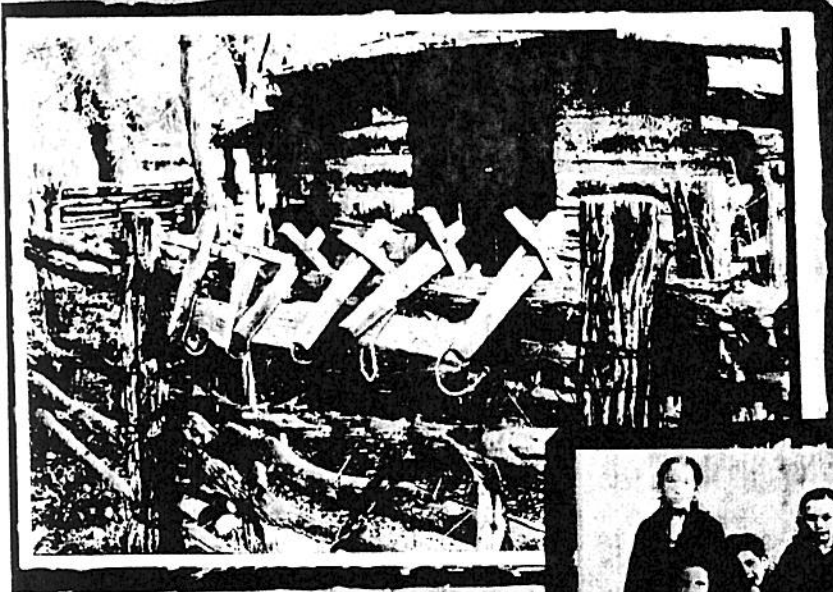


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RESISTANCE IN NEW MEXICO: THE HUMAN RIGHTS STRUGGLES

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Resistance in New Mexico is as old as the history of the first peoples of this area. The ancient Mogollón and Anasazi **cultures**, ancestors of the Pueblo Nations, resisted the harsh high desert climate of New Mexico to develop agricultural societies. The state is home to six different life zones with few, but vital, rivers. For later European colonizers also, the geography of the land and how to adapt to it for survival was the first challenge. Early peoples struggled to find ways to eke out survival from the harsh **topography**. As agrarian cultures developed, there was resistance between **nomadic** and more **sedentary** peoples for specific geographic areas, resources and products.

In the early 16th century, resistance by indigenous peoples of New Mexico took on a new threat - European **colonization**. The first white strangers to New Mexico came from southern Europe - Spain. They came north from the recently-conquered lands of the Caribbean and what is today Mexico. Other colonizing armies from Spain went to what is now South America. The majority of these Spanish armies were comprised of poor people and petty criminals looking for a better life, escape from debt or jail as well as Sephardic Jews, Moors and Arabs who sought to avoid the Spanish Inquisition. Bearing the sword, the cross and disease, they came to claim these new lands and riches for the monarchy of Spain.

Following them came a newly independent Mexican government and, later, the arrival of colonizers from northern Europe via the newly-created United States. The lands were taken by violent and deadly force and disease from the original inhabitants of what is now New Mexico.

These European colonial ventures, although similar in result, were distinct from each other. The **holocaust** of the resulting **genocide** erased entire Native nations (hundreds of thousands of peoples) and destroyed the cultures of ancient civilizations in an attempt to erase the scientific, cultural and linguistic knowledge of the original inhabitants of what today we call the Americas.

Today the culture of New Mexico still reflects this violence and how cultures and peoples have adapted. Names live on in mountains, rivers, geological formations and names of streets and villages. The Native cultures continue to resist erasure, just as *mestizos* (mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry) struggle for recognition from the invisibility that their **phenotype** (distinct physical attributes) and history have produced.

I started this chapter as I did so that we are positioned historically. A view of history from a Hispanic, Chicano, *Mejicano*, *Indo-Hispano* or *Chicano-Indio* viewpoint, clearly differs from the accepted story of the patriarchal colonizer. This viewpoint may get lost in the

historical attempts at correcting history by our **maternal** indigenous (Native American) sisters and brothers. The view presented here is neither the perspective of the Spanish colonizer nor the pure blood indigenous people's counterstory, but rather, that of the *mestizo/a* perspective: a perspective that endures and adapts to the **historical grief** of the loss of maternal culture and heritage and the psychosis of a violent **paternal** ancestry. "Nuevo Mexico, ¿Hasta Cuándo?" a mournful lament composed by Roberto Mondragón, expresses the condition of these peoples today.

Indigenous resistance to colonization in New Mexico began with the early efforts at exploration guided by what some historians have identified as the first Black man in this area, Estevan. Estevan was a dark-skinned Moor who had wandered for seven years with Cabeza de Vaca and two other *conquistadores* (Spanish conquerors) who had survived a shipwreck and washed ashore near present-day Galveston, Texas. They had wandered lost for seven years among indigenous peoples of the Southwest, claiming to be healers. Only three made it back to Mexico, where they had great tales of cities of gold that they had seen. In 1539, Estevan and Fray Marcos de Niza, who had been with Pizarro in the conquest of Peru, served as scouts for exploratory excursions into New Mexico. Although it is not exactly known, it has been said and written that Estevan was killed by Native Peoples. Some accounts say that he may have demanded gifts or worn inappropriate adornments. Others relate that his fascination with

native women brought his demise. The Native peoples had already gotten wind of what might be happening from stories they were hearing of these strange white men in other places. Many of these first European explorers, foot soldiers, priests and missionaries who first came in contact with indigenous peoples from this area - were killed or died. However, just as on the East Coast of the United States and in Central and South America, the Pueblos, Apache, Navajo, Comanche and Ute were unable to stop the brutal European colonization of what is today New Mexico. Their losses were great, and the legacy of that loss characterizes much that is New Mexico.

Unlike the northern Europeans, the Spanish did not bring their women so they brutally and violently took Native women for their sexual and domestic pleasures, giving birth to new miseries for indigenous peoples and creating the *mestizo* race. Other racial and ethnic groups created were mulattos and **genízaros**. It is interesting to note that the Spanish had over 16 racial categories, or castes. The Spanish, like other European colonizers, were not peaceful people. They had come for land and riches, and they took these in areas where they were available; then they stole the food, tools and blankets of the people as well as their women. When Native Americans resisted, there was violent and deadly retaliation. Our indigenous grandmothers taught our European grandfathers how to survive in their new environment. The Spanish became *mestizo* in their culture, taking knowledge brought from Europe and learning the knowledge of a new people and environment in order to

survive. Everything became mixed, including the language. It no longer evolved as the Spanish of the Empire but, rather, was enriched by indigenous words for new foods, flora, fauna, environments and new experiences.

After the first exploratory venture to New Mexico led by Estevan, there were four others between 1580 and 1590. In 1591, an unofficial group attempted settlement after attacking and defeating the Pueblo people of Pecos. Officially, however, it was Don Juan de Oñate who got permission in 1598 to establish the first settlement in San Juan de los Caballeros, north of present-day Española. These earlier exploratory ventures and early attempts at settlement were hard on the indigenous tribes, as they had to share their food and blankets, and, in the end, the Spanish took what they needed, creating hardship and misery for the indigenous peoples.

Native Americans tried accommodation. However, there were many transgressions by the Spanish. Because of better Spanish armaments, horses and new disease to which indigenous people had no resistance, they were disadvantaged. In 1655, the offenses of the Spanish in Acoma had reached such a point that braves from Acoma attacked the Spanish, killing several people including Oñate's nephew. The brutal retaliation by the Spanish upon the Pueblo of Acoma remains sharp in the memories of the people of Acoma to this day. Hundreds of people from the Pueblo of Acoma were killed or given 20 year sentences of slavery, males over 25 had a foot cut off as punishment and 60 young women were sent to live in convents in Mexico. In

1990, a statue erected to honor Oñate in Alcalde, New Mexico again renewed this historical grief: one foot of the statue was cut off by an anonymous person. Many Hispanics were angered. Others celebrated a history avenged. There were also controversies about erecting statues to Oñate in both Albuquerque, New Mexico and El Paso, Texas.

The continued exploitation of the Pueblos for their labor, food, blankets, shelter and favors created much conflict and finally drove the Pueblos to execute an incredible act of resistance, the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. The resistance was planned and led by Po'pay, an indigenous medicine man from San Juan Pueblo. He had been arrested along with others because they were medicine men and their practices were not accepted by the Catholic Church. The Pueblos united strategically to attack and push the Spanish colonizers out of New Mexico. It is important to note that some *mestizo* populations chose to stay with the Pueblos. Some of these *mestizos* lived in the barrio of Analco in Santa Fe. They were mixed peoples who suffered almost as much as the indigenous people in the service of the *patrones*.

Ten years later, the Spanish *conquistadores*, or Spanish elites, came back into the area, and, in spite of heroic resistance by the Native peoples, they once again took **power** – now for good. The poor *mejicanos*, *mestizos* and *genízaros* were the foot soldiers. They became the buffer zone between the Pueblo, Spanish and later Mexican settlements and their nomadic neighbors. The Native Americans who became the brides, slaves and

labor of the Spanish elite, the missionaries and the military. Spain claimed much of what is today the majority of the Southwest and Northwest parts of the United States. The Spaniards took advantage and learned from indigenous labor, wives and neighbors how to survive, how to resist the elements and how to make the land productive. Culture was lost, remained, adapted, merged and continued.

New Mexico was forgotten and left isolated to fend for itself by Spain and, later, by a weak Mexican government that declared its independence in 1810 from Spain. The indigenous and mestizo populations created some alliances - first, with the Pueblos against the Navajos, Ute, the Mescalero and Chiricahua Apache, as well as the brutal *patrones*. However, the *mestizos* were not treated as miserably as the indigenous peoples. Depending on phenotype and political affiliation, the *mestizo* could count as white. This history of colonialism has created class conflict, racialization and division among the poor, inhibiting their ability to create mutually-beneficial unity. It works for the political and racial elite to maintain racial and class distinctions.

A new colonial threat was now appearing from the east with the westward expansion of the United States. The descendants of northern Europeans had colonized the eastern part of the United States, taking Native American lands, eliminating tribes and pushing those that survived further and further west. This, of course, was done with violence equal to that of the Spaniards but with a more genocidal impact. United States settlers looked

west for more grazing land, western ports and mining opportunities. As adventurers, trappers and traders explored these lands, Spain (and later Mexico) became wary. The United States government constructed the **ideology** of "**Manifest Destiny**," the idea that it was the god-given right of the self-proclaimed "superior" Anglo-Saxon race to spread his culture and concept of government from sea to sea. It served this young nation well to consider the Native Americans to be heathens and the Spanish, *mestizo* and **mulatto** cultures to be mongrel, criminal races.

As early as 1807, Zebulon Pike illegally explored Pike's Peak in Colorado, traveled to California and entered New Mexico, where he was arrested. Other settlers from the American South, looking for more slave states, moved into Texas, which was sparsely populated by the Spanish and, later, by the weak, newly-independent Mexico. These settler families had vowed loyalty to the Spanish and later Mexican governments in order to receive grants of land, but their goal was to increase their numbers and then **secede** from Mexico. The Mexican government, weakened by its war of independence from Spain, and poorly governed, commanded and equipped, lost Texas at (what is a bitter memory for all) the Alamo: a battle told and remembered quite differently, depending on the country or racial group doing the telling. In 1836 the Republic of Texas was formed.

New Mexicans had come to expect nothing from Spain and now Mexico. New Mexico continued to struggle under a Mexican government, surviving isolated as before, with little help and supplies 286

from the government. People lived almost completely from subsistence farming and ranching. They formed alliances with the Pueblos for mutual protection against the Navajo, Ute, Apache and Comanches.

In 1846, the US succeeded in provoking a war with Mexico. Poor and weakened by civil strife, Mexico lost half of its territory to the United States. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, brought the Mexican American War to an end. The treaty sought to provide protections for its former citizens. The authors of the document worked to include provisions to safeguard the economic, political, language, cultural and land rights of these former Mexican and Indian citizens; now powerless as a territory of the United States.

Because General Stephen Kearny was credited with occupying New Mexico "without firing a single shot," one may think that there was no resistance. Governor Manuel Armijo left for Mexico the day before Kearny's arrival. Thus, it was an embarrassing surrender for those who were left behind, but the following decades of political assassinations, land theft and criminal activity clearly illustrate that there was much resistance, collaboration and retaliation across racial and class lines.

"We Come as Friends" were the famous words uttered by General Stephen Kearny from a rooftop in Las Vegas. He entered New Mexico proclaiming it a territory under the United States. Clearly, at the particular moment of his entry, the government felt it was in their best interest to not make a fuss. They recognized that the local elite stood to gain political and economic

power from the increased trade that had already begun a few decades earlier with the Santa Fe Trail.

Dr. Tobías Durán chronicles resistance by New Mexicans between 1810 – 1910. He describes the historical conditions and contexts of a series of assassinations as different social groups struggled to gain power, the legal and political maneuvering by the Santa Fe Ring (who worked through extra-legal means to take political power and ownership of hundreds of thousands of acres of land). These folks were not all Anglo. Many elite Mexicans joined Anglo forces to rob land and make themselves rich and powerful. Durán also describes the racism that inspired the struggle for economic power in the Lincoln County Wars and the cultural conflict that dominated this period.

The Penitentes, mutual aid societies and social bandits were part of the resistance that formed. There were political divisions between the upper classes of *patrones* that had held loyalty to Spain and now were loyal to the Anglo leadership. The poor, the mestizos and the Native peoples again took the brunt of the violent evolution of the new order. The penitentes had long served the people left forgotten after the missionary period of Spain. Settlers depended on the Penitentes as the local spiritual leaders. They played a vital civic role within their communities, providing protection and civil mediation in disputes. These men, for the most part, were respected in their communities.

Father José Antonio Martínez from Taos probably more than any other figure embodies New Mexican resistance against Anglo colonization by his activism in 287

politics, church, education and publishing.

As barbed wire was brought into the west by Anglo ranchers, social bandit organizations like the Gorras Blancas resisted the concept of private property. People whose ideology had been **communal** were newly subjected to the fencing of once communally-used land. Las Gorras Blancas rode at night cutting newly-raised barbed-wire fencing. Other groups also operated, such as the Gavilla de Silva, feared by all, as their actions were of a criminal nature (stealing cattle and terrorizing those who protested).

The women played a major role in family, social and political spheres. They were many times the objects of disdain from the Anglo settlers that came to New Mexico. New Mexican women exercised more freedoms in dress and cultural expression. Some, like Doña Tules, who ran a brothel and bar in Santa Fe, were known to have had significant political influence.

The tale that New Mexico was taken "without a single shot fired" is a colonial myth. Political assassination by the upper classes, as they fought for power and position, left many dead and created divisions and conditions that persist to this day. New Mexico remained a United States territory for over 50 years for these reasons, as well as the xenophobia (fear of people different from yourself) of the young conquering nation. New Mexico's diverse racial peoples and cultural and linguistic traditions inspired fear in the young United States. Finally, in 1912, New Mexico was admitted as a state. The struggle continued to be one of land, power,

education and the maintenance of culture and language.

As violence tapered and oppression took new forms, the subjugated continued to survive under their new political and social conditions which left them powerless, almost landless and lacking in education. At the turn of the century (1900) the rural ranching and agricultural lifestyle of sustainability was no longer possible. Many *mexicanos* had helped build the thousands of miles of railroad tracks in the West, along with the Chinese and Native Americans. Mining was a hard industry that hired and exploited many people of color. The legacy of uranium mining has left indigenous peoples in the Acoma, Laguna and Grants area with cancers and other diseases and a highly polluted environment. Others, unable to survive by agriculture and ranching, began to move into seasonal jobs picking crops (*el betabel*) in Colorado and other states or going to herd sheep (*a la borrega*) in Wyoming. Others moved to other states to work in fields, factories and ports on the West Coast.

Those who stayed in New Mexico continued to struggle for political power and to protect their culture, language and chances for education, which they saw as one way to improve their lives and be able to more efficiently resist their condition. However, better schools were slow in coming, and appropriate schooling is still a longing for both Native Nations and New Mexican children of Spanish descent. New Mexicans fought in World War I and continued to endure much stereotyping and discrimination. In 1940, George Sánchez wrote about a "Forgotten People." 288

describing the poor condition of Taoseños in terms of political power, education, health and economics. Today, the condition of many poor *nuevomexicanos/as* is not much changed.

The 1940's and 1950's saw a new and greater exodus from New Mexico by her sons and daughters, as they headed to industrial and urban centers and fought in World War II. Many did not return to New Mexico. They built their lives elsewhere, hoping to have better opportunities than the agricultural and ranching lifestyle that New Mexico offered. Organizations such as League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the G.I Forum were created to deal with new challenges faced by our people during this time. LULAC formed in 1928, originally for the protection of documented Latinos. They concentrated on educational as well as other political rights. The G.I. Forum rose to national recognition when it fought for a WW II Hispano soldier who was denied burial in Texas because of his race. Residents of Portales sought to protect their children's right to an appropriate education in the *Serna v. Portales* case. Efforts to protect linguistic rights continue against present day efforts to promote English only.

Immigration to the U.S. and to New Mexico in particular increased with the Mexican Revolution. Businesses in the United States began to use immigrants for cheap labor to plant and pick our crops. The Bracero programs (guest worker programs allowing workers from foreign countries to work legally in the United States) were developed to fit the labor needs of the country. Unfortunately, when

these workers were no longer needed, they were deported. Immigrants, as well as Hispanic and Chicanos who were citizens, were harassed and deported as well.

In New Mexico, miners in Silver City made world history during the McCarthy years, as they resisted their mistreatment as a racial group in the mining industry and some unions. The International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers challenged issues of safety and lower pay based on racial discrimination. As history would have it, black-listed movie directors and producers learned of the miners' struggle and documented their resistance. They utilized this struggle to produce a historic film, "Salt of the Earth." This film is unique in that it challenged McCarthyism, and was ultimately banned from the United States until the mid-1960's where it became a classic in Chicano and Women's Studies courses. It is also unique because most of the actors were the actual workers and their families. During the shooting of the film, the only professional actress, Rosaura Revueltas (a Mexican citizen who played the main character's wife, Virginia Chacón) was deported.

As the people struggled for labor rights under McCarthyism, a land struggle was beginning. The Civil Rights struggles of African Americans / Blacks in the South beginning in the 1950's, inspired other people of color to struggle. Reies López Tijerina began a historic struggle to reclaim the **land grants** and rights of peoples who had been dispossessed by the extra-legal efforts of the Santa Fe Ring of the 1800's and continued by their descendants. 289

This struggle culminated in the historic 1967 Courthouse Raid in Tierra Amarilla. This raid brought the weight of the National Guard against a small northern New Mexico community.

As the Civil Rights Movement grew, so, too, did practices of resistance in New Mexico. Young people came to the University of New Mexico and Highlands University demanding programs and classes relevant to their lives and history. The Chicano Studies Program and Chicano Student Services Program at the University of New Mexico were created by students who formed UMAS (United Mexican American Students) and community youth. Students walked out of high schools (Río Grande High School) demanding relevant curriculum and bilingual programs. The Brown Berets and Black Berets were formed, challenging police brutality and creating free medical clinics, cultural schools and free breakfast and lunch programs, re-creating practices of the Black Panther party in African American communities. Although there was much fear on the part of elders about these militant activities (fear for their children's safety), many parents knew in their hearts that the students spoke the truth and they silently, if not overtly, supported these efforts.

Another organization, the Chicano Communications Center, brought together youth from different organizations to begin to create a movement building consciousness. Their principal contribution became their publications, which continue to inspire youth and serve as a document to our history through the eyes of the participants. "El Grito del Norte," one of the most

important Chicano newspapers during the 1960's and *450 Years of Chicano History in Pictures* and the subsequent *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures* were researched and published in New Mexico.

Today, our communities are resisting by keeping their cultural ways alive through the management of land grants and the *acequia* system which today operate as quasi-municipal entities. The struggles of the 1960's have brought the land grants and *acequias* into more general awareness. Small ranchers and farmers struggle to find ways to maintain their agricultural way of life by supplementing this work with other efforts such as outfitting, firefighting, art and construction.

As globalization now presents a new economic world, we find ourselves needing to resist the poisoning of our environments and places of work. As globalization seeks to create a cheap labor force, making it more difficult for people to unite for mutual benefit, we need communities to continue their efforts to survive and constantly respond to new challenges.

Political power, appropriate and effective education, health care, affordable housing, jobs and fair pay, combatting racism, classism, drugs, gang activity and protecting our cultural ways, environment and natural resources are challenges that Hispanic and Chicanos continue to struggle with. The question persists. "¿Hasta cuándo, Nuevo México?"

Questions and Activities

Research:

Pre-Columbian Cultures

Histories of these historical periods by
Native American authors

Early Spanish Exploration

First colonies by Spanish

Pre-Columbian New Mexico

Native Trade Routes

The Camino Real

The Santa Fe Trail

Doña Tules

The Santa Fe Ring

Social Bandits

The Buffalo Soldiers

History of tribal nations in New Mexico

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

History of federal and state parks

History of land grants and land grant
movements

Study *acequia* culture

Visit with the New Mexico Acequia
Association

Study the art and culture of the different
New Mexican cultural groups

Study and research **primary documents**.

* Draw a wall-size map of New Mexico in your room with the help of an overhead projector. As you learn about New Mexico, identify the areas and actions with a written or visual marker.

* Take a trip to the library and work with primary resource material at a library or the state archives.

* Invite the state historian or someone from their staff to your school or classroom.

* Work on an oral history project. Interview a person in your family about a particular time in history in which they lived or heard stories about.

* Create a play that would depict how newly-colonized Mexicans, Native Peoples and Anglos and French and German traders and trappers would have seen each other and how they may have acted toward one another based on these perceptions and the power that they had or didn't have.

* Create other plays re-enacting a particular historical moment or figure: i.e., Po'pay, General Stephen Kearny in Las Vegas, Padre José Antonio Martínez, Doña Tules, etc.

* Invite to class or go visit visual artists, musicians, dancers and museum exhibitions of the different ethnic groups who inhabit New Mexico.

* Identify music and dances from a particular time period, learn and perform them.

* Create a rap or spoken word piece that tells about a particular point in history or makes social criticism.

* Watch movies about New Mexico.

* Visit historical sites.

Definitions

Acequias: The irrigation system constructed on New Mexico's land grants.

Bilingualism: Speaking two languages.

Colonization: One group invading and making their homeland in an area of another group; usually subjugating the original group.

Communal: Held and used by a group rather than just an individual.

Counter-story: The alternative history given by a group or individual not in power.

Culture: The total of our learned behavior.

Genízaro/a: Native Americans living away from their tribe and acculturated to the Spanish culture.

Genocide: Attempts to eliminate an entire group or race of people.

Historical grief: A state of upset because of some injustice that has occurred.

Holocaust: Complete destruction.

Ideology: The underlying precepts which guide behavior.

Land grants: Lands given to individuals or groups to settle by the government of Spain or Mexico.

Manifest Destiny: The attitude in the United States that it was that country's destiny to rule from one ocean to another.

Maternal: Coming from the mother's side.

Mestizola: A mix of European (Spanish) and indigenous/Native American.

Mulattola: A mixture of Anglo and black parents.

Nomadic: a group which is not settled in a specific place.

Paternal: Coming from the father's side.

Patriarchy: The father is recognized as the head of the family or group.

Patron/a: Spanish word for one who rules over a household or workplace; usually in a dictatorial manner.

Peon: An ordinary working person.

Perspective: An individual point of view.

Phenotype: All individuals belonging to a certain category; physical characteristics.

Power: The ability to control or influence others.

Primary documents: Documents written by the participants or people living at the time of an event.

Race: The classification of people according to skin color, hair, facial features.

Resistance: Working to eliminate injustice.

Secede: To establish a political entity as separate from its former sovereign.

Sedentary: A group which stays in one place.

Stereotypes: A preconceived idea of someone's character because they belong to a certain group rather than judging their individual traits.

Topography: surface features of a place.

Xenophobia: fear of people who are from a different culture or race.

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