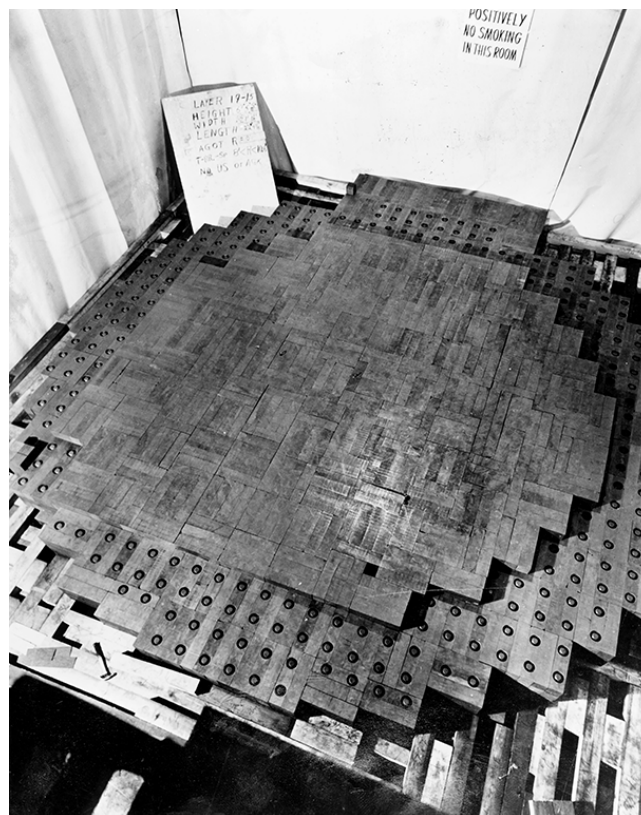
Courtesy of University of Chicago Library

In December of 1942, with a group of graduate students in a racquetball court at the University of Chicago, Fermi and Szilárd [conducted an experiment](#) to test their hypothesis about pure carbon. The result was the first sustained nuclear chain reaction. Word spread among their U.S. colleagues, and eventually to representatives of the federal

Working at Columbia University and then at the University of Chicago, Italian physicist [Enrico Fermi](#) and his colleague [Leó Szilárd](#), a Hungarian physicist, hypothesized that pure carbon would work to mediate the chain reaction. German scientists had attempted to create the chain reaction using impure carbon and had failed. Although Allied scientists did not know it at the time, the Germans had abandoned carbon as an agent for the chain reaction and hoped to conduct experiments using heavy water.

government. Once officials learned that a chain reaction was possible, the Roosevelt administration began to develop an official fission program. Although their work was a major breakthrough, intensive engineering was then required to translate the nuclear reaction into a weapon that could be used in the war.

General [Leslie Groves](#) led the U.S. atomic program which was placed under the purview of the Army Corps of Engineers. By the time that his team of engineers and physicists began work on the project, the United States had been involved in the war for about a year. The Japanese attack on [Pearl Harbor](#) on December 7, 1941, the “[date which will live in infamy](#)” in the words of President Roosevelt, drew the nation into World War II. Groves had the task of overseeing the creation of a powerful weapon that would cause both Japan and Germany to surrender.



November 1942 photograph of Chicago Pile nuclear reactor. The first experiment using the reactor took place in December of that same year.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Library

General Groves already had a reputation as one of the foremost Army engineers. He oversaw the construction of the Pentagon. The atomic program presented a number



One of the most prominent officers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Groves headed the Manhattan Project from its inception in the fall of 1942.

Courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy

of unique challenges, not least of which was the requirement of complete secrecy. To maintain security, Groves made the decision to [compartmentalize](#) the physicists' and engineers' assignments. This meant that small teams of scientists worked on specific pieces of the puzzle in isolation from one another. No single group possessed complete knowledge of all facets of the project.

Compartmentalization allowed Groves to include British allies in the work as well.

The operation was dubbed the Manhattan Project because several of the first scientific facilities were located in New York City. In an extension of his [compartmentalized](#) approach, Groves harnessed U.S. manufacturing and technological industries and American labor to further the work. He secured the cooperation of the General Electric, Kodak, Chrysler, and DuPont corporations, among others. Along with producing the tools and equipment that the project required, those companies helped to construct facilities to refine uranium-235 and plutonium at Oak Ridge and Hanford.

Groves served in an administrative and engineering capacity, and [J. Robert Oppenheimer](#), a respected theoretical physicist at the University of California Berkeley, oversaw the scientific aspects of the project. Oppenheimer's political views remain a source of debate, as his politics nearly prevented his work on the project. By his own estimation, he refrained from any sort of opinion on

political matters until the [Spanish Civil War](#) broke out in 1936. He sympathized with the plight of Spanish Republicans who battled [Francisco Franco's](#) fascist forces. To donate money to the cause, he worked through the U.S. Communist Party. He also eventually married Katherine Harrison, a party member, although he never joined the party himself. Later in life, Oppenheimer recounted his political awakening:

I woke up to a recognition that politics was a part of life. I became a real left-winger, joined the Teachers Union, had lots of Communist friends. . . . Most of what I believed then now seems complete nonsense, but it was an essential part of becoming a whole man. If it hadn't been for this late but indispensable education, I couldn't have done the job at Los Alamos.

Due to his affiliation with members of the Communist Party, Oppenheimer was initially denied security clearance to Manhattan Project facilities in New York and then at Site Y, despite his appointment as its director. General Groves granted him temporary clearance until he was finally granted a permanent security clearance in July of 1943.[12](#)

Meet J. Robert Oppenheimer

Born in New York City on April 22, 1904, J. Robert Oppenheimer demonstrated a dedication to his studies which was illustrative of his wide intellectual range and interests. At Harvard, although most students took five courses, he successfully completed six and audited four others. Oppenheimer graduated summa cum laude from Harvard and pursued graduate studies at Cambridge in 1927. The next year,



Theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer oversaw the scientific work on the Manhattan Project. Concerned by slow progress, he convinced General Groves to locate all of the project scientists at a remote laboratory on the Pajarito Plateau in New Mexico.

Courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy

Berkeley and the California Institute of Technology at Pasadena.

he worked at Göttingen University. He studied there for a time without matriculating, but just three weeks after enrolling he received his Ph.D. He was only twenty-four years old at the time. In 1929 he received a dual appointment in theoretical physics at the University of California

As he tried to coordinate the efforts of the physicists on the project, Oppenheimer realized that the compartmentalization policy was a major hindrance on their progress. He suggested to Groves that all of the scientists and engineers be relocated to a central facility in order to speed up their efforts. After much discussion, Oppenheimer convinced the general that New Mexico's Pajarito Plateau would be an ideal location that would allow them to maintain the project's security.

Site Y

In early 1943, the town of Los Alamos did not exist. In fact, it did not appear on any maps of New Mexico until after World War II had ended. Oppenheimer and Groves never intended to create a community at the site of the secret Manhattan Project facility. Neither did they fully comprehend the ways in which their work would transform New Mexico and the world.

Prior to the development of the lab, Pajarito Plateau was home to a [boys' ranch school](#). It was an isolated, pristine space where young men lived and learned in wilderness conditions. During his career at Berkeley, Oppenheimer spent summers at a cabin in the area. He realized that the locale not far from the Jemez Mountains provided an abundance of open space in a place where most people would never expect to find an atomic weapons laboratory. He also loved the northern New Mexico wilderness, and welcomed the opportunity to carry out the project there.



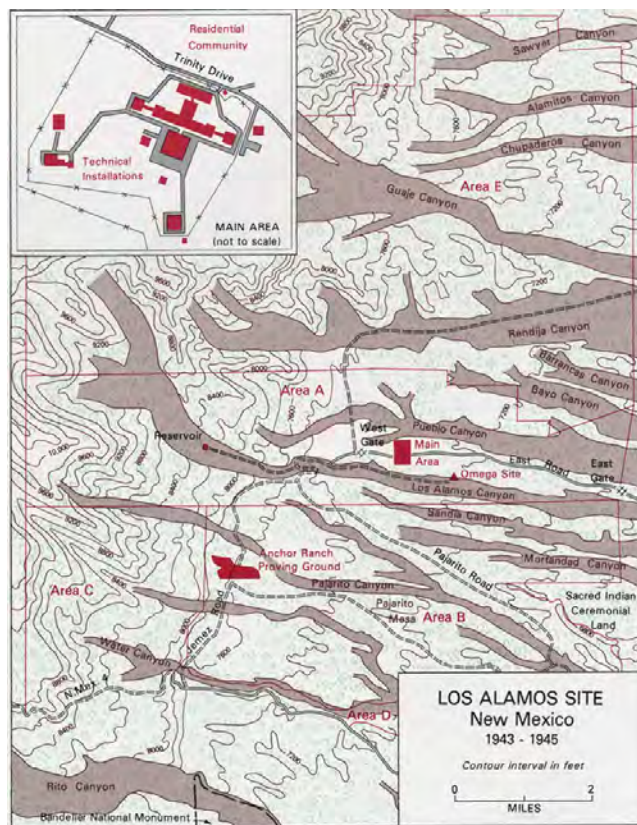
This is a photograph of one of the dormitories at the Boys Ranch on the Pajarito Plateau. The creation of Site Y displaced the Ranch in early 1943.

T. Harmon Parkhurst (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 001318.

Site Y, as the laboratory was first designated, was also ideal due to its proximity to uranium mines in western New Mexico, near Grants and Gallup. The open deserts near Alamogordo in the southern part of the state later provided an ideal site for a test detonation of the first atomic bomb. As later analysts have commented, New Mexico is something of a “Nukes-R-Us.” If New Mexico were to secede from the nation today, it would be the third largest nuclear power on earth.¹³

Today, the nuclear industry is the economic backbone of northern New Mexico. About thirteen percent of the residents of nearby communities are directly employed at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and another thirty percent are indirectly

employed at the labs through contractors with ties to the facility. As geographer Jake Kosek has pointed out, “much of the nuclear cycle takes place on indigenous lands: from uranium mining on Navajo lands; the design and building on Pueblo lands; testing in the indigenous outback of Australia and the South Pacific and here in the United States on Shoshone-Paiute land; and the national nuclear waste dump, also on Shoshone lands.”¹⁴



Los Alamos Site Map Important locations at the original Site Y.

Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

What was the impact of uranium mining on Acoma and Laguna Pueblos?



Initially, Oppenheimer and Groves decided to move between thirty and forty scientists and their families to Site Y to create a unified, top-secret effort. The facility that they pioneered later became known as the Special Weapons Laboratory. The scope of the Manhattan Project far exceeded initial expectations, however. By the end of the war, there were over 6,500 scientists and their families living at the site.

Los Alamos proved to be the ideal location for the project, and it hastened progress on atomic technology, just as Oppenheimer had hoped. The site was extremely remote; a single dirt road led to the entry gate, facilitating surveillance of everyone and everything that came and went. Those assigned to work at the laboratory reported to an office in Santa Fe where they presented their credentials and were then transported by bus to Site Y. All mail was also delivered to Santa Fe, and the site was alternatively known by its post office box number, P.O. Box 1663. The laboratory was one of the most tightly shielded secrets of World War II.



[Dorothy McKibbin](#) had the difficult task of heading the front office for Los Alamos at 109 East Palace Avenue in Santa Fe. In effect, she was the public face of a project that did not officially exist.
Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory (photographer).

Dorothy McKibbin led the office at 109 East Palace Avenue in Santa Fe where new members of the Manhattan Project first reported. A widow in her mid-forties, McKibbin was one of the “unsung [heroines](#) of the Manhattan Project.”¹⁵ She ushered every new recruit to the project onto the buses that took them to Site Y. She also had to discreetly turn away those who arrived at her office looking for information about the secret activities that were taking place on the Pajarito

Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 030187

exist.

Plateau. McKibbin was the face of a project that, to the public, did not

Among those who reported to the site were European scientists included in the self-imposed exile—the Brain Drain. Not only physicists, but also engineers, psychologists, sociologists, and other public intellectuals fled Europe for Great Britain and the United States. It is estimated that they numbered nearly 25,000. European physicists joined their American counterparts at Site Y in support of the Manhattan Project. Their ages ranged from 19 to 60 years old, and many remained at Los Alamos after the war when the burgeoning Cold War ensured the continuation of nuclear research and development.

Notable among those at Site Y were [Niels Bohr](#), who escaped from Nazi-occupied Denmark; [Enrico Fermi](#), who fled fascist Italy; [Edward Teller](#), originally from Hungary; [Victor Weisskopf](#), an Austrian-born Jewish physicist; and [Hans Bethe](#), a German Nobel Prize winner. Along with the well-known scientists were hundreds of others, called the [Special Engineer Detachment](#) (SED). Los Alamos was arguably the most stimulating intellectual community in the world during the war.

Espionage with a packet of Jell-O

[Learn about](#) these dessert box puzzle pieces as a means for sharing atomic weapon secrets in 1945.

Not only did the physicists and engineers focus on atomic development. Many of them followed other intellectual pursuits as well. Oppenheimer, for example, spoke nine different languages. He had learned to read Sanskrit because of his interest in Hinduism and his desire to read the Vedic texts in their original language. Nearly all of the scientists took an interest in local history and cultures. Fermi, Bohr, and Oppenheimer toured nearby San Ildefonso Pueblo and sites at [Bandelier National Monument](#).

Although General Groves had been hesitant to relocate the project to New Mexico due to security concerns, Site Y remained secret until the end of the war. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, even the physicists' wives did not know what their husbands were actually working on. Following the war's conclusion, British-German scientist [Klaus Fuchs](#) passed information about the Manhattan Project to Soviet informants—reportedly at a pizza parlor in Santa Fe. Otherwise, a veil of secrecy shrouded Los Alamos.

Local construction companies from Santa Fe, as well as nuevomexicanos from small towns in [Rio Arriba](#) County, hired on to build the facility, so New Mexicans knew that the federal government was active on the Pajarito Plateau. They did not know what the facility was for, however. In that context, a series of rumors spread throughout northern New Mexico. Some believed that the facility was a poison gas factory, others that it was the manufacturing site of space ships, and still others that it was a hospital for pregnant members of the [Women's Army Corps](#) (WAC). Interestingly, Oppenheimer spread a counter-rumor that the facility was the development site of a semi-electric rocket.



A German-born, naturalized British citizen, in the early 1940s theoretical physicist Klaus Fuchs migrated to the United States and worked on the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos. He was [convicted of espionage](#) for passing plans for the Hydrogen Bomb to Soviet agents after the conclusion of World War II.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Testing the Bomb

After months of research, development, and localized testing of hypotheses, Oppenheimer and other physicists realized that they would need to test the bomb once it had been completed. They were uncertain whether their design would detonate, and they did not fully understand what the consequences of a nuclear explosion would be.

Two different types of atomic weapons were created at Los Alamos; one used uranium and the other used plutonium. The scientists were most concerned about the detonation of the plutonium bomb because the “gun method” that they used with the uranium device would not work with plutonium. As an alternative, they developed an implosion method in which the plutonium was to be surrounded with explosives (TNT); the explosion of the TNT would theoretically compress the plutonium and ignite the nuclear chain reaction. Although they were certain the gun method would work with uranium, they were less sure about the implosion method.

Between May and November 1944 debates ensued throughout Los Alamos about whether to conduct a live test of the plutonium bomb. Oppenheimer and [George B. Kistiakowsky](#), an explosives expert at Harvard, argued that the test was necessary but General Groves opposed the idea. His main concern was that if the test failed to produce a nuclear explosion, plutonium would be strewn across the desert.

Facilities at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Hanford, Washington, had been established to produce the fissionable uranium isotope, U-235, and plutonium for the work at Los Alamos. U-235 is rare, however, and in 1940 scientists

estimated that they would need twelve million years to extract a pound of the isotope from naturally occurring uranium. As an alternative, plutonium was created by bombarding uranium-238 with neutrons through a complex process.

The creation of plutonium, however, was not much quicker than the creation of U-235. Following the war, General Groves spoke of the teams at Oak Ridge and Hanford in the highest terms due to their ability to develop new techniques for the extraction of U-235 and the generation of plutonium. The result was the production of several pounds of each in just a few years during the war.



This photograph shows the placement of Jumbo, the 214-ton tank designed to capture the plutonium if the atomic test at Trinity should fail.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Groves' opposition to the test was primarily due to his fear of losing the fissionable material, upon which the project relied, with nothing to show for the effort. In the end, Oppenheimer convinced the general to approve a field test by proposing the construction of an enormous, 214-ton tank that the team called "Jumbo" to contain the plutonium if the blast failed. If the test was successful, on the other hand, Jumbo would be incinerated.

In November 1944 Oppenheimer's team chose a desert section of the [Alamogordo Bombing Range](#), today the White Sands Missile Range, as the site for the test. Located in southern New Mexico's [Jornada del Muerto](#), the

site is often associated with the town of Alamogordo which is about sixty miles distant. Socorro was the nearest population center of consequence, about thirty miles to the north. The land itself had belonged to the state of New Mexico and been leased to ranchers for grazing. When the United States entered the war, the military took control of the area.

It seems that Oppenheimer named the site Trinity based on his study of the Vedic texts, although historians continue to debate exactly how the site was named. Historian Marjorie Bell Chambers was the first to attribute the name to Oppenheimer's study of Hindu belief.¹⁶ As historian Ferenc Szasz later explained, "the Hindu concept of Trinity consists of Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Shiva, the Destroyer. For Hindus, whatever exists in the universe is never destroyed. It is simply transformed."¹⁷ Given that Oppenheimer's team produced the most destructive weapon yet known to humankind, the idea that nothing is truly destroyed might have offered some comfort.

Once the location was secured, a number of theoretical concerns remained. Among the most troubling was that the physicists were not sure whether or not an atomic explosion would ignite the earth's atmosphere. As construction of the Trinity site proceeded in early 1945, the question was nothing new. As early as the summer of 1942 [Edward Teller](#)'s calculations suggested that the bomb could create enough heat to cause the atmosphere to flare. The result would be the eradication of all life on earth.

Oppenheimer was deeply troubled by Teller's findings, and he interrupted Arthur H. Compton, head of the Metallurgical Laboratory at the University of Chicago, for a second opinion while he was vacationing with his family in Michigan. The pair conversed for long hours on the banks of Oswego Lake. Ultimately, Compton concluded that if calculations "showed that the chances of igniting the atmosphere were more than approximately three in one million . . . he would not proceed with the Manhattan Project."¹⁸

Back in Los Alamos, several different teams of scientists examined the question over the course of 1943 and 1944. Teller revised his initial figures to account for the presence of cooler air that would occur near the explosion itself, but as late as the fall of 1944 the question had yet to be settled to anyone's satisfaction. Ultimately, [Hans Bethe](#), head of the Theoretical Division at Los Alamos, calculated that the Trinity test explosion would not ignite the atmosphere. His figures seemed to account for all variables, and, as [Kenneth Bainbridge](#)

recalled, “We all put our faith in Bethe.”¹⁹ An added comfort was that Teller’s revised calculations jibed with those of Bethe.

Several other questions were never fully resolved as the Los Alamos team prepared for the Trinity test. They were not completely sure whether or not the blast would set off earthquakes, although their calculations suggested that the probability of tremors was low. Additionally, they did not fully comprehend the nature of nuclear fallout until years after the Trinity test and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

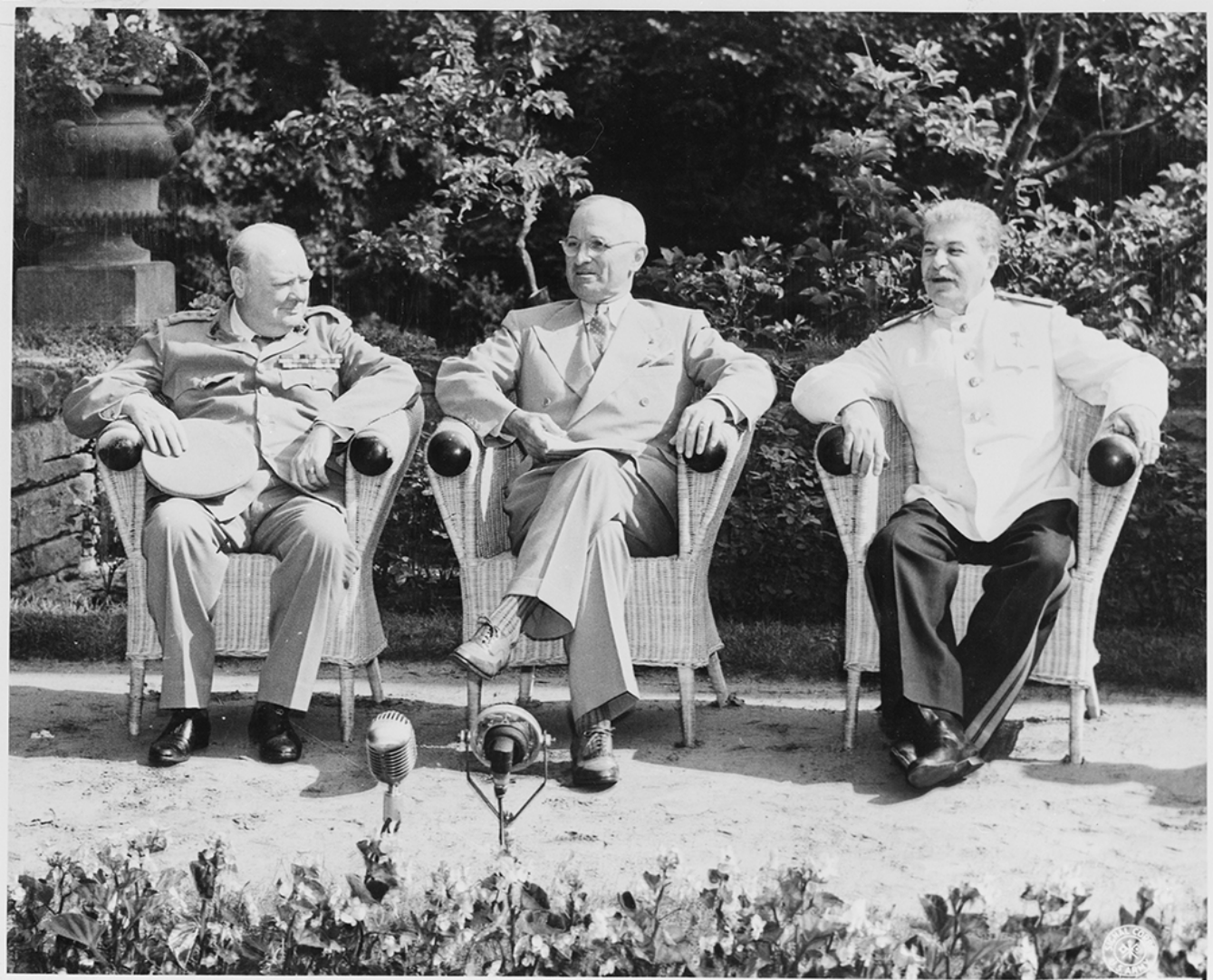
In that regard, the weather—specifically the winds—would be the key to ensuring that the fallout remained relatively contained at the site. Among the ideal weather conditions for the test were visibility greater than forty-five miles, humidity less than eighty-five percent, stable temperature lapse rate, little to no atmospheric inversion, and light winds to the northeast. With winds to the northeast, fallout would travel over the most sparsely populated ranch lands and avoid populated areas like Socorro, Alamogordo, Las Cruces, or El Paso. During the summer months, thunderstorms would be the major weather concern.

Jack Hubbard served as chief meteorologist for the Trinity test. His job was perhaps one of the most stressful. Given the paucity of weather records for the Jornada del Muerto, his task of predicting when the ideal conditions would occur was quite difficult. He successfully forecasted the date of May 7, 1945, for the “100 Ton Shot,” a preliminary test detonation of TNT to help calibrate the instruments at the Trinity site. In June, he made a long-range forecast for the summer that indicated July 18-21 as the best weather window. July 12-14 would be the second best chance for ideal conditions.

The team never addressed the issue that if they opted for Hubbard’s first choice, his second would have already passed. International politics intervened following Germany’s surrender in May of 1945. President Roosevelt had died on April 12, and his vice president, [Harry S. Truman](#) became the leader of the United States. Truman had been largely kept in the dark about the Manhattan

Project and he was quickly debriefed about its progress and status not long after taking the oath of office.

Upon learning of the project, Truman pushed General Groves to hold the test to correspond with his [conference at Potsdam](#), a suburb of Berlin, with [Winston Churchill](#) and [Joseph Stalin](#). He believed that news of a successful atomic test would provide the upper hand in negotiations between the “Big Three” regarding the shape of the postwar world. Under pressure from above, Groves set July 16 as the date for the test.



L to R: British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Harry S. Truman, and Soviet leader Josef Stalin just prior to the [Potsdam Conference](#).

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Hubbard was tasked with watching the weather in the hours leading up to the

test, and he was to make the call of whether or not to go ahead. On the evening of July 15 he predicted light, variable west-to-southwest winds for the next morning. Violent thunderstorms developed in the area overnight. At 2 a.m., Hubbard advised the team to postpone the test by one hour; he predicted that, by that time, the winds would change and the storms would dissipate.

When the test occurred at 5:30 on the morning of July 16, 1945, almost none of the ideal weather conditions were met—except the winds. They had changed direction as Hubbard had predicted. The blast exceeded all expectations. By several reports, it lit up the entire area like the sun. Heat at its core was comparable to that of the center of the sun, and the fireball created a half-mile crater. People in at least three states saw the light from the explosion, which projected a mushroom cloud 38,000 feet into the atmosphere. Every living thing was destroyed within a mile radius.



A color version of Jack Abbey's photograph of the Trinity test, July 16, 1945.

Photograph by Jack Aeby, courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

Members of the Los Alamos team witnessed the blast from several vantage points around the site, all at a safe distance from the bomb. [Enrico Fermi](#) experienced the explosion from 10,000 feet away. Just before the bomb ignited, he tore up a piece of paper. Immediately [after the explosion](#), he let go of the papers to see how far the blast wave carried them. Based on his calculations, the bomb's force was equal to about 10,000 tons of TNT.

Forest Ranger Ray Smith was on duty near Lookout Mountain, northwest of Silver City when the test occurred. He reported feeling an earthquake, as did residents of the small town of Carrizozo. Santa Fe Railroad engineer Ed Lane was on a train near Belen that morning, and he later commented that “he had a front seat for the greatest fireworks show he had ever witnessed.”[20](#)

According to many New Mexicans in the southern half of the state, the sun rose and then went down again at 5:30 on the morning of July 16. Reportedly, Georgia Green, a blind woman living near Socorro, even knew that something major had occurred. The bomb produced more than visual effects.

The [Trinity test](#) intensified General Groves' efforts to maintain secrecy because so many people in the region knew that [something of a great magnitude had occurred](#)—even if they did not understand what had happened or who was responsible. As had been the case throughout the work of the Manhattan Project, Groves even instructed the scientists to keep the truth from their wives.

The official press release explained that “[a remotely located ammunition magazine containing a considerable amount of high explosives and](#)

Getting the job done?



[pyrotechnics](#)” had been accidentally set off. No one was injured, no property damaged. People removed from the Trinity site by distance, such as the inhabitants of Albuquerque, accepted the official explanation. Locals nearer the blast were more skeptical, however.

Alamogordo resident Beatrice McKinley, for example, reported, “Everybody knew something had happened. The stories they told were very clumsy.” Indeed the *Alamogordo News* printed both the official press release as well as accounts from locals that “some experimentation was going on in explosives which required an isolated terrain such as the explosion occurred on.”²¹ Similar reactions characterized the responses of Lincoln and Doña Ana County residents. New Mexicans understood well that the federal government had used their home state as a proving ground for an awesome new weapon.

Although President Truman had insisted upon the July 16 test date in order to gain bargaining position at the Potsdam Conference, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin was not surprised. Information from [Klaus Fuchs](#) through Soviet informants had not yet apprised him of the magnitude of the weapon’s power, however. A Soviet nuclear program had been in motion since the 1930s, and it intensified in 1942 when its primary scientists alerted Stalin that publications on nuclear developments in the United States had ceased.

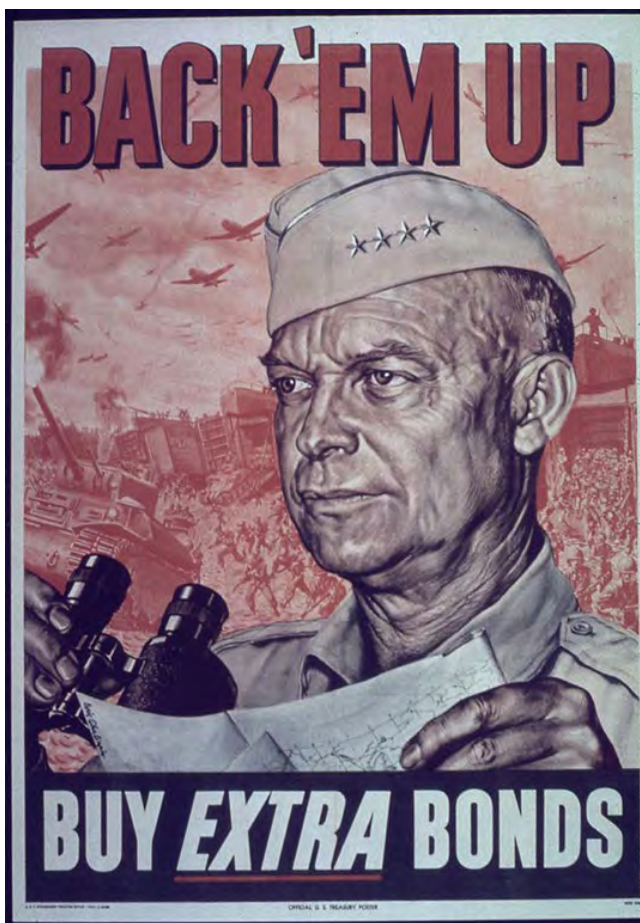
In a brief and awkward exchange on July 24, Truman mentioned in passing to Stalin that U.S. scientists had successfully tested a new and powerful weapon. Stalin briefly responded with approval and he urged President Truman to use the atomic weapon against the Japanese. Truman believed that his Soviet counterpart had missed the gravity of his remark.

Following the Trinity field test, the central question that was debated among high-level military officials and U.S. policymakers was whether or not to use the atomic bomb. Indeed, the ongoing debates about atomic weapons and energy have gravitated back to that question in one way or another ever since 1945.

Many different lines of reasoning for and against the use of atomic weapons

have been proffered since the close of World War II. The cliché that “hindsight is twenty-twenty” seems to fit subsequent debates about nuclear weapons. Those involved in the conversation at the time had no such luxury. Some argued that the U.S. military should not use the atomic bomb because to do so would open Pandora’s Box—all other nations would race to create the same destructive technology.

Other voices clamored for the use of the weapon. Some argued that the use of the atomic bomb would not only end the war against Japan, it would also intimidate Stalin and the Soviet Union. The wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviets was strained at best; the end of the war led to increased polarization as Truman and Stalin each made opposition to the other nation a specific, nationalist goal.



This poster featured an image of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the top military commander in the European theater during World War II.
Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

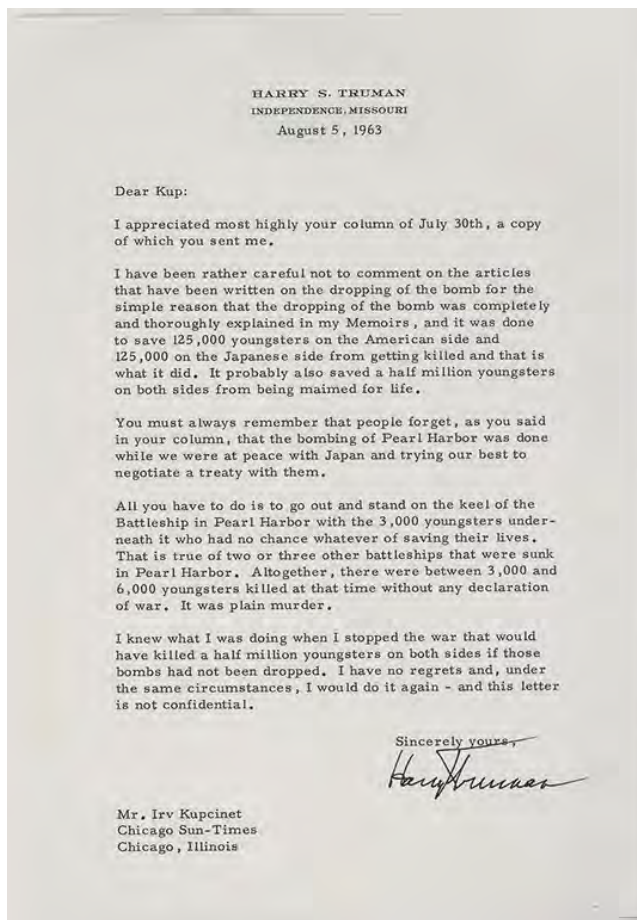
President Truman also felt pressure from the American electorate to end the war as soon as possible in order to save the lives of U.S. servicemen and women. One of the other lines of reasoning in support of using the bomb centered on the idea that to do so would preserve the lives of American soldiers. Revisionist historians after 1945 painted Truman as something of a villain regarding the use of atomic weapons at the close of the war. By taking that action, they asserted, he appeased those who wanted to project strength to the Soviets and he simultaneously used the lives of U.S. servicemen and women for political ends.

A significant contingent of Americans

and U.S. military leaders opposed the use of atomic weapons based on the idea that nuclear bombs were unnecessary. Among those who voiced this opinion were [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#), top military official in the European theater. Admiral [Chester Nimitz](#), commander in the Pacific theater, and [General George C. Marshall](#), overall commander of the U.S. military effort in World War II, shared this view. Eisenhower argued that Japan was already on the verge of defeat whether or not the bomb was used. Nimitz argued that the U.S. military did not need to open Pandora's Box through the use of nuclear weapons. And, after the fact, Marshall publicly declared that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki only shortened the war by a few months at most.

Debates over the [decision to use](#) atomic weapons at the close of World War II will certainly continue in historical and public forums. In *The Day the Sun Rose Twice*, historian Ferenc Szasz placed Truman's decision in its political and social context. He emphasized the enormous pressure placed on the president to save U.S. lives and end the war at the earliest date possible. Additionally, scientists, politicians, and military officials did not fully recognize the potential ramifications of the use of atomic weapons in 1945. Teams from Los Alamos and certain U.S. and European universities traveled to Trinity, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, to study the effects of the devastating explosions and fallout.

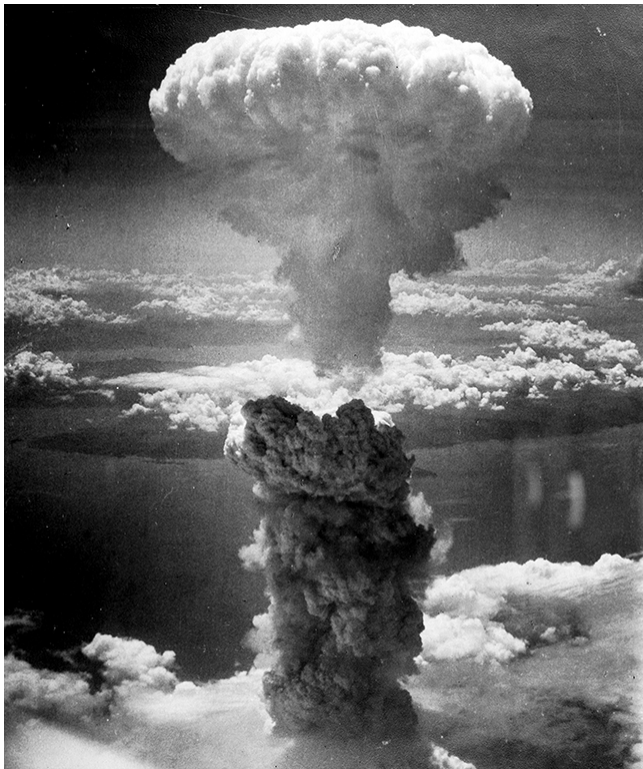
As debates ensued in U.S. political and



This is a copy of a letter intended for Chicago newspaper columnist Irv Kupcinet from President Truman. In the letter, Truman defends the decision to use atomic weapons in Japan. The letter was never sent.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

military circles about whether or not to use nuclear weapons in Japan, the [arguments](#) were overshadowed by the reality that the nation had poured a massive level of resources and funding into the Manhattan Project. Szasz argues for a middle-ground interpretation of events based on “the simple question of momentum of the Manhattan Project.” Oppenheimer once remarked that “the decision [to drop the bombs] was implicit in the project.”²² Several of the physicists involved in the project were deeply conflicted as they witnessed the Trinity test because they knew that the intention had always been to use atomic bombs in combat.



Charles Levy's photograph of the mushroom cloud produced from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

population of just over 260,000 people, casualties there were even more extensive than had been the case at Hiroshima. In central Hiroshima, the mortality rate per square mile was 15,000; in Nagasaki 20,000. By comparison, the firebombing of Tokyo in March of 1945 caused a casualty rate of 5,300 people per square mile.²³ The initial number of casualties in Nagasaki

The historical context involving the Manhattan Project's momentum is important for understanding the use of atomic weaponry in World War II, but that context does not minimize the destruction wrought in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Only three weeks after the Trinity test, on [August 6, 1945](#), the *Enola Gay* dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, a city of about 320,000 people at the time. Between 70,000 and 80,000 were killed instantly and another 100,000 or so died over the next few years due to burns and radioactive fallout.

Three days later, the *Bockstar* dropped another nuclear bomb on the city of Nagasaki. With an estimated

numbered about 100,000.

Many survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki have shared their accounts of the experience of living through an atomic attack. Their accounts detail the intense human suffering caused by the blasts. Among publicly available accounts are these:

- [Father John A. Seimes, Professor of Modern Philosophy at Tokyo's Catholic University](#)
- [Several via Nuclear Weapon Archive.org](#)
- [The account of Dr. Michihiko Hachiya](#)
- [Audio of Kaleria Palchikoff Drago's account](#)



Aerial photographs of Nagasaki before and after the atomic blast

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Photographer Yosuke Yamahata was present in Nagasaki during the bombing, and he took a series of photographs to document the destruction and loss of life. An online gallery of his work, along with brief commentary, is located at [Nagasaki Journey](#). As Yamahata poignantly reminds us:

Human memory has a tendency to slip, and critical judgment to fade, with the years and with changes in lifestyle and circumstance. But the camera, just as it seized the grim realities of that time, brings the stark facts . . . before our eyes without the need for the slightest embellishment. Today, with the remarkable recovery made by both Nagasaki and Hiroshima, it may be difficult to [recall](#) the past, but these photographs will continue to provide us with an unwavering testimony to the realities of that time.²⁴



This photograph of one of the Japanese victims of the atomic blasts in August of 1945 is a gruesome illustration of the impact of atomic heat and radiation on the human body.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Whether intended or not, the Manhattan Project marked a [major turning point](#) in world history. Human beings had constructed a weapon that was powerful enough to potentially destroy all of humankind, if used in combat without restraint. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced the surrender of Japan on August 10, 1945. As famed television journalist [Edward R. Murrow](#) remarked following the end of the war, “Seldom if ever has a war ended leaving the victors with such a sense of uncertainty and fear, with such a realization that the future is obscure and that survival is not assured.”²⁵

Within a few years the Cold War ignited an arms race that pitted the United States and its allies against the Soviet Union and its allies. Even more powerful

weapons with wider range were created, such as the hydrogen bomb developed under the direction of Edward Teller and ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads. Historian Jon Hunner reminds us that New Mexico, and specifically Los Alamos, “was a nucleus of this atomic future.”[26](#)

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The Oldest Newspaper in the Southwest, Founded in 1849

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Published Every Day

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Los Alamos Secret Disclosed by Truman

ATOMIC BOMBS DROP ON JAPAN



Deadliest Weapons in World's History, Made In Santa Fe Vicinity

Santa Fe learned officially today that it is the birthplace of the atomic bomb, with Los Alamos being the center of the great project. Secretary of War Stimson, who lifted the secret of the atom bomb, said in a statement, "The atomic bomb was developed in the Santa Fe vicinity, and it is the greatest scientific achievement of our time."



'Utter Destruction,' Promised in Potsdam Ultimatum, Unleashed; Power Equals 2,000 Superforts

WASHINGTON, Aug. 6 (AP)—The U. S. Army Air Force has released the Japanese atomic bomb exploding in Nagasaki, the second of two atomic bombs. It produced more than 2,000 times the blast of the largest bomb ever used before.

Hi Johnson Dies at 79

Hi Johnson, 79, died today in Los Angeles. He was a well-known actor and comedian. He had been in the hospital for several days.

4 More Nippon Cities Now Smoldering Ruins

Four more Japanese cities were destroyed today by atomic bombs. The bombs were dropped from B-29 Superfortresses. The cities were Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and two others.

Tomato Juice Off Rationing

Tomato juice is no longer rationed. The War Relocation Authority has announced that tomato juice is now available to all people in the United States.

May Be Tool To End War, New Era Seen

The atomic bomb may be the tool to end the war, and a new era is seen. The bomb has shown that the world is now in a new era of atomic energy.

Note They Can Be Told About 'the Hill'

Note they can be told about 'the Hill'. The article discusses the political situation in Washington and the role of the Hill.

The Weather

The weather is expected to be clear and sunny today. The temperature will be in the 70s and 80s.

Los Alamos Secret Disclosed by Truman

Los Alamos secret disclosed by Truman. The article discusses the disclosure of the atomic bomb project and the role of Los Alamos.

Tomato Juice Off Rationing

Tomato juice off rationing. The article discusses the removal of tomato juice from the rationing program.

May Be Tool To End War, New Era Seen

May be tool to end war, new era seen. The article discusses the potential of the atomic bomb to end the war and the beginning of a new era.

The Weather

The weather is expected to be clear and sunny today. The temperature will be in the 70s and 80s.

Once atomic weapons were used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Los Alamos no longer a secret. This headline from the Santa Fe New Mexican reveals the site's connection to the atomic age. Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

Impact on Local Communities

The Manhattan Project brought New Mexico into the center of national and international debates about nuclear weaponry and technology. Many historians and other analysts have written about the development of the program at Los Alamos, but as geographer Jake Kosek has pointed out, “LANL [Los Alamos National Laboratories], as an institution that has so fundamentally changed the world, is rarely situated in context” of the surrounding region and its peoples.²⁷



Montage of ID badges for scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos.

Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

When considered in the context of the local people who helped to construct the facility, who continue as members of its staff, and whose lands and resources were both taken away and contaminated by LANL, the colonial nature of the relationship between the laboratory and neighboring [Rio Arriba](#) County is brought into sharp relief. As one nuevomexicana put it, Los Alamos is “the white sheep of the family.”²⁸ Its population was enumerated the 2000 U.S. Census as ninety-four percent white, and Los Alamos County is numbered as the fourth-wealthiest in the nation. By contrast, the four neighboring counties are between seventy and ninety-five percent non-white.

By some accounts, the areas surrounding Los Alamos are designated using the term “minority” instead of identifiers like “non-white,” “[nuevomexicano](#),” or “Native American.” That the majority of a locale’s population can be deemed a “minority” speaks to the colonial nature of relations between LANL—by—extension the federal government, and northern New Mexican communities.²⁹

About fifteen percent of Rio Arriba County adults have bachelor’s degrees or higher, compared to Los Alamos which boasts the highest number of Ph.D.s per capita in the nation. Additionally, the dropout rate in Rio Arriba is about twelve percent; in Los Alamos County nearly ninety percent of students not only graduate high school, but then go on to attend a four-year college or university. Los Alamos could not appear any more different than the rural region of northern New Mexico of which it forms a part.

Yet the histories of Los Alamos and northern New Mexico are intimately interconnected. Kosek refers to “these often-opposed places” as “co-constituted colonial geographies.”³⁰ LANL and its contractors supply surrounding towns with economic survival. Such was the case since the construction of Site Y in 1943. The northern New Mexican Sundt and Morgan and Sons construction companies secured the contracts to build the laboratory facilities and housing districts to serve the Manhattan Project. Most of the laborers were nuevomexicanos and Pueblos.

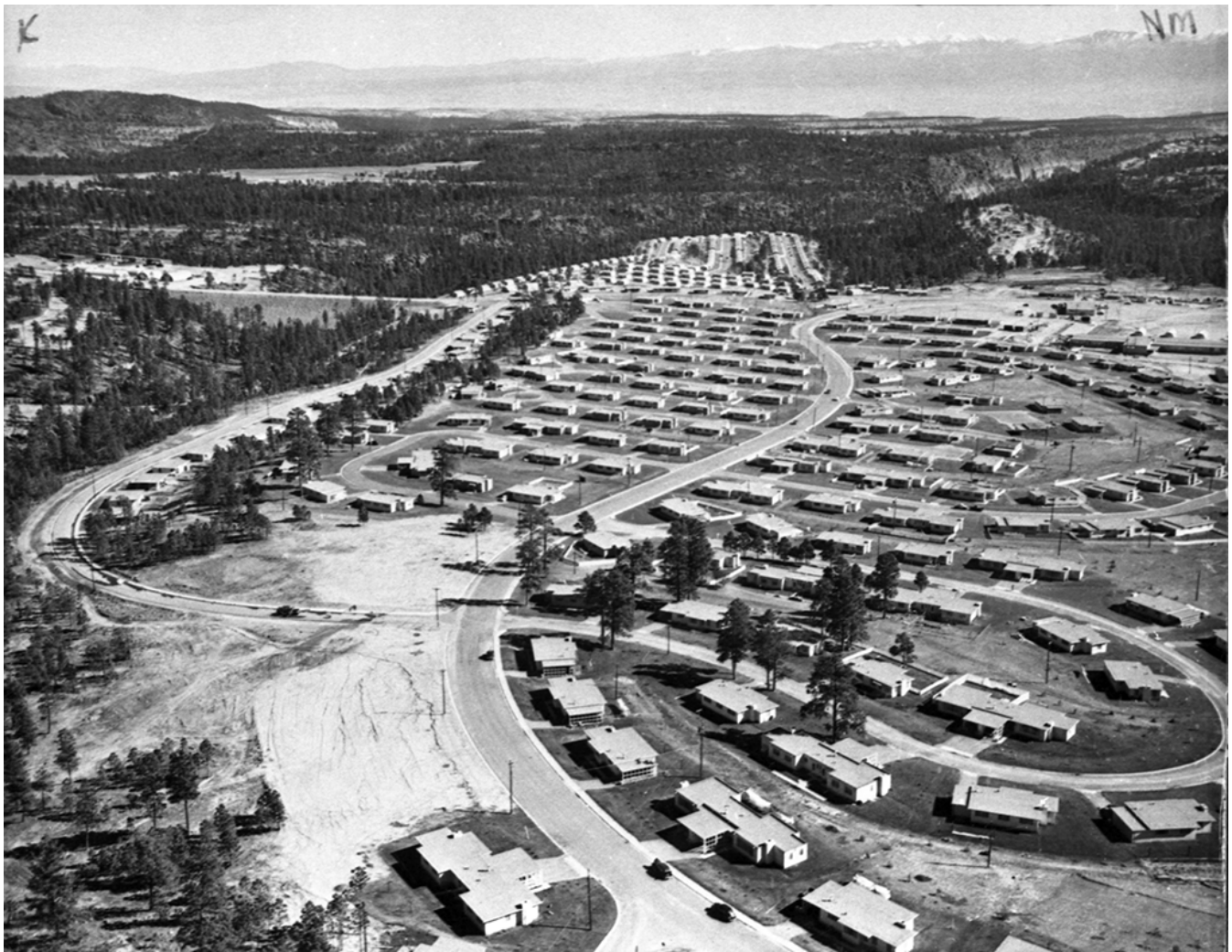


This 1948 photograph shows artist Maria Martinez, a renowned San Ildefonso potter, meeting [Enrico Fermi](#).
Courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy

Local people were employed at Site Y after the initial construction as well. They worked as maids, janitors, and technicians to maintain the facilities themselves. As a community took shape around the labs, those able to secure high-paying positions were those who held advanced degrees in physics and engineering. In the early 1940s, that distinction “excluded the working class and virtually all non-Anglos.”³¹ Indeed, a person’s place of residence directly corresponded with his or her job at Los Alamos.

Nuevomexicanos and Pueblos thus contributed to the construction of Los Alamos alongside [Anglo](#) American scientists and their families. Some locals, such as [Popovi Da](#)—a well-known San Ildefonso pottery artist, assisted physicists in the labs. Most, however, worked in service jobs to support the existence of Site Y. Pueblo maids from the surrounding towns of Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, and Pojoaque performed household chores to free up time for

Anglo women to work at the Tech Area. They also helped new mothers care for their babies.



This photograph shows the growth of Los Alamos neighborhoods by the early 1950s. This aerial shot looks toward the east along Sandia Drive.

Bob Crooks (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. 055375.

For many Los Alamos residents, the interaction with the maids was their first experience with Native American people. Wife and mother Bernice Brode marveled at the maids who “dressed in Pueblo fashion, short, loose, colorful mantas, tied with a woven belt, high deerskin wrapped boots, or just plain stout walking shoes; gay shawls over the head and shoulders, and wearing enough jewelry to stock a trading post.” Despite the fact that the Pueblo people had inhabited the area for centuries, people like Brode considered them “more guests than servants.”³² In reality, the guests were the scientists and their families.

The town of Los Alamos had been created in such haste that the water system remained above ground. During the bitterly cold winter of 1945-1946, the pipes froze and burst. Water was brought to the town by tanker trucks until the weather warmed and the problem could be permanently addressed. By the late 1940s, what had been intended as a temporary facility had become a regular town, albeit a gated community that appeared to be more a suburb of Washington, D.C., than part of rural New Mexico.



After World War II, Los Alamos became a regular town and community. This photograph illustrates an event that marked the creation of Los Alamos County in 1949.

Harold D. Walter (photographer). Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), No. 053110.

By 1954, debates ensued within Los Alamos and the surrounding region about when the guard station and outer security fences might come down. Within four years of the war's end similar fences at the atomic towns of Oak Ridge and

Hanford had been dismantled. Residents of Los Alamos, however, opposed such a move. Fears occasioned by the nuclear age and the cohesiveness of the small community that had formed there over the past decade played a role in that sentiment.

People in the surrounding region saw the fences as an outward extension of the segregation that existed among workers at LANL and in the housing arrangements in Los Alamos. Those who performed the service work at the labs lived in the less desirable housing developments, while scientists and administrators lived in the newer, more luxurious homes. Residential arrangements outlined the hierarchy of race and class within the town as well as between Los Alamos and surrounding communities.



In April 1943 the secret weapons laboratory was founded on the Pajarito Plateau to facilitate the creation of a nuclear weapon for the Allied effort in World War II. Initially, a single gate allowed armed guards to restrict access to the laboratory. During the war, a community developed at Los Alamos—an unintended

outcome of the Manhattan Project.

Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

Carlos Vásquez was twelve years old when his family moved to Los Alamos from Santa Fe in 1956. He immediately noticed that that question “Where do you live?” served as a marker of what work a person did, and by extension, his or her level of education and wealth. Susan Tiano was also a child in Los Alamos. Her father operated one of the only private businesses in town. Even after the war, the Atomic Energy Commission maintained control over the town layout, including who lived where and who could operate commercial enterprises. Due to her father’s status as a merchant, Tiano’s family was not eligible to live in the newer homes enjoyed by the scientists—no matter his ability to pay.

Outside of Los Alamos, hundreds of residents of towns like Española, Pojoaque, and Truchas in Rio Arriba and Santa Fe Counties secured employment at the labs in supporting roles. The vast majority maintained their existing homes and commuted to work on the Hill. As had been the case during the war, nuevomexicanos and Pueblos performed the labor required to maintain day-to-day operations at LANL. Their work included the disposal of nuclear waste, which was initially dumped into the environment at places like Bayo Canyon and many others.

Nuclear contamination in local landscapes is a well-known fact. During the 1950s and 1960s, scientists performed a series of 254 Radioactive Lanthanum (RaLa) tests which released high levels of radiation into the air. Prevailing winds carried the fallout into the valleys where Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, Pojoaque, Española, and Chimayó are located. The Pueblos and community members were never notified of such tests, and documents which evaluated the costs of the RaLa experiments predicted that the fallout would “move east into ‘unpopulated areas.’”³³ But it did not.

Radiation

WITH DAVID CORREIA, PH.D.



Since that time, the residents of the region have experienced high atypical incidences of thyroid cancer and other ailments. LANL officials have initiated several different campaigns to clean the local environment, but Santa Clara and San Ildefonso tribal councils maintain their own surveys of their lands to check for nuclear contamination. Portions of the Pueblos located nearest to the test areas and disposal zones remain highly contaminated. Tribal councils prohibit community members from inhabiting such areas.

LANL has promoted its continued presence in northern New Mexico in terms of its recent positive contributions to scientific research and environmental restoration. Additionally, lab officials underscore LANL's crucial economic contribution to the region. People like Joe Montoya, a native of Truchas and thirty-five-year LANL employee until his death from Thyroid cancer, touted the labs as "the best job in the state."³⁴ Without the lab, most nuevomexicanos would be unable to find jobs that provide health benefits or a regular salary.

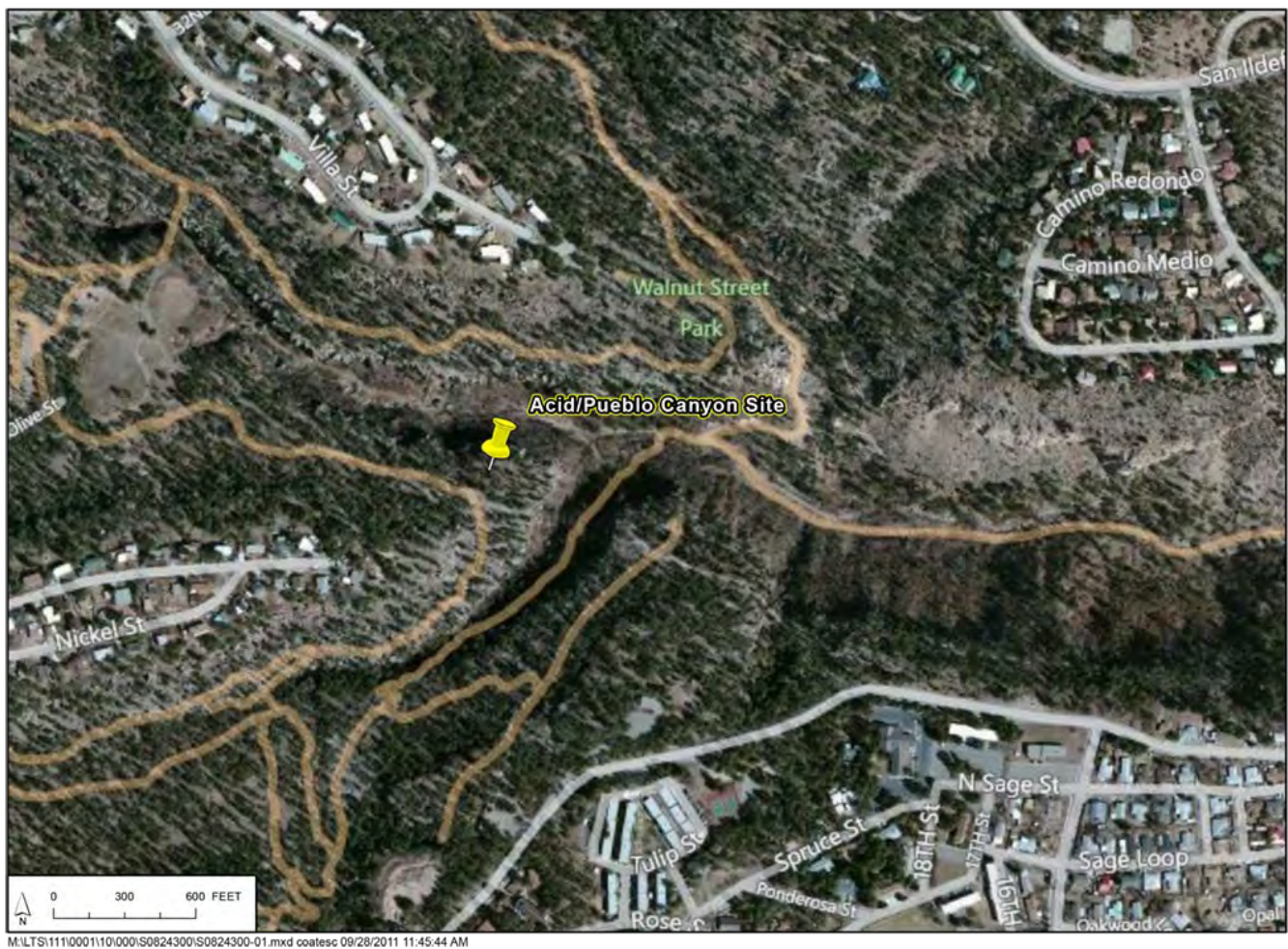
His daughter, Paula, on the other hand, sees LANL as an industry that has taken far more from northern New Mexico than it has given its people. She is also an employee of the labs, but she feels far more conflicted about her work

there. In describing Los Alamos, she uses the metaphor of a bad boyfriend:

You enter into [a relationship with] it seeing all the possibilities, but then it doesn't live up to your expectations and even though you know it's bad, it gives you something, you can't get out, you can't see another way. . . . You think it's better than nothing, and maybe it is. That's why I still work there. What's worse is that he can never tell the truth and he always has an excuse, he's never wrong, never responsible, sometimes cute, ultimately painful.³⁵

The relationship between Los Alamos and surrounding New Mexican communities, then, is [deeply conflicted](#), one borne of necessity and mutual, although highly unequal, reliance.

Paula Montoya is sure of LANL's negative impact on the local environment and cultures, but her father continued his staunch support of the labs until the day he died. Early in his career, he personally dumped radioactive waste into surrounding canyons, including the one that has become known as "acid canyon." Later in life, he realized that such actions were destructive, but reasoned, "we just didn't know better. It was 'out of sight, out of mind.'"³⁶



Acid Canyon Aerial map showing the location of Acid Canyon
Courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Legacy Management

His wife Flora understood the benefits and costs of work at Los Alamos, yet, like her husband, she was unwilling to deny the economic value of work at the labs. She and many others in her community know that the high rates of cancer are the result of work performed at LANL. But, in another sense, due to the invisible nature of radiation, “it’s hard to know for sure.”³⁷

The legacy of the Manhattan Project is quite mixed in northern New Mexico. Families remain deeply divided about whether or not LANL has been a boon to their way of life. LANL’s continued presence provides the economic backbone of the New Mexican villages that were the focus of the earlier movement to preserve their unique cultures. But the Manhattan Project and the laboratory represent a different way of life. Somewhat paradoxically, LANL promises to support village economies while simultaneously altering nuevomexicano and Pueblo patterns of living.



In recent years, LANL has made a concerted effort to give back to local communities. This photograph shows one of the recipients of a new pair of shoes during the LANL Laces Shoe Drive in 2012.

Courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

More broadly, the World War II era changed New Mexico and the West in profound ways. The rise of the military-industrial complex altered western landscapes and helped to free the region from economic domination by points in the eastern United States. The war also initiated massive migration from East to West to support facilities like LANL, Sandia National Laboratories, [Kirtland Air Force Base](#), [Cannon Air Force Base](#), and the White Sands Missile Range.

Los Alamos

WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



Within New Mexico migration from rural areas to cities, like Albuquerque, Santa Fe, or Las Cruces, increased as federal funding for the war effort poured into the state. New Mexico remains among the states that receive the highest level of per-capita federal spending in the nation, a reality that helps to secure the state's economy. Additionally, the Forest Service and [Bureau of Reclamation](#) draw federal funds to New Mexico.

Even as New Mexico became a focal point for the Cold War nuclear arms race, many of its people were estranged from the benefits of the military-industrial complex. Nuevomexicanos, Pueblos, Navajos, Apaches, African Americans, and women all participated in the various civil rights movements that began in the 1950s.

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Chapter 15: Civil Rights Movements

Civil Rights Movements

Alianza de Mercedes Libres

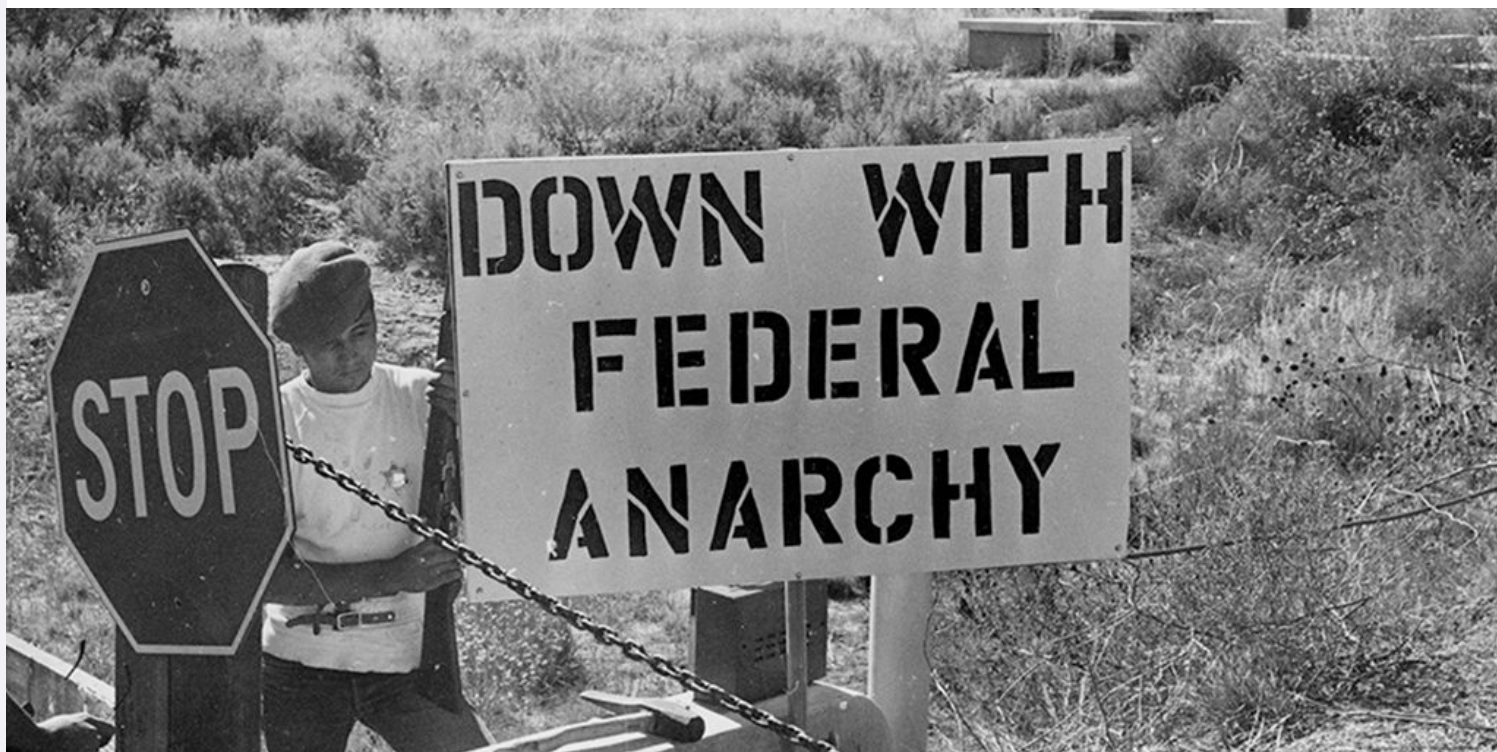
Chicano Community Organization

African American Rights

Indigenous Peoples' Civil Rights

References & Further Reading

Civil Rights Movements



In 1935 Harold and Bessie Mae Kent traveled from Hollis, Oklahoma, to Tucumcari, New Mexico, in search of rumored job opportunities. The African American couple found the work they sought and made Tucumcari their home. Harold earned a secure income from his position at the Pelzer Motor Company, and then as a porter on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Eventually, he operated a small grocery store on the north side of town.

On May 26, 1938, the Kent's first daughter, Haroldie, was born. Over the next few years the births of other sons and daughters—Alice, Sammie, and Frances—rounded out their family. During an oral history interview in the summer of 2001, Haroldie recalled her family's middle-class status in contrast to the living conditions endured by poorer blacks in Tucumcari. Her parents had received

very little education, and they worked tirelessly to provide better opportunities for their children.

Others were not so fortunate. When she was young, Haroldie had friends among the poorer African Americans in Tucumcari. She reflected on the one-room house inhabited by one of the families. At least six people lived in the small space, and the cereal the family ate for dinner was diluted with water to make it go farther. Haroldie had never experienced such poverty, and she recounted that the members of her family “were pretty well off for blacks.”¹

During Haroldie’s childhood, Tucumcari’s neighborhoods were segregated along racial lines. North of the railroad tracks, the most prominent feature in the town’s built landscape, African Americans and hispanos resided. On the south side were the homes of the white residents and a few of the wealthier nuevomexicanos. The majority of the Hispanos identified as Spanish American; Haroldie recalled that they considered the title “Mexican” to be degrading.

Haroldie could not recall many fights between people of different racial backgrounds, but they did occur. Her brother, Sammie, remembered that when fights broke out among the children or teenagers the whites and nuevomexicanos called the blacks, “niggers.” Near the end of his junior year in high school, Sammie broke up a fight between one of the other black girls and his sister, Frances. When the other girl brandished a knife and cut Frances’ hand, Sammie took the knife from her and ended the confrontation which occurred near the school grounds.

“Tootsie” Velasquez, police chief and Sammie’s boxing coach, arrived on the scene and arrested Sammie. “For some reason they apprehended me even though I wasn’t involved in the fight other than taking the knife from the girl who had cut my sister,” by Sammie’s account. During a hearing, Velasquez and several teachers testified that Sammie had been the center of the conflict. He spent ten days in jail and was unable to complete his junior year of high school. Fortunately, based on his above average grades, school officials allowed him to continue on to his senior year when he was elected vice president of his

graduating class.

Haroldie and Sammie's recollections paint a picture of institutionalized racism and discrimination. By her own admission, Haroldie never gave much thought to the fact that members of her family and the close-knit local black community were required to enter restaurants through the back door and eat in a dining room separate from whites and nuevomexicanos. Blacks also had to sit in the balcony seats at the local movie theaters, African American travelers were not allowed to stay in the whites-only hotels, and black children attended separate schools located on the north side of town.

According to Haroldie, "We never questioned why. We just accepted it until the civil rights movement, when we said we would not accept it anymore."² She adopted a live-and-let-live attitude, and believed that people should learn their place in society. Her sister, Alice, however, did not share this sentiment; she always resented the different treatment afforded to African Americans. Alice became heavily involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the civil rights movement.

"We never questioned why. We just accepted it until the civil rights movement, when we said we would not accept it anymore."

Sammie's attitude fell somewhere in between those of his sisters. He recognized the injustice of Jim Crow segregation and discrimination, even in the comparatively mild forms expressed in Tukumcari. For the most part he accepted the situation, although not all of his friends did. On one occasion, he

went to a hamburger restaurant with a [nuevomexicano](#) friend. When the proprietor refused to allow Sammie to eat there, his friend declared that he would not eat there either unless they served Sammie.

As was the case in the national African American civil rights movement, many blacks in New Mexico considered school desegregation to be a first step toward ending discrimination at other levels of society. Tukumcari's elementary and middle schools were segregated, but the closest segregated high school was in Clovis, a little over eighty miles distant. African American students who wished to attend high school had to move to Clovis and live with family or friends until Harold Kent petitioned the state legislature with the support of sympathetic white community members, like Dr. Thomas Gordon and his wife, Helen. As a result, in 1952, Tukumcari's high school was integrated.

Most of New Mexico's high schools integrated prior to the 1954 [Brown v. Board of Education](#) ruling that initiated school integration on a national level. Segregation impacted not only the African American population (which comprised about three percent of New Mexico's total population in the period between 1950 and 1970) but also nuevomexicanos and the children of Mexican immigrants—especially in the southeastern quadrant of the state known as [Little Texas](#). Additionally, Native American students attended schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and were thus segregated.

Towns like Clovis, Hobbs, Carlsbad, Artesia, Roswell, and Las Cruces maintained segregated elementary and high schools into the early 1950s. No state-level [mandate](#) ever existed for the racial separation of students; all segregation policies were formulated at the municipal level. Some historians have noted that although nearly all of these towns integrated their school systems prior to *Brown v. Board*, the reasoning behind the change often had more to do with economics than a concern for equality. Carlsbad, for example, integrated its high school in the summer of 1951 to avoid the cost of updating the all-black high school in order to bring it into accreditation compliance. And, school integration was only a step toward equality in civil rights. Neighborhoods throughout the state continued in a state of de facto racial and

economic segregation.

Civil rights movements in New Mexico, as in the rest of the nation, were multifaceted. The overall goal was to gain access to rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship on a daily basis, no matter a person's ethnic background. Such struggles had been ongoing in New Mexico since 1848 when the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) transferred the Southwest to the United States. During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, however, African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans organized across the nation to advocate for equal rights before the law.

Within each civil rights movement were leaders who espoused non-violence, militancy, and middle-ground measures to achieve their ends.

[Reies López Tijerina](#) emerged as the face of a militant movement to achieve the restoration of nuevomexicano land grants. Some hispanos and participants in the broader Chicano movement, however, opposed his methods and opted instead for peaceful protests. Similar patterns emerged within the Native American and African American movements.



Police monitor demonstrations in response to the Kent State Massacre in 1970 at the UNM campus in Albuquerque.

Courtesy of Mark G. Bralley

Whatever the methods, civil rights advocacy ended ongoing de jure, or legally sanctioned, segregation in schools, at restaurants, and other public facilities across the state.



This photograph shows Sansi Coonan and her daughter Molly as they listen to a commemoration of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Santa Fe Plaza. In background, Santa Fe Indian School teacher Diana Saiz, a teacher at the Santa Fe Indian School, holds up the image of King.

Sydney Brink (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives \(NMHM/DCA\)](#), No. HP.2014.14.748.v

Despite the gains, de facto, or unofficially sanctioned, segregation and discrimination continued. Many of the factors that comprise a person's racial identification—including economic, educational, and residential opportunity—meant that people of certain racial backgrounds continued to live in neighborhoods dominated by people of their race.

The civil rights struggles of the mid-to-late twentieth century provided new legal recognitions of equality, but they did not end the ways in which racial discrimination had been institutionalized in social conventions or daily practices. In many ways, the struggle for equal rights for all continues.

Alianza de Mercedes Libres

Chicano Movement WITH BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.



A fiery orator and militant leader from Texas, [Reies López Tijerina](#), emerged as the unlikely face of the Chicano civil rights movement in northern New Mexico. Although some scholars have asserted the notion that New Mexico was minimally impacted by the Chicano movement, more recent studies indicate that many nuevomexicanos supported *el movimiento's* (as participants referred to Chicano activism) struggle for civil rights.

Unlike earlier strains of Spanish American ethnic identity, Chicanos proudly asserted their dual heritage as descendants of Spanish conquistadores *and* indigenous peoples. The idea that the [Mexica](#) homeland, or [Aztlán](#), was located somewhere in the modern U.S. Southwest bolstered Chicano claims on that region. Chicano activists in southern California, Colorado, and elsewhere in the nation focused on issues ranging from agricultural working conditions, to school segregation, to cultural expressions of Americanism. In New Mexico, Tijerina galvanized ongoing [nuevomexicano](#) efforts to restore lost lands.

Tijerina

WITH DAVID CORREIA, PH.D.



Reies López Tijerina was born in Falls City, Texas, in 1923 to a Mexican-origin working class family. Spanish was his native language; he did not learn to speak English until he was about twelve years old. As a teenager, he participated in a three-year Assembly of God education program near El Paso. Upon graduation at age eighteen, Tijerina worked as an evangelical missionary on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. His religious background informed the tone of his later

activism.

In 1957, Tijerina organized a cooperative village in southern Arizona called Valley of Peace. Local agriculturists and mining interests, however, opposed his moves to help working-class hispanos gain a modicum of economic independence. Resistance to the community forced Tijerina to relocate with his family to northern New Mexico where he intended to continue his ministry and his organization of Mexican Americans in support of their economic, social, and political rights.

Tijerina had first visited [Rio Arriba](#) County in the 1940s and since that time had maintained ties with [La Mano Negra](#) (the Black Hand), a clandestine organization that sought the restoration of land and resource rights to nuevomexicano heirs of Spanish and Mexican land grants. When he settled in New Mexico in 1959, his commitment to nuevomexicano land disputes solidified. He saw the land grant heirs as people with cultural, historical, and numerical strength. Within the existing class and political structure of New Mexico, Tijerina believed that nuevomexicanos “could make their rights felt in the eyes of the government.”³

As geographer David Correia reminds us, heirs of the Tierra Amarilla land grant engaged in militant activism prior to Tijerina’s arrival. Those associated with [La Mano Negra](#) destroyed fences and barns, and attempted to intimidate outsiders looking to purchase grant lands, much as had been the case with *Las Gorras Blancas* in the late nineteenth century. In the late 1930s, land grant heirs had also organized [La Corporación de Abiquíu](#) which sought to work within the legal system to restore rights to lands and resources.

When Tijerina arrived in northern New Mexico in the late 1950s, conditions were ripe for another phase of land grant activism. [Fernanda Martínez](#) and [Gregorita Aguilar](#) taught Tijerina the long, contested history of the Tierra Amarilla land grant. They also introduced him to members of local advocacy groups and informed him of their methods and approaches. Tijerina provided the existing movement with national notoriety and connections to other civil

rights groups. It is crucial to understand his central role in the land grant activism of the 1960s, but to also recognize the long historical roots of the struggle.



Headquarters of the Alianza Federal de Mercedes Libres in 1967.

Courtesy of Peter Nabokov

On February 2, 1963, the anniversary of the signing of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), Tijerina and his supporters founded the *Alianza Federal de Mercedes Libres* (Federal Alliance for Free Land Grants). Alianza attempted to bring together all heirs of land grants that had been in existence when the treaty had been formalized in 1848. In organizing Alianza, Tijerina asserted that “none of these grant lands and waters which the United States asserts it acquired from Mexico under the treaty . . . ever formed any part of the public domain. These lands and waters therefore cannot be taken for that purpose.”⁴

Tijerina's arguments were based on diligent research that he conducted in the archives of Madrid, Mexico City, and Santa Fe. As Alianza made claims for the restoration of northern New Mexico land grants, in particular the San Joaquín del Río Chama and Tierra Amarilla grants, the group cited the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#) and the [Recopilación de leyes de las Indias](#), a seventeenth-century Spanish legal tract. The Recopilación helped Alianza to establish the original delineation of New Mexican land grants, and, according to the group, the U.S. government had violated articles VIII and IX of the 1848 treaty. Those were the articles that had guaranteed U.S. citizenship and property rights to former residents of Mexico.

In an effort to legitimate Alianza's efforts and gain wider support, Tijerina worked to build connections to other civil rights leaders. He also attempted to foster international solidarity by meeting with Mexican president [Luis Echeverría](#) and other high-level officials. To a greater degree than most other Chicano leaders, including [Rodolfo "Corky" González](#), [César Chávez](#), and [Dolores Huerta](#), Tijerina sought to forge ties with African American and Native American civil rights leaders.

United Farm Workers boycott and prevail

Agricultural workers organize a boycott on farm produce to receive equal rights. Watch the following videos from KQED news to learn more.

- [Braceros](#)
- [Chávez explains the need for boycotts](#)
- [Interviews with United Farm Worker Strikers](#)
- [United Farm Workers picket in fields](#)



This 1962 photograph shows activists Dolores Huerta (second from the left) and César Chávez (far right) with two other members of the National Farmworkers Association at its founding convention.

Courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

In 1967 and 1968, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became increasingly convinced that the plight of poverty united minority groups seeking citizenship rights, Tijerina joined him in organizing the [Poor People's Campaign](#). King was assassinated before the Poor People's March on Washington took place, but on May 12, 1968, Reverends [Ralph D. Abernathy](#) and [Jesse Jackson](#), along with Tijerina, led the march in a vow to continue the work that King had begun. Tijerina also sought to make connections with Native American civil rights leaders. He believed that:

We have been forced by destiny to adopt two languages; we will be the future ambassadors to Latin America. At home, I believe the Southwest is breeding a special kind of people that will bridge the color gap between black and white. It will be brown that fills the gap. . . . We are the people the Indians call their 'lost brothers.'⁵

Despite such efforts, Tijerina's increasing reliance upon militant and overtly violent methods attracted much criticism and split his support along class lines. For years, scholars have followed the official narrative on Alianza and Tijerina in reporting that his combination of militancy and religious zeal espoused violence. More recently, however, David Correia has shown that state violence against Alianza intensified the militancy of both sides. Religious zeal no doubt also played into Tijerina's, and Alianza's, response to state violence.⁶ The FBI targeted militant civil rights advocates like Tijerina, as well as those who [advocated nonviolent methods](#), like King.

Alianza Federal de Mercedes

WITH DAVID CORREIA, PH.D.



Alianza not only attempted to restore land grant rights by appeals to centuries' old documents. Under Tijerina's leadership, the group also tried to forcibly retake control of lands granted under Spanish and Mexican law, and guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In order to stake the claims of

land grant heirs, Alianza set up the Republic of San Joaquín del Río Chama in the Kit Carson National Forest in 1966. That October, a confrontation occurred between forest rangers and Alianza members. Alianza took three rangers prisoner, convicted them of trespassing on their lands, granted them suspended sentences, and released them, along with their trucks. Tijerina avoided arrest in this instance, but federal and state law enforcement agents, including FBI director [J. Edgar Hoover](#), more closely monitored his activities.



Left to right: Hopi leader Thomas Banyacya, SNCC ([Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#)) Representative Ralph Featherstone, Maulana Ron Karenga, and Reies Tijerina. Photograph taken near the time of the Tierra Amarilla courthouse raid in June of 1967.

Courtesy of Peter Nabokov

two hostages. The prisoners were soon freed, and most of the Aliancistas surrendered within two days of the raid. [E. Lee Francis](#), New Mexico's lieutenant governor who was in charge because Governor [David Cargo](#) was out of the state at the time, ordered municipal law enforcement agencies to join efforts led by the state National Guard to locate Tijerina who eluded authorities

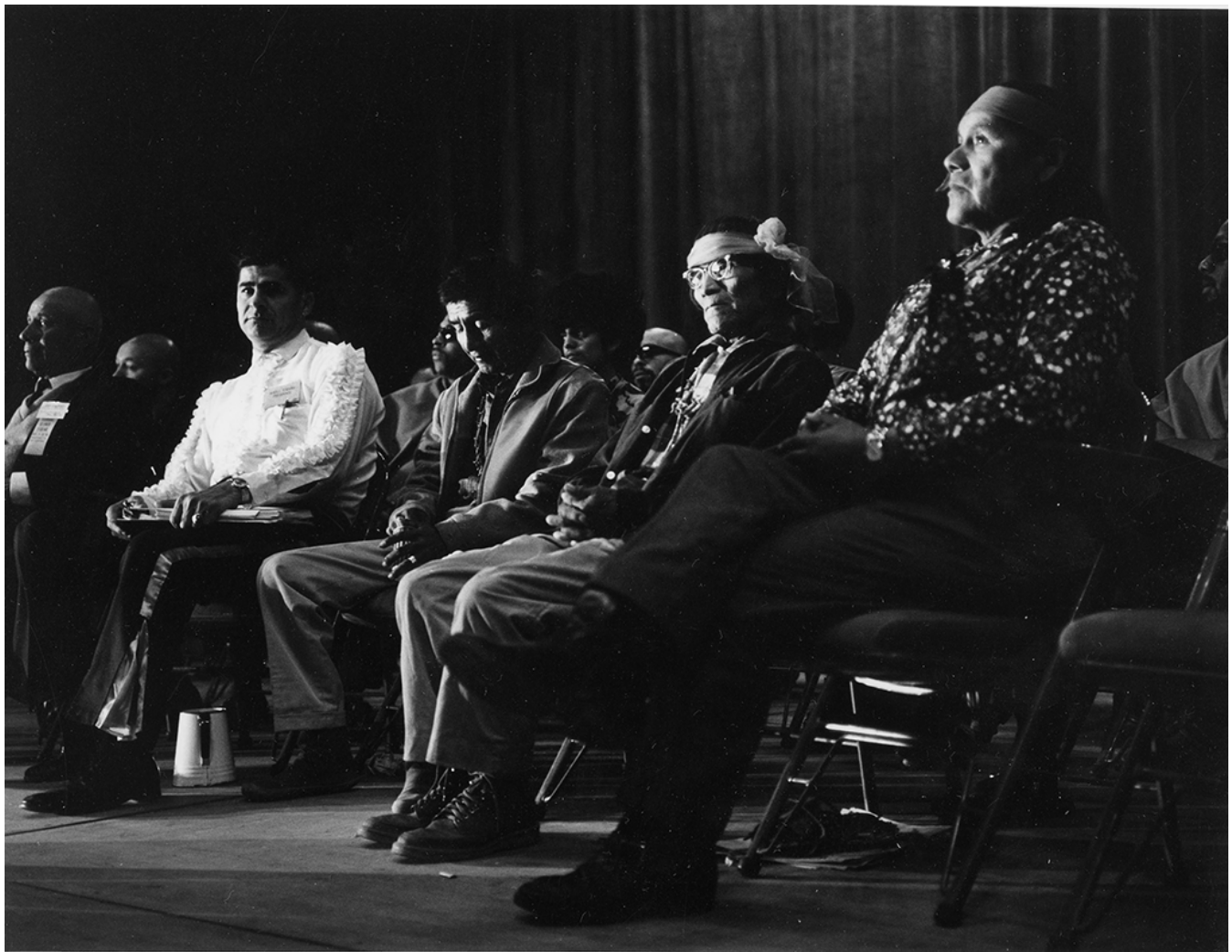
On June 5, 1967, Tijerina led a group of twenty *Aliancistas* (members of Alianza) in a daylight raid of the Rio Arriba County Courthouse located in the small town of Tierra Amarilla. Their goal was to make a citizens' arrest of district attorney Alfonso Sánchez in response to his efforts to prevent Alianza members from gathering and organizing meetings. Aliancistas charged Sánchez's actions, which included setting up roadblocks and arresting Aliancistas on outdated charges, violated their First Amendment right to assembly.

Sánchez did not present himself at the courthouse. As they sought to locate him, the Aliancistas shot and wounded a state police officer and a jailer before fleeing into nearby mountains with

in the mountains near Canjilón.

State troopers had already been working in coordination with FBI agents to undermine Alianza efforts. During the manhunt, the combined law enforcement detail used two tanks, several helicopters, spotter planes, a hospital van, and patrol jeeps to search for Tijerina. When they were unable to locate him, a group of about fifty nuevomexicanos, including men, women, and children, were detained in the elements without shelter, food, or water as bait to force Tijerina's surrender. Within five days of the raid, Tijerina submitted to the authorities.

Following his arrest, Tijerina was charged with fifty-four criminal counts, including kidnapping and armed assault. The courthouse raid drew television crews and journalists to the area and brought Alianza's struggle to restore Spanish- and Mexican-era land grants to the nation's attention. Some heralded Tijerina as a hero of an oppressed group of people; others emphasized the "backward" and seemingly pre-modern lifeways and culture of nuevomexicano people at the heart of the struggle. That more stereotypical perspective appeared in an NBC report on the raid that aired in 1967.



Reies López Tijerina and other activists at the 1967 Alianza Convention in Albuquerque.
Courtesy of Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico

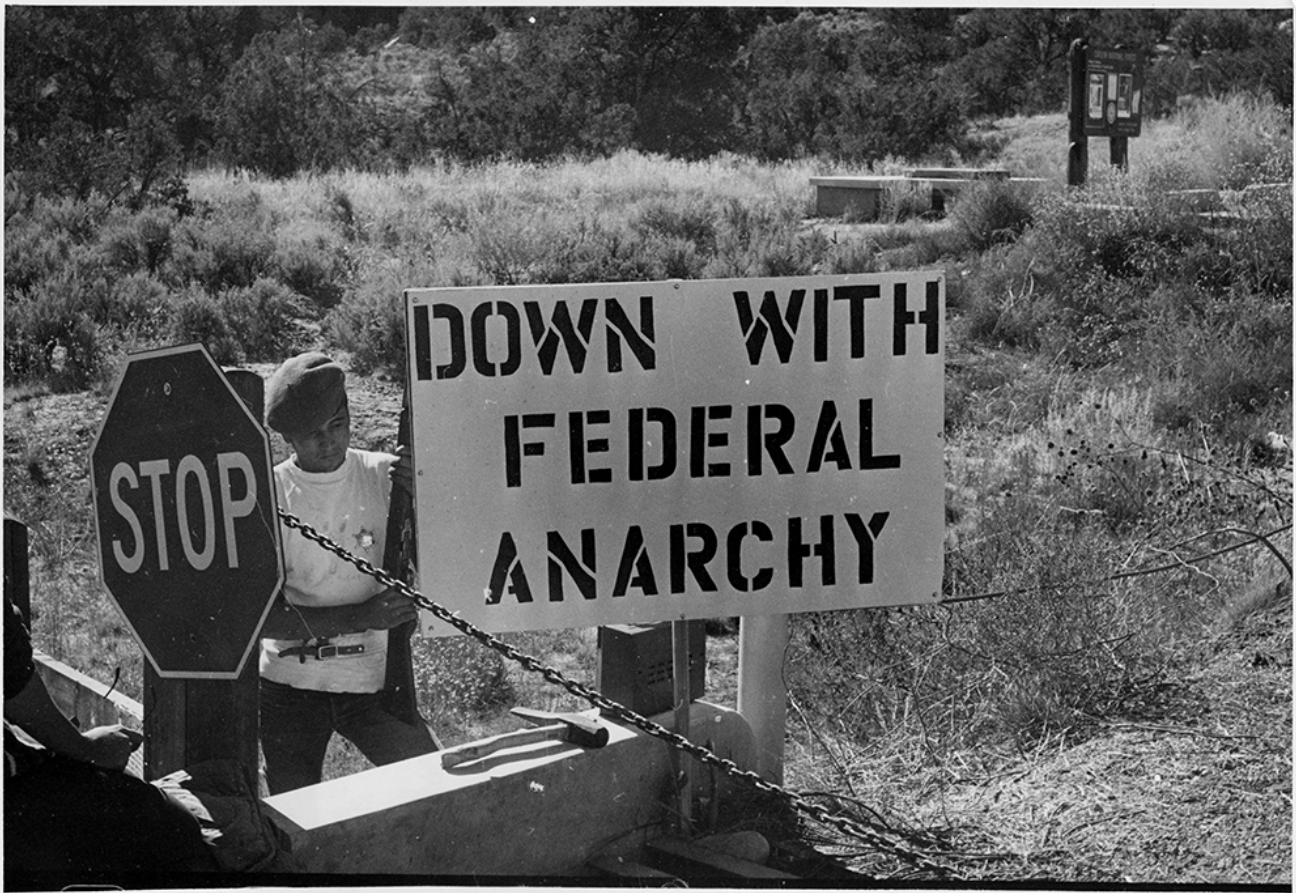
The courthouse raid also galvanized local divisions over Tijerina's actions. Those belonging to the [rico nuevomexicano](#) old guard considered Tijerina an outsider and a troublemaker who merely wanted to make a name for himself at the expense of local communities. Senator Joseph Sánchez—at the time the highest-ranking hispano politician in New Mexico, for example, lashed out against Tijerina. He declared that the “last thing the Spanish-speaking need is agitation, rabble rousing, or creation of false hopes,” all ostensibly things that Tijerina was responsible for.⁷

Indeed, the general sentiment in mid-1960s New Mexico was that any action should be avoided that might create racial tension. In recent years, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo's central role in the history of New Mexico has been recognized by scholars and residents of the Southwest alike. Such was not the

case in the 1960s. At that time, efforts to highlight the economic, social, and political inequalities rampant in New Mexico was cast as an attempt to stir up racial animosities and cause trouble. The *Albuquerque Tribune* considered Tijerina within that context. In 1967 the paper reported that the land grant movement was a “fraudulent effort to read Spanish-Americans out of the white race,” and thus as a “reprehensible attempt to divide and exploit.”⁸

When he was brought to trial, Tijerina dismissed his attorneys in a ploy to buy more time. Instead, the judge told him that he had thirty minutes to prepare his own defense. Under pressure, he argued that those involved in the courthouse raid simply hoped to make a citizens’ arrest of district attorney Sánchez in order to assert their constitutional right to assembly. The prosecution was not prepared for his line of argumentation, nor his moving oratory, and the trial concluded with the acquittal of all charges.

Despite the victory in court, federal and state agencies intensified their efforts to dissolve Alianza and imprison Tijerina. At that point, counterinsurgency methods were employed by the FBI to deny the legitimacy of Alianza’s actions. Tijerina himself was dubbed a communist sympathizer in the press, despite his personal opposition to communist economic ideologies. During the Cold War, however, to be labeled a communist was to be labeled an enemy to the national good.



In 1967, scholar Peter Nabokov took this photograph of a sign inspired by the land grant activism of the 1960s in northern New Mexico.

Courtesy of Peter Nabokov

The labeling of Alianza leaders was not simply the work of the media. In 1964 J. Edgar Hoover had requested that a special index be established to keep track of alleged communist influences on civil rights groups. As far as the FBI was concerned, movements to promote the civil rights of groups considered to be racial minorities were inherently subversive and threatening to the interests of the United States. By 1967, Hoover created the “Rabble Rouser Index,” a system to identify and undermine the actions of “racial agitators and individuals who have demonstrated a potential for fomenting racial discord.”⁹

By 1968, the [Rabble Rouser](#) Index was renamed the Agitator Index. Hoover directed agents in FBI field offices to draw up “wide-ranging and detailed plans of action against Rabble Rouser targets.”¹⁰ Tijerina was identified as one of the key Rabble Rousers or Agitators worthy of special action. Following his acquittal and release in December 1968, FBI agents intensified efforts to

undermine Alianza. The homes of Aliancistas were mysteriously firebombed, and no official investigations made. According to the records of the Albuquerque FBI field office, “due to the controversial nature of the group, no investigation shall be conducted.”¹¹

In May of 1968, a former New Mexico state trooper and federal marshal named [Tiny Fellion](#) severed his own left hand while placing an explosive device at the Alianza headquarters in Albuquerque. An earlier FBI report indicates that bureau officials enlisted his services because of his expertise in explosives. He was a paid assassin.

Late in 1968, Tijerina was once again placed on trial. His wife had set fire to a forest service sign, but he took the blame for the action and was arrested. The judge in the case revoked his bail from the 1967 conviction and once again charged him for his participation in the courthouse raid. Despite defense appeals to prohibitions on double jeopardy, the 1968 trial resulted in Tijerina’s conviction. He was sentenced to serve a prison term first at the Federal Correctional Facility at La Tuna in Anthony, New Mexico, and he was later moved to the federal facility at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Between 1969 and 1971, Tijerina served his sentence. During that period, Alianza’s activities and legitimacy declined. Following his release in 1971, Tijerina himself declared that he had “outgrown militancy,” and he adopted a softer line toward land grant issues—although he never gave up the struggle for the restoration of land and water rights in northern New Mexico until his death

“Si, se puede!”

Civil Rights activist leaders, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta restored equal rights using nonviolent protest methods and boycotting farm products.

- [Dolores Huerta & The Presidential Medal of Freedom](#)
- [The Year of César Chávez](#)
- [Trampling out the Vintage: César Chávez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers](#)

in January of 2015.¹²

Based on his changed attitude, various rumors surfaced that Tijerina had been tortured during his time in prison. By his own account, prison guards at Fort Leavenworth forced him to take medication for dementia that caused him to lose the use of his limbs. During his paralysis, he believed that the medication was going to kill him.

While he was imprisoned, members of his family and Aliancistas endured acts of terror by federal agents. Tijerina testified:

My wife was violated by police. My daughter Rose was kidnapped by police. My son Noé was kidnapped and raped by police. My home and office were bombed four times by police . . . And why all this terror? What is the motive for all this terror? The State and Federal Government will stop at nothing to cover up the ruthless raping of all our municipalities that were created under the Governments of Spain and Mexico. The stealing of our property rights is the real motive behind all this terror. This is the reason for denying me and my wife our constitutional rights.¹³

Investigations carried out by the Senate committee led by Frank Church in 1975, known as the [Church Committee](#), determined that FBI activities toward domestic civil rights groups “violated the law and fundamental human decency.” The damning report went on to conclude that “the Bureau went beyond the collection of intelligence to secret action defined to ‘disrupt’ and ‘neutralize’ target groups and individuals.”¹⁴ The findings were little consolation to Alianza members, but their actions did result in important changes in northern New Mexico.

Chicano Community Organization

Alianza's public militancy and influence declined by the early 1970s, but members of the group became more active in New Mexican politics and legal proceedings as a means of continuing the struggle for land and resource rights. They were not willing to give up on the struggle that their ancestors had carried out since 1848. Over time, the methods of the land grant heirs changed. At times, they employed militancy, as in the cases of Las Gorras Blancas, [La Mano Negra](#), and Alianza. At other moments they attempted to gain redress through the legal system by organizing their communities in groups like [La Corporación de Abiquíu](#).

At about the same time that Tijerina and Alianza orchestrated the courthouse raid, residents of Vallecitos took advantage of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society initiative. With federal funds, they began their own community action program in the fall of 1967. The New Mexico Office of Economic Opportunity and the state-level Home Education Livelihood Program (H.E.L.P.) provided resources to help them market locally fabricated fencing.



Invited to New Mexico by Tijerina in 1967 before the courthouse raid, Varela was an experienced community organizer. She made her home in northern New Mexico and helped local nuevomexicanos create cooperatives to sell their grain, wool, and other agricultural products in order to support their communities economically.

Courtesy of Lorenzo Zuniga Jr.—Maria Varela Photography

Also in late 1967 Tijerina invited the veteran civil rights activist [María Varela](#) to northern New Mexico to work with Alianza. She had served as a staff member of the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) (SNCC) in Alabama and Mississippi between 1962 and 1967, and had proven herself as a publicist and fundraiser. In the spring of 1968, Varela became Tijerina’s liaison to the Poor People’s Campaign. After her break with Tijerina in the fall of 1968, Tierra Amarilla land grant heirs invited her to help form [La Cooperativa Agrícola de Tierra Amarilla](#) (The Agricultural Cooperative of Tierra Amarilla). The [Cooperativa](#) was a community-based nonprofit organization that partnered with small-scale landowners to raise agricultural productivity and to create rural jobs.

Despite the Cooperativa’s initial agricultural focus, health crises in the summer

of 1968 caused the group to shift resources toward the creation of a community health clinic. Not long after it opened, local anti-land grant forces in the Chama Valley paid arsonists to destroy the clinic. The attack, however, did not end the community's resolve. Supporters from across New Mexico contributed funds, building materials, and labor to repair the burned structures.

Anselmo Tijerina (Reies' older brother) recruited Varela to help devise a strategy that would allow the community to purchase and staff La Clinica del Pueblo del [Rio Arriba](#). Along with a number of local supporters, including activist [Craig Vincent](#) of Taos, Varela's team created a plan for sustained fundraising that solicited funds from individuals, charities, religious institutions, and foundations to make up for the lack of government funding for the facility. La Clinica reopened in the spring of 1969 with the aid of new financing through the New Mexico Presbyterian Church. It was the first clinic in New Mexico to offer a sliding fee scale to provide wide access to health care for impoverished local communities.

Historian Suzanne Forrest describes the 1960s as a period of time during which federal and state reform efforts once again focused on northern New Mexican hispano communities. Reform in the 1960s was driven less by the idealistic hope of preserving local village cultures, and instead geared toward social and economic justice. Despite that shift, federal support for local initiatives to improve educational and economic opportunity were fleeting. By the mid-1970s the [War on Poverty](#) ground to a halt. Additionally, by that time the national recognition gained from Tijerina's militant actions at the head of Alianza had also faded.



Along with María Varela, Manzanares organized the Ganados del Valley cooperative. In this photograph, he shows Ubaldo Lasalle where to deposit a load of hay at to feed a large flock of sheep in Los Ojos, New Mexico.

Courtesy of Mark Holm/The New York Times/Redux

Groups like the Cooperativa and [Ganados del Valle](#) (Livestock Growers of the Valley) were more successful in the long term at providing economic and social relief to northern New Mexico. With Varela's knack for fundraising and the support of cofounder [Francisco Antonio Manzanares](#), Ganados del Valle branched out to support training programs that led to the creation of six new businesses in the 1980s: Tierra Wools, Pastores Lamb, Rio Arriba Wool Washing, Pastores Collections, Otra Vuelta, and [Los Pastores Feed and General Store](#).

Vallecitos and Ganados cooperatives both made gains in the realm of economic self-sufficiency for their members. During the late 1970s Vallecitos residents launched La Madera Wood Products Cooperative to sell lumber and woodwork specific to New Mexican architectural styles, such as *vigas* and *latillas*. Despite initial successes, La Madera faced opposition from the competing Duke City

Lumber Company as well as from the U.S. Forest Service. By the late spring of 1990, the Forest Service denied La Madera's application to incorporate as an independent lumber harvester in the Carson National Forest. Forest Service officials denied the application on the grounds that La Madera did not own its own sawmill.

Agents of La Madera pushed back by filing a lawsuit against the Forest Service for racial discrimination. The basis of their claim was that the Duke City Lumber Company had harvested with official recognition in the Carson National Forest for a period of eighteen years, despite not owning its own sawmill. Plaintiffs charged that the denial of La Madera's application was not only discriminatory, but it also violated earlier compacts that allowed for local communities' use of forest resources. The case, [*La Compañía Ocho v. U.S. Forest Service*](#), languished in the courts in the mid-1990s without definitive resolution. The defendants blocked the motion to hold individual forest rangers accountable for discrimination, and La Madera received the opportunity to revise an appeal but that initiative never gained traction.



Truchas resident and activist Ike de Vargas and Sam Hitt, director of the Forest Guardians, at a gathering in the woods of northern New Mexico. The two men were often at odds with one another on issues of environmental protection and access to timber and other resources.

Courtesy of Kay Matthews

As the case petered out, Vallecitos residents engaged in open conflicts with environmental groups, most prominently the [Forest Guardians](#) directed by [Sam Hitt](#). Environmentalists openly opposed the sale of timber extracted from the Carson National Forest due to its impact on the habitat of the Mexican Spotted Owl. Residents of Vallecitos and members of La Madera vocally asserted their right to use the timber for community and commercial purposes.



[Nuevomexicano](#) activists hanged prominent Forest Guardians Sam Hitt and John Talberth in effigy. This effigy of Talberth was hanged at the La Manga site protest in 2006.

Courtesy of Kay Matthews

they refused to back down. Nuevomexicano activists claimed that they had rights to the forests and natural resources of northern New Mexico based on the provisions of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#). The efforts of Duke City Lumber, the U.S. Forest Service, and Forest Guardians to prohibit their use of the land was “just another way of abrogating Chicano rights to moral and

In October 1995, a federal judge prohibited further logging operations in national forests in New Mexico and Arizona, an outcome that outraged not only residents of Vallecitos but also members of Hispano communities throughout northern New Mexico who relied on firewood drawn from national forest lands to heat their homes in the winter. That November, Hispano and Pueblo activists rallied in Santa Fe and they hanged Sam Hitt and environmentalist [John Talberth](#) in effigy on the grounds of the state capital.

Members of Ganados del Valle supported the struggle of their neighbors at Vallecitos. In December they organized a prayer vigil in Santa Fe to help alleviate the contentious atmosphere. In doing so, however,

economic justice.”¹⁵

Ganados ranchers were drawn more directly into the conflict in the summer of 1996 when environmental activists attempted to halt grazing in the Carson National Forest. Having lost their own grant lands, Ganados shepherds grazed their animals on allotments they had obtained from the Jicarilla Apache Tribe on territory now claimed by the state Department of Game and Fish. With no place for their sheep, Ganados herders drove their herds onto the [Humphries Wildlife Management Area](#). Following a several-day standoff, the governor’s office located an alternate grazing area for the communal flock.

The long history of conflict over land and resource issues in northern New Mexico dated back to the period prior to 1848. Due to high profile acts of occupation, such as those staged by Alianza and Ganados ranchers, state and federal officials negotiated settlements with nuevomexicanos in the mid-1990s that did not hold because the lack of summer grazing lands jeopardized the ability of organizations like Ganados to keep their sheep from dying out. Nuevomexicanos’ participation in the Chicano civil rights movement was based on a continuation of land disputes that had long existed and that have yet to be resolved.



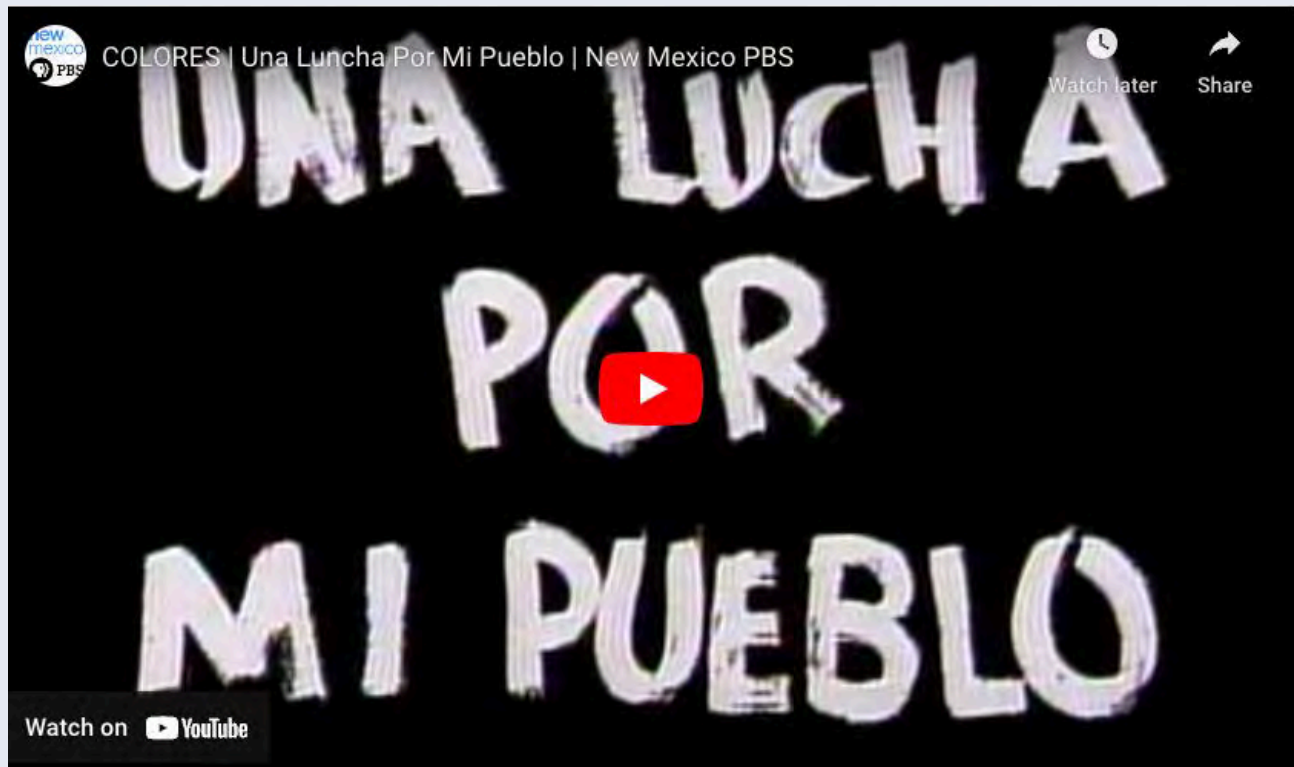
Land disputes in Tierra Amarilla again raged in the mid-1980s. Based on Spanish and Mexican documentation, Amador Flores asserted his family's right to 600 acres of land claimed by an Arizona development company. In this photograph, his twenty-year-old son Raúl guards the entrance to the Flores camp at Tierra Amarilla in May 1988.

Courtesy of Larry Beckner

In the political realm, participation in La [Mano Negra](#), Alianza, and community organizing groups led to increased activity among nuevomexicanos. Alianza and different groups involved with the national-level Chicano movement had supported the creation of [La Raza Unida Party](#) in south Texas in the late 1960s. A New Mexico chapter of the party was formed in late 1971 and its adherents actively participated in the national conventions. The party had a presence in Bernalillo, Doña Ana, Grant, Lea, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, San Miguel, Taos, and Union counties. Local groups tended to focus on the issues that were most critical to them. For example, in Rio Arriba and Union counties, party members focused on police brutality while labor issues were the main concern in Taos County. In San Miguel county, Marxist ideologies influenced party members

who also participated in the Socialist Workers Party movement.

What were the land struggles faced by the Flores family?



Sydney Brink (photographer). Courtesy of [Palace of the Governors Photo Archives](#) (NMHM/DCA), No. HP.2014.14.470.

In the course of four generations of the Flores family, they have fought against the documentation made by outsiders trying to take control of their land. Pictured here are four generations of the Flores family asserting their rights to the land grant commons in Tierra Amarilla in the 1980s. Generations of history has been preserved due to the Flores family choosing to fight for what rightfully belongs to them.

Despite local fragmentation, affiliates of the Democratic and Republican parties considered the new third party a major threat. Established politicians prevented La Raza Unida Party from placing its candidates on the ballot by erecting bureaucratic obstacles. Most candidates ran write-in campaigns rather than bow to the pressure. [Juan José Peña](#), [Pedro Rodríguez](#), and [Manuel Archuleta](#) were among the earliest to campaign as members of La Raza Unida Party in New Mexico.

By the late 1970s, however, support for the third party waned as its candidates met with little electoral success. Only Otero, Rio Arriba, and San Miguel counties had active Raza Unida groups by the end of the decade. Still, the party also served to unite nuevomexicanos through cultural outreach. Artists Jesús Aragón and Francisco LeFebre contributed to the effort by creating silkscreen posters, woodcuts, and flags that broadcast the symbol their icon “La Familia” and party slogans. [Roberto Archuleta](#) organized [El Teatro Norteño](#) as a traveling troupe that presented Chicano- and [nuevomexicano](#)-themed plays throughout the state.

Labor organization and nuevomexicano opposition to the Vietnam War also grew out of La Raza Unida. The party’s labor committee and Chicano activists supported strikes throughout the state in the 1970s in an effort to secure improved working conditions for nuevomexicanos. Striking sanitation workers in Artesia enjoyed the support of Chicano organizations throughout the state, as well as from César Chávez, who visited the strikers several times in support of their action. The eventual settlement with the sanitation department achieved the strikers’ goals.



This photograph shows José Angel Gutiérrez, Reies López Tijerina, and Rudolfo “Corky” González at the initial convention of the Raza Unida Party in El Paso in 1972.

Courtesy of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center

Chicano students at the University of New Mexico and Highlands University in Las Vegas formed a strong presence in opposition to the Vietnam War and in support of cultural studies programs. In all, the efforts of Chicano civil rights activists had a significant impact on New Mexico in terms of access to land, resources, and the political system—even if the result was not the one envisioned by Tijerina and land grant activists in the 1960s.

African American Rights

Although the national Chicano movement formed in the context of the gains made by African American civil rights activists in the early 1950s and Alianza followed some of the tactics initiated by black civil rights leaders, in New Mexico black civil rights advocates followed the lead of hispano activists. Such was the case due to the small number of African Americans in New Mexico. By some estimates, they never accounted for more than three percent of the state's population during the period between 1950 and 1970.

Historian George M. Cooper has suggested that the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision was not a significant watershed for New Mexico's African American communities precisely because their numbers were so small. Not only were they few in number, but they were spread out in cities and towns throughout the state. Their separation meant that presenting a unified front was more difficult than was the case for nuevomexicanos or for African American activists in the Deep South.



This photograph shows a class of students, including African Americans, in Albuquerque's Third Ward in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Courtesy of Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico

Additionally, as mentioned in the introduction, many New Mexican towns began to integrate schools prior to *Brown v. Board*. In Hobbs and Carlsbad, accreditation and a desire to conserve municipal funds were central to that decision.

In Albuquerque, the state's largest city with the largest percentage of African American residents, de jure segregation of schools had never existed. In his 1969 report on blacks in Albuquerque, activist and Black Power advocate Roger W. Banks declared that the lack of segregated schools was not due to Albuquerque residents' tendency toward integration. On the contrary, in the 1930s Albuquerque Public Schools had attempted to open a separate school for the city's African American children but black families "refused this invitation to segregate themselves."¹⁶

Black students in Albuquerque Public Schools sat at the back of classrooms and were forced to line up separately during commencement ceremonies. They were

placed as a group at the center of the graduation procession to prevent them from leading their graduating class into or out of the arena in which the ceremonies were held.

Banks argued that Albuquerque's chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was a defensive, rather than an offensive, organization. It had been founded in 1915 to address the concerns of the local black community; access to education was among the first issues addressed. That same year, the NAACP challenged the University of New Mexico's policy of excluding African Americans by funding Birdie Hardin's admission application. Hardin's application was rejected, but through the organization's persistence, Romero Lewis became the first black student of UNM in 1921.

In the late-1940s, UNM became the focal point of a campaign to end racial discrimination in Albuquerque. On September 12, 1947, the editor of the student newspaper, *The New Mexico Lobo*, sent black student [George Long](#) and a reporter to Oklahoma Joe's, a café near campus. The wait staff at the café refused service to the pair on the basis of Long's race, and the *Lobo* published an account of the incident in its [September 19](#) issue. The publicity given to Long's experience, including a follow-up letter to the editor in the [September 23](#) *Lobo*, initiated events that resulted in the passage of Albuquerque's anti-discrimination ordinance in 1952.

George Long, *Law*
Ramon Lopes, *Law*
William C. Marchiondo, *Law*
Richard P. McGlamery, *Law*
Robert B. McKechan, *Law*

Irving E. Moore, *Law*
George M. Murphy, *Law*
Richard A. Parsons, *Law*
James C. Ritchie, *Law*
Ruben Rodriguez, *Law*

Haskell Rosebrough, *Law*
Jay Rosenbaum, *Law*
Monte Howden, *Law*
Alexander Scresses, *Law*
John L. Sheldon, *Law*



The College of Law

Yearbook photograph of George Long during his time at UNM's law school. Long was at the center of the effort to end racial segregation in Albuquerque—achieved with the 1953 city ordinance that prohibited segregation in public businesses.

Courtesy of University of New Mexico, Mirage Publication 1950

In the fall 1953 edition of the NAACP publication, *Crisis*, Long published an account of what had been dubbed “The George Long Incident.” Following the *Lobo's* report, “a sizable group of irate students on campus” came together to demand that the student council convene to take action. When a special session of the student council met on September 18, the leaders declined to act on the issue of racial discrimination due to the “unimportance” of the issue, yet they did create a special investigation committee to further study the problem.¹⁷

Joe Fiensiler, owner of Oklahoma Joe's, justified the actions of his staff by claiming that the café's policy was in accordance with the practices of UNM fraternities. The investigating committee and student council seemed content with his response, but a majority of the student body refused to let the matter

die. A voluntary student boycott of Oklahoma Joe's, and subsequently a nearby Walgreens store, inspired a temporary change in the two establishments' policies.

During the Walgreens boycott in January 1948, African American participants organized a student chapter of the NAACP. [Herbert Wright](#), who later became the NAACP's national youth director, became the chapter's first president.

Wright and other members of the student chapter quickly realized that the boycott's success was limited. Only two businesses had been impacted, and they had not committed to long-term anti-discrimination policies. Wright proposed a campaign for a city-wide anti-discrimination ordinance, based on similar legislation that had already been established in Portland, Oregon. With the support of the Albuquerque NAACP, the students worked to adjust the Portland law to the needs of Albuquerque.

Between June of 1948 and February of 1952, when the Albuquerque city council adopted the anti-discrimination ordinance, Wright and NAACP supporters worked tirelessly to advocate for the measure. Groups like the Ministerial Alliance, the G. I. Forum, labor unions, and the Catholic Archdiocese added their support for the legislation. Based on city council suggestions, Long, who had entered UNM's law school, redrafted the ordinance several times before a final version was accepted.



Herbert Wright, at age 82. In 1948, he became the head of the first student chapter of the NAACP at UNM. Later, he became national youth secretary of the NAACP and he debated Malcolm X on several occasions in the 1960s.

Courtesy of Carol Kaliff, The Danbury News-Times. © Hearst Connecticut Media Group

Even after the wording had been finetuned, hurdles remained. In mid-October 1950 the city council appointed a special committee to investigate the extent of discrimination in Albuquerque. When the committee's report reached the city council in November of 1951, it had concluded that discrimination in public places was minimal except "as regards members of the Negro race."¹⁸ Committee members also reported that discrimination against African Americans was increasing and most members of the community supported the proposed legislation.

Despite a few impassioned speeches delivered in opposition to the measure during public readings of the bill, the ordinance became law on February 15, 1952. In its final form, the ordinance "prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin or ancestry" in "places of public accommodation."¹⁹ Violators of the law were to be charged with a misdemeanor and fined between one hundred and three hundred dollars, depending on the severity of the offense.

By Long's own account, within the first two years of the ordinance's passage the vast majority of local businesses complied with its provisions, although there previously "were numerous public places that staunchly refused to serve Negroes no matter how many appeals were made to serve them."²⁰ In his 1953 article, he also wrote that the struggle was far from over. Equal rights in terms of employment and housing had not yet been accomplished for African Americans in New Mexico. Indeed, written covenants in many of Albuquerque's subdivisions prohibited black residents and they remained on the books into the 1970s.

The South Broadway region of the city, also known as Census Tract Thirteen, was the place that most of the city's African Americans inhabited. Most of them were of the working class, but some opened businesses including barber shops, cleaners, shoeshine



Grant Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church was the first African American church in New Mexico. It was organized in 1883, during the territorial period. Originally located on Coal Avenue, it relocated to its present location at 1720 Claremont NE.

Courtesy of Blackpast.org

eastern edge while the western border was defined by the railroad tracks that ran south of the present-day Alvarado transit center in downtown Albuquerque. Although Banks recognized the accomplishments achieved by the local NAACP, he also emphasized the fact that the anti-discrimination ordinance addressed middle-class concerns without taking the plight of working class blacks into consideration.

parlors, and nightclubs. The first black church, the [Grant Chapel AME Church](#), was also located there.

Activist Roger W. Banks referred to the South Broadway neighborhood as a space “between the tracks and the freeway.” Interstate 25 marked its



African American men and women taught at Albuquerque's Technical Vocational Institute (TVI—today Central New Mexico Community College) since its inception in 1965. The school stood as an example of integrated higher education in New Mexico.

Courtesy of Central New Mexico Community College

Later analysts cite African Americans' small numbers in explaining the relatively low profile of their activism in New Mexico during the civil rights era. Banks' focus on class divisions, however, posits an alternate interpretation. He acknowledges that African Americans' meager numbers kept them from being fully included in New Mexico's political system. As the NAACP assumed a more active profile in Albuquerque during the 1950s, however, blacks in other towns in the state continued to face discrimination on a daily basis—especially in [Little Texas](#).

Middle class blacks in Albuquerque had “become culturally, emotionally, economically, and geographically part of the white community,” according to

Banks.²¹ Because of their economic affinity with whites and nuevomexicanos, they were not in a position to address the concerns of working class African Americans who comprised the majority of New Mexico's black community.

Among the concerns of working class African Americans were the desire to find gainful employment, receive educational opportunities, and thus break the cycle of poverty. Such concerns prevented African Americans in Census Tract Thirteen from joining Albuquerque's social and political circles in the way that middle class blacks had done. For most of the neighborhood's residents, poverty and transience defined daily life.

National civil rights militancy, including events in [Watts](#), Atlanta, Washington, D.C, and Alianza's occupation of sections of the Carson National Forest, soured white Albuquerque residents' opinions of their African American neighbors in the mid-1960s. As a result of such perceptions, opportunities for education, decent housing, and employment diminished in Albuquerque during the 1960s. Throughout that decade, the unemployment rate for African Americans hovered at about eight percent—a figure that was twice that of the white unemployment rate.

In 1969, Banks painted a picture of Albuquerque blacks who were becoming increasingly frustrated with negative perceptions of them based on national events rather than anything they had actually done or said. His purpose was to



Despite the persistence of New Mexico's tri-cultural myth that places most emphasis on nuevomexicanos, Pueblos, and Anglos, African Americans maintained an important presence at TVI as students in order to gain new skills and economic opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s. *Courtesy of Central New Mexico Community College*

advocate for the rise of more militant, Black Power actions in Albuquerque, and the problems he highlighted in his report were very real. Many African Americans in New Mexico took public action to alleviate the situation, and in 1963 the Albuquerque city council passed a [Fair Housing Practices](#) law to end discriminatory practices like the creation of covenants and riders that banned blacks from certain neighborhoods.

On March 27, 1960, in the small southeastern New Mexico town of Hobbs, college-age African Americans staged a sit-in at the McLellan store's soda fountain. Their action came just less than two months after the more well-known sit-in at [Greensboro, North Carolina](#). The local NAACP chapter (by the early 1960s, Hobbs, Roswell, Carlsbad, and Las Cruces also had an NAACP presence) supported legal actions, rather than public protest or demonstrations. Despite the lack of other civil rights organizations, like the Urban League or the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), New Mexican blacks demonstrated when opportunities arose.

The Hobbs sit-in only lasted for about fifteen minutes, but it generated a discussion about race and discrimination. Bud Peters, the manager on duty at the McLellan store, reported that “a couple of white customers left and that two white women got up and stood behind their husbands while the blacks remained at the counter.”²²

As historian George M. Cooper has pointed out, the coverage of the sit-in by the *Hobbs Daily News-Sun* was troubling at best. A brief account of the demonstration occupied the front page spot that was typically reserved for the lead story. The article did not include a headline. Adjacent to it on the page, an Associate Press release appeared, also with no headline, which recounted Ku Klux Klan retaliation against protesters in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. Cooper concludes that the juxtaposition was “more of a warning to the students who participated in the sit-in at Hobbs than a serious attempt at reportage.”²³

WILL HARRISON'S
**Inside
the
Capital**

Hobbs Daily News-Sun

Only Newspaper
in New Mexico
With Wirephoto

VOL. 34, NO. 42

HOBBS, NEW MEXICO MONDAY, MARCH 28, 1960

DAILY 5 CENTS; SUNDAY 15 CENTS

Sitdown Spreads to Hobbs

Three Blasts Occur Before Air Fatalities

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. (AP)—Three blasts in separate sections of Oklahoma City today were the first in a series of sit-downs which took place in the state.

The legal department in a letter Wednesday said that the law applied to all legislative members of state legislatures.

Official records in the office of Secretary of State Billy Patton show the following legislative bills on house floor:

CRUCES SENATE
HEADS STATE BOARD
Sen. John Hutchinson of Los Alamos, president; board of education, New Mexico State University.

Rep. Carl Tamm of Houston, president; board of regents, New Mexico State University.

Rep. Max Adams of Houston, member of board of New Mexico State School.

SHREVEPORT
AND CROWBY
Rep. Robert Evans of Alamosa County, member state auxiliary board.

Rep. Bill Coffey of San Miguel, member state auxiliary board.

Rep. R. H. Wain of Hidalgo, member state commission.

COLFAX SENATE
ON FAIR BOARD
Sen. William Gallagher of Colfax, member of state fair board.

Sen. Tito Chavez of El Paso, member state auxiliary board.

Rep. Dale Teet of Alamogordo, member of board of the school for the Visually Handicapped.

Sen. Fabian Chavez of Santa Fe, member capital building improvement committee. Chavez said the governor asked him to step up.

CAMPBELL, LUNN
KUN OFF BOARD
Effect of the option was to run Campbell and Lunn off the finance board and three legislators off the state board of educational finance.

Sen. Carlos Meloy of Las Vegas, Sen. Leroy Goodall of Moriarty, Sen. Bill Wheatley of Clayton.

Presence of the legislators on the boards after their membership was held illegal by the attorney general could not be legally held actions in such cases as bond issues and contracts, and an action in which the legislative members' votes had been the deciding ones.



REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (center) and other leaders of the sit-in at the McLellan store's soda fountain in Hobbs, N.M., are seen in this photo.

Far East Airmen Visit in Hobbs

By BARTHELMY MORRIS
Guests in the homes of 31st and 32nd, Joe St. Francis, 3223 Indian Road, yesterday were their counterparts, a captain in the United States Air Force, and two Vietnamese Air Force officers, who left today.

The Vietnamese officers, Capt. Nguyen Van Hanh, and Lt. Vuong Van Hiep, were accompanied by their wives and children.

Senate Group Turns Wrath Against Hoffa

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Senate labor committee today indicted the unions and expelled members in using any leverage to bring any leverage to force any union to accept any terms, during which it repeatedly called him a disloyal and traitorous Communist.

The committee also announced a plan to set up a special committee to investigate the activities of James H. Hoffa and a number of other union leaders.

During these points of knowledge, during which it repeatedly called him a disloyal and traitorous Communist, the committee also announced a plan to set up a special committee to investigate the activities of James H. Hoffa and a number of other union leaders.

Engineering Soon To Start on Big Highway Project

Engineering is to begin soon on a \$100 million project designed to build a four-lane highway from the Mesquite Creek through Hobbs, N.M., to the Texas border, State Highway Commissioner John S. Hester said today.

The project is one of the most important in the state's history, and will provide a major link between the city and the Texas border.

The Highway Commission, which authorized the project, is expected to start work on the project in about 10 to 15 days.

The project is one of the most important in the state's history, and will provide a major link between the city and the Texas border.

Negroes Seek Food Service At Store Here

About 10 young Negroes sat down briefly at the McLellan Store fountain in the Bel Aire Shopping Center yesterday, but no trouble resulted, officials of the firm said today.

The group left the store after an estimated 10 or 15 minutes, without being served.

The group included both men and women, of "college age," and that they, before the sit-down, who was on duty at the time.

"They came in and sat down. The 201 in the fountain didn't move, we were very nice, we wouldn't serve them at all. The fountain didn't move, we were very nice, we wouldn't serve them at all. The fountain didn't move, we were very nice, we wouldn't serve them at all."

The Negroes asked an official if they could be served at the fountain. He said they could not be served at the fountain.

The group was on vacation, and they said they would be back in the city in about 10 or 15 minutes after the sit-down.

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Klans in Dixie Burn Crosses

The Dixie Klans in Dixie burned crosses in the city of Hobbs, N.M., on Monday night.

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Front page of the Hobbs Daily News-Sun, March 28, 1960, with an article on the sit-in at the McLellan store's soda fountain.

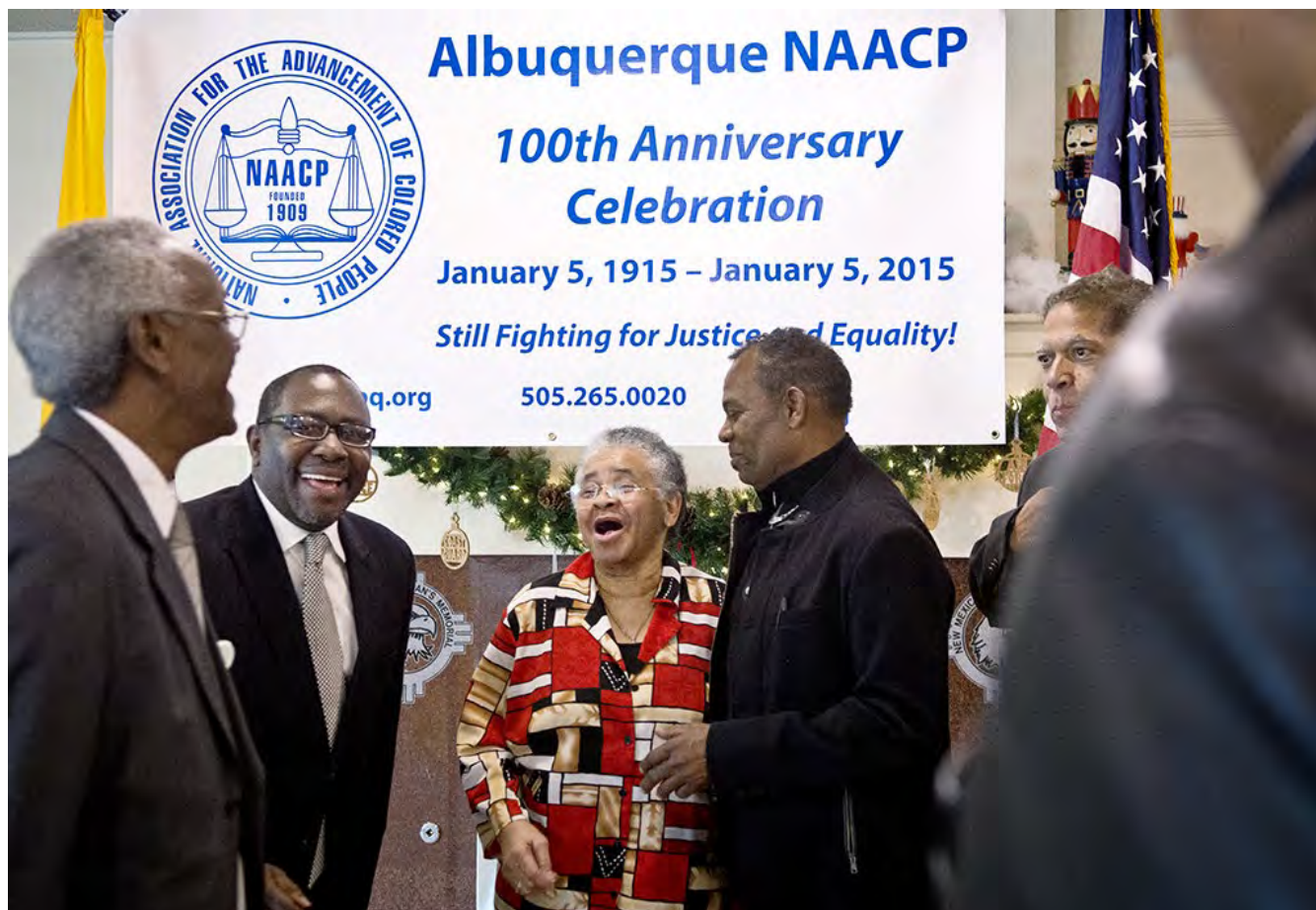
Courtesy of Hobbs Daily News-Sun

The situation in Hobbs highlighted a reality that all African Americans understood well in the early 1960s. The end of school segregation and the proposal of anti-discrimination ordinances were only first steps toward full equality before the law. Those who had staged the sit-in joined members of the Hobbs NAACP in advocating for legislation against discrimination at the municipal level. Their struggle eventually resulted in the eventual integration of Hobbs at the social level a few years later. For example, the requirement that African Americans enter the homes of whites through separate entrances was invalidated through such efforts.

Tensions between Chicano and African American Activists also characterized the period between 1950 and 1970. Despite the presence of Dr. Alton Davis, the black president of the American Emancipation Centennial, as the keynote speaker of Alianza's first annual meeting and Tijerina's work with Martin

Luther King, Jr. and the Poor People's Campaign, many nuevomexicanos believed that the subjugation of African Americans was not the same as the oppression that they faced themselves.

In a 2008 comment, meant to capture the feeling of the previous generation, Fernando C. de Baca remarked: "The truth is that Hispanics came here as conquerors, African Americans came here as slaves. . . . Hispanics consider themselves above blacks."²⁴ Although C. de Baca certainly did not speak for all nuevomexicanos of his father's generation, his comment captures the sense of distrust that remained between African Americans and hispanos in New Mexico, even as some individuals of the two ethnic groups tried to foster cooperation in support of civil rights for all.



In January 2015, the Albuquerque chapter of the NAACP celebrated its 100th anniversary. L to R: Harold Bailey, Jesse Dompfeh, E. Lena Brown, Josef Powdrell and Joseph Frank Dabney.

Courtesy of the Albuquerque Journal

Placed in the context of their extremely small numbers, the civil rights

achievements of African American activists in New Mexico are striking. Unfortunately, their struggle and the struggle of Chicanos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, women, and LGBT people for equality before the law continues.

Civil Rights Struggle Continues

WITH XETURAH WOODLEY, PH.D.



Indigenous Peoples' Civil Rights

As in the case of African American civil rights in New Mexico, Native Americans utilized the legal system to assert their rights to equal treatment before the law. Also, as was the case for Chicanos, access to land and resources lay at the center of Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache civil rights activism in the period between 1950 and 1970. Most of New Mexico's Native Americans did not participate in the more militant manifestations of the civil rights era, such as the Red Power movement or the [American Indian Movement](#) (AIM), but they used other methods to advocate for equal treatment before the law and status as U.S. citizens.

As historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz has argued, during the Civil Rights Era “Pueblos stuck to their method of defending their rights, making considerable gains, such as the return of Taos’s sacred Blue Lake.”²⁵ For centuries, since the Spanish Reconquest of New Mexico, most Pueblo people preferred to work within current legal and political systems to preserve their right to lands, resources, and cultural identity. Their ability to do so should not be underestimated: they have endured three colonial impositions under Spanish, Mexican, and then U.S. administration.

In the 1920s, Pueblo peoples re-established the [All Indian Pueblo Council](#) (AIPC) to defend their lands and access to crucial resources like water and timber. Their efforts in the early twentieth century resulted in the [1924 Pueblo Lands Act](#). Interestingly,

[John Collier](#) participated as a field worker in the battle to achieve passage of that legislation, an act that propelled him to the position of BIA director in the Roosevelt administration.



This logo was created in the 1970s to represent the All Indian Pueblo Council, a pan-Pueblo organization that worked to preserve and restore rights to sacred lands and resources.

Courtesy of Indian Pueblo Cultural Center

Pueblo concerns of the 1920s and the Depression era did not abate following World War II. As was the case with many [nuevomexicano](#) villages, Pueblos faced depopulation due to the increasing need to relocate to towns and cities that offered more employment opportunities than could be found within Pueblos themselves. Also, as was noted in Chapter 14, atomic developments in New Mexico appropriated Native peoples' lands and resources—in the form of land for Los Alamos National Laboratories (LANL) and for the extraction of uranium.

As people moved away from nuevomexicano villages and Pueblo towns, tax revenues decreased resulting in lower funding for education and health care. Due to such developments, Dunbar-Ortiz concluded that “northern New Mexico had been brought into the mainstream of the American economic system and it resembled other depressed rural areas of the United States—parts of the Deep South and Appalachia, for example.”²⁶ In furthering this perspective, Dunbar-Ortiz highlights the continued legacies of colonialism in New Mexico.

The AIPC successfully advocated for the return of Blue Lake to Taos Pueblo in 1971, but their achievement was hard fought. Several witnesses who testified before the Senate Subcommittee worried that the return of Blue Lake would set

a “dangerous precedent.”²⁷ Senators finally reached the conclusion that the Taos case was sufficiently unusual to bar the creation of a precedent, and the measure succeeded.

Under the terms of an executive order signed by President [Theodore Roosevelt](#) in 1906 that designated the area as part of the Carson National Forest, Taos Pueblo had lost all rights to Blue Lake. As soon as the order was issued, Pueblo leadership initiated a legal battle to regain rights over the sacred landscape.

Although opponents argued that Taos Pueblo had no legal claim on Blue Lake, the Taos Pueblo Council referenced the provisions of the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#) as evidence of their centuries’ old legal right to the area. The treaty guaranteed land titles from the Spanish and Mexican eras. In a 1955 press release, the council cited a passage from the *Recopilación de las Leyes de las Indias* as evidence that the Spanish Crown had granted them control over Blue Lake.

As had been the case for Alianza, claims based on the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo](#) were not readily recognized by the twentieth-century U.S. legal system. Rather than turn to militancy, however, members of Taos Pueblo continued their patient appeals to the U.S. Congress as a means of regaining their sacred site. They also initiated a campaign to inspire public support for their claim, based on the notion of religious freedom—an idea that resonated with many Americans in the 1950s and 1960s.

As stated by [Severino Martínez](#), Taos Pueblo Governor in the late 1950s:

Blue Lake is the most important of all our shrines because it is part of our life, it is our Indian church, we go there for good reason, like any other people would go to their denomination and like a shrine in Italy where the capital of the Roman Catholics worship is different: people go visit and give their humble words to God in any language that they speak. It is the same principle at the Blue Lake, we go over there and talk to our Great Spirit in our own language and talk to Nature and what is going to grow, and ask God

Almighty, like anyone else would do.²⁸

Between 1966 and 1971, a series of hearings transpired in both the House and Senate to decide the issue. Congress also conducted investigations into the economic and social situation faced by Native Americans across the nation generally. In early 1970, public opinion focused on the poor conditions endured on Indian Reservations, and, as stated by New Mexico Senator [Clinton P. Anderson](#), “the Blue Lake Claim has become a symbol of American Indians’ plight.”²⁹

Despite Anderson’s sympathy to the Taos claim, the bill he sponsored in the Senate was seen as a compromise measure. His proposal did not include the 48,000 acre watershed connected to the lake, a crucial part of the claim to Taos Pueblo people. Accordingly, the Taos Pueblo Council threw its support behind a bill proposed in the House that included their full claim. By the spring of 1970s, they secured the backing of six senators, including [George McGovern](#) of South Dakota, who served as chairman of the Senate Subcommittee of Indian Affairs.

Unwilling to leave the issue in the hands of the Congress, members of the pueblo initiated a mass media campaign to gain public support for their claims. They wrote hundreds of letters in a coordinated effort to pressure Congress to act. Archbishop of Santa Fe [James Peter Davis](#), political cartoonist [William “Bill” Mauldin](#), photographer [Eliot Porter](#), and former director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs John Collier joined a national Blue Lake support committee to publicize the issue. [Kim Agnew](#), the fourteen-year-old daughter of Vice President [Spiro Agnew](#), rode horses with a group of Pueblo People in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to further publicize Taos Pueblo’s struggle for Blue Lake. Such efforts at promotion paid off; the story of their claim appeared on national television and in the [New York Times](#) and *Washington Post*.

In December of 1970, Anderson’s compromise measure met defeat in the Senate, opening the way for the House bill to come to a vote. In early 1971,



This photograph shows the Presidential ceremony in which Richard Nixon signed the bill that returned Blue Lake to Taos Pueblo, December 15, 1970.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

conditions of poverty. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, several of New Mexico's Native American groups began to investigate the prospect of gaming and tourism to boost their tribal economies and to promote self-determination. The Mescalero Apache people under the leadership of [Wendell Chino](#) were among the most successful.

Chino rose to a leadership position within the Mescalero tribe during the 1950s, a period of time during which federal policies toward Native Americans had turned toward the

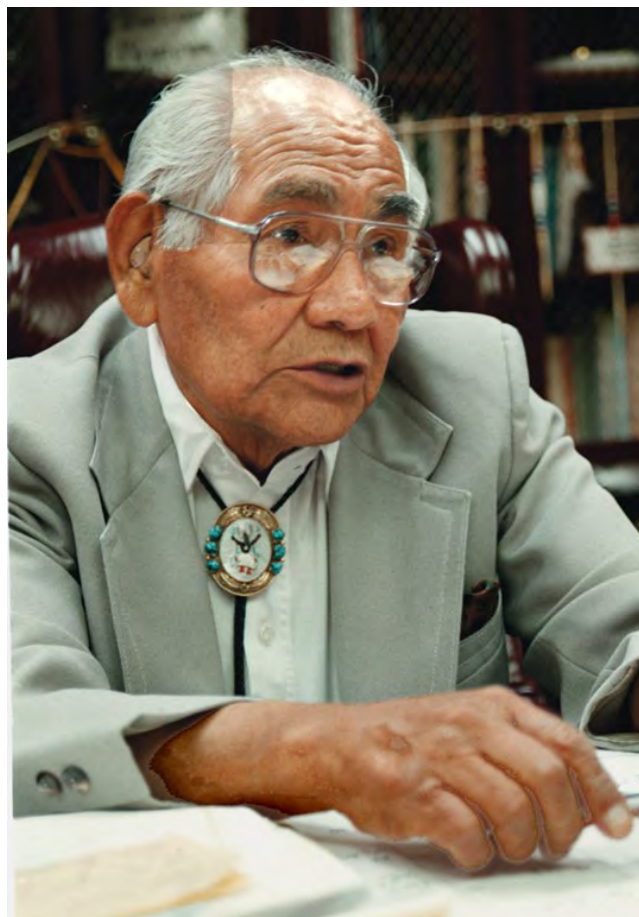
both houses of Congress voted overwhelmingly to support Taos Pueblo's full claim to Blue Lake and the surrounding watershed. In the Senate, the bill passed by a measure of seventy to twelve, illustrating the impact of the pueblo's publicity campaign in popularizing the conflict. Then, on August 14 and 15, 1971, the people of Taos Pueblo celebrated their victory by inviting outsiders to participate in festivities that included traditional dances and feasts, as well as commemorative speeches.

For Taos Pueblo and the AIPC, the return of Blue Lake marked a major civil rights victory, but Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache peoples continued to face

termination of the responsibility to protect Native trusts and self-determination that had been secured in the 1934 [Indian Reorganization Act](#). A descendant of both Mescalero and Chiricahua ancestors, Chino was raised in a Christian household and became an ordained minister in his early twenties. Still, he possessed a clear understanding of and respect for Apache traditions.

His work as a minister prepared him to communicate his ideas clearly to people of different backgrounds. With the exception of a single four-year period, Chino served as the elected head of the Mescalero people continuously from 1953 until his death in 1998. His lengthy tenure was uncommon among Native American peoples, so much so that historians Joseph P. Sánchez, Robert L. Spude, and Art Gómez characterized Chino as “the autocratic chairman of the Mescalero Apache Tribal Council.”³⁰ As Myla Vicenti Carpio and Peter Iverson have noted, he never shied from decisions that he felt would benefit the Mescalero people. As Chino himself remarked, “Too many tribal leaders want consensus because they’re afraid to exercise real leadership.”³¹

Central to all of Chino’s leadership decisions was the drive to maintain and expand Mescalero self-



Considered autocratic by his critics, Chino served as the Chairman of the Mescalero Tribal Council from 1953 until his death in 1998. He consistently sought to preserve Mescalero self-determination by solidifying the tribe’s economic base.

Courtesy of the Albuquerque Journal

Leaders Carving Out a
Brighter Future

determination over their own political, social, and political affairs. Early in his political career, he resolved to support measures that would bring income to the Mescalero reservation, a place isolated from principal transportation corridors in south-central New Mexico. In the late 1950s, he worked with other members of the tribal council to create [Apache Summit](#), a modest development geared to bring tourists to Mescalero lands during the ski season. When it opened, Apache Summit included a small motel, restaurant, and curio shop. The Mescalero tribe borrowed \$200,000 dollars to construct the facility.

From fighting for the Tribal Watershed, rising from poverty, and the erupting story of nuclear waste storage, learn about the efforts of Tribal Leaders in New Mexico:

- [Paul Bernal, 92; Fought for Tribal Watershed](#)
- [Flip-flop on storing nuclear waste shakes up tribe](#)
- [Wendell Chino, raising the Mescalero Apache Nation from poverty](#)

Early successes caused the Mescalero tribal council to take out further loans and construct new ski facilities and a large hotel. The [Inn of the Mountain Gods](#) opened in 1966, and it represented the connection between notions of self-determination and economic development. Along with the hotel, the resort included a golf course and two man-made lakes. Water to fill the lakes was pumped from one side of the reservation to the other, an action that drew criticism from the New Mexico State Engineer. Chino filed a lawsuit on behalf of the tribe, and argued “this is the aboriginal home of the Mescaleros. This is Apache Water.”³² A federal appeals court sided with the Mescaleros and the development went forward over the protests of the state engineer.



Despite the economic troubles of recent years, the Inn of the Mountain Gods continues to stand as one of Wendell Chino's most tangible legacies among the Mescalero people.

Courtesy of Jen Eastwood

As Chino initiated plans to diversify the Mescalero economy through the reintroduction of elk and fewer restrictions on hunting and fishing within reservation lands, the tribe once again came into direct conflict with state agencies. New Mexico's Fish and Game Bureau continued to enforce state regulations on Mescalero lands until the tribe filed another suit against the state. In 1983, the Mescaleros once again emerged victorious.

Based on Chino's continued reelection to tribal leadership, most Mescaleros seem to have supported his focus on self-determination. Yet by the early 1990s, many began to raise the question of the environmental and cultural costs of the

measures that Chino so staunchly supported. The opposition gained traction when Chino supported an initiative to store nuclear waste on Mescalero lands.

Chino and supporters of the proposal on the tribal council referred to nuclear waste storage as an excellent opportunity to diversify the Mescalero economy. In their words, the initiative was “in the best interest of tribal people, utilizing the best technological knowledge and expertise in the nuclear waste field.”³³

The Mescalero people did not share these sentiments. On January 31, 1995, a tribal vote defeated the measure by a [490 to 362 vote](#). Despite the defeat, Chino and his supporters circulated a petition that called for another vote on the issue. The second vote reversed the decision, passing the proposal by a measure of [593 to 372](#). Almost immediately after the election, opponents accused supporters of corruption. They alleged that tribal members had been promised a payment of \$2,000 each if the measure passed. Additionally, members of the opposition, including some traditional female Mescalero leaders, reportedly received threats and harassment by the measure’s proponents. [Rufina Marie Laws](#) and [Joseph Geronimo](#) were among those who endured such treatment.

State officials, including New Mexico Attorney General Tom Udall, opposed the nuclear waste proposal and spoke out against the second vote. Udall believed that “tribal leadership [had] strong-armed members” to change the result.³⁴ Within the Mescalero tribe, the episode fostered factionalism, conflict, and bitterness. Former council vice president [Fred Peso](#) emerged as a staunch opponent of Chino’s leadership, but much of the controversy abated when several national utilities revoked their support for the proposed nuclear waste relocation project. When the Power Company of Minnesota backed out of the deal, Congress discontinued funding for the proposal.

The debate over nuclear waste storage on Mescalero lands underscores the difficult balancing act between efforts to preserve sovereignty and self-determination on Native American lands. In 1984 [Acoma Pueblo](#) became the first in New Mexico to use bingo as a means of raising tribal funds; following the a Supreme Court decision in [California v. Cabazon Band of Mission](#)

Indians in 1987, tribes across the country determined to build casinos as a means of economic revitalization.

Casinos

MARVIS ARAGON JR.



Just five months before his death, Chino testified before a Senate subcommittee that “our sovereignty means the inalienable right to govern ourselves.”³⁵ Although the means by which groups like the Mescaleros are able to promote their own economic well-being are often contested—even within the tribes themselves, proposals for new casinos or the storage of nuclear waste are often considered in terms of sovereignty and self-determination.

As the stories recounted in this chapter point out, civil rights efforts in New Mexico have taken various forms and achieved mixed results. Conflicts over access to land and resources are still part of daily life for nuevomexicanos, Pueblos, Apaches, and Navajos. The anti-discrimination measures of the 1950s and 1960s have contributed to increased opportunities for people of all racial

backgrounds in the state, but poverty and the need for additional educational and economic opportunities continue. Self-determination remains an important goal for nuevomexicanos and indigenous peoples throughout the state.

Explore 2010 U.S. Census Data on New Mexico

Use 2010 U.S. Census Data on New Mexico to consider the continued ethnic and gender diversity of New Mexico's people. [See this profile sheet](#) from census.gov and this [compilation of census data](#) by the University of New Mexico's Bureau of Business and Economic Research. What do the data suggest about the composition of New Mexico's populace, and the issues that will need resolution in the future? Despite New Mexico's diversity, the [tri-cultural myth](#) that began in the late-nineteenth century still shapes perceptions of ethnic relations in New Mexico. Why do you think that is the case?

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Chapter 16: Into the 21st Century

Into the 21st Century

Lowrider Culture

Rock Your Mocs

Indigenous Resistance Tour of UNM

Jemez Pueblo & Valles Caldera

Ending Remarks

Into the 21st Century



In 1997, eighty-five years after achieving statehood, the state legislature decided to commission a statue of [Po'pay](#) as the second piece from New Mexico to be included in the [National Statuary Hall Collection](#) in Washington, D.C. The first statue was a likeness of Senator [Dennis Chávez](#) that was donated to the collection in 1966.

In 1999, Jemez Pueblo sculptor [Cliff Fragua](#) received the commission to create the likeness of the leader of the [Pueblo Revolt](#) of 1680. After six years of work, the seven-foot statue created from pink Tennessee marble was unveiled. Fragua's own description of his portrayal of Po'pay is poignant enough to quote at length:

In my rendition, he holds in his hands items that will determine the future existence of the Pueblo people. The knotted cord in his left hand was used to determine when the Revolt would begin. As to how many knots were used is debatable, but I feel that it must have taken many days to plan and notify most of the Pueblos. The bear fetish in his right hand symbolizes the center of the Pueblo world, the Pueblo religion. The pot behind him symbolizes the Pueblo culture, and the deerskin he wears is a humble symbol of his status as a provider. The necklace that he wears is a constant reminder of where life began, and his clothing consists of a loincloth and moccasins in Pueblo fashion. His hair is cut in Pueblo tradition and bound in a chongo. On his back are the scars that remain from the whipping he received for his participation and faith in the Pueblo ceremonies and religion.¹

Clif Fragua

The presence of Po'pay's likeness in the nation's capital is a powerful testament to the resilience and fortitude of Pueblo peoples. Their vibrant traditions and stories have not only survived centuries of colonialism, but they continue to flourish. Indeed, if they were able to visit the present, figures like [Juan de Oñate](#) and General [James H. Carleton](#) would be surprised at the vibrancy of Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache cultures today. During their respective lifetimes, they believed that indigenous peoples were destined to fully assimilate into the colonial religious and social practices.

New Mexico's varied histories emphasize the value of understanding other groups of people on their own



In 1999, Jemez sculptor Cliff Fragua received the commission to create a statue of Po'pay for the Statuary Hall on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

terms. This region's past is complex and heavily contested. It remains a place that is conflicted between its roots in indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. stories. People of all ethnic backgrounds, not only Native American, Hispano, and [Anglo](#)-American have made New Mexico their home, and all have a unique perspective on the meaning of the place and its past.

He also created a companion statue that stands at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque.
Courtesy of Indian Pueblo Cultural Center

In this brief final chapter, I hope to emphasize once again that there is no such thing as “New Mexico History” in the singular. Instead, New Mexico's past is comprised of multiple stories and traditions. Conflict, accommodation, and resilience are among the central themes of these histories. Although the idea of tri-cultural harmony originally posited by Governor [L. Bradford Prince](#) in the late nineteenth century is problematic, New Mexico has long been a place where peoples of diverse worldviews have worked out their differences. At times intense violence has marked regional conflicts; at others compromise and accommodation carried the day.

As the people of New Mexico enter the twenty-first century and look toward the future, many problems persist. Poverty among rural [nuevomexicano](#) and Native American peoples has yet to be resolved. Atomic developments have devastated local environments. Yet New Mexico is also known as the Land of Enchantment, a place of beauty where differences are appreciated. The notion that New Mexicans—whatever their cultural or ethnic background—can work out divisive, harsh differences provides hope for the future. As we learn from our past, we are better able to understand one another and create a more harmonious society.

The descriptions, links, and videos that follow provide a lens into New Mexico in the early twenty-first century. Native American and [nuevomexicano](#) people continue to shape local society, even as they struggle to assert their rights to full U.S. citizenship. In terms of protecting and providing civil rights for all, much progress has been made. By learning the lessons of New Mexico's diverse histories, the future can be a place where new strides toward equality become a

reality.



This montage of New Mexico residents shows the diversity of the state's people.
Courtesy of Students, Faculty and Staff of Central New Mexico Community College

Lowrider Culture

Although there is some debate over the genesis of lowriders, L.A. native [Ron Aguirre](#) is often credited with pioneering the practice of adding hydraulics to automotive suspension systems. As one Dallas journalist pointed out, however, “If you go to Santa Fe there are some that would say [lowrider culture] began there. If you went to San Antonio they would say it began there. If you went to East L.A. they would say it was born there.”²

By the late 1970s, Española declared itself the lowrider capital of the world. Neighboring Chimayó is also noted as an epicenter of lowrider culture. No two lowrider vehicles are alike. Each is a manifestation of the beliefs, values, and image of its creator. Hispano men and women in New Mexico and throughout the Southwest began to create them as a manifestation of their unique heritage and place in U.S. culture following World War II. Lowriders are an art form.

What City is the Lowrider Capital of the World?



In 1999 Carmella Padilla published a study of New Mexico lowrider culture titled [Low 'n Slow: Lowriding in New Mexico](#). Jack Parsons contributed breathtaking photos of lowriders across northern New Mexican landscapes, and Juan Estevan Arellano's poems help readers connect to the spirit of lowrider culture. On the heels of an offensive political gaffe in which Governor Gary Johnson suggested that the creators of lowriders made him uncomfortable, and in conjunction with the publication of Padilla's book, the governor declared January 15-February 12, 1999, to be New Mexico Lowrider Month.

Additionally, in 1990 the Smithsonian Museum of American History acquired "[Dave's Dream](#)," a 1969 Ford LTD converted into a stunning lowrider by David Jaramillo of Chimayó and members of his family. Although he died before the car was fully finished, his wife and other family members completed the car as a tribute. In the early 1980s, the car won awards at regional and national car shows. Dave's Dream epitomizes the community and family orientation of Hispano lowrider culture in northern New Mexico.

Lowriders

WITH JASON GARCIA



Rock Your Mocs

In 2010, Jessica “Jaylyn” Atsye, a [Laguna](#) Pueblo teenager, called on Native Americans in New Mexico and across the country to celebrate their heritage by wearing their moccasins on November 15. When she first suggested to others [on Facebook](#) that indigenous peoples wear their moccasins to show their cultural pride, she could not have imagined that her initiative would become a worldwide event. The fourth annual Rock Your Mocs Event was held on November 15, 2014, with events at the [Indian Pueblo Cultural Center](#) and Balloon Fiesta Park, both in Albuquerque. [In 2015 Rock Your Mocs will transpire over an entire week, from November 8 to 15.](#)

Rock Your Mocs

WITH JESSICA “JAYLYN” ATSYE & MELISSA SANCHEZ



Indigenous Resistance Tour of UNM

Since the [1992 Columbus Day holiday](#) that marked 500 years since the [Genoese](#) sailor first encountered Native Americans in the Caribbean, indigenous peoples vocally and publicly opposed the celebration of Columbus Day as a relic of colonialism. As an alternative, they organized measures to rename the commemoration “[Indigenous Peoples’ Day](#)” and to recognize the resilience of Native American peoples on that day.

To mark Columbus Day 2014, Native American students at the University of New Mexico [organized a tour](#) of the campus that highlighted the presence of indigenous peoples’ claims to areas around the campus and the state. Their goal was to challenge the commemoration of Columbus’ actions and instead emphasize his historical initiation of violent colonialism and genocide. In doing so, participants highlighted centuries of ongoing Native American resistance against policies and programs that sought to erase their histories and cultural identities.

Columbus Day

WITH DAVID CORREIA, PH.D.



Should Columbus Day be renamed?



Jemez Pueblo & Valles Caldera

As the Rock Your Mocs event and Indigenous Peoples Tour of UNM presented two different ways of publicizing Native American rights and histories in New Mexico, the people of Jemez Pueblo continued a legal struggle to regain rights to the [Valles Caldera](#) nature preserve. On the official website of Jemez Pueblo, a section at the bottom requests donations to the [Valles Caldera Recovery Project](#). Until 2000 the land was privately owned. That year, the federal government purchased the area with the intention of placing it under the purview of the National Forest Service.

According to the Jemez people, however, Valles Caldera has always been a sacred site for their tribe. As the governor of the Pueblo stated in a 2014 interview, “the Valles Caldera is our church. It’s our Holy Land. This place is as important for us as the Vatican is for Catholics.”³ After a decade-long legal battle, a federal judge ruled against the Jemez claim in 2013. But at the [end of 2014](#), as the federal trust administered to the area neared its expiration date, the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned that decision.

At present, the Jemez Pueblo continues [the struggle to regain ownership](#) of their sacred space. Unlike the 1970s case when Taos Pueblo reclaimed Blue Lake, however, the Jemez people have not been able to create the same type of widespread public support for their position.

Feast Dances

WITH EMMETT “SHKEME” GARCIA



The actions of the Jemez Pueblo, Rock Your Mocs organizers, and Indigenous Peoples Resistance Tour all emphasize the continued resilience of New Mexico's Native peoples, as well as the stark reality that they still struggle to maintain their cultural identities and civil rights within the United States.

Wellness

WITH JUANITA C. TOLEDO



Ending Remarks



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FROM BRANDON MORGAN, PH.D.

In the early fall semester of 2013, Audrey Gramstad, Administrative Director of the Distance Learning department (DL) at Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), contacted me with a difficult question. She wanted to know whether or not I could write a New Mexico History textbook. At that point in time I had recently defended my doctoral dissertation and I was feeling ambitious, so I answered in the affirmative. Little did I know the level of research and writing work that such an endeavor would require. Without the help of more people than I can possibly name in this short section, this project would never have come about.

I enjoy research—particularly about the U.S. Southwest and the Mexican North. My dissertation (now book manuscript) deals with the closely connected histories of economic development and violence along the Chihuahua-New Mexico border between the 1880s and 1930s. To tell the truth, I was excited at the prospect of continuing a strong research agenda while I taught at CNM.

For a few months the project remained on the back burner as I considered how I might pursue it, and as I continued to complete my teaching schedule. Then, on March 8, 2014, I realized belatedly that the commemoration of Pancho Villa's Raid on the tiny town of Columbus, New Mexico, was to take place the following day. Feeling a bit sheepish (I mean this is my field of expertise—I should have been on top of it), I contacted Audrey who graciously made arrangements for Jacob Lujan (then a work-study employee, [now a Full-Time DL Technician](#)) to accompany me on a trip to document the commemoration. Sydney Gunthorpe, [Vice President of Academic Affairs](#), graciously provided the

funds—in conjunction with the DL budget, to travel on last-minute notice to attend the various commemorations. As noted later in this text, several different memorials that present different perspectives continue to this day each year in Columbus. Without the support of CNM administrators, including [President Katharine Winograd](#) who spearheaded the idea for this type of project, we would not have been able to capture the re-creation that takes place each year in Columbus.

Such is the story of how this e-text came to fruition. I was approached with the question of whether or not I could write it, and numerous people from CNM and outside institutions have supported me in the effort. Ever since I began to study New Mexico History, under the tutelage of UNM professors Samuel Truett and Durwood Ball, I have heard the common sentiment that existing textbooks on New Mexico History were not up to the task of undergraduate education. I hope that my attempt provides a fresh interpretation of the region's past.

As I've expressed below in Chapter 1, I fully realize that this work is not perfect—that it cannot possibly cover every perspective, event, or aspect of New Mexico's rich and widely varied past. No single book can. I hope, however, that this text will provide many avenues through which students can develop their critical analysis skills by undertaking new pursuits in New Mexico History. I am of the school of thought that firmly believes that no narrative can ever address all questions. Instead, I hope that this work inspires a series of new historical inquiries. If such is the case, my work will be fulfilled.

Early in the pursuit of the dream of an interactive, online New Mexico History text, CNM enlisted the aid of Trillium Productions. At Trillium, Roger Brown, Gaylon Emerzian, and Nelson Taruc provided constant attention to this endeavor. In particular, Gaylon spent countless hours that included numerous emails, trips to New Mexico, and time in front of a computer screen, dedicated to securing the numerous images, interviews, and interactive features that are included in this text. Additionally, researchers Debbie Busch, Kayleigh Madjar, Sam Rong, Barb Cameron, Adam deSantis, Ingrid Franca, Zach Silva, April

McDonnell, Joel Rao, Dominique Ochoa, and Kirby Barth aided in the quest for images that would compliment the text and, in many ways, offer their own perspectives on New Mexico's various histories.

Cathleen Kane of Direct Video in Albuquerque organized and produced the early video shoots that accompany the text. Jonathan Sims, himself a member of the Acoma Pueblo, was behind the camera at many of our interview sessions. Cathleen and Jonathan both have a great eye for video production, and Gaylon, with the support of her editing crew, including Sam Johnston, Alessandro Medici, and Marissa Cameron, transformed the raw footage into the rich interviews that you will find in the text.

Keith Dadey drew the maps, and I appreciate his flexibility and dedication to ensuring that each map is accurate for the time period that it portrays. Marissa Cameron and Barb Cameron aided him as members of the Trillium Graphics Crew. Finally, Roger Brown and Kirby Barth oversaw the acquisition of international images and figures. Without the dedication of all of the members of the Trillium Productions staff, this text would be nothing more than another static treatment of New Mexico History.

Cathleen and Gaylon were able to secure interviews with members of Acoma Pueblo, and they established a connection with Andrew Connors, curator of the Albuquerque Museum. They also brought Christine Sims, Vina Leno, Emmet Garcia, David Patterson, Marvis Aragon, Juanita Toledo, Melissa Sanchez, and Jaylyn Atsye into the project. Jacob Lujan brought Jason García on board. I called on many of my colleagues, including Paul A. Hutton, Bryan Turo, Matthew Martínez, Deena González, David Correia, David Holtby, and Xeturah Woodley, to provide their unique professional insights on different aspects of New Mexico's past. I am grateful for the contribution that each of these people provided.

Various members of CNM's Distance Learning department supported this project. Melanie Magdalena came on board as the Multimedia Specialist a few months into the project. Her expertise in multimedia, as well as project

management, proved invaluable to the timely completion of this text in its final form. I am also grateful that she was able to locate the InKling platform that has enabled the availability of this text across devices. Jacob Lujan has been involved with the project from the beginning. José Pedraza recorded the voiceovers for many of the videos. Gene Higgins copyedited sections of the text and wrote the chapter objectives. Matthew Padilla handled travel vouchers and navigated the administrative bureaucracy to enable Trillium Productions' participation in the project. Hallie Ray, Julie Good, Patricia Miera, and Glenys Thompson also provided behind-the-scenes support.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Jacobo Baca and Roland Rodríguez. Both were teaching as adjunct instructors during the year that I wrote this text, and both edited my work—not just for grammatical issues, but also to insure the soundness and validity of the historical interpretations. Jacobo and Roland are both experts in New Mexico and U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History. Despite the constraints on their time and resources (both were finishing their Ph.D. Dissertations and teaching when I asked them to edit this project), they provided excellent feedback and challenged my thinking on various aspects of New Mexico's histories. Without their support, the result would surely be lacking in rigor. Of course any mistakes or omissions are my sole responsibility.

My colleagues at CNM who also teach New Mexico History, including Kara Carroll, Ellen Cain, and Andy Russell, have also provided encouraging words along the way. Erica Volkers, the Dean of the school of Communications, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CHSS), graciously supported my year of course releases and other types of financial needs that allowed me to take the time required to write the text. I may sound like a broken record at this point, but I am so deeply grateful for the excellent institutional support that I received for every step of this project.

Students in my New Mexico History classes in the spring of 2015 were able to use a bare-bones version of the text in order to provide feedback and help me fix unwieldy prose. In particular, Ashley Flores, Reina Archuleta, Caitlin Coppotelli, and Leticia Topa contributed multiple choice questions that appear

in the final version of the e-text. I appreciate the great dedication of all of my students and their willingness to offer unique insights on New Mexico's past.

Finally, Pauline, Brent, Nathan, and Paige had to put up with an overly busy husband and father for the past couple of years. Without their understanding, love, and support this text would never have come to fruition.

¡Gracias a todos!

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Appendix

Remarks

Remarks

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Daniel J. "Buck" Chadborn Interview, in Jessie Peterson and Thelma Cox Knowles, eds., *Pancho Villa: Intimate Recollections by People Who Knew Him* (New York: Hastings House, 1977), 204; and Letter from Albert B. Fall to Sam Ravel, 14 September 1914, reel 38, Albert B. Fall Microfilm Collection, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico. In the letter, Fall explained to Ravel that although Figueroa had been operating as a Mexican Consular Official, he had no authority to do so from anyone except Villa.

Quotes from *Deming Headlight*, 28 August 1914, which ran a brief report of Villa's visit. The competing *Deming Graphic*, 28 August 1914, printed a much more extensive account of the event. That the *Graphic* was a bilingual paper, whereas the *Headlight* was not, perhaps helps to explain its extended account. Additionally, Seaman Guiney, a Deming resident that drove Villa from the rail depot to Camp Cody, the local National Guard installation, recalled Villa's trip through Deming in a 1980 interview with Virginia Measday. See, Virginia Measday and George Pete Measday, *History of Luna County, Supplement One* (Deming, N. Mex.: Luna County Historical Society, 1982), 56-57. All accounts

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Congress seem to have tempered his commitment to Progressivism, although he did offer the keynote speech at the first convention of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party in 1912. Indeed, his decision to leave the Republican Party in favor of the new third-party resulted in his failure to gain reelection to the Senate. See John Braeman, "Albert J. Beveridge and Statehood for the Southwest, 1902-1912" *Arizona and the West* 10, no. 4 (winter 1968): 313-342, especially the conclusion, p. 342.

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Quoted in *Ibid.*, 120-121.

John Nieto-Phillips, "Spanish American Ethnic Identity and New Mexico's Statehood Struggle," in Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and David R. Maciel, *The Contested Homeland: A Chicano History of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 120.

Maud Wright's story was published in several newspapers in the weeks following the raid. See, for example, *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, 10 March 1916; and *Deming Headlight*, 14 April 1916. Maud's story is also the prologue to Eileen Welsome, *The General and the Jaguar: Pershing's Hunt for Pancho Villa: A True Story of Revolution and Revenge* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009). Not long after her ordeal, Maud was reunited with her son Jonnie in El Paso, Texas.

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New York Times, 4 September 1871. Digitized article available at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9Fo5EoDD113EEE34BC4C53DFBF66838A669FDE>, accessed October 23, 2014.

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This is an example end note. You will find these associated with text and citations.