Territorial Politics and Cultural Impact

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In 1866 a gruff ex-Confederate soldier arrived in the territory of New Mexico. His name was Thomas B. Catron, and he hailed from a state that had provided New Mexico with most of its early Anglo leaders, Missouri, at the other end of the Santa Fe Trail. A shrewd and opportunistic young man, Catron quickly perceived that the only way he could have a successful political or economic career in this remote frontier territory was to learn Spanish, so he located in a native village where that was the only language spoken and soon became fluent. Grounded in the culture and language of the territory's overwhelming majority, Catron aggressively moved into the field of law. Again he was successful, becoming one of the most active and important practicing attorneys in the territory. One of his legal specialties was to defend native grantees whose lands awarded under Spanish or Mexican rule were being threatened by acquisitive Anglo newcomers. A calculating lawyer, he saw the advantage of taking plentiful land instead of scarce money as his legal fee, and by 1883 he was reputed to be one of the largest landowners in the nation.

Catron also had great skills as a politician. During his long tenure in New Mexico, which fell seventeen years short of spanning the entire sixty-two years of the state's territorial period, he was the key person in that nefarious and shadowy political clique, the Santa Fe Ring. This political ring, which specialized in gaining control of much of the territory's economic wealth, including its coveted land grants, provided Catron with much of the support he would need to win high office. In 1894 he was elected territorial delegate, receiving important backing from the more affluent native leaders, the ricos, as well as from significant numbers of los pobres for
whom he had become a revered patrón. When New Mexico was admitted to statehood in 1912, this remarkably astute and successful Republican was chosen as one of the first two United States senators. A more impressive success story for a New Mexico Anglo would be difficult to find.

In many ways Catron’s career is symbolic of the traditional scenario of the prominent Anglo achieving success in territorial New Mexico. As historians of the territorial era have noted, the Anglo, being a comparative newcomer, started as an outsider, a member of a small minority. Prior to the seventies, the Anglo population was small indeed. Col. George A. McCall, whom the Taylor administration sent to New Mexico to assist in the organization of a state or territory, claimed there were only 1,200 Anglos in 1860; a later estimate made by the territory’s first delegate, Richard T. Weightman, was only half that number. Newcomers from “the States,” as the East was frequently called, usually made business or political alliances with native New Mexicans; indeed, success in almost anything would have been elusive without at least some cooperation with the territory’s Spanish-speaking majority. Usually the Hispano ally was wealthy, if not in money then in land. New Mexico historians have customarily labeled such people ricos. The nature of Anglo relationships with less affluent or less notable Hispanos, however, is more clouded. Some prominent Anglos, such as Catron, won through patient and systematic efforts the exalted status of patrón. Others apparently confined their cooperation to the more accessible and “savvy” ricos. But the interaction of Anglos and Hispanos in all these relationships has usually been viewed as one of accommodation. Certainly in comparison with other states the United States acquired as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, this accommodation view appears sound, even though it is largely derived from studies involving the territory’s more affluent or influential citizens.

An examination of this accommodation model (here the Catron model) should illuminate that distinctive brand of cultural politics practiced in territorial New Mexico. It should also suggest some provocative questions. For example, was the territory’s governance primarily the handiwork of the much-chronicled alliance involving ambitious Anglos and those ricos with keen political instincts, or
were there other important factors that must be considered? What was the role of the ordinary Spanish-speaking citizen who was usually rural and often remote from the sources of political power (a group that many Chicano historians call los pobres because their material goods were few)? Was there any political role for that third group in New Mexico’s proud cultural triad, the Indian? Of course, complete answers to these queries will not be possible in a brief essay, but answers of a suggestive nature are not only possible but quite illuminating. Indeed, such answers, if carefully developed, can increase an understanding of what many regard as the most diverse and fascinating political arena in the American union.

Cultural politics in New Mexico were especially murky in the beginning. The presence of American troops in 1846, recent conquerors of the territory during the Mexican-American War, muddied New Mexico’s political waters as nothing else could. There was, of course, the abrupt change caused by the reversal of roles; Anglos replaced Hispanos as leaders of the new power structure the American Army imposed under the Stars and Stripes. Prominent native New Mexicans willing to cooperate could participate in the new order, but Anglos would have an influence far beyond their meager numbers. Curiously, though, the most critical issue facing the new leadership was the influence of the military in civil affairs. To some of the recently arrived Anglos the attitude on the part of many officers that they were superior in authority to civilian officeholders ran contrary to the nation’s traditional constitutional interpretation. One of these was ex-army paymaster, later territorial delegate, Richard Weightman. Undoubtedly an opportunist, Weightman carefully began to form political alliances with prominent ricos in much the same way that Catron would two decades later. During New Mexico’s premature effort to achieve statehood in 1850, Weightman and his allies became vocal statehood boosters. For support in this effort, they made important advances toward the Roman Catholic Church, involving in their ranks such prominent members of the Mexican clergy as José Manuel Gallegos of Albuquerque, one of the priests so vividly portrayed in Willa Cather’s classic *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Weightman characterized his political opponents as diehard advocates of continued territorial status for New Mexico who were
influential and powerful only because of their military support. They were backed by Col. John Munroe, head of the armed forces in the territory, who allowed them as self-serving Anglos to organize a territorial party as a vehicle to continue their privileged status. They were often called the Houghton faction because their leader was the army-backed judge, Joab Houghton. Although Houghton and his chief sponsor, Colonel Munroe, were eventually pressured into supporting statehood for New Mexico by the presidential administration of Zachary Taylor, the feud between the Weightman and Houghton factions continued throughout the early territorial years essentially along the lines of civil-versus-military authority.

At New Mexico's first statehood convention in Santa Fe in May of 1850, another issue important to native Hispanos arose to divide the feuding Anglos. It was the heated question of slavery. Of the two chief rivals, Judge Houghton was an antislavery zealot, who was determined to see New Mexico become a free state if admission to the union were inevitable. And his views ultimately prevailed; slavery was prohibited in the 1850 state constitution. Although Weightman's views on this issue were somewhat neutral, he would later fight for the Confederacy. As for the Spanish-speaking majority, it is difficult to conclude that the slavery issue could have been that vital to them after the terrible recent trauma resulting from the Conquest. In fact, during the 1850s Hispanos, at least the ricos, demonstrated a curious ambivalence toward the sectional controversy. One wealthy Hispano, Miguel A. Otero, who married a southern belle from Charleston, South Carolina, used his influence while serving as territorial delegate during the 1850s to persuade territorial leaders to align themselves with the South on the sectional question. In 1862 when the Confederates invaded northern New Mexico, however, the overwhelming majority of Spanish-speaking natives remained loyal to the Union. Yet one suspects that their antipathy toward the Confederates was not so much because of their slaveholding views as it was their Texas background. Memories of the ill-fated Texas–Santa Fe Expedition of 1841 and land-grabbing activities of Texans in the Mesilla Valley region probably did more to galvanize resistance to the Confederate invasion than other questions of morality.

The Union victory in 1865 put an end to the divisive slavery
issue among the territory's Anglos. The slavery question had sur-
vived by many years the often bitter controversy over civil-versus-
military authority, an issue that declined in importance shortly after
New Mexico received territorial rather than state government un-
der the Compromise of 1850. Now that both issues were dead,
Anglo and native politicians could devote their energies to terri-
torial questions, such as the adjudication of disputed land grant
titles and statehood for New Mexico. The close of the Civil War
also brought more ambitious Anglos to the territory. One partic-
ularly important group of new Anglos were the much-heralded
veterans of the California Column, the now-famous military unit
that marched from California to New Mexico to turn back Confed-
erate invaders during the Civil War. Many members of the column
took their discharge in New Mexico to remain in the territory and
to exercise significant influence for years to come. One of them
was Albert J. Fountain who went on to become both the president
of the Territorial Council and speaker of the Territorial House of
Representatives. (Fountain's assassination in New Mexico's isolated
White Sands region in 1896 remains one of the state's more famous
unsolved murders.) Another soldier who served in the California
Column was William L. Rynerson, who won terms in both houses
of the territorial legislature and was an unsuccessful candidate for
territorial delegate in 1884. But some of those who had served the
Confederate cause also came to New Mexico to launch important
careers. Certainly the most noteworthy of these was "Tom" Catron,
the kingpin of our accommodation model.

Catron was the apparent leader of one of the territory's most
controversial institutions, the Santa Fe Ring. Since it was a covert
group of shrewd lawyers and politicians, the ring has been shrouded
in controversy for years. Some New Mexico historians have credited
it with all the questionable manipulations of that selfish alliance of
Anglos and ricos that constitute the core of our accommodation
model. Other historians have contended that no solid proof exists
for such a ring, only accusations of envious or threatened outsiders
alleging its existence. Certainly it would be difficult to place a
beginning or ending date to its activities. Since it was an informal
arrangement, probably a conspiratorial one, it is even difficult to
reconstruct the ring's history or describe accurately its structure.
Perhaps it was the connecting link between the leadership of the Democratic and Republican parties in New Mexico. The ring was certainly bipartisan; it had prominent members from both parties. If political partisanship was negligible, and the ring was as important as its detractors claim, the territory of New Mexico had what historian Kenneth N. Owens has called a "no-party" system. In other words, instead of there being one dominant party or two healthy rival parties, a cooperative arrangement existed between the territory's two political organizations that made true partisanship negligible. More important is the objective of the Santa Fe Ring: its members were dedicated to the acquisition of economic resources or the special privileges that would make the acquisition possible. Land acquisition was especially significant, particularly when it involved the immense tracts of land awarded under Spanish and Mexican rule.

Undoubtedly the best contemporary description of the Santa Fe Ring was that by Territorial Governor Edmund Ross in 1887. Ross, the courageous man whose refusal to vote against President Andrew Johnson during the famous impeachment trial of 1868 may have preserved the integrity of the presidency, was a Cleveland appointee who wanted nothing to do with the selfish machinations of politicians regardless of their political stripe. In a long letter to a friend, Ross described the organizers of the Santa Fe Ring as a "few sharp shrewd Americans" who purchased at nominal prices a few small Spanish and Mexican land grants and proceeded to enlarge them by manufacturing titles and lobbying for congressional recognition. They were largely successful because they had "in-gratiated themselves" with New Mexico natives by learning their language and currying their favor. (The name of Catron immediately comes to mind.) They had, according to an observation related to Ross by an old veteran of the Mexican War, "some legal lore with a large amount of cheek and an unusual quantity of low cunning and astuteness that always had an inclination to run in a crooked direction." They were most successful in corrupting some of the native landowners, too. These Anglos taught Hispanos a "few tricks" on how "to swell" their holdings to "colossal dimensions," the Anglos receiving as compensation "large shares of these grants for their services." Again another characteristic of the Catron model. But
according to Ross, the Santa Fe Ring was more than a land grant ring because the opportunities for “speculation and plunder” were legion. As a consequence, there were “Cattle Rings, Public Land Stealing Rings, Mining Rings, Treasury Rings, and Rings of almost every description.”

Santa Fe, as the political and commercial capital of New Mexico, was the logical center for all this ring activity. The lawyers and businessmen of this important territorial center were in an enviable position to coordinate this speculation and plundering. And, as Ross noted, their efforts were bipartisan: at least one Democrat and one Republican served in every important law firm or commercial enterprise. Consequently, no matter which party was dominant, ring members were in a position to influence political decisions. In Catron’s Santa Fe law firm, for instance, there were two powerful Democrats, Charles H. Gildersleeve, who was once accused of heading a clique of land grabbers, and William C. Thornton, who was appointed territorial governor of New Mexico during Cleveland’s second term. The prevalence of lawyers in the activities of the Santa Fe Ring almost causes one to conclude that the New Mexico bar and the Santa Fe Ring were synonymous. Moreover, as testimony to Santa Fe’s importance to the legal profession, ring-connected lawyers in other towns were subordinated to their counterparts in Santa Fe, the “central head.” Ross insisted that there was one lawyer for every ten Anglos in the territory during his gubernatorial term. Such a figure seems remarkably high, but with the number of land disputes that needed to be adjudicated in American law courts the need for lawyers was undeniably great.

A striking aspect about those Anglos alleged to control the Santa Fe Ring was the immensity of the land tracts they acquired. Catron, labeled by Ross as one of two originators of the land grant ring (generally considered synonymous with the Santa Fe Ring), had an insatiable appetite for land. His holdings included the 593,000 acres of the Tierra Amarilla Grant in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, his largest acquisition, and the 240,000 acres of the Mora Grant flanking the Sangre de Cristos on the east. Stephen B. Elkins, a two-term territorial delegate and Republican colleague of Catron who left the territory later to become a United
States senator from West Virginia and secretary of war under Benjamin Harrison, was the ring's other organizer. When he departed for the East, he left control of the ring in Catron's capable hands. Despite his departure, Elkins, largely in cooperation with Catron, could claim at one time a large portion of the Mora Grant and boast of being the principal owner of the Ortiz Grant north of Albuquerque. Other prominent Anglo politicians, lawyers, and businessmen were also successful speculators in land and possibly connected with the Santa Fe Ring. Distinguished Republican Governor Le Baron Bradford Prince, for example, a leading lay Episcopalian with a national reputation, had presumed connections with the ring; and Max Frost, editor of the Santa Fe New Mexican and a man who was once indicted in a land fraud prosecution, may also have been a member of the ring.

While Ross' remarkable description of the Santa Fe Ring makes the group appear solely Anglo, it was not. Well-to-do native leaders were alleged members, benefiting from the sometimes illicit, often steamroller, tactics of the ring. Antonio Joseph, a Democrat who served as territorial delegate from 1884 to 1894, was once accused of being a henchman of the powerful Democratic leader and ring member, Gildersleeve. Joseph's first election victory was allegedly engineered by the Santa Fe Ring with the help of a split in the Republican party. He, too, had land grant holdings and was accused of manipulating "poor ignorant Mexicans" to acquire his holdings in the Chama and Ojo Caliente grants. Other Hispanos, or ricos, to use the preferred term for our accommodation model, were suspected of ring connections. J. Francisco Chaves, grandson of one of the Mexican governors and a two-term territorial delegate, was one. Mariano S. Otero, a shrewd Bernalillo businessman who also served as territorial delegate, was another. And, the members of the Perea family, which for a time controlled much of Bernalillo County, were believed to have strong ring connections; one of the family, Pedro Perea, was widely regarded as a Catron protegé.

Because Ross' description of the Santa Fe Ring is so systematic and complete, one is strongly inclined to believe most of his allegations. They have the undeniable appeal of a conspiracy theory that most Americans tend to accept if at all convincing. But one's judgment must be tempered; after all, Ross was a fierce opponent
of the power structure in Santa Fe, whatever it was called. He arrived as an outsider following his appointment and remained one throughout his term. Another aspect of the governor’s analysis that should not be accepted uncritically is his description of the interaction between the Anglos and their rico allies. The Anglo is the catalyst in this relationship; he is the one who teaches the “dirty tricks” that both will use to swindle or cheat los pobres out of their lands and other sources of wealth. Although this interpretation seems convincing, it does not necessarily follow that Anglos will remain leaders in the resulting selfish conspiracies. Given the power and prestige that an old or well-placed New Mexico family would enjoy in a society of landed aristocrats and beholden rural folk, one would have to suspect that some ricos could do very well on their own. If accusations of land-grabbing hurled at Antonio Joseph, for instance, are true, he needed little help from Gildersleeve or any other calculating Anglo to achieve his economic objectives; he operated effectively on his initiative.

Ross’ analysis also suggests that harmony would inevitably result from such a mutually profitable relationship. With millions of acres of grant lands up for grabs and the Anglo’s needing the rico because of his connections and the rico’s needing the Anglo because of his legal knowledge, there seems little to cause friction between the two parties. Yet the two cultural groups were so different that this assumed harmony cannot be taken for granted. Observations recorded during the Conquest by such Americans as Susan Shelby Magoffin, Lewis Garrard, and army officer Philip St. George Cooke reveal a disdain for all native Hispanos regardless of their social station. That such an attitude would change in little over one generation seems unlikely. Besides, new Anglos were arriving each year, and their views toward the Spanish-speaking majority would have had to change significantly if they resembled in any way the views of their elected representatives in Washington. Unfair, often vicious, attacks in Congress against native New Mexicans were, unfortunately, common during the Gilded Age, particularly on those occasions when the territory’s inhabitants were seeking statehood. Antonio Joseph, while serving as territorial delegate during the early nineties, heard his Spanish-speaking constituents criticized as members of an “Aztec civilization” by a Republican congressman
and a "race speaking a alien language" by a Populist representative. Slurs about the territory's dominant religious faith during a debate over statehood in 1894 caused one fair-minded congressman to ask his colleagues "whether a man's religion is to be made a test of his fitness for citizenship in the Union?"

Newspapers in the East were even more hostile to New Mexico. In 1875, for instance, during one of the territory's bids for statehood, a Cincinnati newspaper characterized New Mexicans as "aliens to us in blood and language" who would undoubtedly dominate any new "Catholic State." The Chicago Tribune waged an even more abusive attack in 1888 when New Mexico sought admission under the Springer bill. Territorial natives were maligned as "not American but 'Greaser,' persons ignorant of our laws, manners, customs, language, and institutions." The Tribune also printed some all-too-familiar stereotypes, characterizing native New Mexicans as illiterate, shiftless, and superstitious.

How many of these negative stereotypes Anglo lawyers and businessmen who comprised the Santa Fe Ring accepted is difficult to determine. Many of them were undoubtedly distressed by the knowledge that such attacks on the Hispano majority crippled New Mexico's statehood efforts, for any delay in admission would adversely affect the ring. It would, for example, deny ring members opportunities to hold new offices, and several ring leaders coveted state offices or seats in the United States Congress. Anglos also had powerful economic reasons for seeking admission; statehood, whenever achieved, would mean increased values for many of their extensive land speculations. But whether the frustrations caused by the delay were in any way vented against those ricos involved in the ring is unclear. More than likely these frustrations were directed against los pobres. Such anger if manifested in criticism, however, would have to be low-keyed and private, particularly if its author had political aspirations in the territory. After all, the Spanish-speaking people remained the electoral majority throughout the remainder of the territorial period. Consequently, when Melvin W. Mills, a partisan Republican and probable ring member from Colfax County, characterized the territorial natives as "ignorant people" unfit to govern, he did it in a confidential letter to his fellow Republican, Gov. L. Bradford Prince.
Of course, any discussion of the intercultural relationship of Anglos and native New Mexicans must include all Hispanos, including los pobres. Poorer Hispanos obviously were important in that they made up in numbers what they lacked in influence, and any attempt to exclude them from our accommodation model would be ridiculous. Yet sometimes New Mexico historians have done just that, leaving only ricos to represent the model’s native component. Assessing relations between Anglos and poor Hispanos, however, is a difficult task. For one thing, los pobres left little in the way of written records, but many ricos, being highly literate (several had graduated from such Catholic universities as St. Louis and Notre Dame), gave their side in a record rich in its diversity and extensiveness. Obviously association with the ring is denied or ignored in all such accounts; instead contributions to the welfare of all native peoples are stressed. In fact, as a number of these ricos were powerful, if not generous, patróns, their service to the community was of unquestioned importance. Indeed, important safeguards for the Spanish-speaking majority in New Mexico’s state constitution were largely the result of rico participation in the constitutional convention of 1910. No provision that would work against the welfare of the Hispano majority was allowed in that conservative, bilingual document. Soloman Luna, the wealthiest sheep owner in the territory and the most influential native delegate at the convention, had only to “lift a finger or his eyebrows” to stop any detrimental proposal.

But what about the interaction between Anglos and los pobres? How can this relationship fit into the accommodation model? Most people with even a nodding acquaintance with New Mexico political history know that the poor and the marginal were often the alleged victims of land-grabbing, grant stealing, and legal manipulations. One cannot conclude, however, that there was no accommodation involving los pobres in this presumably adversarial relationship. Anglos too acted as patróns, and Catron, once again, is one of the best examples. Hispanos saw his ability to cater to their needs as beneficial whether it advanced their true interests or not. Moreover, his political support in the territory’s northern counties, where the majority of native New Mexicans lived, was impressive; he managed to capture most of these counties during all three of his
bids for territorial delegate. His being a Republican, of course, helped because the party, the dominant one during the territorial period, had established an early alliance with the native majority. But Catron as the dominant party figure, the "Mr. Republican" of the territorial G.O.P., was a key person in bringing about this important accord.

One interesting example of Catron's remarkable hold on the territory's Spanish-speaking majority occurred in Union County during Catron's successful bid for delegate in 1894. A number of Hispanos in that remote county had been attracted to the Populist party, which had a platform deliberately geared to appeal to people from humble circumstances. The Populist movement, which managed to garner more than 8 percent of the presidential vote in the national election of 1892, called for such reforms as government ownership of the railroads (an appealing issue to people living in a lonely stockgrazing county that would be adversely affected by higher freight rates) and a graduated income tax. Other popular issues included free coinage of silver, direct election of United States senators, and a shorter work week to benefit the nation's urban toilers. Many of these new converts to Populism had been Democrats because throughout the West the often-disenchanted Democratic party tended to provide more support for Populist goals than the Republican party. And most were apparently Hispanos; the members of the Union County Populist party central committee, for example, were Emeterio Gallegos, Mateo Lujan, Saturnio Pinard, and Francisco Gallegos. Despite this Democratic–Populist alignment, Catron, working through a Las Vegas attorney named Lewis C. Fort, managed to win an endorsement for his Republican candidacy from the entire Union County Populist organization.

What is so extraordinary about Catron's feat is his ability as an archconservative to attract members of a party regarded by many as socialistic. But this is New Mexico, and Catron's success is another example of that unique brand of cultural politics so long practiced in this state. First and foremost, of course, was Catron's image as a patrón, and thus his role as a friend of the Spanish-speaking people of northern New Mexico was a contributing factor to his coup: Consider too the crucial favors needed to make a patrón a patrón. In 1892, while Catron was maneuvering to control the
territory’s delegation to the Republican national convention, he promised the citizens of Clayton and Folsom a new county; the result was Union County created from Colfax and San Miguel counties. Finally, there were the necessary go-betweens that insure the success of any politically adept patrón. Catron’s emissary in this case was Lewis Fort. Fort had gained immense popularity in 1891 when he traveled to Clayton as district attorney of San Miguel to take into custody a notorious murderer who killed an old man in his sleep. The accused killer’s abusive statements about Fort during his trial in Las Vegas could only make him a local hero in northeastern New Mexico. The popular Fort was a persuasive advocate for Catron’s candidacy in 1894.

Certainly Catron was not the only Anglo to appeal to the masses of ordinary native New Mexicans. Even more successful was Bronson Cutting. An analysis of Cutting does not belong in this study of territorial politics because his political career soared during the statehood period when he became a widely respected and powerful United States senator, but the pattern of political favors that characterized his approach resembles Catron’s. He built a bloc of Spanish-speaking voters even more loyal to him than Catron’s native supporters were to the veteran territorial leader. Moreover, as a political maverick, Cutting, a nominal Republican, was able to lead his Hispanic backers in and out of the Republican party as he switched parties from election to election to pursue his more liberal policies. Cutting’s favors also took the form of loans to constituents (another Catron tactic). But in Cutting’s case, the amount of the loans he extended was astonishingly large. Cutting, at the time of his death from a plane crash in 1935, left $500,000 worth of largely unpaid loans to nearly 500 constituents. Many unpaid loans were to Hispanics.

If the relations that Catron and Cutting had with los pobres were typical of all Anglo leaders, then our accommodation model would seem most appropriate in describing interaction between almost all Anglos and Hispanos in New Mexico. Ricos cooperated with Anglos through arrangements such as the Santa Fe Ring for the mutual benefit of both, but los pobres tended to support Anglos because of favors extended to them by leaders of the Anglo community. Accommodation, then, is the byword; it best describes
relations between these two dominant cultural groups of territorial New Mexico.

True? Of course not. Historians have long recognized the frictions that existed between these two cultural groups, frictions that tended to surface dramatically during such well-publicized confrontations as the Maxwell Land Grant controversy, the Lincoln County War, the White Cap raids, and the relatively recent raid of Reies López Tijerina and his Alianza supporters on the Tierra Amarilla courthouse. But most New Mexico historians, including this writer, have looked upon these celebrated conflicts in New Mexico history as aberrations, and the numerous books about the conflicts have, for the most part, treated them as such. Scholars have rarely viewed these encounters as part of a broader struggle pitting Anglos against Hispanos, a conflict that could discredit at least a part of the accommodation model involving Anglos and los pobres. Viewing these struggles as exceptions to the rule, of course, means viewing the violent behavior of the native New Mexicans involved as exceptional; thus the more familiar characterization of territorial Hispanos as a patient, accepting, even docile people has been allowed to prevail. Recent research, including that of this author, does not support these mild traits of behavior, particularly when the legitimate rights of these native peoples were being threatened or challenged.

One must, in fact, modify this accommodation view of intercultural relations and territorial politics so that the deep differences that existed between Anglos and Hispanos of more humble means be recognized. While the intercultural relations in territorial New Mexico were more harmonious than in other parts of the Spanish-speaking Southwest, to argue this point without honest assessment of the differences that often prevailed is to present an incomplete and, therefore, inaccurate argument.

The major cause of these differences that led to confrontations and violence was rivalry over land. Perhaps in no other state in the union has land been more important as a cause of conflict than in New Mexico. New Mexico's dubious record of having more political assassinations than any other state is largely attributable to struggle for land or the economic power associated with landholding. Clearly, princely tracts of that coveted commodity awarded
under Spanish or Mexican authority led to warfare in Colfax and San Miguel counties. The struggles in both these counties have been dealt with extensively, but, as previously mentioned, these conflicts have been chronicled as exceptions rather than the rule in analyzing the actions of participants. Land grants, however, were not the only reason for violence; disputed grants of land were not located in Lincoln County or in those parts of Rio Arriba and San Juan counties where competition for land existed between Anglos and Hispanos. So competition for all kinds of land has characterized much of this violence and has made the term accommodation inappropriate in describing some aspects of intercultural relations in New Mexico.

Historian Robert Rosenbaum, who has conducted extensive research into violence as a native response to Anglo intrusion, has done the most convincing job of defining the geographical region in New Mexico where most of these serious intercultural confrontations occurred. He has described the “battle zone” as a region extending from San Juan County in the northwest across the northern boundary of the state to the Sangre de Cristos and down the eastern flank of that range into Lincoln County, which at one time encompassed the entire southeastern corner of the state. Here native frontiersmen moved during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century in a movement that noted historical geographer Donald W. Meinig has characterized as a “spontaneous folk migration.”

The problems began when Anglos moved into the same regions during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The most typical response of these native land claimants, many of whom held the lands of this region in common, was extended resistance or opposition in what some modern historians and social scientists have called long-term skirmishing. Such resistance occurred in Rio Arriba County and the more recently created San Juan County to the west. Sometimes this resistance was a long-delayed process; in parts of Rio Arriba County, for instance, native settlers ignored Anglo intruders until the very lands that they were cultivating or grazing were threatened. Where Anglo intrusion was more dramatic and aggressive, this skirmishing occurred sooner and tended to accelerate into more serious violence. The wars in Lincoln County are
the best example of this kind of conflict. Although historians have been inclined to concentrate on the feud between the McSween and Murphy-Riley-Dolan factions that erupted in 1878, the rivalry over land and water rights in Lincoln County began a decade before and ended a decade after 1878 and involved Hispanics to a far greater degree than previously recognized. Few historians, for instance, have dealt with the Horrell War, where native Hispanics struggled to preserve their rights to the land, than with the legendary Lincoln County War. Moreover, far more attention has been paid to such Lincoln County participants as Billy the Kid than to such important native leaders as Juan Patron.

The same could be said of the long-term skirmishing along the eastern side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Colfax County where the famous Maxwell Land Grant was located. Most chronicles of the Maxwell controversy—and there have been some excellent ones—have concentrated on either the Anglo grant owner or the Anglo resisters. Much less has been done with the native resistance to the Maxwell claimants, which started later but was in some respects more effective. In San Miguel County to the south, an even more impressive show of native resistance occurred. As a matter of fact, one should upgrade the resistance of *Las Gorras Blancas* (White Caps) to Anglo encroachment in San Miguel to the level of a coordinated rebellion, a term some historians and social scientists use today to describe a much more advanced, better planned show of resistance. In San Miguel another land grant was involved, the Las Vegas Community Grant, and the better organized resisters were the heretoforementioned Las Gorras Blancas. These resisters not only responded with force to immediate threats to their land but established an alliance with a liberal Anglo union, the Knights of Labor, and cooperated with more progressive-minded Anglos in a political party, the Populist party or *El Partido del Pueblo*, which agitated for the eventual incorporation of the grant under the jurisdiction of the town of Las Vegas. These largely successful Gorras came closer to perceiving their movement as one representing small Hispano landowners everywhere than any group or organization until Tijerina’s Alianza was founded. Of course, Las Gorras did not include all Hispanics in their social thinking; the concept of a universal struggle was to elude them just as it did
most of the followers of Tijerina, who were probably more concerned with the ancient land claims of their family than with general welfare of Hispanics.

Clearly, this pattern of native resistance has not been fully understood or appreciated, but also it has not been adequately studied. More articles and monographs are needed on this subject. For instance, the territorial activities of native resisters in Rio Arriba County have been almost ignored. Histories of the resistance in Lincoln County have been largely confined to the famous range war of 1878, and accounts of the Colfax County War that erupted because of the Maxwell Land Grant have focused on the Anglos involved. While White Cap resistance in San Miguel has attracted a more recent crop of historians, they have not been entirely successful in putting the efforts of these native night riders in the broader historical perspective.

New research will not lead to simple answers. Indeed, reinterpretation may be thwarted by an array of frustrating complications. Obviously some of the Anglo intruders were important grant-hungry capitalists. Catron, for example, was involved in the struggles in Rio Arriba, along with Thomas Burns and two aggressive English companies, the Rio Arriba Land and Cattle Company and the Carlisle Cattle Company. The man for whom the accommodation model fits best was also allied with the Murphy-Riley-Dolan faction in the Lincoln County War and was for a brief time co-owner of the sprawling Maxwell Grant. On the other hand, many of the Anglo intruders on the eastern plains were small settlers or westering cowboys whose one aim was to extinguish the claims of Anglo grant speculators and native grantees so that the entire area could be declared public domain and opened to any enterprising homesteader. Also, there are cases where the Anglo landowner and the native landowner made common cause against the powerful Anglo speculator in alliance with the ricos.

On the basis of this newer interpretation or hypothesis, where does the accommodation model stand? It appears intact concerning relations between the more powerful and educated Anglos and their rico allies. Outside this relationship, however, the term accommodation may not be accurate: the growing evidence of widespread conflict between Anglos and los pobres has already been cited as
evidence that confrontation may be the more appropriate term. Other questions regarding cultural interaction should also be addressed. What type of relations existed, for instance, outside that peripheral region of conflict that extended in an arc from San Juan County to Lincoln in the southeast? Did Anglos and Hispanos of ordinary means living in the more crowded Rio Grande Valley accommodate their conflicting desires and needs to achieve greater harmony?

One New Mexico historian, Gustav L. Seligmann, Jr., has suggested that many territorial Hispanos employed withdrawal as a mechanism to deal with aggressive Anglo intruders. Withdrawal, however, is not an accommodating action if harmonious relations are the objective. As for Indians, the third group in the state’s cultural mix, they remained remote from the day-to-day social and political activities of mainstream New Mexico life. Although Pueblo Indians were involved in the Taos uprising of 1847 and some nomadic tribes were engaged in bloody violence as late as the eighties, as wards of the federal government, Indians stayed detached from territorial life even though their votes were sometimes solicited during the early days following the Conquest. The whole concept, then, of accommodation as a major characteristic of cultural interaction in territorial New Mexico is one that should be challenged, studied, and probably modified.

But any reassessment of New Mexico’s cultural relations should not be confined to the political or economic realm. The social arena is also a legitimate area for fresh examination. Intermarriage was common in territorial New Mexico, yet most would concede that the implications of this important social practice have never been adequately studied. Relations involving Anglo and Hispano women are just beginning to command the attention of historians. Other facets of social interaction such as the influence of Protestant missionaries on native peoples also need further study to ascertain the degree to which accommodation characterized cultural relations in New Mexico.

The results of this proposed reassessment would not undercut significantly the proud record of cultural harmony from which the citizens of this state draw great pride. After all, two governors of Hispanic background have served this state in the past decade, not
to mention the members of this cultural heritage who have served in Washington during these past years. A new assessment would, however, show that healthy racial and cultural relations are rarely achieved without struggle. It would also set the record straight from a historical standpoint, a worthy objective for any free society.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY


In the political realm, Kenneth N. Owens's "Patterns and Structure in Western Territorial Politics," *Western Historical Quarterly* 1 (October 1970): 373–92, is a good place to start; his analysis of territorial politics is superb. Dealing more

An impressive number of studies deal with two of New Mexico's more conspicuous episodes of violence: the controversies concerning the Maxwell Land Grant and the Lincoln County War. In regards to the first conflict, Jim B. Pearson's *The Maxwell Land Grant* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961) remains one of the standard studies. Excellent for the role of resisters in the power struggle with the Maxwell Land Grant Company is the late Morris F. Taylor's *O. P. McMains and the Maxwell Land Grant Conflict* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979). For the Lincoln County War there are many sources; the one most useful, however, is William A. Keleher's *Violence in Lincoln County, 1869–1881: A New Mexican Item* (1957; Albuquerque: UNM Press: 1982).