The Spanish Frontier in North America

DAVID J. WEBER

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tion gave shape to the *place* that Spain regarded as its North American frontier—or, perhaps more accurately, the distinctive *places* that Spain regarded as its multiple North American frontiers. Expansion and contraction occurred at different rates, of course, so that one Spanish frontier zone might contract even as another expanded.

Within Spain's shifting frontier zones in North America several other processes worked at different rates and exerted different ranges and depths of influence. Perhaps the broadest yet most shallow range of Spain's influence was its claim to much of the continent—a geopolitical frontier of the imagination that existed as an abstraction on Spanish maps and in documents, but that had little actual impact on native Americans or rival European powers. To give substance to its geopolitical claims, Spain occupied territory by planting settlements that became the centers of spheres of Iberian frontier influence. Spain's frontier settlements set into motion several simultaneous frontier processes, including urbanization, agriculture, ranching, and commerce. Each type of frontier exerted different ranges and depths of influence on native peoples. Indians who lived close to Spanish settlers, for example, usually found their lifeways altered substantially, as did Navajos when they began to raise European-introduced sheep and to weave wool into textiles. Natives who lived so far from Spanish settlements that they never saw a Spaniard, still felt the transformative power of European culture, as they obtained European curiosities such as metal tools and coins, clothing, horses, and watermelon and peach seeds through trade with Indian intermediaries. Long before they had commercial relations with Spaniards, Caddos at one village in Texas possessed a number of articles of Spanish origin, including a papal bull exempting residents of New Spain from fasting during the summer.[41]

In contrast to the Anglo-American frontier in North America, which largely excluded natives, Spain sought to include natives within its new world societies. Thus, Spanish missionaries labored to win the hearts and minds of Indians in what might be defined as a spiritual or cultural frontier—a frontier that some natives resisted with a fervor that matched the missionaries' zeal to convert them. Natives who declined to submit passively or who resisted militarily often found themselves caught up in another zone of Spanish frontier influence. Along a wide-ranging military frontier, soldiers and soldier-settlers pounded some natives into submission and tried to hold others at bay through fear and intimidation.

Spaniards, of course, were not alone in contending with natives for control of North America and its peoples. On the North American frontiers of European empires, France, England, the United States, and Russia vied with Spain and with one another as well as with native Americans.

These imbricated zones of political, economic, social, cultural, spiritual, military, and imperial influence constitute the main subjects of the chapters that follow. Most of the chapters are held together by the themes of contention and transformation. Contention for power and resources is, of course, part of an ongoing struggle between classes, cultures, races, and genders *within* established societies. In frontier zones,

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it seemed wise to cooperate.[124] Like Christians, many North American Indians believed that priests and ceremonies had power to mediate between man and nature, and Franciscans claimed such power as they conjured cures, rain, and good harvests.[125] From the first, several signs of the friars' power were readily evident to Indians. Armed Spanish soldiers and splendidly attired government officials prostrated themselves before the unarmed, plain-robed friars. Franciscans introduced and controlled domestic animals, larger than the natives had previously known, and could thereby provide a steady supply of meat without hunting.[126] Strange diseases that took the lives of Indians spared Europeans who followed the Christian god. At first, then, natives had reason to believe that the foreign preachers possessed life-saving powers. The specter of death from mysterious maladies, rather than the apparition of the Lady in Blue, probably persuaded some tribes to request missionaries and some Indian mothers to seek baptism for their children.[127]

The extent to which Indians saw themselves as beneficiaries of relationships with missionaries was, in part, specific to the values of each native society. Franciscan celibacy may have seemed unremarkable to some natives, for example, but probably awed the Pueblos for whom, as one historian has put it, "coitus was the symbol of cosmic harmony."[128] Pueblo males believed that by abstaining from sexual activity for several days they achieved greater strength for the hunt, for curing, or for conjuring rain. What power might accrue to those friars who practiced lifelong sexual abstinence!

Economic and environmental conditions also figured into the natives' calculations of costs and benefits. Nomads and seminomads, such as Apaches and Chiscas, succeeded in retaining their spiritual and physical independence for they could move beyond the Spanish sphere and leave behind little of value at traditional hunting or gathering places—a fact that Franciscans recognized.[129] Conversely, Franciscans in Florida and New Mexico made their earliest conversions among town-dwelling agriculturalists, who had the most to lose if antagonized Spaniards burned their villages and trampled their crops—the more so perhaps in arid New Mexico which offered few ecological niches to which native farmers might escape. Of course, some town-dwellers, protected from reprisal by distance or natural barriers, managed to retain a high degree of spiritual independence and physical freedom. Hopis, for example, submitted to missionaries in 1629, but regained their independence in 1680 and refused thereafter to permit a missionary to remain among them. "The religion of the Moqui [Hopi] today is the same as before they heard about the Gospel," lamented one Franciscan who visited their isolated mesa-top villages in 1775.[130]

Natives who decided to accept missions after weighing their apparent benefits and liabilities also determined which aspects of Christianity and European culture they would embrace and which they would reject. As a rule, those native societies that had not been vitiated by war or disease adopted from the friars what they perceived was

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deeper issue of who would exploit Indian land and labor stood at the core of the Spaniards' debilitating intramural contention.[64]

III

By squandering their moral authority and dissipating their energies through internal quarrels, Spaniards weakened their hold over their Indian subjects. At the same time, native societies grew increasingly volatile, aggrieved by religious persecution and oppressive demands on their labor and resources. When the natives' resentment reached the boiling point, it shattered the fragile colonial structures of Florida and New Mexico.

Violent eruptions that Spaniards characterized as rebellions but which Indians probably saw as armed struggles for liberation, broke out in Guale in 1597, 1645, and the early 1680s, in Apalachee and Timucua in 1565, in Apalachee in 1647, and in Apalachicola in 1675 and 1681.[65] In New Mexico, in the first half of the sixteenth century alone, Pueblos took the offensive at Zuni in 1632, at Taos in 1639–40, at Jémez in 1644 and 1647, and in a number of Tewa villages in 1650.[66] Indeed, Pueblos and Florida Indians may have rebelled more frequently than Spanish reports indicated.[67] In all of these episodes, Spaniards lost property and lives—especially the lives of missionaries.

Occasionally rebellions brought lasting independence for natives. Isolated groups, such as Hopis and Apalachicolas, revolted and retained their liberty through Spanish inadvertence; Pueblos from Taos, who killed two priests and burned the church down in 1639, retained their freedom by fleeing to western Kansas and remaining for over twenty years at an Apache settlement the Spaniards called El Cuartelejo.[68] In the main, however, rebels won only temporary reprieves from Spanish domination. Although vastly outnumbered, Spaniards crushed most of these rebellions primarily because the linguistically and culturally diverse native communities could not unite. On a few occasions, as in New Mexico in 1650 and 1667, several Indian villages joined in rebellion, but they lacked sufficient strength to prevail. Spaniards hanged their leaders and sold suspected participants into slavery.[69]

Not until 1680 did Pueblos launch a highly unified, full-scale offensive against Spanish intruders. Mission Indians in Florida, scattered in three provinces, never emulated the Pueblos by cooperating with one another to drive Spaniards out, but by the early 1700s they had achieved much the same result. The appearance of outside forces—Apaches and drought in New Mexico and Englishmen in Florida—provided the impetus for the large-scale native resistance that began in both places in the 1680s.

Pueblo society in New Mexico grew increasingly restive during two decades of low rainfall and higher-than-average temperatures, which began in 1660 and lasted until the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.[70] During the worst of it, one priest reported, "a

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26. The three-foot-tall statue of Nuestra Señora del Rosario, best known as La Conquistadora, *still reposes in the north chapel of the parish church of Santa Fe. Photograph by Robert H. Martin, 1948. Courtesy, Museum of New Mexico, neg. no. 41984.*

Better prepared for another rebellion than Governor Otermín had been and more cunning, Vargas launched a methodical war of attrition, striking food supplies as well as rebel positions. After a six-month campaign, Vargas and his Pueblo allies had reasserted Spanish control over all of the rebellious communities except the westernmost—Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi.[105] Acoma and Zuni soon submitted again, but the isolated Hopis, their population swelled by refugees from the Rio Grande pueblos, retained their independence throughout the next century.[106]

The struggle for independence had cost the Pueblos dearly. Their population declined sharply, from about 17,000 in 1680 to 14,000 in 1700. A disproportionate number of Pueblo males had died, and entire families had fled their communities. Many, for example, joined the apostate Hopis, and some Pueblos from Picurís fled to the Apache settlements at El Cuartelejo in western Kansas, just as Pueblos from Taos had done in a time of trouble a few generations earlier. A shrinking population forced Pueblos to abandon some of their smaller communities, never to rebuild them. Zunis,

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Indians into Spaniards, accomplishing with the iron fist and the velvet glove what missionaries had been unable do to do through less violent and cynical means.

Modified and refined, the *Instructions of 1786*, together with the *Regulations of 1772*, governed Spanish-Indian relations on the northern frontier for the remainder of the colonial period. Like other official policies, however, they were not fully implemented. Strapped for funds and arms for its own army, Spain never had sufficient resources to buy a peace. Nor is there evidence that Spain provided significant amounts of alcohol to Indians. To the contrary, Gálvez's recommendation regarding liquor was not adopted and officials continued the traditional Spanish policy of restricting the distribution of alcohol, even in Louisiana. The new policies apparently met greatest success in areas where Spain did not have to compete with English or American traders,[122] but across northern New Spain Gálvez's *Instructions* did establish clear rules under which some of Spain's ablest officers could play a new game. Henceforward, minor infractions of the peace by individual Indians were to be overlooked as Spanish Indian policy followed Gálvez's dictum: "A bad peace . . . would be more fruitful than the gains of a successful war."[123]

VII

Trade, treaties, and toleration, previously subordinate to force, became the cornerstones of a new French-inspired Indian policy. Rarely used on earlier frontiers by Spaniards, written treaties came into vogue, implying respectful dealings between sovereign peoples and replacing the earlier Spanish assumption that Indians were vassals of the king.[124] Along with silver-headed canes, or *bastones*, uniforms, and suits of clothing, Spanish officials began to bestow banners and medals on Indian leaders. These secular symbols of allegiance to the Spanish Crown were distributed wherever Indians had come to expect them from Frenchmen or Englishmen; Spain had to compete.[125]

The new policy began to show results in the interior provinces well before Bernardo de Gálvez reformulated it in 1786. One of the most notable successes occurred in New Mexico under the leadership of Juan Bautista de Anza, a third generation presidial officer whose father had been killed by Apaches on the Sonora frontier. As governor of New Mexico from 1778–87, Anza won an enduring peace with Comanches, who had been the scourge of the province since midcentury. In February of 1786, Anza and Ecueracapa, the designated leader of one of the main bands of the so-called western Comanches (including Yamparikas and Yupes), signed a treaty of peace and alliance that lasted for the next generation. Anza skillfully negotiated this agreement without rupturing longtime Spanish alliances with two groups whose enmity toward Comanches was well known: the flexible Jicarilla Apaches who farmed and hunted in the Sangre de Cristos of northern New Mexico, and Utes who lived in the Rockies to the northwest of New Mexico. Once he had come to terms with Comanches, Anza went

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on to lay the foundation for an alliance with Navajos, who were soon persuaded to turn on their former allies, the Gileño Apaches.

Anza owed these feats of diplomacy in part to the military pressure that he had exerted on Comanches. In 1779, accompanied by the usual contingent of Pueblo allies, he had led Spanish forces into southeastern Colorado where he smashed a Comanche camp and killed a prominent war chief, Cuerno Verde. The unusual victory had apparently earned him the grudging respect of Comanches as well as of other tribes. In the next few years, as Comanche bands sought to make peace with Anza, he patiently insisted that he would not negotiate unless all Comanche leaders participated. Anza's diplomatic success also benefited from the initiative of his counterpart in Texas, Gov. Domingo Cabello, who had signed a treaty with the eastern Comanches the previous autumn, after using his alliances with the Nations of the North to bring more pressure on them. To a considerable extent, then, the military reforms and greater coordination between frontier provinces had paid dividends for New Mexico.[126]

But Spaniards had entered into agreements with Comanche bands on previous occasions. Gov. Tomás Vélez Cachupín had negotiated peace agreements in 1752 and 1762, as had Gov. Pedro Fermín de Mendinueta in 1771.[127] Anza and his successors, however, were able to maintain the peace with Comanches in large part because peace rather than war had become the goal of Spanish policy, because Spaniards now had more to offer Comanches than the absence of war, and because Comanches themselves saw benefits in the new arrangements. New Mexico officials now offered arms, ammunition, and gifts, including clothing, hats, mirrors, orange paint, indigo, knives, cigars, and sugarloaves.[128] They also offered access to trade fairs, cooperation against mutual enemies, and more equitable and consistent treatment than Indians had been accustomed to receiving in the past. An important part of the deal that Anza offered Ecueracapa in 1786 was the promise to regulate the trade fair at Taos, where Comanches often felt cheated by double-dealing New Mexican traders.[129]

Anza's successor, Fernando de la Concha, a Spanish-born career officer who served as governor of New Mexico from 1787–93, continued to use the liberal dispensation of gifts and regulated trade to maintain alliances with the Comanches, Utes, and Jicarilla Apaches, and to strengthen relations with Navajos.[130] Through the end of his term, Concha believed that all four allied tribes remained firmly in the Spanish orbit. He singled out Comanches, once viewed by Spaniards as faithless, for special praise: "in this tribe one finds faith in the treaties that it acknowledges, true constancy, [and] good hospitality."[131]

Under Concha, Comanches and Navajos in particular joined with Spanish forces to increase military pressure on Gileños, Chiricahuas, Mimbreños, and other Apaches. Meanwhile, Apaches were squeezed from the south. From Sonora and Nueva Vizcaya, Spaniards and their Opata and Pima allies coordinated campaigns against Apaches with New Mexicans and their Indian allies. The war against these indios bárbaros, who

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45. The Comanche warrior His-oo-san-chees, *"The Little Spaniard," described by George Catlin as "half Spanish . . . being a half-breed." A lithograph based on a painting by Catlin, 1834. Catlin,* North American Indians *(1844). Courtesy, the Vargas Project, University of New Mexico.*

refused to conform to the ways of so-called civilized people, was waged without pity. Beginning at least as early as 1787, Spaniards offered rewards for pairs of Apache ears.[132] By the 1790s it was common to ship Apache prisoners of war, including women and children, from New Spain to Havana, so they might never escape and return to their people as earlier deportees to Mexico City had done. Shackled, incarcerated en route, and exposed to new diseases, most failed to survive the ordeal of the journey to the Caribbean. Those who did generally spent the remainder of their lives in some form of forced labor.[133]

As the balance of power shifted in favor of the Spanish forces, many Apaches began to sue for peace and its attendant benefits—not only in southern New Mexico, but across the northern frontier. The turning point in the Apache-Spanish relations occurred during the administration of the experienced and exceptionally able Jacobo de Ugarte, who served as commander in chief of the Interior Provinces from 1786–90.

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On the western front, in Sonora and western Nueva Vizcaya, Spaniards regarded many of the bands of Gileños, Chiricahuas, and Mimbreños as at peace by mid-1790.[134] On the eastern front, from southeastern New Mexico through Texas, a shakier and uneven peace reigned with Faraones, Mescaleros, and Lipanes.[135]

Peace with these different Apache bands was never as firm or as enduring as that with Comanches, but raids and occasional outbreaks of war notwithstanding, contemporaries recognized that they had entered a new era. A number of Apaches accepted the Spaniards' offer to make peace more attractive than war and settled in *establecimientos de paz*—peace establishments that resembled later-day Indian reservations. By 1793, some 2,000 Apaches de paz, or *mansos*, had settled onto eight establecimientos—one just outside the walls of the presidio at Tucson.[136] As they had since the sixteenth century, Spanish policymakers still envisioned turning Indians into town-dwelling Spanish Catholics who farmed, ranched, and practiced familiar trades. Even when issuing the harshest of military orders, the Crown never failed to remind officials that religious conversion was the principal reason for Spain's presence on the frontiers of empire. Where missionaries had failed among nomads, however, soldiers were to play the role of benevolent Indian agents. To Apaches who agreed to surrender and settle in establecimientos, soldiers were to distribute weekly rations of corn, meat, tobacco, and sweets and to offer instruction in the ways of Spaniards. Much as Franciscans had tried to enter into Indian cultures by learning their languages, Spanish officers now stressed speaking native languages and making greater use of interpreters to assure accurate communication.[137]

Viewed in the most optimistic light, the establecimientos de paz could themselves become agencies to pacify other nomads. As New Mexico Governor Concha explained in 1792, prosperous settlements of Apaches would weaken the resistance of bands who remained "dispersed in the empty Sierras with nothing but wild foods to eat, stealing to live." Those Apaches would find Spanish life irresistible and "solicit peace in order to enjoy the same benefits as their companions."[138]

A considerable gap existed, of course, between the ideal and the real. Critics argued that soldiers corrupted Apaches and failed to teach them to farm or ranch—although some Apaches already possessed those skills—and that Indians who enjoyed Spanish largesse continued to raid at will. Franciscans in particular argued that the system neglected the Indians' spiritual welfare.[139] Many Indians, on the other hand, found settled life confining or in conflict with their values. A group of Comanches, for example, installed themselves in new houses at San Carlos de los Yupes on the Arkansas River in southeastern Colorado in 1787 but moved away in less than a year when a woman died and custom required family and friends to abandon the site of a death.[140] Raiding, which brought prestige as well as economic benefits to Apaches, also proved difficult to forswear.[141] A settlement of Gileño Apaches on the Rio Grande, near Sabinal, lasted for just four years, from 1790–94.[142] But despite some failures and defections, a number of the Apache reservations enjoyed a long life,

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especially in Sonora, and endured even through times of scarcity when Spaniards failed to fulfill their promises of food and supplies.[143] Two generations later, American officials inaugurated a reservation system with similar characteristics, unaware of the earlier Spanish experiments.[144]

VIII

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, then, the northern frontier of New Spain entered a period of relative peace that owed more to diplomacy and a mutual desire for peace and trade than to military and administrative reform.[145] Military escalation, coordinated punitive expeditions, and administrative restructuring had not in themselves forced Indians to negotiate. The military buildup had reached its height under Teodoro de Croix by the early 1780s; thereafter, the number of soldiers and the number and position of presidios remained static.[146] The advantages of a centralized command for the interior provinces had diminished after 1786, when José de Gálvez placed the northern frontier back under the immediate supervision of the viceroy, his nephew. Thereafter, the office of commander in chief underwent numerous redefinitions of jurisdiction in relation to viceroys and to other frontier commanders. The frequency of these administrative changes mitigated against continuity of policy, intensified bureaucratic infighting (generally intense in any event), and lessened the efficiency of military operations.[147]

The mantle of peace had fallen over the frontier mainly because Spanish and Indian leaders had come to believe, as Bernardo de Gálvez hoped they would, that they had more to gain from peace than from war. Spanish officials had arrived at this understanding slowly, only after Indians had forced them to the bargaining table and extracted from them more gifts, fairer and more open trading arrangements, and dependable alliances. Only then did a significant number of Indian leaders agree that peace would bring greater benefits than raiding or warfare.[148]

Once they had reached agreement, leaders on both sides worked at maintaining friendly relations. Individually or in small groups, Spaniards and Indians alike continued to commit murder, mayhem, and theft, but most of their spokesmen tried to prevent such episodes from degenerating into war. In response to criticism in 1799, Commander in Chief Pedro de Nava justified forbearance toward individual Comanches because the alternative would be war, "an error of very serious consequences." Comanche warriors, he noted, far outnumbered Spanish forces.[149] For their part, Nava reported, Comanche leaders understood that Spanish punishment of individual Indians who committed crimes would not be a reason "to break the peace."[150] Indeed, in order to maintain peaceful relations with Spaniards, Comanche leaders themselves ostracized or punished individuals who crossed the bounds of acceptable behavior.[151]

Out of such understandings, one-time adversaries began to develop personal rela-

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corner, heated some corn gruel, or *atole*, over a fire he made from corn shucks, and bedded down. He spent two nights there. Then, on July 4, 1776, the same day that rebel representatives from the British colonies on the other side of the continent approved a declaration of independence, Garcés rode out of the pueblo fearing for his life. Lacking sufficient supplies and guides to continue to Santa Fe, he went back the way he had come.

Garcés had effectively opened a trail to New Mexico. Although he failed to make the last leg of the journey, one of his letters did. Before he left Oraibi, Garcés wrote a letter to the Franciscan priest at Zuni, "although I did not know his name."[68] An Acoma Indian whom Garcés apparently met at Oraibi carried the missive to Zuni, the most westerly of the New Mexico missions, and eventually it reached its minister, fray Silvestre Vélez de Escalante who, by remarkable coincidence, was in Santa Fe preparing to find a way to Monterey.[69]

The young Escalante was one of several New Mexico priests who had received instructions from Mexico City to seek a route to the California coast. In 1775, Escalante had traveled from Zuni to the Hopi pueblos to learn more about the country to the west. Like Garcés, he too had met a chilly reception, especially at Oraibi. Hopis had not threatened him with death, but at Walpi the men had assaulted his sensibilities with a dance in which, as Escalante noted in his diary, "the only part of their bodies that was covered was the face, and at the end of the member it is not modest to name they wore a small and delicate feather subtly attached." Appalled by this "horrifying spectacle," Escalante left the next day, convinced that only military force could bring the depraved and obstinate Hopi back into the Spanish fold.[70]

Garcés's letter caught up with Escalante in Santa Fe in late July 1776, as he and his superior, Francisco Atanasio Domínguez, prepared to embark on their own search for a route to Monterey. Discouraged by the aridity of the land and the belligerence of Indians due west of Santa Fe, they had planned to explore what they believed would be a more direct route to the northwest. The arrival of Garcés's letter, with the news that he had traveled directly across Arizona, did not change their plans. The two priests, who hoped to lay the groundwork for new missions among the Utes as well as find the way to the coast, decided that "the knowledge we could acquire of the lands through which we traveled would represent a great step forward and be of use in the future."[71]

Domínguez and Escalante never reached Monterey, but they did gather a fund of knowledge on an epic journey into the Great Basin. Setting out from Santa Fe on July 29 with eight companions, including Bernardo Miera y Pacheco, a soldier-cartographer, and Andrés Muñiz, an interpreter who had traded in the Ute country, they rode up much of the length of what is today western Colorado, then westward into Utah. By September 23 they had reached Utah Lake and the site of future Provo. Utes told them of the Great Salt Lake to the north, but they did not visit it. Instead, they traveled southwesterly toward California until October 8, when they decided to turn back. Near present Milford, Utah, they reckoned themselves in the

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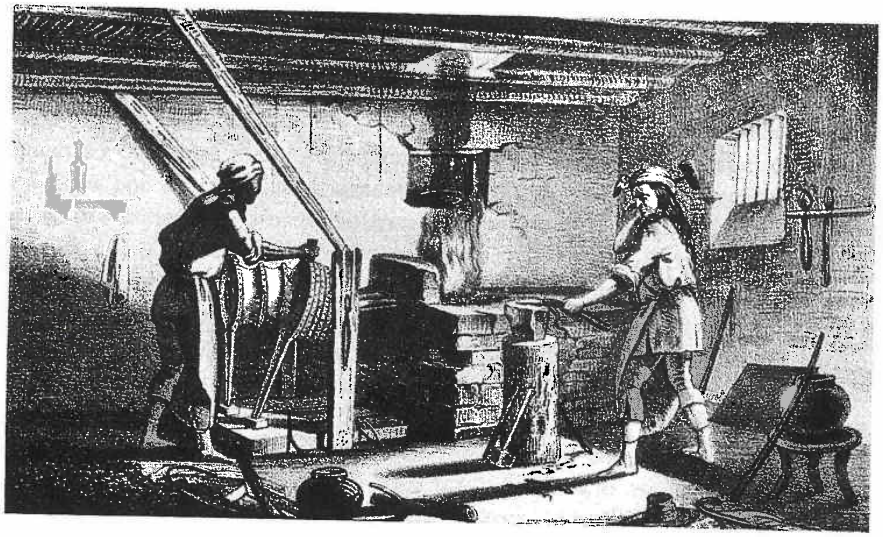

57. Iron tools and weapons stood high on the list of European goods adopted by Indians. Indian Blacksmith Shop (Pueblo Zuñi). Lithograph based on a drawing by Richard H. Kern, 1851. Lorenzo Sitgreaves, Report of an Expedition down the Zuni and Colorado Rivers *(Washington, D.C., 1853).*

ownership of household and lands, while isolated pueblos came under less pressure to shift ownership to men in the Spanish fashion. Directly or indirectly, however, Hispanic influences transformed all of the Pueblo communities irrevocably—even the isolated Hopis, who never resubmitted to Spanish rule after the great revolt of 1680.[9]

I

Throughout North America, in ways large and small, Spanish influences changed the cultures of all native Americans who lived within trading distance of Spanish communities. In 1743, a Jesuit who visited a small group of Indians at the mouth of the Miami River in South Florida was surprised to find them speaking Spanish. Far from any Spanish mission or settlement, those Calusa and Key Indians had learned Spanish from sailors from Havana, with whom they traded.[10] In 1808, Capt. Francisco Amangual rode into an isolated Comanche village on the southern plains where he was greeted by "well dressed" chiefs wearing "long red coats with blue collars and cuffs, white buttons, [and] yellow (imitation gold) galloons."[11]

Change had been a constant feature of native life before the arrival of Europeans, but with their coming the pace of change accelerated throughout North America.[12] Rapid, profound change began immediately in the wake of initial Spanish-Indian contact, wherever alien infectious diseases killed high numbers of Indians and altered

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