
Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War

BRIAN DELAY

IN THE SUMMER OF 1845, amid mounting concern that the United States and Mexico would go to war over Texas, the New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin* reported that a Comanche Indian force of “extraordinary magnitude” was preparing to descend upon the “weakened population” of northern Mexico. According to the editors, the whole of the Mexican north would soon be “engulfed in a terrible Indian war.” This fact would “powerfully influence political relations” and “would have to be considered as a new element in diplomatic calculations.” The translated article soon appeared in Mexican newspapers, including Durango’s *Registro Oficial*. The paper’s editors admitted that Comanches posed a tremendous threat, but blamed their “philanthropic” American neighbors for that. From Durango’s perspective, Americans were “impelling” and “inviting” Indians across the frontier, encouraging “the evils that always attend the depredations of the savage,” all with an eye to acquiring lands that excited the “insatiable greed” of the United States.¹

This cross-border conversation had a broad and tragic context. In the early 1830s, following what for most had been nearly two generations of imperfect peace, Comanches, Kiowas, Navajos, and several different tribes of Apaches dramatically increased their attacks upon northern Mexican settlements. While contexts and motivations varied widely, most of the escalating violence reflected Mexico’s declining military and diplomatic capabilities, as well as burgeoning markets for stolen livestock and captives. Indian men raided Mexican ranches, haciendas, and towns, killing or capturing the people they found there, and stealing or destroying animals and other property. When able, Mexicans responded by attacking their enemies with comparable cruelty and avarice. Raids expanded, breeding reprisals and deepening enmities, until the searing violence touched all or parts of nine states.

These events had powerful but virtually forgotten consequences for the course and outcome of the U.S.-Mexican War. In pursuing their own material, strategic, and cultural goals, indigenous polities in the Mexican north remade the ground upon which Mexico and the United States would compete in the mid-1840s. Raids and counter-raids claimed thousands of lives, ruined critical sectors of northern Mexico’s

I gratefully acknowledge those who have critiqued and encouraged this essay throughout its many incarnations: Fred Anderson, Dilia Angelova, John Coatsworth, Jonathan Conant, Bill Gienapp, Daniel Gutiérrez, Joanne Meyerowitz, Christopher Morris, Robert Schneider, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, David Weber, John Womack Jr., and the *AHR*’s anonymous readers and staff. I would also like to thank the donors, staff, faculty, and fellows of the Clements Center for Southwest Studies at Southern Methodist University, where I completed an important round of revisions on this article.

¹ *El Registro Oficial del Gobierno del departamento de Durango*, August 17, 1845. The editors reprinted translated portions of the *Bulletin*’s editorial from *El Diario de Veracruz*.

economy, stalled the north's demographic growth, depopulated much of its vast countryside, and fueled divisive conflicts between Mexicans at nearly every level of political integration. Exhausted, impoverished, and divided by fifteen years of war, and facing ongoing and even intensifying Indian raids, northern Mexicans were singularly unprepared to resist the U.S. Army in 1846 or to sustain a significant insurgency against occupation forces.

At the same time, as the editorials from New Orleans and Durango suggest, Indian raiders shaped how Americans and Mexicans viewed each other in advance of the war. From Texas to Washington, Anglo-American observers began looking at Mexico *through* the autonomous native peoples of the borderlands, as if these Indians were lenses calibrated to reveal essential information about Mexicans, their lands, and their futures in North America.² Schooled in Indian removal—that supreme exhibition of state power over native peoples—Americans watched Indians driving Mexicans backward, and this observation inspired ambitions and tactics for continental expansion. Mexicans living through the conflicts could not afford the same creative detachment, but they too came to gaze through Indians rather than at them. Mexicans saw Americans standing behind *los indios bárbaros*, employing them as proxies in a plan to seize Mexico's territory. In other words, Americans and Mexicans both used Indians to conceive of and talk about each other, synthesizing the actions of Comanches, Apaches, Navajos, and others into narratives of the nation-state. Conversations about Indian raiders conditioned Mexican responses to the U.S. invasion, informed American expectations, war plans, and occupation strategy, and figured prominently in the debate over how much land Mexico should have to surrender in defeat.

Thus U.S. expansion into Mexican territory should be viewed not as the culmination of one story, but rather as the collision of two. The more familiar tale about competition between a thriving and a faltering republic intersected in neglected but decisive ways with a story—or, more precisely, multiple stories—about independent Indian peoples pursuing their own interests at the margins of state power. Such a reinterpretation is long overdue, because Indians remain all but invisible in the narrative of the U.S.-Mexican War and its economic, military, and ideological context. This is not for lack of sources. Reports and commentaries on Indian raiders are common in American sources from the time, widespread in Mexico City's publications, and ubiquitous in northern Mexico's newspapers and official correspondence.³ Ralph Adam Smith and Isidro Vizcaya Canales long ago tapped into this material to give scholars on both sides of the border glimpses into the devastation suffered

² I use the terms "autonomous" and "independent" to distinguish Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, and Navajos from the large majority of indigenous peoples in North America, those in Mexico who by the nineteenth century had long since come under some kind of subordination by nonnative political authorities. Following independence, Mexican officials also came into conflict with semi-autonomous peoples such as the Yaquis and Mayos of northwestern Mexico, but such "rebellions" stood outside of the discourses that are central to my analysis. See Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Yaqui Resistance and Survival: The Struggle for Land and Autonomy, 1821–1910* (Madison, Wis., 1984), 18–65; Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700–1850* (Durham, N.C., 1997), 288–301.

³ Newspapers are especially valuable sources from this period of northern Mexico's history, because when military and civilian officials corresponded about Indians, editors usually published the letters in their entirety rather than summarize their contents. For this reason, it is possible to recover in some detail Mexican interactions with Indians in any given state by working with the state's official newspaper.

by parts of northern Mexico prior to the U.S. invasion.⁴ And yet, so tightly have historians framed the story of the war as a contest between nation-states that the narrative has no conceptual space for the actions of stateless Indian peoples. Hence the U.S. literature on manifest destiny and on the war itself says precious little about raids and otherwise includes the region's Indians only on those rare occasions when they traded, talked, or fought with U.S. soldiers.⁵ Josefina Zoraida Vázquez has championed Mexico's renewed scholarly interest in *la intervención norteamericana*, and a few Mexican scholars have begun integrating Indian conflicts into the war's history at the state level.⁶ But still we lack an appreciation of the broader international consequences of Mexico's far-flung conflict with independent Indians.

In part this can be attributed to a lack of communication between the literatures concerning U.S. expansion into northern Mexico and the growing scholarship on Indian-Mexican relationships in that region.⁷ In recent decades, scholars on both sides of the border have significantly advanced our understanding of these relation-

⁴ Smith's most expansive article is Ralph A. Smith, "Indians in American-Mexican Relations before the War of 1846," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 43, no. 1 (1963): 34–64. See also his "The Comanche Invasion of Mexico in the Fall of 1845," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 35, no. 1 (1959): 3–28; "The Comanche Bridge between Oklahoma and Mexico, 1843–1844," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 39, no. 1 (1961): 54–69; "Apache Plunder Trails Southward, 1831–1840," *New Mexico Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (1962): 20–42; and "Apache 'Ranching' below the Gila, 1841–1845," *Arizoniana* 3, no. 1 (1962): 1–17. Isidro Vizcaya Canales, ed., *La invasión de los indios bárbaros al noreste de México en los años de 1840 y 1841* (Monterrey, 1968).

⁵ See, for example, Farnham Bishop, *Our First War in Mexico* (New York, 1916), 142; Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 2 vols. (New York, 1919), 1: 298, 479, 521; Bernard Augustine De Voto, *The Year of Decision, 1846* (Boston, 1943), 156, 249–250, 388–392, 417; Alfred Hoyt Bill, *Rehearsal for Conflict: The War with Mexico, 1846–1848* (New York, 1947), 126, 130; Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War* (Indianapolis, 1950), 131; Seymour V. Connor and Odie B. Faulk, *North America Divided: The Mexican War, 1846–1848* (New York, 1971), 95; David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia, Mo., 1973), 76; K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846–1848* (New York, 1974), 19, 136–137; John Edward Weems, *To Conquer a Peace: The War between the United States and Mexico* (Garden City, N.Y., 1974), 315; Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), 145–146; Robert Walter Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York, 1985), 33; John S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846–1848* (New York, 1989), 220–221, 234, 249; Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen, *The U.S.-Mexican War* (San Francisco, 1998), 113; Douglas W. Richmond, "A View of the Periphery: Regional Factors and Collaboration during the U.S.-Mexican Conflict, 1845–1848," in Richard V. Frangaviglia and Douglas W. Richmond, eds., *Dueling Eagles: Reinterpreting the U.S.-Mexican War, 1846–1848* (Fort Worth, Tex., 2000), 127–154, 136, 140–141; Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the U.S. Mexican War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002), 140; Douglas V. Meed, *The Mexican War, 1846–1848* (New York, 2003), 41, 89.

⁶ See José de la Cruz Pacheco Rojas, "Durango entre dos guerras, 1846–1847," in Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, ed., *México al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos (1846–1848)* (Mexico, 1997), 189–212; Ignacio Almada Bay, José Marcos Medina Bustos, and José René Córdova Rascón, "Medidas de gobierno en Sonora para hacer frente a la guerra con los Estados Unidos, 1846–1849," in *XXI Simposio de historia y antropología de Sonora: Sonora y la región* (Hermosillo, 1997), 229–263; César Navarro Gallegos, "Una 'Santa Alianza': El gobierno duranguense y la jerarquía eclesiástica durante la intervención norteamericana," in Laura Herrera Serna, *México en guerra (1846–1848): Perspectivas regionales* (Mexico, 1997), 233–251. For older Mexican literature that briefly mentions Indian raids in the context of the U.S.-Mexican War, see, for example, Carlos María Bustamante, *El nuevo Bernal Díaz del Castillo o sea historia de la invasión de los anglo-americanos en México* (1847; repr., Mexico, 1949), 57–58; Gastón García Cantú, *Las invasiones norteamericanas en México* (Mexico, 1971), 163–179; Fernando Jordán, *Crónica de un país bárbaro* (Chihuahua, 1978), 221–230, esp. 227; Leopoldo Martínez Caraza, *El norte bárbaro de México* (Mexico, 1983), 130–131.

⁷ While it says little about Mexican-Indian violence, the important book by Andrés Reséndez is an exception to this observation. See *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, 2005).

ships during the 1830s and 1840s, albeit usually in the context of much longer chronological studies. We now have careful examinations of interactions between Mexicans and independent Indians in individual states, biographies of key figures, and rich studies of particular Indian groups and their stances toward outsiders.⁸ A few works take a more comprehensive view. David Weber's classic *The Mexican Frontier* situates worsening violence within a larger matrix of challenges facing Mexico's far north, including the often disruptive effects of U.S. commercial expansion. James Brooks's justly celebrated *Captives and Cousins* interrogates the dynamic social and economic networks that bound together diverse peoples across a wide arc of Mexico's far north in ways both creative and destructive.⁹ But even these comparatively expansive treatments restrict their core analyses to the present-day American Southwest, whereas the worst of the violence occurred south of the Rio Grande. Because it has been focused on specific locales, states, or tribes, or on one side or another of a border that did not exist before 1848, the borderlands scholarship has obscured

⁸ For Chihuahua, see William B. Griffen, *Utmost Good Faith: Patterns of Apache-Mexican Hostilities in Northern Chihuahua Border Warfare, 1821–1848* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1988); Luis Aboites, "Poder político y 'bárbaros' en Chihuahua hacia 1845," *Secuencia* 19, no. 1 (1991): 17–32; Víctor Orozco Orozco, *Las guerras indias en la historia de Chihuahua: Primeras fases* (Mexico, 1992); Orozco, *Las guerras indias en la historia de Chihuahua: Antología* (Ciudad Juárez, 1992); Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson, Ariz., 1995), 21–111; Ricardo León García and Carlos Gonzáles Herrera, *Civilizar o exterminar: Tarahumaras y apaches en Chihuahua, siglo XIX* (Mexico, 2000). For Sonora, see Stuart F. Voss, *On the Periphery of Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Sonora and Sinaloa, 1810–1877* (Tucson, Ariz., 1982), 64–74, 95–106. For Coahuila, see Martha Rodríguez, *Historias de resistencia y exterminio: Los indios de Coahuila durante el siglo XIX* (Mexico, 1995), 55–74; Rodríguez, *La guerra entre bárbaros y civilizados: El exterminio del nómada en Coahuila, 1840–1880* (Saltillo, Coahuila, 1998). For Nuevo León, see Isidro Vizcaya Canales, *Tierra de guerra viva: IncurSIONES de indios y otros conflictos en el noreste de México durante el siglo XIX, 1821–1885* (Monterrey, 2001). Matthew McLaurine Babcock, "Trans-National Trade Routes and Diplomacy: Comanche Expansion, 1760–1846" (M.A. thesis, University of New Mexico, 2001), 81–123, discusses Comanche activities below the Rio Grande, focusing especially on Coahuila and Chihuahua. For New Mexico, see Ward Alan Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840–1846" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1966); Frank D. Reeve, "Navaho Foreign Affairs, 1795–1846," *New Mexico Historical Review* 46, no. 2–3 (1971): 101–132, 223–251; Frank McNitt, *Navajo Wars: Military Campaigns, Slave Raids, and Reprisals* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1972), 66–123; Daniel Tyler, "Mexican Indian Policy in New Mexico," *New Mexico Historical Review* 55, no. 2 (1980): 101–120; David M. Brugge, *Navajos in the Catholic Church Records of New Mexico, 1694–1875*, 2nd ed. (Tsaila, Ariz., 1985), 57–87; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002), esp. 180–228. For Texas, see F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786–1859* (Lincoln, Neb., 2005), chaps. 5–6; Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820–1875* (Norman, Okla., 2005), 81–226. Biographies include Edwin R. Sweeney, *Cochise: Chiricahua Apache Chief* (Norman, Okla., 1991), 3–77; Edwin R. Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas: Chief of the Chiricahua Apaches* (Norman, Okla., 1998), 27–137; Ralph Adam Smith, *Borderlander: The Life of James Kirker, 1793–1852* (Norman, Okla., 1999). For studies of particular native groups, see, for example, Thomas W. Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706–1875* (Lincoln, Neb., 1996), 193–294; Morris W. Foster, *Being Comanche: A Social History of an American Indian Community* (Tucson, Ariz., 1991); F. Todd Smith, *The Wichita Indians: Traders of Texas and the Southern Plains, 1540–1845* (College Station, Tex., 2000), 111–154.

⁹ David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821–1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1982); Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*. Thomas D. Hall, *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350–1880* (Lawrence, Kans., 1989), 147–203, takes a broad view and discusses both independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War, but does little to combine the two. See Cuauhtémoc José Velasco Avila, "La amenaza comanche en la frontera mexicana, 1800–1841" (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998), 233–342, for Texas and northeastern Mexico to 1841. While it ends in 1830, the complex analysis in Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Indian Southwest, 1580–1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention* (Norman, Okla., 1999), also embraces multiple peoples and represents a major advance in the literature.

the geopolitical significance of the interethnic violence of the 1830s and 1840s. By exploring the connections between regional and international conflict, it is possible to set the rich but fragmented borderland literature in a revealing continental context.

More broadly, recovering the significance of Indians to the U.S.-Mexican War advances the project of integrating native peoples into the international history of the Americas. It is now a basic tenet of North America's colonial narrative that Indians could decisively shape the course of inter-imperial relations. Sometimes native peoples did so directly, by lending military support to particular European powers. But one of the chief virtues of the groundbreaking work done on this subject by Richard White, Daniel K. Richter, Colin G. Calloway, and others has been an insistence that Indian polities could just as often influence imperial designs and colonial realities indirectly, by independently pursuing their own complicated and shifting agendas.¹⁰ With the literature still focused on eastern North America, however, this influence is thought to have peaked with the Seven Years' War, declined through the American Revolution, and vanished after the War of 1812. Scholars are only now beginning to give more serious consideration to the role of Indians in international relations after that date.¹¹ Similarly, historians of Mexico's early national period have been integrating indigenous peasants into the larger narrative, and yet the tens of thousands of autonomous Indians who controlled Mexico's northern territories are still ignored or consigned to regional scholarship.¹² Finally, historical and socio-

¹⁰ The historiography bearing on Indians and inter-imperial conflicts is large. Important works since 1990 include Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991); David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, Conn., 1992); Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); Daniel H. Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673–1800* (Cambridge, 1997); Anderson, *Indian Southwest*; Jerry Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *AHR* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814–841; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, 2000); Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Gregory Evans Dowd, *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore, Md., 2002); Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (New Haven, Conn., 2002); Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln, Neb., 2004); David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, Conn., 2005); Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500–2000* (New York, 2005), 1–246; Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington, Ind., 2006); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York, 2006); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2006).

¹¹ See, for example, Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln, Neb., 2005); Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, which includes consideration of Indians and Texan-Mexican relations; and David G. McCrady, *Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands* (Lincoln, Neb., 2006).

¹² See, for example, Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995); Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800–1857* (Stanford, Calif., 1996); Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810–1821* (Stanford, Calif., 2001); Peter F. Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750–1850* (Durham, N.C., 2005), 122–291. For thoughts on the place of nomads in Mexican memory, see Aguilar Luis Aboites, "Nómadas y sedentarios en el norte de México: Elementos para una periodización," in Beatriz Braniff C. and

logical literature on the emergence of nation-states in the Western Hemisphere has grown up around explicit and implicit comparisons to Europe. But this literature has made little conceptual use of the striking difference that, unlike Europe, vast portions of the Americas remained under the control of stateless societies well into the second half of the 1800s.¹³

As nineteenth-century North America's defining international conflict and an event with enduring consequences for all of the continent's peoples, the U.S.-Mexican War is an ideal starting place for reconceptualizing indigenous contributions to the hemisphere's international history. By taking seriously both what Indians did and how their deeds informed discourse in the U.S. and Mexico, it is possible to see how native politics could "powerfully influence political relations" between rival states in North America and beyond.

IN 1830, NORTHERN MEXICANS enjoyed relatively peaceful relations with most independent Indians. Despite frequent animal thefts, killings and kidnappings were relatively rare and were met more often with negotiation than with organized violence. Conditions deteriorated rapidly during the next decade, until overlapping theaters of war canvassed the whole of the north. By the early 1830s, Apaches in the northwest were raiding in five states: "Western" Apaches in Sonora and Chihuahua; Chiricahuas in Sonora, Chihuahua, and southern New Mexico; and Mescaleros in Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Durango. As the decade progressed, New Mexicans became embroiled in renewed war with Navajos, and during the early 1840s they provoked narrower quarrels with Utes and Arapahos as well. Lipan Apaches on the Lower Rio Grande broke a wary peace with Mexicans repeatedly in the 1830s and 1840s, raiding ranches and settlements throughout the northeast. Finally, Comanches and Kiowas dramatically escalated their raids on Chihuahua in the early 1830s, turned to Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila by mid-decade, and by 1840 were even campaigning across Durango, northern Zacatecas, and parts of San Luis Potosí.

While all of these conflicts had local and regional proximate causes, a few broad changes help explain why violence metastasized across the north when it did. Following independence in 1821, the Republic of Mexico found itself without the financial and, to a lesser extent, the diplomatic resources that had helped Bourbon New Spain foster a delicate system of alliances, regulated trade, and gift-giving with independent Indians. Presents to Indians became fewer and shabbier, provoking "humiliating" excuses from cash-poor northern Mexican officials and violent outbursts by Indian visitors.¹⁴ The consequences of Mexican parsimony were nowhere

Marie-Areti Hers, eds., *Nómadas y sedentarios en el norte de México: Homenaje a Beatriz Braniff* (Mexico, 2000), 613–621.

¹³ Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves, eds., *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); James Dunkerley, ed., *Studies in the Formation of the Nation-State in Latin America* (London, 2002); Sara Castro-Klarén and John Charles Chasteen, *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Washington, D.C., 2003). For brief thoughts on how independent Indians might fit into the concerns of this literature, see Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (University Park, Pa., 2002), 137–138.

¹⁴ Changes in the conceptualization and implementation of Spanish frontier policy are explored in



FIGURE 1: Approximate zones of conflict between independent Indians and Northern Mexicans, ca. 1844.

more calamitous than in the northwest, where Apaches resorted to widespread raiding only after the cancellation of a decades-old ration program.¹⁵

For most independent Indians, the costs of conflict diminished along with the benefits of peace. The presidios (garrisons) that had anchored Spanish military force on the frontier went into steady decline beginning in the 1810s. By the 1840s, no presidio had even half of the men required by a law passed in 1826—to say nothing of the men they realistically needed following the collapse of security in the 1830s.¹⁶ National leaders seldom employed regular army troops against autonomous Indians, distracted as they were by interminable coups and regional uprisings. State and local officials worked tirelessly to organize civilian defenses, and in Sonora, Chihuahua, and New Mexico they regularly sent offensive campaigns against Indian enemies. But authorities across the north complained bitterly that they lacked the money, the mounts, and, especially, the arms and ammunition to defend their people against horse-borne raiders. Zacatecans had special grounds for protest. Disarmed by the central government following an uprising in 1835, the state's population faced well-armed Comanches, they said, without even “nails to scratch ourselves.”¹⁷

By making peace attractive and war dangerous, the regional system established in the late colonial era had put a brake on the contest for animals and, to a lesser extent, captives that fueled nearly all organized conflict between independent Indians and northern Mexicans. Native and nonnative economies alike depended on domestic animals for transportation of goods and people, and for hunting and war. Throughout northern Mexico, horses, mules, and (especially for Mexicans and Navajos) sheep also served as markers of wealth, as resources that bound together

Max L. Moorhead, *The Apache Frontier: Jacobo Ugarte and Spanish-Indian Relations in Northern New Spain, 1769–1791* (Norman, Okla., 1968), and Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 204–235. For this period, see also the classic account in Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540–1795* (Norman, Okla., 1996), 226–697. For gifts, see Ross Frank, *From Settler to Citizen: New Mexican Economic Development and the Creation of Vecino Society, 1750–1820* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000), 132–136. For independent Mexico's fiscal troubles, see Barbara A. Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury: Debts and Taxes in Mexico, 1821–1856* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1986). For outbursts and “humiliating” explanations, see, for example, Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 201, 205.

¹⁵ On the reduction of rations, see William B. Griffen, *Apaches at War and Peace: The Janos Presidio, 1750–1858* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1988), 131–133. For the initial years of the conflict in Chihuahua, see Griffen, *Utmost Good Faith*, 21–41. There were also scattered reports of deaths caused by Apaches in southern New Mexico during the 1830s. See Cayetano Martínez to Governor of New Mexico, March 9, 1836, frame 535, roll 21, Mexican Archives of New Mexico (microfilm). For Mescaleros in Durango, see “Ofensas a la nación por bárbaros que la invaden,” folder 10, Uncataloged Imprints, W. B. Stephens Collection, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

¹⁶ For presidios, see Max L. Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman, Okla., 1975); Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 204–235. For a brief but insightful analysis of the problems facing presidios following independence, see Pedro García Conde, “Memoria del secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Guerra y Marina leída en la cámara de Senadores el día 10 y en el de Diputados el día 11 de Marzo de 1845,” document no. 501 in Colección Lafragua, Biblioteca Nacional, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City [hereafter Lafragua]. Data from presidios is taken from the annual reports of the ministers of war for the years 1841, 1844, 1845, and 1846, available as documents no. 517, 494, 501, and 499, respectively, in Lafragua. There were no reports for the years 1842 and 1843, when Congress was not in session.

¹⁷ Manuel Gonzalez Cosío to Valentín Gómez Farías, Zacatecas, October 17, 1845, Doc. no. 1288, Valentín Gómez Farías Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin. My thanks to Daniel Gutiérrez for sharing this document with me. For disarmament in Durango, see *Gaceta del Supremo Gobierno de Durango*, August 22, 1833.

networks of patrons and clients, and as the gifts most commonly used for bride-price. Without access to animals, then, young men could not participate in basic aspects of economic and social life. Indian and Mexican societies likewise placed a premium on captive women and children, who could be treated as commodities, slaves, or dependent kin. Across northern Mexico, inequalities and unrealized ambitions encouraged men to improve their own fortunes by taking animals and captives from ethnic others.¹⁸

Meanwhile, maturing connections to outside markets made theft all the more lucrative. American commercial activity in the Mexican north increased dramatically after 1821. Mexican officials denounced U.S. merchants whom they labeled “traders of blood” for supplying raiders with arms and ammunition in return for stolen Mexican animals.¹⁹ There is evidence of such activity among Apaches, and especially on the southern plains, where American and Texan merchants established several trading houses on the edges of *la comanchería* in the 1830s and 1840s.²⁰ Other Indians probably provided even more dynamic outlets for Mexican plunder than did Americans or Texans. Osages, Cheyennes, and Arapahos all forged peaceful trading relationships with Comanches and Kiowas in the 1830s and 1840s.²¹ Perhaps most importantly, Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws, and other native peoples displaced by the U.S. policy of Indian removal presented a huge market for stolen horses and mules, often working through Shawnee, Delaware, and Caddo intermediaries. These quiet but persistent traders also conducted a lucrative trade in captives, and likely provided the lion’s share of guns and munitions to the southern plains market in the decade before the U.S. invasion.²² Internal inequalities and

¹⁸ The pioneering work emphasizing inequalities on the southern plains was Bernard Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare among the Plains Indians* (New York, 1940). More recently, Jane Fishburne Collier, *Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies* (Stanford, Calif., 1988), and Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*, have made in-group inequality a still more revealing analytic.

¹⁹ Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 83–105, esp. 95.

²⁰ For Apaches, see Smith, *Borderlander*, 47–58; “Comunicado de José Agustín de Escudero,” 1839, in Orozco, *Guerras indias: Antología*, 263–273; Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman, Okla., 1954), 202. For the southern plains, see, for example, testimony of Dionisio Santos, Lampazos, July 11, 1873, in Cuauhtémoc José Velasco Avila, ed., *En manos de los bárbaros* (Mexico, 1996), 40–43. For Texan traders and Indian agents distributing ammunition to Comanches, often following explicit instructions from Texan officials, see, for example, Thomas G. Western to Benjamin Sloat, Washington, May 12, 1845, and “Report of a Council with the Comanche Indians,” Trading House Post No. 2, November 23, 1845, both in Dorman H. Winfrey and James M. Day, eds., *The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest, 1825–1916*, 5 vols. (Austin, Tex., 1966–1995), 2: 238–240, 410–413; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, May 21, 1845.

²¹ For glimpses of Osages trading, see *Telegraph and Texas Register*, October 3, 1841; *The Weekly Despatch* [Matagora, Tex.], March 16, 1844; James Mooney, *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 274–275. For Cheyennes, see J. C. Eldredge to Sam Houston, Washington on the Brazos, December 8, 1843, in Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 1: 251–275.

²² For the trade generally, see David La Vere, *Contrary Neighbors: Southern Plains and Removed Indians in Indian Territory* (Norman, Okla., 2000), 115–118; R. A. Irion to Sam Houston, Houston, March 14, 1838, in Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 1: 43; Testimony of Cornelio Sánchez, Lampazos, June 4, 1873, in Velasco Avila, *En manos de los bárbaros*, 52–54. For other Indians trading for captives taken by Comanches, see, for example, *Weekly Despatch*, March 16, 1844; Grant Foreman, “Journal of Elijah Hicks,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 13, no. 1 (1935): 68–99, n. 2; Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 25, 1844, in Senate Doc. no. 1, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., 307, 439. For firearms specifically, see Barnard E. Bee to John Forsyth, Washington, D.C., December 15, 1840, in William R. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831–1860*, vol. 12: *Texas and Venezuela* (Washington, D.C., 1939), 208–211; Ralph A. Smith, “Mexican and Anglo-Saxon Traffic in Scalps, Slaves, and Livestock, 1835–1841,” *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 36, no.

external opportunities, then, encouraged Indian and, to a lesser extent, Mexican men to steal animals, women, and children from outsiders. These economic bases for conflict have received extensive and subtle treatment in borderlands literature.

Less attention has been given to the political processes structuring interethnic conflict in the region.²³ Students of southern plains Indians, for example, have recognized that Comanches and Kiowas sometimes campaigned in large groups but nonetheless have portrayed raiding as an essentially apolitical endeavor governed by individual material ambitions. Consequently, far more stress is placed on raiding as an ongoing economic activity than on raids as historical events. Perhaps partly for this reason, plains scholars have shown little interest in determining what exactly Comanches and Kiowas did south of the Rio Grande.

The copious Mexican source material, some of it already mined by Mexican scholars, makes possible a quantitative reconstruction of Indian raiding activities. Three features of the data suggest that economic explanations for raiding should be situated within a larger political framework. First, changes in Comanche and Kiowa raiding indicate coordination of policy rather than coincidence of ambition. Over the 1830s and 1840s, the geography and intensity of raiding expanded in sharply defined stages, each stage corresponding to geopolitical events on and around the southern plains. Second, large campaigns were the norm rather than the exception. On more than thirty occasions between 1834 and 1846, Comanches and Kiowas sent parties of one hundred men or more below the Rio Grande. More than a third of these groups included at least five hundred warriors, and on four occasions Mexican officials reported expeditions of eight hundred to a thousand men. These largest campaigns involved perhaps half of the total fighting force of the southern plains.²⁴

Third and finally, the tremendous destruction of these campaigns often worked against the very material ambitions that seem to have motivated raiders in the first place. In addition to plundering homes, taking captives, and seizing horses and mules, southern plains men exerted great energy and took great risks to kill Mexicans, slaughter thousands of pigs, cows, goats, and sheep, and set fire to dwellings, barns, and granaries. In October 1844, for example, several hundred raiders attacked settlements in northern Tamaulipas. While they took many horses and captives, they also burned to death more than twenty men, women, and children at Los Moros, killed another forty-six men who came to help, and later killed upward of one hundred residents of Rancho de la Palmita.²⁵ The data suggest that Comanches and their allies killed at least two thousand Mexicans in the twelve years before the U.S.-

1 (1960): 98–115, 99; Testimony of Francisco Treviño, Musquiz, September 21, 1873, in Velasco Avila, *En manos de los bárbaros*, 44–49; Manuel de Mier y Terán, “Noticia de las tribus de salvajes conocidos que habitan en el Departamento de Tejas, y del número de Familias de que consta cada tribu, puntos en que habitan y terrenos en que acampan,” in Mauricio Molina, ed., *Crónica de Tejas: Diario de viaje de la Comisión de Límites* (Mexico, 1988), 129–139, 130.

²³ On the need to take internal politics seriously before we draw conclusions about how a community confronts outside powers, see Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 173–193.

²⁴ Quantitative information in this and the next paragraph comes from data in the appendix of Brian DeLay, *The War of a Thousand Deserts* (New Haven, Conn., forthcoming).

²⁵ See Francisco Lofero to judges of sections 6, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18–23, Matamoros, October 12, 1844, 8–9, vol. 51, Matamoros Archives Photostats, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin [hereafter MAP]. Jorge L. de Lara to Francisco Lofero, Matamoros, October 13, 1844, 11–13, vol. 51,

Mexican War—a figure that amounts to five Mexicans killed for every two the raiders tried to capture. Indeed, southern plains Indians occasionally became so engrossed with the work of killing people, slaughtering animals, and destroying property that Mexican forces had time to converge on the scene and deprive them of their spoils.

Famously fractious and anti-authoritarian, Comanche society consisted of interlocking segments. The smallest family units usually moved in larger gatherings of extended kin, groups of extended families collectively formed a band, and each of the four Comanche tribes existing in the 1830s and 1840s (Kotsotekas, Yamparikas, Tenewas, and Hois) consisted of several bands. Any explanation for how individuals cooperated so effectively within and across these diffuse organizational units to forge consensus and act on public goals would have to consider a host of mechanisms, all supported by networks of blood, affine, and fictive kinship. Some of the more important included emerging military societies, public dances, the traditional roles of women in policing male honor, and the integrative functions of tribal and pan-tribal meetings.²⁶

But one feature in particular of the Comanche and Kiowa political traditions helps to explain the coordination, size, and extreme violence of the campaigns into Mexico: vengeance. Like most non-state peoples, individual Comanches and Kiowas could call upon kin to help them avenge loved ones killed by outsiders. Among southern plains Indians, however, grieving families could enlist prominent, ambitious men to recruit on their behalf. The injured party came humbly before such influential men, weeping and asking for pity, for help in killing enemies and assuaging grief. Then the seekers would widen the circle. Once the grieving relative had convinced a *paraibo* (leader) in his own community to sponsor his quest, according to a shrewd observer, the pair then journeyed to other neighboring bands, “weeping and calling for help in defeating the enemy.” This more distant *paraibo* received the two “afflicted ones” graciously, gathering warriors and old men to hear their guests explain “why they have come and the reasons which impel them to summon the tribes of their people.” Although supplicants were occasionally refused, more often they convinced their host to help, to raise volunteers, and perhaps to send runners to other bands. The soliciting pair would set a time and a place for a general rendezvous, and then move on to visit still another *paraibo*. This process could continue for weeks or even months, sometimes intersecting with tribal or pan-tribal meetings.²⁷

MAP; *Gaceta del Gobierno de Tamaulipas*, October 19, 1844, and editorial and list of dead, *ibid.*, October 26, 1844.

²⁶ Non-Indian observers occasionally glimpsed connections between pan-tribal meetings and emerging raiding campaigns. In December 1847 and January 1848, for example, a Texan Indian agent reported a meeting of between five and six thousand members of “upper” Comanche tribes, Kiowas, and a few Mescalero Apaches. “The avowed intention of the present assembling is to make preparation for a descent upon the northern provinces of Mexico, Chihuahua, and others, early in the spring.” See Robert S. Neighbors to W. Medill, U.S. Special Indian Agency, December 13, 1847, in Senate Report Com. no. 171, 30th Cong., 1st sess.; and same to same, January 20, 1848, House Executive Doc. no. 1, 30th Cong., 2nd sess., 573–575. For more on the political mechanisms mentioned above, see DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, chap. 4.

²⁷ Jean Louis Berlandier, *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, ed. John C. Ewers, trans. Patricia R. Leclercq (Washington, D.C., 1969), 69–75; José María Sánchez, “A Trip to Texas in 1828,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1926): 249–288, 262. See also Mooney, *Calendar*, 282. It seems that Kiowa notions of justice did not demand that the death be revenged upon the killer per se, but simply upon one of his people. See Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare*, 29. For parallels, see White, *Middle Ground*, 75–82; Walter

In the abstract, the huge campaigns organized in this way were supposed to be brief, to culminate with an enemy's death, and to remain conceptually distinct from the much smaller and informal "raids" targeting animals and captives.²⁸ But these distinct endeavors seem to have collapsed into one in the years before the U.S. invasion, thanks to the peculiar manner in which profits intersected with dangers in northern Mexico. While many Comanches and Kiowas made reputations and fortunes raiding Mexicans between 1834 and 1846, at least five hundred southern plains men lost their lives in the attempt.²⁹ Kiowas often chose the deaths of prominent men killed while raiding in Mexico as the touchstone events of the year, memorializing them in their painted calendars. The winter of 1834–1835, for example, was marked in the calendar as the winter that Pa-ton was killed; 1835–1836 was the winter that To'edalte was killed; and 1836–1837 was the winter that K'inahiate was killed.³⁰ These kinds of deaths produced mourners and calls for revenge, activating the complicated machinery on the southern plains for provoking pity, enlisting patrons, and organizing retaliatory campaigns. The sources provide glimpses of this process. Twice in 1845, for example, large parties of Hois Comanches preparing descents into Mexico told Texan envoys that vengeance was their goal. The Kiowa calendar reveals that the brutal attacks mentioned above upon Los Moros and Rancho de la Palmita were organized by a man named Zepkoeete in response to the death of his brother, who had been killed while raiding in Tamaulipas the year before. Mexicans slew one of Zepkoeete's companions, and Kiowas thereafter memorialized the season as the winter that Atahaik'i was killed.³¹

Rather than simply promote the individualistic, economic benefits of raiding

Goldschmidt, "Inducement to Military Participation in Tribal Societies," in Paul R. Turner and David C. Pitt, eds., *The Anthropology of War and Peace: Perspectives on the Nuclear Age* (Granby, Mass., 1989), 15–31; John Phillip Reid, *A Law of Blood: The Primitive Law of the Cherokee Nation* (New York, 1970), 153–162. More generally, see Reid, *Patterns of Vengeance: Crosscultural Homicide in the North American Fur Trade* (Pasadena, Calif., 1999). As important as vengeance was for the prosecution of the Comanches' war with Mexico, their conflict fits poorly with the notion of a "mourning war" as described by Daniel K. Richter for the Iroquois, waged not just to avenge but to formally replace deceased community members. See Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 40, no. 4 (1983): 528–559.

²⁸ For the distinction between a raid executed simply to obtain horses, captives, and plunder and a raid motivated by revenge, see Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare*, 28–34; Berlandier, *Indians of Texas*, 71–72; Anderson, *Indian Southwest*, 238–239; William C. Meadows, *Kiowa, Apache, and Comanche Military Societies: Enduring Veterans, 1800 to the Present* (Austin, Tex., 1999), 313.

²⁹ Five hundred is almost certainly an underestimate. Comanches took tremendous risks to recover the bodies of dead comrades—a cultural imperative reinforced by the Mexican practice of taking as trophies the hands and heads of fallen raiders. See, for example, José María de Ortega to Governor of Nuevo León, Monterrey, March 1, 1841, in *El Seminario político del gobierno de Nuevo León*, March 4, 1841; Sánchez, "A Trip to Texas in 1828," 262. Ethnographers working with Comanches in the early twentieth century reported that if a warrior's corpse was scalped, he was forever barred from heaven. See Ernest Wallace and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains* (Norman, Okla., 1952), 188. Because Comanches absconded with fallen comrades, Mexican authorities often had to refer to the number of enemy dead in adjectives rather than numbers, or by gesturing to the amount of blood they left behind; see, for example, Miguel Guerra to D. Francisco Casteñeda, Santa Rosa, December 10, 1843, in *El Voto de Coahuila*, December 16, 1843.

³⁰ Mooney, *Calendar*, 269–271.

³¹ The vast majority of Comanche casualties in Mexico were men, but occasionally women who accompanied raiding campaigns were killed as well. See, for example, Orozco, *Guerras indias: Primeras fases*, 160–161. For Hois, see Thomas G. Western to A. Coleman, Washington on the Brazos, May 11, 1845, in Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 2: 236–237; and *Telegraph and Texas Register*, September 3, 1845. For the Kiowa version of the attack on Los Moros, see Mooney, *Calendar*, 282.

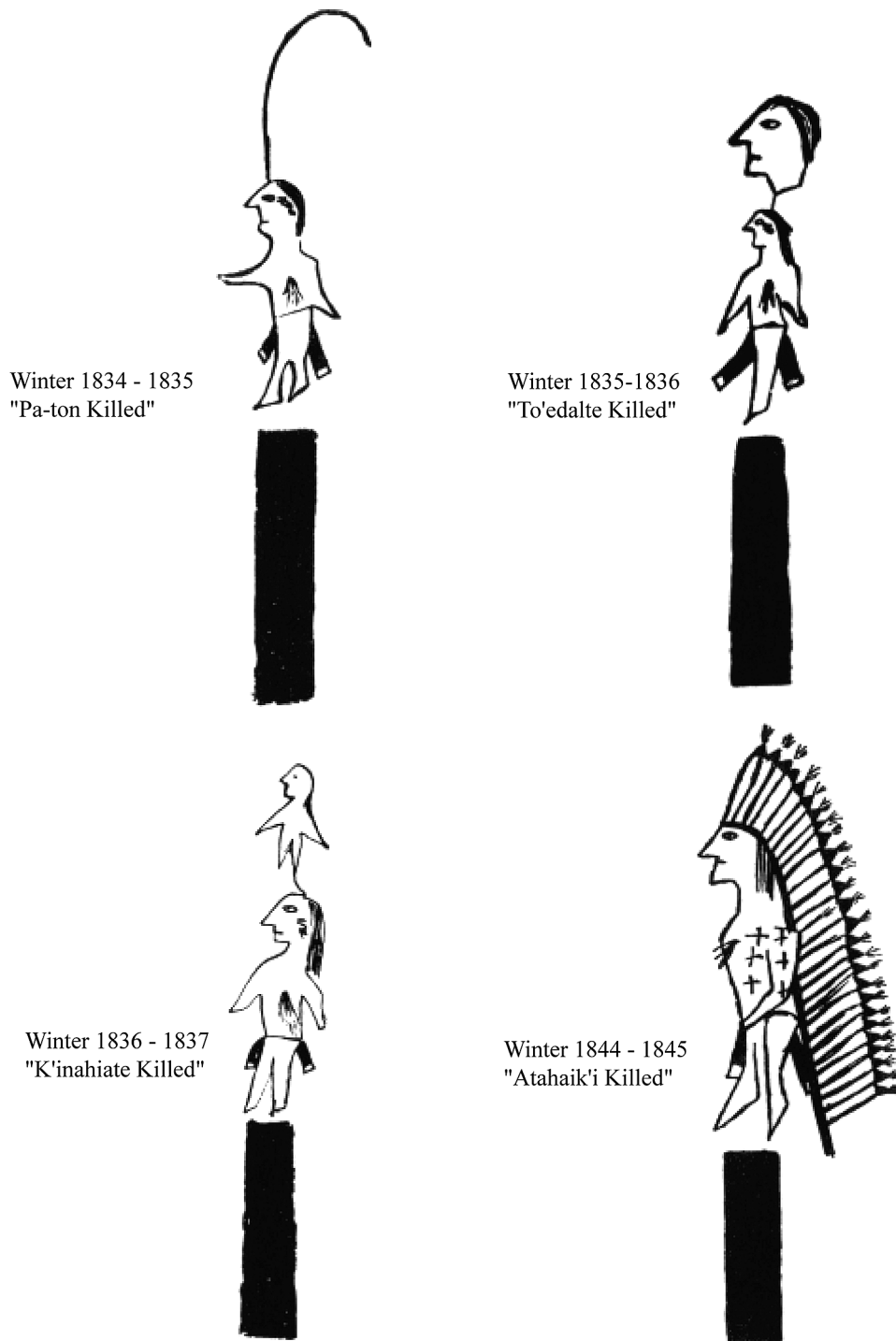


FIGURE 2: Prominent Kiowas killed in Mexico. From James Mooney, *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians* (Washington, D.C., 1898).

Mexican settlements, then, Comanches and Kiowas united their broader communities in the enterprise in part by submerging economics in a discourse about honor, pity, and, especially, revenge. Doing so enabled them to assemble enough men to penetrate deep into Mexican territory for weeks at a time, to take hundreds of captives and steal tens of thousands of horses and mules. But because vengeance provided the political gravity necessary to organize these armies of raiders, Comanches and Kiowas crossed the river to hurt Mexicans as well as take from them. Hence the vast destruction during the 1830s and 1840s, destruction that often undermined the economic objectives that fueled raiding in the first place. Thus it was not simply what Indians wanted from Mexicans but how they took it, how they structured their conflicts politically, that did such damage to Mexico before and during the U.S. invasion. More than a land of unbridled economic predation, northern Mexico in the 1830s and 1840s must also be seen as a zone of intense competition between distinct polities, some state-organized and others not, all struggling imperfectly to secure unity of purpose in pursuit of shared goals.

Most observers from the time reduced the complex reactions and counterreactions of this competition to simplistic national stories. Americans and Mexicans saw little in the brutal reports out of northern Mexico to suggest that coherent native policies were behind the region's security crisis. And in any case, that was not how the world was supposed to work. Observers in both nations tacitly agreed that while tribes could certainly trouble nation-states, they were not entities of international significance. And yet, as the editors in New Orleans and Durango noted, northern Mexico's worsening situation was indeed a matter of international interest. Americans and Mexicans overcame this interpretive problem by adjusting their gaze, looking less *at* Indians than *through* them in search of compelling explanations for Mexico's security crisis. Americans and Mexicans in this way subsumed the complex, organized, and deeply consequential activities of northern Mexico's indigenous communities into affirming, nationalistic dialogues about rival states.

We can begin exploring this process in the United States, where observers took to the notion of native transparency instinctually. What American politicians saw as they gazed through Indians encouraged most to despise Mexico's historic claim to its northern territories. Glimpses of what they came to see as a race war between mongrel degenerates and Indian savages left many Americans feeling entitled—even manifestly destined—to possess and redeem the region themselves. This supreme self-confidence began, appropriately, with Texas.

THE SCALE AND INTENSITY of interethnic violence increased at a sickening pace across all of northern Mexico after 1830, but subregions endured significant episodic conflict before then. Texas was one such place. Soon after Mexico's War for Independence began in 1810, Spanish authority went into sharp decline in Texas, Indian diplomacy faltered, and native peoples began raiding *tejano* settlements. Spanish officials saw Indian violence as one important factor retarding the development of Texas, and in 1820 began allowing limited Anglo-American colonization in the troubled province. Following independence in 1821, Mexican authorities expanded the

pace of colonization. This decision they soon came to regret, as colonists quickly outnumbered *tejanos*, conflicts mounted, and, finally, Texans declared independence from Mexico in 1836.³²

The rebels dispatched their most illustrious citizen, Stephen F. Austin, to tour the United States and capitalize on sympathy for the movement.³³ Austin delivered a stump speech in several states, laying out the Texan case. "In doing this," he stated, "the first step is to show, as I trust I shall be able to do by a succinct statement of facts, that our cause is just." Indeed, the Texan cause was better than just—it was American: "the same holy cause for which our forefathers fought and bled." Preamble finished, Austin invoked Indians:

But a few years back Texas was a wilderness, the home of the uncivilized and wandering Comanche and other tribes of Indians, who waged a constant warfare against the Spanish settlements . . . The incursions of the Indians also extended beyond the [Rio Grande], and desolated that part of the country. In order to restrain the savages and bring them into subjection, the government opened Texas for settlement . . . American enterprise accepted the invitation and promptly responded to the call.³⁴

This story, which we can call the Texas Creation Myth, was retold and refined in books, articles, and pamphlets published in cities across the U.S. Texan ambassadors to the United States chanted the Creation Myth like a mantra, and sympathetic U.S. politicians soon knew it by heart.³⁵ The myth contained three basic components: First, Texas had been a wasteland before Anglo-American colonists arrived,

³² On Indians and colonization, see Dieter George Berninger, *La inmigración en México* (Mexico, 1974), 28–29. On the decision to open Texas to foreign colonists, see also Mattie Austin Hatcher, *The Opening of Texas to Foreign Settlement, 1801–1821* (Austin, Tex., 1927); Edith Louise Kelly and Mattie Austin Hatcher, trans. and eds., "Tadeo Ortiz and the Colonization of Texas, 1822–1833," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1–4 (1929): 74–86, 152–164, 222–251, 311–343, 153; and Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 158–178. For a fresh interpretation of the Texas Rebellion, see Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 146–170.

³³ As soon as news spread about the war in Texas, there were public meetings in support of the rebels in New Orleans, Mobile, Montgomery, Boston, New York, and other cities. The earliest debates in Congress over the recognition of Texan independence were taken up in response to petitions received from several different states. See Ethel Zivley Rather, "Recognition of the Republic of Texas by the United States," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 13, no. 2 (1910): 155–256, 171, 213.

³⁴ "An Address Delivered by S. F. Austin of Texas, to a very large Audience of Ladies and Gentlemen in the Second Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Kentucky, on the 7th of March, 1836," in Mary Austin Holley and William Hooker, *Texas* (Lexington, Ky., 1836), 254, 269. The address was quickly reprinted. See Rebecca Smith Lee, "The Publication of Austin's Louisville Address," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (1967): 424–442. For Austin's tour, see Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin, Empresario of Texas* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), 329–347.

³⁵ In defining this collective story as a "creation myth," I have been influenced by the discussion of mythogenesis in Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, Conn., 1973), 6–24. For the descriptive and historical literature that elaborated upon the Texas Creation Myth, see, for example, Chester Newell, *History of the Revolution in Texas, particularly of the War of 1835 & '36: Together with the latest geographical, topographical, and statistical accounts of the country, from the most authentic sources, also, an appendix* (New York, 1838), 14–15; L. T. Pease, *A Geographical and Historical View of Texas, With a Detailed Account of the Texian Revolution and War* (Hartford, Conn., 1837), 252–254; Joseph Emerson Field, *Three Years in Texas: Including a View of the Texan Revolution, and an Account of the Principal Battles, Together With Descriptions of the Soil, Commercial and Agricultural Advantages, &c* (Boston, 1836), 6–7; William Kennedy, *Texas: The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas* (1841; repr., Fort Worth, Tex., 1925), 297–298, 329–338; William H. Wharton, *Texas: A Brief Account of the Origin, Progress, and Present State of the Colonial Settlements of Texas, Together with an Exposition of the Causes Which Have Induced the Existing War with Mexico* (Nashville, Tenn., 1836), 3–5. Written under the pen name "Curtius," most of Wharton's Texas pamphlets were sent directly to Washington. See Lee, "The Publication of Austin's Louisville Address."

because the Mexicans, “either through a want of personal prowess or military skill . . . were unable to repel the frequent incursions of their savage neighbors.” Second, officials in Mexico invited American colonists into Texas both to redeem the wilderness from the Indians and to protect northeastern Mexico from Indian attack. Third, the Americans quickly accomplished these twin tasks. As one author put it, “the untiring perseverance of the colonists triumphed over all natural obstacles, expelled the savages by whom the country was infested, reduced the forest to cultivation, and made the desert smile.”³⁶

The political utility of the Texas Creation Myth may be gauged in part by how often it was invoked in Washington. Arguing for immediate U.S. recognition of Texan independence in 1836, for example, Senator Robert Walker informed his colleagues that Americans had been “invited to settle the wilderness, and defend the Mexicans against the then frequent incursions of a savage foe.”³⁷ Representative E.W. Ripley echoed these sentiments in the House. Mexicans had used the colonists as “a barrier against the Camanches and the Indians of Red River, to protect the inhabitants of the interior States.” Once the Anglo-Americans responded to Mexico’s invitation, another representative insisted, Texas changed overnight: “The savage roamed no longer in hostile array over the plains of Texas.”³⁸

Beleaguered northern Mexicans would have found much to criticize in these characterizations of Texan history, especially in the notion that the colonists had actually formed “a barrier against the Comanches.” But the Texas Creation Myth had of course been crafted for Americans, and with this constituency it helped solidify the moral foundation of Texan independence. More importantly, the myth introduced a set of ideas about Indians and Mexicans into American political discourse at a moment when the nation was taking notice of the whole of northern Mexico for the first time. More and more U.S. politicians could read about Mexico in newspapers and journals such as *Niles’ Weekly Register*, consular reports, travel literature on and descriptions of Texas and northern Mexico, and, of course, executive and congressional reports and debates. Through these kinds of sources, U.S. observers increasingly came to perceive the whole of the Mexican north in the same way that they saw the pre-American history of Texas, complete with savage Indians, suffering Mexicans, and desolate wastes.

Americans quickly learned that Indians had been frustrating Mexico across the north. An 1839 memorial from the Missouri Assembly, for instance, informed representatives in Washington that New Mexico had been devastated by Indian raiders: “The plains and pastures of that province have now become waste and deserted, and her people impoverished.” Josiah Gregg, chief chronicler of the Santa Fe trade, marveled at the “temerity” of Apaches and the inability of the Mexicans to resist

For diplomatic use of the Creation Myth, see Memucan Hunt to John Forsyth, Washington, August 4, 1837, in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 12: 129–140.

³⁶ For “either through want,” see Field, *Three Years in Texas*, 6. For “the untiring perseverance,” see Wharton, *Texas, a Brief Account*, 5. For a later rendition of the Texas Creation Myth, complete with quotes from Austin, see Charles Hunter Owen, *The Justice of the Mexican War* (New York, 1908), 92–96.

³⁷ Speech of Sen. Robert Walker, April 26, 1836, *Congressional Globe*, 24th Cong., 1st sess., 401.

³⁸ Speech of Rep. E.W. Ripley, May 7, 1836, *Congressional Globe*, 24th Cong., 1st sess. Appendix, 369–370; Speech of Rep. Adam Huntsman, March 2, 1837, *Congressional Globe*, 24th Cong., 2nd sess., Appendix, 226–228.

them: "Small bands of three or four warriors have been known to make their appearance within a mile of the city of Chihuahua in open day, killing the laborers and driving off whole herds of mules and horses without the slightest opposition."³⁹ The U.S. consul in Matamoros frequently reported on Indian depredations in other northern states. Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Sonora all seemed under siege, and Indian raiders went even farther. William Kennedy, widely accepted as an authority on Texas, informed his readers that Comanches and Apaches had for many years "penetrated into the interior of Durango . . . plundering and destroying the villages, and driving off horses and cattle." In 1840, *Niles'* reported that a raiding party of several hundred Indians had pushed as far south as Real de Catorce, in San Luis Potosí. Geographically minded readers would have marveled at the distances involved. Had Comanches ridden east instead of south, they would have been in striking range of Nashville or Atlanta.⁴⁰

For Americans, nothing so viscerally epitomized Mexico's prostration before the Indians as Mexican women and children in bondage. The same sources reporting Comanche raids often included notice that the Indians had "carried off several women," "made their escape with several captives," or "carried off a large number of women and children," whom they "invariably convert into servants."⁴¹ In 1846, Waddy Thompson, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, insisted that there were "not less than five thousand Mexicans at this moment slaves of Comanches." And Mexican ranchers, militia, even regular military personnel could seemingly do nothing about it. In 1844, for example, *Niles'* reported that Comanches had killed one-fourth of General Mariano Arista's entire northern army in a single engagement.⁴²

But while Comanches overwhelmed Mexicans, informants assured their readers, the Indians became craven wretches in the presence of armed Anglo-American men. The popular *New Orleans Picayune* explained that Comanches "care little for the Spaniards, but they dread the Americans." Gregg agreed, insisting that Comanches appeared "timid and cowardly" when they encountered Americans. Another author added that Comanches "recede as fast as encroachments are made upon their territory."⁴³ A historian of Texas observed that as they were "incapable of united and

³⁹ *Memorial of the Assembly of Missouri*, Senate Doc. no. 225, 25th Cong., 3rd sess., 1–4; Gregg, *Commerce*, 203.

⁴⁰ For the consular reports, see, for example, D. W. Smith to U.S. Secretary of State, Matamoros, October 24, 1836, frames 613–614, reel 1, *Despatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826–1906* (microfilm, 12 reels, National Archives Microfilm Publications) [hereafter *Despatches*]; same to same, November 30, 1837, frame 744, reel 1, *Despatches*; Kennedy, *Texas*, 330. Kennedy was an English writer and diplomat. See Laura Lyons McLemore, *Inventing Texas: Early Historians of the Lone Star State* (College Station, Tex., 2004), 41–42. For references to his work in congressional debates, see, for example, *Congressional Globe*, 28th Cong., 1st sess., Appendix, 696–701; *ibid.*, 760–775. For reports of Indian raids into San Luis Potosí and Durango, see *Niles'*, April 4, 1840, 66.

⁴¹ Richard Belt to John C. Calhoun, Matamoros, July 5, 1844, frame 369, reel 2, *Despatches*; D. W. Smith to U.S. Secretary of State, Matamoros, May 26, 1840, frame 166, reel 2, *Despatches*; *Niles'*, November 23, 1844, 178; Henry S. Foote, *Texas and the Texans; or, Advance of the Anglo-Americans to the South-West; including a history of leading events in Mexico, from the conquest by Fernando Cortes to the termination of the Texan revolution*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1841), 1: 298.

⁴² Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico* (New York, 1846), 172. For the reported slaughter of Arista's soldiers, see *Niles'*, April 4, 1840, 66.

⁴³ For the *Picayune's* reports, see Matthew C. Field, *Matt Field on the Santa Fe Trail*, ed. John E. Sunder (Norman, Okla., 1960), 269; Gregg, *Commerce*, 436; Orceneth Fisher, *Sketches of Texas in 1840; designed to answer, in a brief way, the numerous enquiries respecting the new republic, as to situation, extent, climate, soil, productions, water, government, society, religion, etc* (Springfield, Ill., 1841), 47.

skillful action in self-defense or otherwise,” Comanches must “melt away before their [Anglo-American] enemies by inches.” Kennedy, the great authority, dismissed these Indians as “a nation of robbers.” “Even a single American armed with the rifle has been known to keep large parties of them at bay,” he explained; “their depredations are always committed upon the defenseless.” So it was, still another author insisted, that Comanches chose to attack Mexicans, “an enemy more cowardly than themselves, and who has been long accustomed to permit them to ravage the country with impunity.”⁴⁴

In other words, the same Indians who had in American minds so efficiently dismantled northern Mexico supposedly dissolved into hapless cowards in the presence of Anglo-Americans. This idea was as essential as it was self-serving. By denigrating Comanches, critics excoriated the Mexican men who allowed themselves to be bested by such contemptible enemies. As in the Texas Creation Myth, American discourse about northern Mexico made Indians into the great signifiers of, rather than the reason for, Mexico’s failures. Like Texas prior to colonization, northern Mexico was in tatters not because Indians were strong, but because Mexicans were weak.

And why were Mexicans weak? Many commentators emphasized deficiencies of courage or intelligence. Writing about Apache depredations in Chihuahua, for example, Gregg insisted that occasional efforts at pursuing Indian attackers did nothing but “illustrate the imbecility” of the Mexicans, who were “always sure to make a precipitate retreat, generally without even obtaining a glimpse of the enemy.”⁴⁵ American observers also tried to explain Mexico’s Indian problem as a consequence of Mexican sloth, physical weakness, and stupidity. More holistic thinkers gathered all of these condemnations together under the roof of what during the Jacksonian period had become increasingly sophisticated pseudo-scientific theories about racial difference.⁴⁶

So in a fundamental, physical sense, Mexican blood was to blame for the Indian raids that had wrecked northern Mexico. The Texas Creation Myth featured mixed-

⁴⁴ For “incapable of united and skillful action,” see A. B. Lawrence, *A History of Texas; or, The emigrant’s guide to the new Republic, by a resident emigrant, late from the United States* (New York, 1844), 255. Kennedy, *Texas*, 332–333. For “an enemy more cowardly,” see Francis Moore, *Map and description of Texas, containing sketches of its history, geology, geography and statistics: With concise statements, relative to the soil, climate, productions, facilities of transportation, population of the country; and some brief remarks upon the character and customs of its inhabitants* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1840), 31–33.

⁴⁵ Gregg, *Commerce*, 203–204. For the compelling argument that anti-Mexican prejudice in the nineteenth-century U.S. should be understood as a legacy of the “Black Legend” of earlier centuries that had long demonized Spaniards in Anglo eyes, see David J. Weber, “Scarce More than Apes: The Historical Roots of Anglo-American Stereotypes of Mexicans in the Border Region,” in Weber, *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1988), 153–168, and Raymund A. Paredes, “The Origins of Anti-Mexican Sentiment in the United States,” in Weber, ed., *The Idea of Spanish Borderlands* (New York, 1991), 145–174.

⁴⁶ For the pseudo-scientific foundations of racism in this period, see Andrew Delinton Ferrand, “Cultural Dissonance in Mexican-American Relations: Ethnic, Racial and Cultural Images of the Coming of the War, 1846” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1979), 98–138. The standard work on the intersection of racism and territorial expansion is Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, 1981). For an early articulation of similar ideas, see Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York, 1963), 237–247. See also Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 132–172; Thomas R. Hietala, “‘This Splendid Juggernaut’: Westward a Nation and Its People,” in Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station, Tex., 1997), 48–67; John M. Belohlavek, “Race, Progress, and Destiny: Caleb Cushing and the Quest for American Empire,” *ibid.*, 21–47.

blood Mexican “Zamboes” who, from either “their dread of Indians” or their “want of personal prowess or military skill,” had been “too lazy to cultivate the soil, and too cowardly to resist the aggressions of the northern Indians.”⁴⁷ Stories about Indian raids from elsewhere in northern Mexico had the similar effect of rhetorically invalidating Mexico’s claim to the land, only on a much larger scale. Waddy Thompson, who had nothing but contempt for Comanches, thought that Mexico’s unending ordeal with Indian raids presented the best evidence against that nation’s future in North America. “That the Indian race of Mexico must recede before us, is quite as certain as that that is the destiny of our own Indians, who in a military point of view, if in no other, are superior to them.”⁴⁸ By the mid-1840s, such amateurish ethnographic comparisons had become commonplace in American thinking about Mexicans and their enticing northern territories.

MEXICANS ALSO ARRIVED at a rough consensus on why Indians had done such damage to the northern third of their nation, but it took them more than a decade to get there. Everyone acknowledged that the once-formidable Spanish defenses had declined and that Indians found it easier to raid than before. But that opportunity spoke more to how Indians accomplished their raids than to why they launched them in the first place. In reaching for ultimate causes, northern Mexicans tended initially to attribute the violence to what they saw as the base, animalistic, evil nature of *los salvajes*, whereas prominent authorities in Mexico City pointed to the Indians’ disadvantaged, pitiable condition.

Undoubtedly northerners held a range of shifting views about raiders.⁴⁹ Still, by the early 1830s, most northern policymakers and writers began framing the “war against the barbarians” as one pitting civilization, religion, and political organization against savagery, faithlessness, and chaotic individualism. A commentator from Chihuahua, for example, asked whether the same people who had cast off Spanish rule would now consent to become “slaves to some wandering barbarian tribes, who have no more policy than robbery and assassination.” Another observer demanded to know “what is a miserable handful of fearful cannibals that they should keep an organized society in constant anxiety?” Some in the north argued for negotiation and insisted on a shared humanity, but they were in the minority. “I could never agree that they are like us who live in society, profess a religion, and recognize all the rights established in it,” a lieutenant governor of Sonora informed an advocate for ne-

⁴⁷ Wharton, *Texas, a Brief Account*, 3; Kennedy, *Texas*, 338; Field, *Three Years in Texas*, 6.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico*, 239.

⁴⁹ The influential New Mexican priest Antonio José Martínez, for example, insisted that *los bárbaros* were fully human, lacking only education. He attributed raiding to desperation (shrinking bison populations, for instance), and found evidence of Indian capacity for conversion and reduction to civilized life in the many *convertidos* (referring to baptized Indian captives, especially—in the 1840s—Navajos) who lived alongside the New Mexicans. See Antonio José Martínez, *Esposición que el prebitero Antonio José Martínez, cura de Taos de Nuevo México, dirige al Gobierno del Exmo. Sor. General Antonio López de Santa Anna: Proponiendo la civilización de las naciones bárbaras que son al contorno del Departamento de Nuevo México* (Taos, N.Mex., 1843), n.p., reproduced in David J. Weber, ed., *Northern Mexico on the Eve of the United States Invasion: Rare Imprints Concerning California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, 1821–1846* (New York, 1976), n.p.

gotiation. “The Apaches are not similar to us, except in their human shape.”⁵⁰ *Los bárbaros* were animal, elemental, something, in the words of political geographer José Agustín Escudero, that “the ground seems to vomit forth in its pain.” Editors wrote that the enemy strikes without reason or warning, “kills the poor shepherd . . . wretched woodcutter . . . washer women . . . little children.” Hence the only rational, indeed the only possible, response, according to Sonora’s legislature, was “destruction and eternal war against these barbarians.”⁵¹

Presidents and prominent ministers in the nation’s capital thought the northern rhetoric excessive, and insisted not just that Apaches, Comanches, Navajos, and other raiders were human, but that they were Mexican. This was consistent with the sweeping claim of the Constitution of 1824 that everyone born inside Mexico’s territorial limits was *mexicano*, but it was also important because Mexican political elites contrasted their own enlightened, inclusive benevolence with the aggressive exclusionism of the United States, and especially with remembered Spanish cruelties.⁵² When northerners dehumanized Indians in deed as well as word—by promoting state-funded scalp bounties, for example—national officials intervened. Northern Indians needed to be helped, not hunted. In 1835, after four years of intense violence, President Antonio López de Santa Anna optimistically affirmed this notion that Apaches and Comanches were Mexicans. He admonished his northern subordinates that these wandering “groups of forest men . . . demand the attention of all friends of humanity,” and should be reduced to a state of civilization. Regrettably, individual raiders might need to be destroyed for their misdeeds. But ultimately those misdeeds followed from ignorance and misfortune, not from some essential and irredeemable corruption.⁵³

The conceptual chasm between these two positions aggravated the security crisis. Northerners viewed their fight against *los bárbaros* as an “eminently national” war, albeit one waged against an incomprehensible enemy. National officials saw raiders as something closer to Mexican “banditti,” and hence as domestic agents of local or

⁵⁰ For “slaves to some wandering barbarian tribes,” see letter from Chihuahua signed “a contributor,” in Orozco, *Guerras indias: Antología*, 247–248. For “what is a miserable handful,” see Carlos Pacheco to the permanent diputación of the congress of Chihuahua, Chihuahua, December 13, 1833, *ibid.*, 227–229. For the lieutenant governor, see Ignacio de Bustamante to Ignacio Mora, Arizpe, May 13, 1835, Doc. no. 373, Pinart Prints microfilm set, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley [hereafter Pinart Prints].

⁵¹ For “the ground seems to vomit,” see “Comunicado de José Agustín de Escudero, 1839,” in Orozco, *Guerras indias: Antología*, 265. For “kills the poor shepherd,” see *La Luna de Chihuahua*, March 2, 1841, quoted in Smith, *Borderlander*, 123. For “destruction and eternal war,” see J. Joaquín G. Heróeros, circular, Arizpe, June 30, 1835 (copy of notice from June 2), Doc. no. 405, Pinart Prints. For consideration of savagery rhetoric in the centuries-long contest between Spaniards/Mexicans and northern Indians, with a focus on nineteenth-century Chihuahua, see Jorge Chávez Chávez, “Retrato del Indio Bárbaro: Proceso de Justificación de la Barbarie de los Indios del Septentrión Mexicano y Formación de la Cultura Norteña,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 73, no. 3 (1998): 389–425.

⁵² For *los indios bárbaros* as Mexicans, see Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 103–104. For the conceptual position of Indians in post-independence Mexico, see Charles A. Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821–1853* (New Haven, Conn., 1968), 215–247. For an insightful discussion of how Indian identities complicated the national project in Latin America, see Héctor Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Quest for Self-Determination*, trans. Lucia Rayas (Boulder, Colo., 1997), 3–22, 65–82.

⁵³ For the cancellation of Chihuahua’s scalp-hunting program, see Smith, *Borderlander*, 71. For the president’s quote, see law of January 8, 1835, in Manuel Dublán and José María Lozano, eds., *Legislación Mexicana; ó Colección completa de las disposiciones legislativas expedidas desde la independencia de la República*, 22 vols. (Mexico, 1876–93), 3: 9–12.

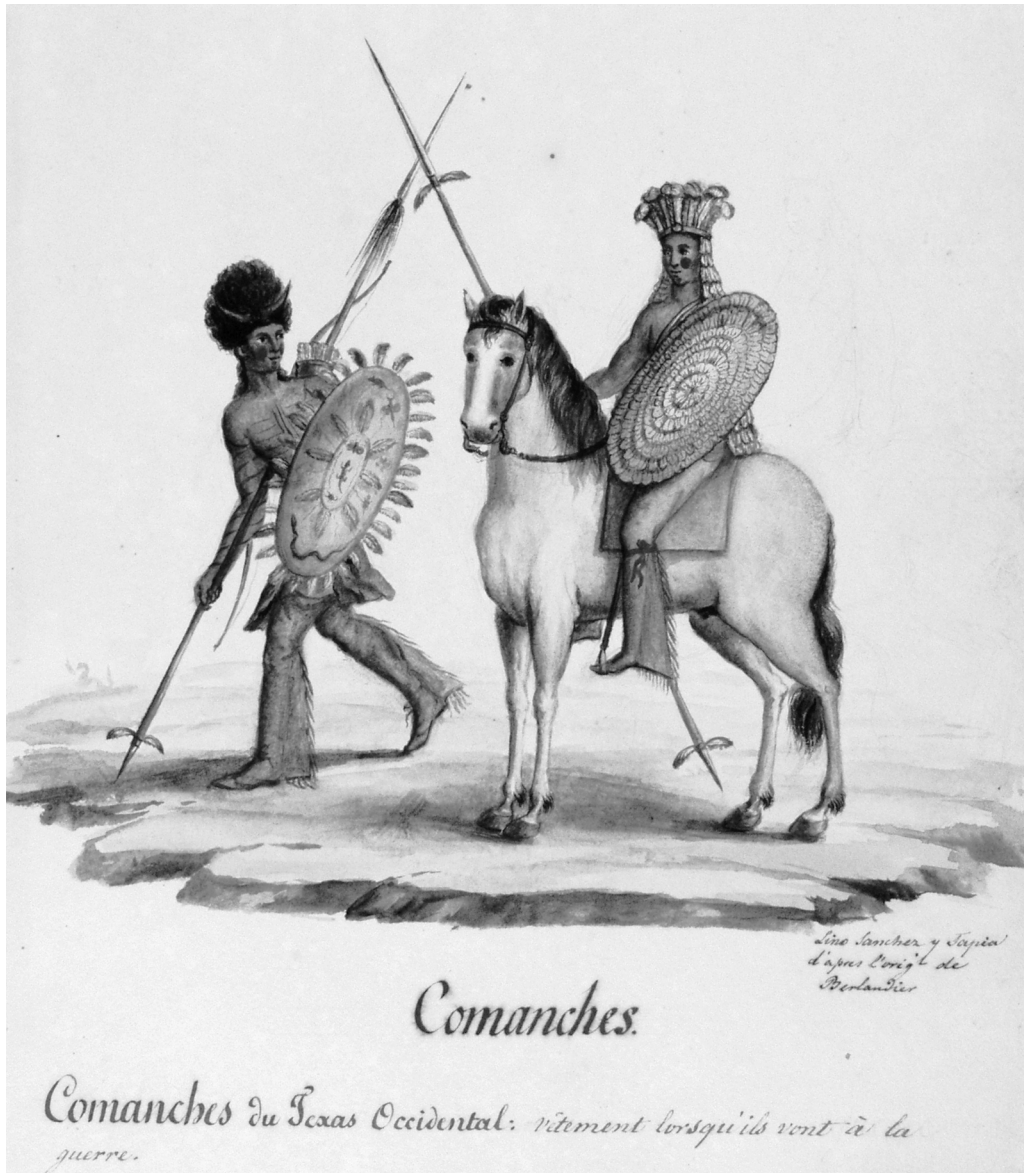


FIGURE 3: *Western Comanches in War-Dress*. Watercolor by Lino Sánchez y Tapia. Reproduced by permission of the Gilcrease Museum of the Americas.

regional crime waves—not as alien threats to national security. Without a single interpretive framework that situated Indian raiders in an unambiguously national context, frontier defense remained disorganized, ineffective, and hobbled by bitter competition for inadequate resources.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For “the war against the barbarians is eminently national,” see *El Republicano: Periodico Oficial del Gobierno de Coahuila*, November 1, 1845. The “banditti” characterization was an attempt by the U.S. ambassador to Mexico to explain Mexico’s perspective to the U.S. secretary of state. See Joel R. Poinsett to Henry Clay, Mexico City, April 13, 1827 [private], in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Mexico, 1826–1906* (microfilm, 179 reels, National Archives Microfilm Publications), M97.

After a decade of disagreement, Mexicans finally began to construct a unified discourse about Indian raiders. As was the case in the United States, the nationalization of Mexico's conversation started with Texas, and emerged from a combination of deliberate political calculation, ideological reasoning, and honest observation. In the early 1840s, as the Republic of Texas adopted more belligerent rhetoric toward Mexico, northern officials observed that the word "Texan" commanded Mexico City's attention in a way that "Apache" or "Comanche" never had. Editors of northern newspapers began discerning heretofore underappreciated links between Texans and *los salvajes*. Northern governors started doing the same, informing their constituents and superiors that the Indian invasions were "directed by the Texans," and successfully linking the two threats in appeals for resources.⁵⁵

Mexico City felt comfortable with such notions. Observers in the capital had long believed that Texans and Americans provided Indians with their firearms, and pronouncements and policies from the early 1840s suggest that national officials were coming to see connections more sinister still.⁵⁶ In 1841, for example, when Texan officials started boasting of plans to make the Sierra Madre their southern boundary, the editors of Mexico's official newspaper insisted that Texans were inciting Indian raiders to prepare the way for a planned invasion. In 1842, the central government rewarded the northern town of Reynosa, Tamaulipas, for repelling a Comanche attack. The militiamen and their leaders received a coat of arms, and a title that had nothing to do with Indians: "Valiant defender of Texas, of the integrity of the Mexican territory." In 1844, the Mexican congress urged the president to send resources to frontier populations because "their loyal breasts are the walls that contain the barbarians beyond San Luis [Potosí], Zacatecas, and other departments," and because "the national honor and dignity wants not to submit to the disloyal Texan."⁵⁷

Once the purported Texan-Indian connection started coming into focus at the frontier and in the capital, two things happened to turn this rhetorical convergence into something resembling a national consensus. First, U.S. president John Tyler presented Congress with a plan for the annexation of Texas in the spring of 1844. Tyler's scheme failed, but Mexico's leaders took it to mean that annexation was only a matter of time. While officials in Mexico considered the implications of this, the second change took place: Indians dramatically escalated their raiding activities across the whole of northern Mexico. In Chihuahua, a series of agreements that had secured peace with Apaches in 1842 and 1843 started to unravel in 1844 and came entirely undone the year after. In New Mexico, the Navajo conflict seemed worse

⁵⁵ For editorials, see, for example, *Gaceta del Gobierno del Tamaulipas*, October 26, 1844. For "directed by the Texans," see Smith, "Comanche Bridge," 69. For an example of the successful use of this connection in an appeal for resources, see Juan N. de la Garza y Evia to Minister of War, Monterrey, July 25, 1845, and Pedro García Conde to Juan N. de la Garza y Evia, Mexico, August 4, 1845, E4 and E5, C18, Correspondencia con la secretaría de Guerra y Marina, Archivo General del Estado de Nuevo León, Monterrey, Nuevo León [hereafter AGENL-MGM].

⁵⁶ Mexico's foreign ministry complained repeatedly about arms sales to its U.S. counterpart during the 1830s. See, for example, the documents in Expediente H/610 "837"/2, Legajo 16-3-31, Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City.

⁵⁷ *Diario del Gobierno de la Republica Mexicana* [Mexico City], February 24, 1841, as described in Antonio Escobar Ohmstede and Teresa Rojas Rabiela, eds., *La presencia del indígena en la prensa capitalina del siglo XIX* (Mexico, 1992), 168. For the coat of arms, see Dublán and Lozano, *Legislación Mexicana*, 4: 198–199. For congressional appeal, see "Contestación del presidente de la cámara de diputados," July 4, 1844, no. 1519, Lafragua.

every month, and the Mexican governor foolishly provoked Utes, who began threatening exposed northern towns and villages.⁵⁸

Most importantly, after a relatively uneventful 1843, Comanches and Kiowas launched several destructive campaigns into Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Durango, and Zacatecas in 1844 and 1845. This surge in raiding coincided with the consummation of a formal peace between the Republic of Texas and the Hois, the southernmost Comanche tribe. The treaty indirectly encouraged raiding by establishing vigorous new trade relationships and by improving security for the families and fortunes that Indian men would have to leave behind while campaigning in Mexico. But the timing of the attacks convinced Mexicans of a direct relationship between raiders and *norteamericanos*, and small but significant details only deepened the suspicions. In autumn 1844, for example, Mexican forces drove several hundred raiders from northern Tamaulipas and found Indian dead on the field wearing U.S. peace medals featuring a bust of President Martin Van Buren.⁵⁹ During the same season, victorious Mexican militia in Chihuahua found non-Indians among fallen “Comanche” warriors, a discovery that for them confirmed “the idea that the Texans foment them to make war upon us.” Later, authorities in Durango discovered that four “men of reason”—Christians—were guiding Comanche raiders. “[T]hey are from distant lands and are the foulest murderers.” It now appeared that *norteamericanos* had provided Indian raiders with “more advanced objectives than killing and robbing.” Durango’s *Registro Oficial* urged its readers to see things whole, insisting that “the war against the barbarians cannot be considered isolated and like the one our fathers suffered through, but rather intimately linked to the Texas war [that is, the looming war with the U.S. over Texas], to which it is auxiliary and cooperative.”⁶⁰

As international tension increased, more and more Mexicans started seeing in the security crisis evidence of Indian-*norteamericano* collusion. James Polk won the U.S. presidential election in November 1844 thanks to his strong support for annexing Texas, and the U.S. Congress responded by approving annexation days before his inauguration. Soon after Polk took office, Mexico’s minister of war, Pedro García Conde, confidently explained to Mexico’s house and senate that the “hordes of barbarians” were “sent out every time by the usurpers of our territory, in order to desolate the terrain they desire to occupy without risk and with perfidy.” García Conde described an agreement whereby the U.S. provided Indians not only with arms and

⁵⁸ For diplomacy between Mexico and the United States in these years, see Pletcher, *Diplomacy of Annexation*, 113–311. For Apaches, see Griffen, *Utmost Good Faith*, 91–114. For Utes and Navajos, see Ward Alan Minge, “Mexican Independence Day and a Ute Tragedy in Santa Fe, 1844,” in Albert Schroeder, ed., *The Changing Ways of Southwestern Indians: A Historic Perspective* (Glorieta, N.Mex., 1973), 107–122. For Arapahos, see Frank D. Reeve, “The Charles Bent Papers [Letters from Charles Bent to U.S. Consul in Santa Fe Manuel Alvarez, from the Benjamin J. Read Collection, Historical Society of New Mexico, Santa Fe],” *New Mexico Historical Review* 30, no. 2 (1955): 155–159.

⁵⁹ Texas-Comanche relationships during this period are best discussed in Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 195–211. For the medals, see *Gaceta del Gobierno de Tamaulipas*, October 26, 1844.

⁶⁰ For Chihuahua, see Smith, “Comanche Bridge,” 67–68. For the “men of reason,” see José Francisco Terán to Marcelino Castañeda, Labor del Rodeo, October 15, 1845, in *Registro Oficial*, October 19, 1845. For “more advanced,” see *Gaceta del Gobierno de Tamaulipas*, October 26, 1844. Final quote is from *Registro Oficial*, September 25, 1845. For the U.S.-Indian connection reported elsewhere in Mexico, see, for example, the article from *La Prudencia*, the official paper of Guanajuato, reprinted in *Registro Oficial*, October 9, 1845.

ammunition, but also with a political education, with “the necessary instruction they need to understand the power they can wield when united in great masses.”⁶¹

The emerging national consensus on why Indians did what they did—because unscrupulous *norteamericanos* and possibly even agents of the U.S. government encouraged and instructed them to—was as much a fiction as the Texas Creation Myth. Apaches and Comanches doubtlessly obtained some arms and ammunition from Americans, and there is evidence that a few merchants tried to increase business by fomenting raids.⁶² But *norteamericano* traders had little or no influence over native policy—Indians in Mexico’s far north were much more likely to trade with and seek council from other Indians. And as for the U.S. government, it had little contact with Comanches and Kiowas in the 1830s and early 1840s, and none with Apaches and Navajos.

Nonetheless, the consensus had its uses. It provided a conceptual framework that finally seemed to promise unanimity of national purpose in coping with Indian raiders. By putting an American stamp on the long lists of dead and the numbingly familiar news stories of empty corrals, burned-out ranches, and childless parents, the new consensus also fueled anti-Americanism in advance of an increasingly likely war. And, finally, the imagined conspiracy between *norteamericanos* and Indians helped northerners and national leaders alike escape a conceptual problem of their own making. It had been emotionally and ideologically satisfying to speak of “a miserable handful of fearful cannibals” or of “children of the desert” yearning to be civilized and embraced as compatriots. But such talk had required Herculean self-deception in the presence of several hundred Indian raiders campaigning together with methodical precision across multiple states, year after year. So when, in their hour of crisis, Mexicans started looking through Indians and saw *norteamericanos* on the other side, dispensing weapons, supplies, and “the necessary instruction,” the world made more sense than it had in a long time.⁶³

BUT CONSENSUS CAME TOO LATE. The U.S. Army invaded northern Mexico in the spring of 1846, and Americans won striking victories over Mexican troops due in large part to advantages in light artillery. As Polk’s army moved through the north, it found a land already scoured by war. From New Mexico to Tamaulipas, the invaders saw abandoned homes, overgrown fields, and hastily finished graves. These artifacts of desperation had their complement in the occasional town or village crammed full of refugees, or, as one American called the displaced that he glimpsed

⁶¹ Pedro García Conde, “Memoria del secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Guerra y Marina,” Doc. no. 501 in Lafragua. This sort of argument can be found even in recent literature. See, for example, Jesús Vargas Valdez, “La resistencia del pueblo de Chihuahua ante la invasión norteamericana,” in Serna, *México en guerra*, 157–184.

⁶² Holland Coffee and James Kirker were the two American traders most credibly accused of arming and encouraging raiders. For Coffee, see Angel Navarro to Domingo de Ugartechea, Bexar, June 1, 1835; James Bowie to Henry Rueg, Natches [Neches], August 3, 1835; and Peter Ellis Bean to Domingo de Ugartechea, Nacogdoches, August 11, 1835, all found in Malcolm Dallas McLean, ed., *Papers Concerning Robertson’s Colony in Texas*, 18 vols. (Fort Worth, Tex., 1974–1995), 10: 347, 11: 250, 280. For Kirker, see Smith, *Borderlander*, 47–58.

⁶³ For “hijos del desierto” [a quote from General Mariano Arista], see *Gaceta del Gobierno de Tamaulipas*, February 16, 1843.

in a northern village, “an over portion of inhabitants. Every house and hut was crowded with men, boys, women, and children.”⁶⁴ Sometimes northern Mexicans confided in the *norteamericanos*, telling tales of perpetual insecurity, lamenting dead or stolen kin, and promising cooperation in return for protection from Indians.⁶⁵

Polk and his war planners had counted on this. While the war would eventually end when U.S. troops took Mexico City and the “Halls of the Montezumas,” initially the president intended to wage the war entirely in the north, in those same regions that had been devastated by Indian raids. Polk and his advisors were anxious to obtain the friendship, or at least neutrality, of the northern Mexicans who would fall under U.S. occupation. American generals had to worry about tens of thousands of civilians swelling the ranks of the Mexican army, about coordinated efforts to deny Americans necessary supplies, and, perhaps most importantly, about the possibility of a broad-based guerrilla insurgency against the occupation. Anxiety over such scenarios prompted Polk and his subordinates to craft detailed instructions for commanders on the ground, ordering them to exploit Mexicans’ fears and dissatisfaction with their government. Indians would be central to this task. “It is our wish to see you liberated from despots,” General Zachary Taylor was to announce at each town conquered or surrendered, “to drive back the savage Cumanches, to prevent the renewal of their assaults, and to compel them to restore to you from captivity your long lost wives and children.” General Stephen W. Kearny delivered a New Mexican variant. “From the Mexican government you have never received protection,” he proclaimed. “The Apaches and the Navajoes come down from the mountains and carry off your sheep, and even your women, whenever they please. My government will correct all this.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Observations of deserted homes and tales of raiding, etc., are common in eyewitness accounts of the war. See, for example, James William Abert, *Abert's New Mexico Report, 1846-'47* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1962), 49, 62, 66, 125, 135–136; Ross Calvin, ed., *Lieutenant Emory Reports: A Reprint of Lieutenant W. H. Emory's Notes of a Military Reconnaissance* (1848; repr., Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1951), 80, 82–84, 88; Maurice G. Fulton and Paul Horgan, eds., *Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg* (Norman, Okla., 1941), 90, 91, 98, 99, 108, 109, 111, 112, 119, 123–125; D. H. Hill, *A Fighter from Way Back: The Mexican War Diary of Lt. Daniel Harvey Hill, 4th Artillery, USA*, ed. Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., and Timothy D. Johnson (Kent, Ohio, 2002), 59–60, 145; Napoleon Jackson Tecumseh Dana, *Monterrey Is Ours! The Mexican War Letters of Lieutenant Dana, 1845–1847*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Lexington, Ky., 1990), 103, 115; John T. Hughes, *Doniphan's Expedition: Containing an Account of the Conquest of New Mexico; General Kearny's Overland Expedition to California; Doniphan's Campaign Against the Navajos; His Unparalleled March upon Chihuahua and Durango; and the Operations of General Price at Santa Fe* (Cincinnati, 1848), 143–144, 151, 162, 202–203, 285, 326, 358, 363; Frederick Adolph Wislizenus, *Memoir of a Tour to Northern Mexico* (1848; repr., Fairfield, Wash., 1992), 24, 27, 46, 56, 58, 59, 63, 66, 67, 71. For “over portion,” see Hughes, *Doniphan's Expedition*, 362.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Dana, *Monterrey Is Ours*, 115; Smith, *War with Mexico*, 1: 204, 479; Joseph B. Ridout, “An Anti-National Disorder: Antonio Canales and Northeastern Mexico, 1836–1852” (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1994), 136; Samuel E. Chamberlain, *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue*, ed. William H. Goetzmann (Austin, Tex., 1996), 259.

⁶⁶ For Polk's concern with occupation strategy, see James K. Polk, *The Diary of James K. Polk during His Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife, 4 vols. (Chicago, 1910), 2: 5. See also Elbert W. Smith, *Magnificent Missourian: The Life of Thomas Hart Benton* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1958), 214–215; Marcy to Taylor, Washington, June 3, 1846, in House Executive Doc. no. 60, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 153–155. For fears about Mexicans depriving the U.S. Army of provisions, see Taylor to the Adjutant General of the Army, Matamoros, July 2, 1846, in House Executive Doc. no. 60, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 329–332. These were realistic anxieties. In August and September 1846, for example, military authorities in Nuevo León ordered residents of Cerralvo and Marín to abandon their homes and carry their belongings with them, to hide their animals, to deprive the enemy of all resources, and to attack them when possible. See Miguel A. González Quiroga, “Nuevo León ante la invasión norteamericana, 1846–1848,”

Given Mexican assumptions about the causes of Indian raiding, we can imagine people in the crowds shaking their heads and exchanging knowing looks. But help from hypocrites surely seemed better than no help at all, because conflicts with Indians would only intensify during the U.S.-Mexican War. In New Mexico, Navajo headmen protested when American officers insisted that they stop raiding Mexicans. "You have lately commenced a war against the same people," the leader Zacarillos Largos observed. "You now turn upon us for attempting to do what you have done yourselves." By 1847, American periodicals were reporting that raids in New Mexico were worse than they had been in twenty years.⁶⁷ In Chihuahua and Sonora, the war likewise coincided with an amplification of interethnic violence. Just months after the start of the U.S. invasion, scalp hunters funded by Chihuahua's government assisted Mexican townspeople in massacring at least 130 Apache men, women, and children who had come unarmed and at peace into the town of Galeana. An observer in Chihuahua City recalled "howling jollification," copious amounts of tequila and mescal, and hats thrown into the air in "wild exultation" as the withered black scalps were paraded through town. Mangas Coloradas and other Apache leaders responded with waves of retributive violence that would crash down upon northwestern Mexico throughout the war.⁶⁸

Most consequentially, Comanches and Kiowas continued sending huge raiding campaigns into Mexico during the U.S.-Mexican War. Doubtlessly they sought to profit from Mexico's distractions, but their campaigns also drew impetus from events above the Rio Grande. In 1846, southern Comanche negotiators forged an alliance with Mescalero Apaches, former enemies who frequented critical crossing points into Mexico and who had previously hindered Comanche raiding campaigns. The peace likely put the Mescaleros' extensive knowledge about northern Mexico at Comanche disposal, and may have led to joint raids.⁶⁹ Moreover, 1846 marked the end

in Serna, *México en guerra*, 425–472, 431. Instructions to Taylor and Kearny are in Senate Doc. no. 19, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., 17–18. Kearny's proclamation can be found in Calvin, *Emory Reports*, 50. For similar attempts to convince Mexicans of the failure of their government to protect them from Indians, see *Matamoros Reville*, June 27, 1846; Manuel Alvarez to James Buchanan, Santa Fe, September 4, 1846, *Despatches from U.S. Consuls at Santa Fe, 1830–1846* (microfilm, 1 reel, National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1951), reel 1.

⁶⁷ For continued violence in New Mexico, see J. Lee Correll, *Through White Men's Eyes: A Contribution to Navajo History—A Chronological Record of the Navaho People from Earliest Times to the Treaty of June 1, 1868* (Window Rock, Ariz., 1976), 214–230; McNitt, *Navajo Wars*, 122–131. Quote is from Hughes, *Doniphan's Expedition*, 187. For periodicals, see *Niles' National Register*, November 6, 1847, 155, which took the story from the *St. Louis Republican*. For another, similar lament, see *Niles' National Register*, June 19, 1847, 252.

⁶⁸ For the massacre and quotes, see Smith, *Borderlander*, 161–168. See also the graphic second-hand description of the event in George F. Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains* (1848; repr., Glorieta, N.Mex., 1973), 151–154. For the effect on Apache policies, see Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 135–158.

⁶⁹ In August 1846, P. M. Butler and M. G. Lewis reported that 500 Mescaleros and 3,500 "Esreequetees" had "formed an alliance and acquisition to" a Comanche tribe they called the "Nocoonees," referring to the Nokonis, an ethnonym that only begins to appear in the documents around this time. When they used the term "Esreequetees," Butler and Lewis were referring either to the Comanche word for Mescaleros, "esikwita," or to the Kiowa term from which it was derived, "ésèkwitá-g," both of which mean "gray feces" or "brown feces," a condition thought to be the consequence of eating mescal. (See Morris Edward Opler, "Mescalero Apache," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 10: *Southwest*, ed. Alfonso Ortiz [Washington, D.C., 1983], 419–439, 438.) Thus the 4,000 people to whom Butler and Lewis referred were all Mescaleros. The authors added that the Mescaleros "have heretofore been at

of a long, stable period of greater than average rainfall in most of northern Mexico and the southern plains. The effects of the drought were exacerbated by long-term over-hunting for the hide trade and habitat destruction along critical watercourses. Combined, these developments would do great damage to the southern bison herd. By 1847, the U.S. Indian agent for Texas reported widespread consumption of horses and mules in Comanche camps, and the Kiowa calendar memorialized the winter of 1847–1848 for its elaborate antelope drive—something resorted to only in times of great scarcity. Disappointing hunts seem to have contributed to a series of tremendously destructive raiding campaigns into Coahuila, Chihuahua, Durango, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí during the U.S.-Mexican War.⁷⁰

Northern Mexicans suffered grievously. “And to think that we owe all this,” raged the editors of the *Registro Oficial*, “to those infamous North American enemies who push the bloody hordes of savages upon us and direct their operations with unparalleled astuteness and ferocity! Such are the methods through which a nation that styles itself enlightened and just wages war.” A British traveler passing through north-central Mexico in late 1846 glimpsed the effects of Indian raids everywhere he went. As far south as Zacatecas City, he found that “‘Los Indios! Los Indios!’ was the theme of every conversation.” As he made his cautious way north, he constantly heard tales of terror and “dread expectation,” and saw the raiders’ work in settlement after settlement: “a perfect forest of crosses, many of them thrown down or mutilated by Indians”; a well belonging to Chihuahua’s governor choked with slaughtered animals; vultures feasting on a roadside corpse with an arrow buried in its face.⁷¹

Therefore, when northern Mexicans spoke of the “enemy” in 1846 and 1847, they as often meant *indios* as *norteamericanos*. The ruinous legacy of fifteen years of raiding and the ongoing threat of Indian violence left large segments of northern Mexico’s population unable and probably unwilling to resist the U.S. Army. In the northeast, for example, state officials were ordered to muster all males between the ages of sixteen and fifty against the Americans. While the orders exempted those places most exposed to raids, many local authorities still demurred, insisting that their communities needed the men to patrol against Indians.⁷² Occasionally this scenario un-

war with the Camanches, but recently become their allies, and are now at war with Mexico.” See P. M. Butler and M. G. Lewis to W. Medill, Washington, D.C., August 8, 1846, in Senate Report Com. no. 171, 30th Cong., 1st sess. For similar observations, see Robert S. Neighbors to W. Medill, Austin, Tex., January 6, 1847, House Executive Doc. no. 100, 29th Cong., 2nd sess. For previous Mescalero-Mexican cooperation against Comanches, see, for example, Mauricio Ugarte to commander general of Chihuahua, El Norte, May 18, 1841, in *Diario del Gobierno*, June 14, 1841. For Mescalero-Comanche conflict, see also *Diario del Gobierno*, October 19, 1841.

⁷⁰ For the drought and the decline in the herd, see Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850,” *Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (1991): 465–485, 482. See also Pekka Hämäläinen, “The First Phase of Destruction: Killing the Southern Plains Buffalo, 1790–1840,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2001): 101–114. For the loss of habitat along the Arkansas (and for shrinking herds), see Elliott West, *The Way West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1995), 13–83. For the consumption of horses and mules, see Robert S. Neighbors to W. Medill, Torrey’s Trading House, June 22, 1847, in Senate Doc. no. 734, 30th Cong., 1st sess. For the antelope drive, see Mooney, *Calendar*, 287–289.

⁷¹ *Registro Oficial*, October 22, 1846. For the traveler, see Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico*, 113–129, 161.

⁷² For the draft order, see Juan N. Almonte to Juan N. de la Garza y Evia, Mexico City, August 28, 1846, E10, C18, AGENL-MGM. For failures to supply requested men, see Miguel A. González Quiroga, “Nuevo León ocupado: El gobierno de Nuevo León durante la guerra entre México y los Estados Uni-

folded on a grand scale. In late 1846, Santa Anna labored to amass a huge army and defeat Taylor near Monterrey. Mexico City called upon the states to raise men, but, recognizing the troubles that the north faced from both Indians and Americans, insisted on contributions from only three northern states: Chihuahua, Durango, and Zacatecas. Suspicious of Santa Anna and, more importantly, facing acute threats from Apaches and Comanches, none of the three sent any men. In February 1847, the Mexican army lost the battle of Buena Vista by the narrowest of margins. Had Chihuahua, Durango, and Zacatecas met their quotas, Santa Anna's force would have been increased by one-fifth, perhaps enough to win the battle and shift the entire dynamic of the war.⁷³ Finally, the legacy and ongoing reality of Indian raiding inhibited the emergence of a popular insurgency against the U.S. occupation in the north. While northerners did organize against the invaders, most notably in New Mexico and California, guerrilla activity in the north never seriously threatened Taylor's position. U.S. commanders denounced insurgent attacks on stragglers and the occasional mule train, and even responded to such acts by inflicting severe collective punishments upon Mexican settlements. But cooler heads recognized that the insurgency was but a shadow of what it could be. Traveling with the U.S. Army, Josiah Gregg observed that the key northern insurgent had fewer than a thousand or even a hundred men, although northeastern Mexico should have been able to produce a hundred thousand volunteers to wage irregular warfare against American troops. Had it materialized, such an insurgency would likely have made it militarily and politically impossible for Polk to open up the decisive campaign into central Mexico.⁷⁴

But Taylor's occupation did not come under serious guerrilla threat, Polk did send General Winfield Scott to central Mexico in early 1847, and the Americans did conquer the capital that autumn. In defeat, certain Mexican leaders denounced what they saw as northern indifference, even complicity with the invader. Durango's editors assailed those who accused the state's population of treason. "Why? Because we have not fielded armies that have been impossible to raise, because they need be composed of men paid in cash, and our brothers have been assassinated by the barbarians, or else fled far away from their fury?" Chihuahua's representatives likewise

dos," in Vázquez, *México al tiempo*, 333–359, 341–342; González Quiroga, "Nuevo León ante la invasión," 429. An official in Chihuahua blamed his inability to field men against U.S. soldiers on the fact that Indians had stolen all of the horses; "this land is plagued with savages." See *Registro Oficial*, December 31, 1847.

⁷³ For Santa Anna's efforts at raising men, see William A. DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822–1852* (College Station, Tex., 1997), 108–109. The government's order called for 1,600 men from Zacatecas, 600 men from Durango, and 560 men from Chihuahua. See Tomás Calvillo Unna and María Isabel Monroy Castillo, "Entre regionalismo y federalismo: San Luis Potosí, 1846–1848," in Vázquez, *México al tiempo*, 417–454, 423. For the states' refusal, see Albert C. Ramsey, ed., *The Other Side; or, Notes for the History of the War between Mexico and the United States* (New York, 1850), 85–86; Smith, *War with Mexico*, 1: 376. For explanations why, see, for example, Isidro Reyes to Governor of Durango, San Miguel del Mesquital, November 1, 1846, *Registro Oficial*, November 8, 1846.

⁷⁴ For Gregg, see Fulton and Horgan, *Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg*, 2: 141. There was intense debate in Mexico about whether to formally support a system of guerrilla war. See Ramsey, *The Other Side*, 439–442, for the argument that sustained guerrilla activity would have driven the U.S. Army out of Mexico. See also Irving W. Levinson, *Wars within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites, and the United States of America, 1846–1848* (Fort Worth, Tex., 2005), 66. For U.S. attacks upon villages as reprisals for guerrilla activity, see Foos, *Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, 113–148.

tried to defend their honor. They reminded their compatriots that Chihuahua had been “afflicted and desolated for fifteen years by the savages, drowned in the blood of the men and in the lamentations of the widows and the orphans, an ideal theatre in which to showcase the power of the United States.”⁷⁵

Subtract the irony, and expansionists in Washington would have agreed. To their way of thinking, Chihuahua and the rest of northern Mexico was not only an ideal showcase for U.S. power, but a land in desperate need of it. By the time senators began openly debating how much territory to demand from Mexico, expansionists could draw on more than a decade of observations to describe a Mexican north empty of meaningful Mexican history, and, by all appearances, increasingly empty of Mexicans themselves. So it was that Senator Edward Hannegan could defend taking half of Mexico’s territory simply by characterizing it as empty, “essential to us, useless to her,” a “wilderness uninhabited, save by bands of roving savages.” Senator Robert Hunter said that he did not “believe it practicable to prevent our people from overspreading that country. The Mexican people [are] now receding before the Indian; and this affords a new argument in favor of our occupation of the territory, which would otherwise fall into the occupation of the savage.”⁷⁶

These perceptions should be taken seriously. U.S. leaders turned to tales of Indians attacking Mexicans for more than just rhetorical cover. Congressmen, editors, and administration officials pointed to Mexico’s ruinous war with frontier Indians as compelling and, to their minds, honest evidence that Mexicans were incapable of developing their northern lands. This is not to say that everyone subscribing to this view also wanted to acquire Mexican territory. Politicians ambivalent about or even opposed to the war also talked about raiding, but they incorporated Indians into arguments against a cession—for example, invoking the “well-known fact” that raiders had “encroached upon and broken up many of the settlements of the Spaniards” in the north, leaving behind mainly indigenous Mexicans unfit for American political life.⁷⁷ In other words, rhetoric about Mexico’s Indian war was not so much part of a calculated expansionist argument as it was indicative of assumptions that by 1846 had become common across the political spectrum.

Indeed, one of the men who spoke most earnestly about Indians was often at odds with the expansionist program. John C. Calhoun abstained from the initial vote on the war, disliked the president’s machinations, and thought that acquiring significant territory below the Rio Grande, which is what Polk and some of his cabinet privately

⁷⁵ For Durango, see *Registro Oficial*, April 8, 1847. For charges against Chihuahua, see, for example, Bustamante, *El nuevo Bernal Díaz*, 226. For Chihuahua’s response, see “La Diputación de Chihuahua a la Nación, March 25, 1847,” in José María Ponce de León, ed., *Reseñas históricas del estado de Chihuahua* (Chihuahua, 1913), 350–357; and Luis Jáuregui, “Chihuahua en la tormenta, su situación política durante la Guerra con los Estados Unidos: Septiembre de 1846–Julio de 1848,” in Vázquez, *México al tiempo*, 134–156, 145–147. Final quote is from “La Diputación Permanente de la Honorable Legislatura de Chihuahua a sus comitentes, Villa de Allende, April 6, 1848,” in Ponce de León, ed., *Reseñas históricas*, 344–346.

⁷⁶ For “essential to us,” see speech of Sen. Edward Hannegan, February 26, 1847, *Globe*, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., 516. For “believe it practicable,” see speech of Sen. Robert Hunter, February 7, 1848, *Globe*, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 310.

⁷⁷ For “well-known fact,” see [Sen.] S. W. Downs, *Speech on the Mexican War, delivered before the Senate on January 31, 1848* (Washington, D.C., 1848). Similarly, see Rep. Truman Smith, March 1, 1848, *Globe*, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 416–417.



Indian Atrocities in New Mexico.

FIGURE 4: "Indian Atrocities in New Mexico." From John Frost, *Pictorial History of Mexico and the Mexican War* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1848).

advocated, would hurt the slave states.⁷⁸ So at two different moments when he feared that events might shift in favor of a larger cession, Calhoun made speeches in support of having U.S. forces unilaterally withdraw to the Rio Grande and keeping everything above. First, he justified taking New Mexico and California in part by pointing to Mexico's singular failure with the Indians. "It was a remarkable fact in the history of this continent," he said, "that, for the first time, the aborigines had been pressing

⁷⁸ For the desire on the part of Polk, Secretary of Treasury Robert J. Walker, and Secretary of State James Buchanan to make the Sierra Madre the new boundary rather than the Rio Grande, see Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 186–187. Others championed the wildly unrealistic notion of annexing all of Mexico. See John Douglas Pitts Fuller, *The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico, 1846–1848* (Baltimore, Md., 1936); John H. Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846–1848* (Madison, Wis., 1973), 120–141.

upon the population of European extraction.” A year later, Calhoun added an argument about defense: “Well, the whole of the country covered by that line is inhabited by Indian tribes, so powerful that there is no fear of Mexico invading. They invade Mexico! They are too powerful for her; and it will not require a single soldier to be stationed on its whole extent to protect us against Mexico.”⁷⁹

No one rose to dispute Calhoun’s characterizations. Many disagreed with his position, certainly, but no one challenged the notion that Indians were dismantling Mexico’s accomplishments in the north. This is surely a basic reason why, except in narrow debates about the Texas-Mexico border, opponents of the war and of the cession spoke of Mexico’s territorial rights only rarely and in generalities. Many in and out of Congress thought the war unjust and dangerous to the Union, and these dissenters often attacked Polk’s rationalizations of the conflict.⁸⁰ But when they spoke of Mexico’s territorial rights, they almost never ventured beyond the undisputed though sterile fact that Mexico retained legal title. It is striking that anti-expansionists, groping for ammunition against Polk’s designs, did not invoke more resonant and compelling arguments in defense of Mexico’s claims. Were northern Mexicans not pioneers, warrior-farmers who for generations had worked and bled for family, faith, monarch, and nation, just as the pioneers of U.S. history had? Did not their recent sufferings underscore these sacrifices all the more? Was it not a perversion of basic American ideals to despoil Mexico of lands that its people and their ancestors had been fighting Indians for since the sixteenth century? These were arguments that the war’s many opponents avoided. While anti-expansionists may not have held Mexico’s territorial claims in contempt, they said little about the historical specifics of Mexico’s case, because at bottom they accepted the expansionists’ observation that Mexico’s northern endeavors had been stalled or reversed by Indians.

Northern Mexico’s security crisis had therefore become foundational to how U.S. politicians thought about the proposed cession, irrespective of their position on the war. But that was only half of the story. The other half, fully realized in the Texas Creation Myth but as yet only potential in the ongoing conflict with Mexico, concerned the Anglo-American capacity and even destiny to do what Mexico could not: defeat the Indians and provide security to the long-suffering residents of northern Mexico.

Polk had instructed his generals to promise precisely this to Mexicans in the field, and he took pains to assure Congress that this was his intention when he finally made explicit his territorial ambitions in late 1847. The Mexican government should desire to place New Mexico “under the protection” of the U.S., the president explained, because Mexico was too feeble to stop bands of “warlike savages” from committing depredations not only above the Rio Grande, but also upon more populous states below. Thus the cession would improve life for Mexicans north of the line, but more

⁷⁹ Speech of John C. Calhoun, February 9, 1847, *Globe*, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., 357; Calhoun, March 17, 1848, *Globe*, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 496–497. The U.S. Senate approved the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on March 10. Calhoun’s speech seven days later was part of a larger discussion of how the U.S. might respond if Mexico failed to ratify the treaty. Calhoun’s dilemma is discussed at length in Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., *Reluctant Imperialists: Calhoun, the South Carolinians, and the Mexican War* (Baton Rouge, La., 1980).

⁸⁰ For generalities, see, for example, the language cited in Lyon Rathbun, “Champions of Mexico in Ante-Bellum America,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 35, no. 2 (2001): 17–23. For congressional opposition during the war, see Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 3–88, 160–167.

importantly “it would be a blessing to all the northern states to have their citizens protected against [the Indians] by the power of the United States. At this moment many Mexicans, principally females and children, are in captivity among them,” Polk continued. “If New Mexico were held and governed by the United States, we could effectually prevent these tribes from committing such outrages, and compel them to release these captives, and restore them to their families and friends.”⁸¹

Confident talk, but did anyone believe it? Every senator had to decide for himself, because Article Eleven of the proposed Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo bound U.S. authorities both to restrain Indians residing north of the new border from raiding into Mexico, and to rescue Mexican captives held by Indians. Treaty negotiator Nicolas Trist told Secretary of State James Buchanan that Mexico’s northern states would never have approved the treaty without Article Eleven, and Mexicans took Trist’s support as proof that he saw their cause “as the cause of all cultured nations, that of civilization versus barbarism.”⁸² The article echoed Polk’s self-assured rhetoric, but more importantly it called such confidence to task. All the talk about incompetent and cowardly Mexicans, contemptible Comanches, Anglo-Americans easily defeating the Indians and turning deserts into gardens—was this bravado or conviction?

It is telling that the opposition to Article Eleven was led by those who understood Mexico’s security problem best. Unlike nearly everyone else in Washington, representatives of the new state of Texas had an appreciation for how difficult it would be to prevent Indian raids into Mexico. In the abstract they spoke glibly about saving Mexicans from savages, but when it came time to vote, they assailed Article Eleven. Senator Sam Houston predicted that it would leave the U.S. “encumbered by conditions relative to the Indians which would be worth more, in a pecuniary point of view, than all the vacant land acquired.” Houston and his state counterpart Thomas Jefferson Rusk enlisted Missouri’s Thomas Hart Benton (long the capitol’s expert on New Mexico and the Mexican north), Jefferson Davis (commander of a regiment in northeastern Mexico during the war), and a dozen others to gut Article Eleven before the final vote.⁸³

They failed. The majority of senators, men better versed in the rhetoric than the reality of Mexico’s conflicts with Indians, voted to ratify a treaty that enshrined U.S. obligations for preventing Indian raids into Mexico. They apparently did so because they had persuaded themselves that the United States would indeed save northern Mexico, simply by letting Anglo-Americans and their superior energies flow into the new territories. They would quickly defeat the wandering savages, redeem the helpless Mexican captives, and rescue the vast, derelict garden of western North America from Mexican neglect.

⁸¹ Polk’s address is in Senate Doc. no. 1, 30th Cong., 1st sess. See pp. 7–11 for Mexico material. Quote is from p. 11.

⁸² For northern insistence on Article Eleven, see Nicholas P. Trist to James Buchanan, Mexico, January 25, 1848, in Senate Doc. no. 52, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 280–294. For “civilization vs. barbarism,” see Bernardo Couto Miguel Atristain and Luis G. Cuevas, “Exposición dirigida al supremo gobierno por los comisionados que firmaron el tratado de paz con los Estados-Unidos,” Mexico, March 1, 1848, reprinted in *Registro Oficial*, May 25 and May 28, 1848.

⁸³ For “encumbered by conditions,” see speech of Sam Houston, February 28, 1848, Senate Doc. no. 52, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 5. For the votes, see Senate Doc. no. 52, 30th Cong., 1st sess., 12–13.

THAT REPRESENTATIVES FROM BOTH NATIONS felt confident about and pleased with Article Eleven testifies to an essential congruity between American and Mexican conceptions of Indian raiders. Americans believed that Apaches, Navajos, Kiowas, Comanches, and the like were undisciplined, craven opportunists. Above all, Americans considered these Indians reactive. Mexican weakness, racial impurity, cowardice, and stupidity induced, even compelled, Indians to raid. Most U.S. politicians believed that American strength would quickly reverse the trend. For their part, Mexico's negotiators assumed that *los salvajes* drew much of their strength, most of their weapons, and perhaps even their tactics and political coherence from *norte-americanos*. So it was that Mexican representatives championed Article Eleven as the "only advantage" that could compensate Mexico for all it had sacrificed in the war.⁸⁴

These were vain hopes, born out of a shared nineteenth-century worldview that held only nation-states and empires to be entities of hemispheric significance. Despite an abundance of evidence, national leaders in both Mexico and the United States had been incapable of seeing non-state Indian peoples as consequential political communities pursuing their own collective goals—goals that, however indirectly, might alter the course of nation-states. So it was confusing and infuriating for leaders in both capitals to see raiding surge in the aftermath of the war, and grow progressively worse through the early 1850s. There was evidently more behind raiding campaigns than Mexican incompetence or American provocation. Mexicans responded with outrage and threatened lawsuits into the tens of millions of dollars, based on the violation of Article Eleven. U.S. administrators grumbled about Mexican passivity and asked for patience. Cross-border raids by native peoples would continue in diminished form through the 1880s, but Washington was not prepared to wait nearly that long. Despairing of its ability to honor Article Eleven, the United States bought its way out of it in 1854, with the Gadsden Purchase.⁸⁵

It is unsurprising that nineteenth-century Americans weathered this embarrassment without reevaluating assumptions that had helped them appropriate half of Mexico's national territory. What *is* surprising is that historians on both sides of the modern border retain many of the same assumptions about the capacity of America's indigenous peoples to influence geopolitics in the postcolonial era. But the evidence above suggests that the transformations we associate with the U.S.-Mexican War emerged from a nexus of American, Mexican, and *Indian* politics. U.S. expansion into Mexican territory appears considerably more contingent in its outcome once

⁸⁴ Luis de la Rosa to John M. Clayton, Washington, March 20, 1850, in William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831–1860*, vol. 9: *Mexico, 1848 (Mid-Year)–1860* (Washington, D.C., 1937), 350–352.

⁸⁵ The U.S.-Mexican controversy over Indian raiding following the war is explored in detail in J. Fred Rippy, "The Indians of the Southwest in the Diplomacy of the United States and Mexico, 1848–1853," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 2, no. 3 (1919): 363–396; Rippy, *The United States and Mexico* (New York, 1926), 68–84, 126–147; Luis G. Zorrilla, *Historia de las relaciones entre México y los Estados Unidos de América, 1800–1958* (Mexico, 1965), 275–292. For ongoing violence in U.S.-controlled New Mexico, see Sister Mary Loyola, *The American Occupation of New Mexico, 1821–1852* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1939), 74–99. For initial discussion of lawsuits, see R. P. Letcher to John M. Clayton, Mexico City, April 8, 1850, *Despatches from United States Ministers to Mexico*. On continued raiding below the Rio Grande after 1848, see the detailed report made by the Mexican government, based on interviews and on archival and periodical sources from northern states, *Informe de la comisión pesquisidora de la frontera del norte al ejecutivo de la union, en cumplimiento del artículo 3 de la ley de 30 de septiembre de 1872* (Mexico, 1874), 15–108. The Gadsden Treaty was signed in late 1853 and ratified in 1854. See Odie B. Faulk, *Too Far North, Too Far South* (Los Angeles, 1967).

Indian actors are included in the story. This can only be for the good, given that a perception of inevitability has contributed to collective disinterest in the U.S.-Mexican War, despite its immense and enduring continental consequences.

More broadly, we need to rethink the significance of autonomous native peoples to the interlocked histories of American states. By the early 1820s, more than a dozen generations after Columbus, indigenous polities still controlled between half and three-quarters of the continental landmass claimed by the hemisphere's remaining colonies and newly independent states.⁸⁶ The fact that the scope of Indian power is rarely cast this way, in hemispheric terms, speaks to the grip that national teleologies have upon our historical imaginations. Historians have tended to consider the endurance of native power into the early postcolonial period as a fact relevant to national rather than international histories. Historians of South America, especially, have lately worked to correct the picture, although in this regard the Americas' early national period is still poorly understood in comparison to the colonial era.⁸⁷ The ethnohistorical literature is reaching a point of maturity where it may be fruitfully integrated with more traditional historiographies on topics such as nationalism, diplomacy, military history, and economic development, in order to better understand not only native peoples, but also the broader transnational world in which they moved. Once it is more advanced, this endeavor will likely leave American nation-states and their citizens looking less exclusively determinative of the hemisphere's contours than we now believe them to have been.

⁸⁶ See Claudio Esteva Fabregat, *Mestizaje in Ibero-America*, trans. John Wheat (Tucson, Ariz., 1995), 232, as cited in David J. Weber, "Bourbons and Bárbaros: Center and Periphery in the Reshaping of Spanish Indian Policy," in Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds., *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820* (New York, 2002), 79–103, 79 n. 1. Philip D. Curtin estimates that Europeans actually governed less than one-quarter of the Americas in 1800. See *The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 12.

⁸⁷ See, for example, the essays by Kristine L. Jones, James Schofield Saeger, Neil Whitehead, and Jonathan D. Hill in Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, vol. 3: *South America* (Cambridge, 1999); Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810–1910* (Cambridge, 2004); and Erick D. Langer, "The Eastern Andean Frontier (Bolivia and Argentina) and Latin American Frontiers: Comparative Contexts (19th and 20th Centuries)," *The Americas* 59, no. 1 (2002): 33–63.

Brian DeLay is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he has taught since receiving his doctorate from Harvard in 2004. This article is drawn from his current book project, *The War of a Thousand Deserts*, forthcoming from Yale University Press. His next project examines the international arms trade and Indian freedoms in the Americas during the nineteenth century.