

## Introduction

In the spring of 1794 five hundred Apaches lived peacefully on a Spanish-run reservation surrounding Janos presidio in northwestern Nueva Vizcaya. Led by fifty-two-year-old *nantan* (leader) El Compá, these Indians called themselves Ndé (“The People”) and consisted of nine Chihene (“Red Paint People”) and two Chokonen (“Juniper People”) bands. Spaniards named them Mimbrenos (“people of the willows”) and Chiricaguis (Ópata for “mountains of the wild turkey”) after the principal mountain ranges that they inhabited, the Sierras de las Mimbres and Chiricagui.<sup>1</sup> Today they are better known as the Black Range of southwestern New Mexico and the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona.

After initially making peace at Janos in late 1789, Ndé numbers rose steadily, reportedly reaching 312 in March of 1792 and 406 a year later. Rather than risk being killed, captured, imprisoned, or enslaved by Spanish troops and their Indian allies, these Apaches opted to receive rations and gifts in exchange for their men serving as scouts and auxiliary troops with Spanish soldiers. Apache families received weekly rations of beef, *pinole* (meal made of ground corn and mesquite beans), salt, maize, and cigars and periodic gifts of horses and sheep. Ten of the eleven Ndé bands lived close to the presidio and included such well-known leaders as Vívora, Tetsegoslán, and Nac-cogé (El Güero or “the light-haired one”). Most prominent of all was the Chokonen El Compá, whom Spaniards had named “principal chief of the peaceful Apaches” three years earlier. Favored over the other headmen, El Compá resided inside the walls of Janos presidio with more than fifty of his people, including his two well-known sons, the future Chihene leaders Juan José and Juan Diego Compá (Nayulchi).<sup>2</sup>

The Ndé at Janos were not alone. A prolonged regional drought and coordinated attacks from Spanish troops and their Indian allies influenced thousands of Apaches to relocate and resettle in a group of reservation-like *establecimientos* (establishments or settlements) near Spanish presidios beginning in 1786. Stretching across more than nine hundred miles of arid desert and temperate mountains at its height in the late 1790s – from Laredo, in the east, to Tucson, in the west – this little-known Spanish experiment constituted the earliest and most extensive system of military-run reservations in the Americas. By 1793 approximately 2,000 of an estimated 11,500 Mescaleros, Southern Apaches, and Western Apaches had settled on eight reservations across the American Southwest (see Map I.1).<sup>3</sup> More precisely, along the northern presidial line in Nueva Vizcaya (modern Chihuahua and Durango), from east to west, at least 800 Mescaleros settled at El Norte; 63 Mescaleros, whom Spaniards called Faraons, at San Elizario; 254 Chihenes at Carrizal; and 408 Chihenes and Chokonens (Chiricahuas) at Janos. Farther west in Sonora 77 Chokonens and Chihenes lived at Fronteras; 81 Chokonens at Bacoachi; and 86 Tsézhinés (“Black Rocks People”), or Aravaipas, at Tucson (see Map I.2). Finally, more than 200 miles north of El Paso, 226 Chihenes resided near the village of Sabinal, New Mexico. In September 1798, three Lipan bands camped along the banks of the Salado River in Coahuila near Laredo presidio briefly joined these groups.<sup>4</sup> At the system’s height in this decade, these Apaches probably comprised at least 50 percent of all Mescaleros and Southern Apaches and less than 10 percent of all Lipans and Western Apaches.<sup>5</sup>

A simple question frames this study. How did so many Ndé, who were the primary object of Hispanic military might for more than a century, avoid full-scale incorporation into the Spanish empire and Mexican nation? Carrying out the enlightened Indian policies of Spanish officials, presidial commanders hoped to resettle semisedentary equestrian Apaches on fertile plots of land and transform them into productive town-dwelling farmers subject to crown authority. But, in practice, so-called peaceful Apaches (*Apaches de paz*), largely shaped the system. Subverting Spanish efforts to make them wholly sedentary, the Ndé adapted to reservation life by remaining semisedentary and using Spanish rations, gifts, and military protection to sustain and preserve their families. A minority of Apaches de paz worked together with Spaniards and Mexicans to reduce violence in the region by serving as scouts and auxiliaries, while the majority relied on what they always had to ensure their survival – movement, economic exchange, and small-scale livestock raiding. Although

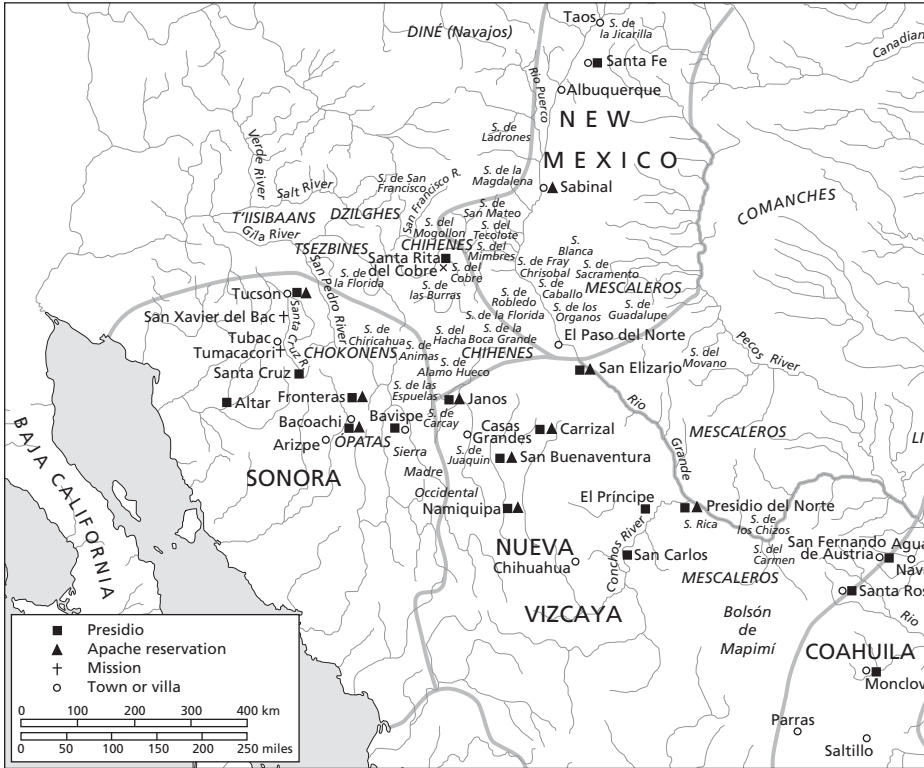


MAP I.1 Nde resettlement, 1786–1798.

Source: AGI; AGS; AGN; Janos Presidio Archives; Max L. Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the* L. Moorhead, *The Apache Frontier: Jacobo Ugarte and Spanish-Indian Relations in Northern New Spain* (Oklahoma, 1968), 88–90n3, 171, 201; Peter Gerhard, *The North Frontier of New Spain* (Princeton reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993) 162, 246, 280, 315, 326, 337.

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MAP 1.2 The Apache-Spanish frontier, ca. 1800.

Source: Adapted from Moorhead, *The Apache Frontier*, 171, 201; Moorhead, *Presidio*, 28; Forbes, *Apaches at War and Peace*, 20; Gerhard, *North Frontier of New Spain*, 315, 326; Robert S. Weddle, *Texas* (1968; reprint, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), page not listed.

these dual strategies caused confusion, periodic disruptions, and results that Spanish policy makers never anticipated, that does not mean that the *establecimientos* were a failure. Instead, they enabled the system to endure and function largely on Ndé terms and the Ndé to reassert their political and territorial sovereignty by 1832.<sup>6</sup>

Ndé adaptations offer deeper insight into the various ways indigenous peoples and colonized groups of all sorts negotiated cultural conquest on frontiers and borderlands across North America and around the world. Those who regard equestrian raiders as backward and barbaric people ripe for conquest by advanced and prosperous empires and states have their facts backwards. The Ndé who chose to relocate to reservations made a strategic decision to do so, fully recognizing that they could continue to move in and out of Spanish zones of control, depending on their needs. Like other upland indigenous peoples, their subsistence routine, social organization, and physical dispersal were purposeful adaptations undertaken to maintain political autonomy and avoid state incorporation. Much more than relentless warriors and savvy traders, Ndé men and women also played important and underexamined roles as diplomats, interpreters, scouts, and auxiliary soldiers. Most importantly, all four groups who settled on Spanish-run reservations practiced at least some agriculture prior to doing so, which meant they never needed Spaniards to teach them how to become “civilized.”<sup>7</sup>

This work also aims to improve scholarly understanding of the balance of power between indigenous peoples and colonizing powers in the Southwest. The recent focus on Comanche ethnogenesis and economic and territorial expansion southward from the southern plains, while important and highly instructive, has shifted attention away from Spaniards’ primary goal in the late eighteenth century: pacifying the Apaches. Facing west and south of the Rio Grande reminds us that the rise of the so-called Comanche empire was not the central compelling historical process transpiring in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century lower midcontinent. Apaches had a vast territory of their own, *Kónitsąhǰi gokíyaa* (Big Water Peoples’ Country), which Spaniards called the *Gran Apachería* (Great Apache Country). Comprising most of modern Texas, New Mexico, eastern Arizona, and upland and arid portions of Coahuila, Nueva Vizcaya, and Sonora in the mid-eighteenth century, this well-established elastic space overlapped the emerging *Comanchería* (Comanche Country), extending more than 700 miles from the Colorado River in the east to the middle Gila River in the west, and more than 350 miles from the Mogollon Mountains and Texas Hill Country in the north to the

Sierra Madre ranges and Bolsón de Mapimí in the south. Although independent Apaches and Comanches helped make much of the Southwest what one scholar has called “an Indian land during the age of European empire,” my book shows that from the late eighteenth century onward Spanish soldiers and their Indian allies regularly penetrated the *Apachería* and influenced – but never forced – Apaches to settle peacefully near Spanish presidios in the region.<sup>8</sup> Apaches used their reservations for their own purposes and culturally reinvented themselves while in contact with Spaniards, not in isolation.

A third goal of this study is to resolve the long-standing scholarly debate over when, why, and how the *establecimiento* system ended. Indeed, a whole host of borderlands historians have mistakenly argued that it collapsed at the outbreak of the Mexican War of Independence in 1810, when Apache raiding allegedly increased in response to a drastic decline in military defense and gifts to Indians across northern New Spain.<sup>9</sup> Other writers have recognized the uneven decline of the *establecimientos* and the region’s economy, maintaining that prosperity continued longer in Chihuahua and Sonora than in Coahuila and Texas, but they disagree on whether decline began in 1820–1821 or 1831 and whether it was because “Apaches grew restless” or Mexicans stopped issuing them rations.<sup>10</sup> Relying primarily on the observations of Ignacio Zúñiga, historian Cynthia Radding has challenged these interpretations, arguing that the “peace encampments” from Janos to Tucson “collapsed by the mid 1820s” because of dwindling supplies stemming from a “lack of fiscal resources (and political will) to maintain them.” As presidial defense and diplomacy broke down at this time, Radding holds that Indian raiding increased and the frontier began receding, a process that would continue through the 1840s.<sup>11</sup>

So how do we reconcile this cacophony of arguments? First, some scholars pinpointed the beginning of the deterioration, while others have identified the point of total collapse. That said, the contention that the system completely broke down in 1810 is simply incorrect and has misled two generations of historians. All that happened in the 1810s was a temporary reduction in money and military defense. With the exception of the Lipans, who spent less time in *establecimientos* than Mescaleros and Apache groups west of the Rio Grande, there is no evidence that Apaches increased their raids in the last decade of Spanish rule. Second, despite the disagreement over the precise timing of the breakdown, scholars generally agree on the overall pattern of decline. As historian David J. Weber has aptly noted, the unraveling of peace with Apaches

and other independent Indians “was specific to individual bands and tribes” and the collapse of Mexican presidial defenses probably preceded Apaches’ recognition that they could raid again successfully.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, scholars concur that Southern and Western Apache bands remained at peace longer than Mescaleros. Finally, it is important to distinguish peaceful Apaches’ responses to the weakening of Mexico’s military defenses from independent Apaches’ reactions. Increased raiding by independent Apaches alone, for instance, would not necessarily signal the collapse of the *establecimientos*, especially if Apaches at peace were helping Spaniards attack them.

This picture of Apache–Hispanic relations is quite different from the one presented by most writers or envisioned by the general public. When most people think of Apaches, they conjure up images of peerless nomadic warriors of the desert Southwest, such as Geronimo and Cochise, who struggled relentlessly to defend their freedom against the U.S. Army in the late nineteenth century. As one early-twentieth-century scholar put it, “The Apache was the original ‘bad man’ of the Southwest.” Hollywood films such as *Geronimo* (1993), *The Missing* (2003), and *The 3:10 to Yuma* (2007) have simply reinforced this stereotype in American popular culture. Some of the most respected English, Spanish, and French language dictionaries are also part of the problem. They continue to offer antiquated definitions for the word Apache, such as “bandit,” “highway robber,” and “ruffian or thug,” which derive from the ethnocentric observations of nineteenth-century European observers.<sup>13</sup>

The portrayal of Apaches as relentless warriors is at best superficial. It fails to address cultural change over time and varieties among tribal groups. Specialists understand, of course, that Apaches have a long history of contact with Euro-Americans, which dates back at least to Francisco Coronado’s expedition in 1540.<sup>14</sup> Few historians of the nineteenth-century American West, however, are aware that thousands of Apaches, including the relatives of well-known future leaders such as Juan José Compá, Mangas Coloradas, and Cochise, settled on Spanish-run reservations fifty years prior to the U.S.–Mexican War. Frequently these same scholars mistakenly assume that the Spanish and Mexican military only minimally impacted Apache culture, their soldiers “could do next to nothing to control the Apaches,” and Apaches’ first significant contact with outsiders began when Anglo Americans entered the region in significant numbers during the 1840s.<sup>15</sup> Mexican scholars, on the other hand, are much better versed in Apache history prior to 1846. They, too, however, regard Apaches as *indios bárbaros*, or savages, owing to the

escalation of Apache raiding in northern Mexico during the 1830s.<sup>16</sup> Even most regional specialists concur that Apaches never made lasting peace agreements with Spaniards. These historians view the mission, not the presidio, as the primary institution for “civilizing” Apaches in the region and ignore the presidio’s role as a reservation agency.<sup>17</sup>

Challenging these assumptions, this book offers a new interpretation of Apache–Hispanic relations that examines both cultures from multiple perspectives in a global context. Borderlands specialists may be surprised to learn that Spaniards and Mexicans did not call garrisoned Apache settlements *establecimientos de paz*. This phrase and its various English equivalents – peace establishments or peace settlements – have been concocted by Mexican and American scholars. Although “reservation” is not a literal translation of “establecimiento” either, this term more accurately reflects the degree of control the Spanish military sought to exercise over peaceful Apache communities and places the system in a broader comparative context.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the most knowledgeable Spanish officers learned the Athapaskan names and culture patterns of the nine Apache groups they recognized in the late eighteenth century may prove equally startling.<sup>19</sup>

Several intriguing parallels also exist between Spanish and United States Indian policy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. First, in the same way that enlightened Spanish Indian policy makers such as Bernardo de Gálvez and Pedro de Nava inaccurately argued that Apaches were primitive nomadic hunters who needed to become farmers to become civilized, so too Thomas Jefferson and his intellectual progeny advocated that Native peoples of the eastern woodlands, such as the Iroquois and Cherokees, needed to become agricultural even though they had farmed for centuries. Second, Gálvez and Jefferson made these grave policy errors at the same time that Spanish and U.S. troops were destroying Apache and Iroquois croplands. Third, Spaniards and Anglo Americans shared a similar desire to rationalize conquest, colonization, and Indian land dispossession and a preference for negotiating with Indian men who sought to protect their hunting grounds rather than with women who assumed “ownership of the land as its principal cultivators.”<sup>20</sup>

“Reserved areas for indigenous populations,” then, were not simply a product of the nineteenth-century United States. They began on Spanish and British colonial frontiers in Europe, North Africa, and North America, where the *establecimientos* constituted one of the most extensive systems on the continent.<sup>21</sup> That I focus more on peace than violent warfare does not mean I am in any way adopting a romanticized Boltonian or “White Legend” viewpoint on the region’s history. Apache–Spanish relations, like



those between the Iroquois and the British in the mid-eighteenth century, were characterized as much by mutual suspicion as by mutual need. Violent warfare predominated between Apaches and Spaniards for most of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and between Apaches and Mexicans from the 1830s onward.<sup>22</sup> One of the lessons we can learn from the Apache experience at the *establecimientos*, however, is that even the most war-ravaged and violent indigenous cultures at the periphery of colonial empires and emerging nations pursued peaceful diplomacy as a political strategy when it was in their best interest to do so. What is significant about the period from 1786 to 1832 is the extent that reservation-dwelling Apaches and Spaniards across the colonial Southwest worked together to reduce reciprocal treachery and violence and overcome deep-seated mutual distrust, even though those practices never entirely disappeared. To gain a fuller appreciation of the enormously complex history of North America's early frontiers and borderlands, it is just as important to understand Native and European motivations for making peace as it is for making war.<sup>23</sup>

To that end, the ensuing six chapters explore the following questions: How did the Ndé adapt to their environment prior to Spanish contact, and what cultural transformations did they make while in contact with Spaniards prior to 1700? Why did Spanish officials resort to resettling Apaches on reservations, and what precedents influenced their decision? Why did so many Ndé, who had dominated the Spanish militarily for nearly two centuries, agree to stop raiding Spanish livestock and farm on the margins of Spanish colonial society? How did the *establecimiento* system function in practice, and when, why, and how did it break down? Finally, how did Ndé relations with Mexicans and Americans change after the collapse of the reservations, and what were their most important legacies?

Chapter 1 begins by showing that the majority of Ndé groups initially embraced Catholicism in the late 1620s and got along with Spanish missionaries and their native neighbors. Adopting a “deep history” approach, it briefly examines Ndé cultural origins and environmental adaptations prior to Spanish contact in 1540 before focusing more thoroughly on their major cultural adaptations after contact. A central argument of the chapter is that Apache violence toward Spaniards and their indigenous enemies increased after 1667, as Apaches adapted to Spanish colonialism and environmental change by becoming equestrians and actively participating in the Pueblo and Great Southwestern Revolts.

Chapter 2 argues that although the reservation system had transcontinental origins, centralized Spanish policy was a less important influence

than face-to-face negotiations between Apaches and Spaniards. Chichimeca “peace camps” in central New Spain in the 1590s and the seldom-recognized *moros de paz* (peaceful Moors) program in North Africa from 1739 to 1803 served as potential precedents, as well as prior Spanish experiments to resettle Apaches in missions, pueblos, and trade with them at presidios. The first Ndé reservation at Presidio del Norte, however, resulted from Mescalero-Spanish agreements at the local level and preceded Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez’s well-known 1786 policy.

Chapter 3 maintains that external military pressure from Spaniards and other Indians, opportunities for economic and cultural exchange, and the ability of Ndé leaders to work the treaty terms in their favor influenced Ndé groups to relocate to reservations after 1786. Although Spanish military officers offered Apaches the opportunity to receive protection and material benefits, the fact that they killed, captured, exiled, and enslaved those who refused angered all Ndé people and created inherent instability within the program.

Chapter 4 examines the pros and cons of the Spanish resettlement program at its height from Ndé and Spanish perspectives. Three beneficial results of the Apache peace from a Spanish perspective were Hispanicization and demographic and economic expansion. The reservation system was also cheaper than the combined cost of waging an all-out war and paying for lost resources from retaliatory raids. Although a small number of Ndé and Spaniards reached an enduring accommodation, the majority of Ndé who settled on Spanish reservations did so only to fulfill temporary needs. Demonstrating minimal signs of acculturation and incorporation, they circumvented the overambitious incorporation efforts of Spanish officials by spreading unsettling rumors, recovering captives, gambling away their rations and gifts, forging interband and intertribal alliances, and continuing to hunt, gather, and raid.

Seeking to resolve the scholarly debate on the *establecimiento* system’s collapse, I argue in Chapter 5 that it transpired unevenly, breaking down more quickly in eastern Nueva Vizcaya and Coahuila than in western Nueva Vizcaya and Sonora because of Comanches’ ongoing wars with Mescaleros and Lipans. In tracing the decline I look at several interrelated factors: increased desertion of Apaches *de paz*, intensified Apache and Comanche raiding, reduced rations and Mexican military manpower, disease outbreaks, and land dispossession.

Chapter 6 opens with the treacherous Johnson Massacre of 1837, using it to symbolize a new era of Ndé relations with Mexicans and Americans in which violent mercenary warfare trumped trading and diplomacy.