

Apache Adaptation to Hispanic Rule

Matthew Babcock



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As a definitive study of the poorly understood *Apaches de paz*, this book explains how war-weary, mutually suspicious Apaches and Spaniards negotiated an ambivalent compromise after 1786 that produced over four decades of uneasy peace across the Southwest. In response to drought and military pressure, thousands of Apaches settled near Spanish presidios in a system of reservation-like *establecimientos*, or settlements, stretching from Laredo to Tucson. Far more significant than previously assumed, the *establecimientos* constituted the earliest and most extensive set of military-run reservations in the Americas and served as an important precedent for Indian reservations in the United States. As a case study of indigenous adaptation to imperial power on colonial frontiers and borderlands, this book reveals the importance of Apache–Hispanic diplomacy in reducing cross-cultural violence and the limits of indigenous acculturation and assimilation into empires and states.

Matthew Babcock earned his Ph.D. from Southern Methodist University, his M.A. from the University of New Mexico, and his B.A. from Dartmouth College. He is currently Assistant Professor of History at the University of North Texas at Dallas and is a recipient of a prestigious Dornsife Long-Term Research Fellowship at the Huntington Library. He has written numerous journal articles and book chapters, which have been published in Spain, Canada (Quebec), and the United States. He is a member of the American Historical Association, American Society for Ethnohistory, Western History Association, and Texas and East Texas State Historical Associations.

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claims of various anthropologists, I had assumed that Ndé or Apache collective historical memory only went as far back as about 1850. I am extremely grateful to Manny for contacting me and his help in connecting me with Ndé people from San Antonio to the Pacific Coast. Thanks as well to Lorraine Garcia and Michael Paul Hill, whose contributions are acknowledged in the footnotes herein.

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A Note on Terminology

This book is written from multiple perspectives and reflects American Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo American viewpoints. Therefore the terminology I utilize derives from each of those cultures. Since members of the Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico contacted me and expressed interest in my work, I have employed their preferred Athapaskan terms for their people instead of Spanish or American terms. That means that I use “Ndé” for “Apache” and “Chihene” for Gileños, Mimbrenos, Warm Springs, and Copper Mine Apaches. At their request, I have also used “Southern Apaches” in place of the cover term “Chiricahuas.” Although employing the term “Southern Apaches” for people whose homeland lies between Ndé groups commonly called Eastern and Western Apaches is potentially confusing from a geographical standpoint, U.S. Indian Agent Michael Steck and anthropologist William B. Griffen also followed this practice. In an effort to minimize the usage of all three of those larger geographical groupings, I have tried to identify Ndé people, especially Southern Apaches, by their specific bands whenever possible. Since headmen tended to marry women in multiple bands and followed a pattern of matrilineal residence, that decision has proven enormously challenging.

Rooted in Spanish archival research, this book also reflects a Hispanic perspective. Since the Athapaskan-speaking people I write about were in close contact with Spaniards and Mexicans who called them “Apaches” and “Apaches de paz,” I also employ those terms, when writing from a Hispanic perspective, for broader clarity (such as in the

title), variety of terminology, or when it is impossible to determine the precise band affiliations of individuals or groups. I encourage all readers to consult the [Appendix](#) for further clarification of the terminology used for the Athapaskan-speaking groups described in this book.

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.¹ 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).²