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Chapter 2

Culture, Contact, and Contest

When Christopher Columbus first set foot on the territory of the Americas in October 1492, he set in motion a long cycle of contact and conflict that lasted for centuries. Columbus brought with him a set of assumptions about where he was and who the people he was meeting were. Those assumptions proved, in retrospect, to be grossly mistaken. But the mistakes that Columbus made continued to influence thinking about Native Americans for centuries to come.

Native American Political and Religious Authority

Columbus assumed, because the people he met did not practice what he considered an organized religion, that Native Americans had no religion. He assumed, because they had no pattern of authority he recognized, that they had no political identity. But religion and political identity were intertwined among both sets of people, Native Americans and Europeans alike. The sense of confusion about religion and about politics complicated relations between the groups for centuries.

In fact, Native American political and religious relations could be as fully complicated and complex as any found in Europe at the time. Perhaps nowhere else in North America in the period around the Columbian contact could one find a more solidly organized political organization than the League of the Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois League). The Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee were drawn together through the recitation of the Iroquois Thanksgiving Address, dated to approximately 1451—almost half a century before Columbus's arrival in the Americas. The text of the address is directed toward spiritual figures, but the act of reciting it drew the Five Nations together. The Iroquois League remained a potent force in North America un-

til its members were torn apart in the aftermath of the American Revolution.

The Requerimiento (1513) based Spanish rule in the Americans on several different authorities. The primary source of authority came from the Christian God, transmitted through a Catholic hierarchy that included Jesus, his delegate Saint Peter, and Saint Peter's representative the Pope. The political aspect of the Requerimiento came from the Pope's action in assigning parts of the Americas to Spain through the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). The treaty divided the known world into two halves: an eastern half assigned to the Portuguese and a western half left to the Spanish. The papal intent was to avoid fighting between the two Catholic powers over territory. Native American interests were not consulted.

Patterns of Conflict between Native Americans and Europeans

In the years following the Columbian contact, relations between Europeans and Native Americans went through a recognizable pattern. First came an initial encounter, marked by relative friendliness and good relations. There were exceptions, but in general Native Americans welcomed Europeans at the initial contact. Over time, however, relations between Europeans and Native Americans inevitably soured. That led to a gradual erosion of Native American authority and the institutions that supported it.

When that authority had eroded too far, violence broke out. The violence could consist of open warfare, targeted assassinations, or murders, depending on how they were viewed by the other power. Finally, there was a retreat from contact (usually by Native Americans, but sometimes by the Europeans). However, the retreat was always followed by a process of reengagement. Native Americans and Europeans never permanently broke off contact with one another after Columbus's arrival.

Hernando Pizarro and Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca

The experience of the conquistador Hernando Pizarro demonstrates the complexity of Native American and European political organization. In his Letter to the Royal Audience of Santo Domingo (1533), Pizarro both excuses his seizing power from the ruler of the Inca empire in the Andes and illustrates the expanse and power of the Inca administration. *The Journey of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca* (1542) tells a similar story, although from the viewpoint of a relatively powerless European among Native Americans. Although the two stories are told from opposite ends of the cultural spectrum, both emphasize their belief in the superiority of the Christian religion and the Spanish political system and its administration.

Criticism of the Spanish administration in the Americas began shortly after. Bartolome de las Casas was a veteran of the Spanish exploration of the Americas. He had begun his career as a settler on the island of Hispaniola in 1502, following in the tracks of Columbus. He held an *encomienda*—effectively a license to enslave Indians—from the Spanish crown, but he later repented, joined the Catholic Church, and was named a bishop in the Americas. He was also given the title "Protector of the Indians" and wrote about the atrocities practiced against them by the Spaniards in *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552). Several accounts refuting de las Casas's report appeared afterwards; among the best known was Bernal Diaz's *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (1576).

Other European Attempts to Occupy and Conquer the Americas

The successes of the Spanish in their occupation and conquest of the Americas caused other European nations to try to mimic them. The Portuguese, French, Dutch, and even the Swedes all made attempts to profit from Spanish American wealth. Each nation also established colonies of their own in the Americas, which brought them into contact with Native American groups—and they, like the Spanish, often misunderstood Native American culture. The artist and colonist John White's map "Americæ pars, nunc Virginia dicta" ("The part of America now called Virginia," 1590) was compiled from his experiences trying to set up the colony of Roanoke on the coast of what is now North Carolina. Thomas Hariot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia,* which described the Roanoke colony and its prospects, was originally published in 1588. (White's map was only included when a later edition was published in 1590.) In part, Hariot's book was intended to serve as an introduction for prospective investors and colonists to the colony. By the time the map appeared in print, however, the Roanoke colony had disappeared; although its disappear-

ance remains a matter of controversy, many historians accept White's theory that the colonists moved inland to find shelter with a friendly Native American group. The Dutch pastor Johannes Megapolensis Jr.'s *A Short Account of the Mohawk Indians* (1644) is one of the earliest accounts of an Iroquois League member nation, but its account describes Native Americans in much the same terms as Columbus had done almost 150 years earlier.

One of the last seventeenth-century wars between Native Americans and Europeans that ended with a Native American victory was the conflict known as Popé's War (1680). Its origins were explained in the Declaration of Pedro Naranjo of the Queres Nation (1680). The Spanish had pushed into what is now the United States southwest about seventy years earlier. They brought with them institutions of the Catholic Church that were willing to fund and maintain church control over the settled pueblos of the region. Over time, however, conflicts emerged between the Franciscan friars who ran the missions to the pueblos, and the Native Americans who were coerced into providing the churchmen with labor and goods. In 1680 the conflicts broke out into open violence. The Spanish authorities were driven out of the Pueblo region.

It did not last. A decade later the Pueblo leaders, reduced to poverty by a series of crop failures and pressure from surrounding Native American nations, surrendered to the Spanish.

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Declaration of Pedro Naranjo of the Queres Nation

Author
Pedro Naranjo

Date
1681

Type
Legal; Essays, Reports, Manifestos

Signifigance
Contemporary account of a successful revolt against Spanish authorities in the Pueblo region of New Mexico

Overview

In the year 1680, a series of small resistance movements against Spanish authority in New Mexico broke out into an open revolt, which became known as Popé's Rebellion. The revolt began when a Pueblo wise man called Popé (c. 1630–c. 1688) coordinated a series of attacks on Catholic missions throughout the region. Since the arrival of the explorer Juan de Oñate (1550–1626) more than seventy years earlier, Spanish control of New Mexico had been in the hands of the Catholic Church. The church's Franciscan missions ran the Pueblo communities as if they were medieval European fiefs, requiring local Puebloans to convert to Christianity, abandon their traditions, and submit to church discipline. The individual missions also required the Pueblos to perform labor services on demand, even if that meant abandoning their own livelihoods.

Popé directed the rebellion specifically at the Spanish churchmen whose policies oppressed Puebloan lives in the name of offering salvation for their souls. About 400 people died in the initial stages of the rebellion, and another 2,000—including the Spanish soldiers in the garrison at Santa Fe—retreated into Mexico. The province of New Mexico was abandoned to Native American control for the next ten years.

Popé's Rebellion failed in its long-term goals. Ten years after the rebellion started, an extended drought led to a series of crop failures, leaving the Pueblos without a reliable source of food. Their problems were made worse by attacks from Apache, Comanche, and other neighbors. Finally, in 1690, the Pueblos surrendered to Spanish control. They were never again able to assert their independence. Nonetheless, Popé's Rebellion marked one of the few times in American history where a Native American group was able to drive out European invaders and reclaim their homelands. This account was told to Spanish government agents by Pedro Naranjo, a member of the San Felipe Pueblo, which still exists today thirty-five miles southwest of Santa Fe.

Taos Pueblo, which served as Popé's base during the 1680 rebellion (Luca Galuzzi)

Document Text

For the prosecution of the judicial proceedings of this case his lordship caused to appear before him an Indian prisoner named Pedro Naranjo, a native of the pueblo of San Felipe, of the Queres nation, who was captured in the advance and attack upon the pueblo of La Isleta. . . .

Asked whether he knows the reason or motives which the Indians of this kingdom had for rebelling, forsaking the law of God and obedience to his Majesty, and committing such grave and atrocious crimes, and who were the leaders and principal movers, and by whom and how it was ordered; and why they burned the images, temples, crosses, rosaries, and things of divine worship, committing such atrocities as killing priests, Spaniards, women, and children, and the rest that he might know touching the question, he [Pedro Naranjo] said that since the government of Señor General Hernando Ugarte y la Concha they have planned to rebel on various occasions through conspiracies of the Indian sorcerers, and that although in some pueblos the messages were accepted, in other parts they would not agree to it; and that it is true that during the government of the said senor general seven or eight Indians were hanged for this same cause, whereupon the unrest subsided. Some time thereafter they [the conspirators] sent from the pueblo of Los Taos through the pueblos of the custodia two deerskins with some pictures on them signifying conspiracy after their manner, in order to convoke the people

to a new rebellion, and the said deerskins passed to the province of Moqui, where they refused to accept them. The pact which they had been forming ceased for the time being, but they always kept in their hearts the desire to carry it out, so as to live as they are living today. Finally, in the past years, at the summons of an Indian named Popé who is said to have communication with the devil, it happened that in an estufa of the pueblo of Los Taos there appeared to the said Popé three figures of Indians who never came out of the estufa. They gave the said Popé to understand that they were going underground to the lake of Copala. He saw these figures emit fire from all the extremities of their bodies, and that one of them was called Caudi, another Tilini, and the other Tleume; and these three beings spoke to the said Popé, who was in hiding from the secretary, Francisco Xavier, who wished to punish him as a sorcerer. They told him to make a cord of maguey fiber and tie some knots in it which would signify the number of days that they must wait before the rebellion. . . .

Asked for what reason they so blindly burned the images, temples, crosses, and other things of divine worship, he stated that the said Indian, Popé, came down in person, and with him El Saca and El Chato from the pueblo of Los Taos, and other captains and leaders and many people who were in his train, and he ordered in all the pueblos through which he passed that they instantly break up and burn the images of the holy Christ, the Virgin Mary and the other saints, the crosses, and everything pertaining to Christianity, and that they burn the temples, break up the bells, and separate from the wives whom God had given them in marriage and take those whom they desired. In order to take away their baptismal names, the water, and the holy oils, they were to plunge into the rivers and wash themselves with amole, which is a root native to the country, washing even their clothing, with the understanding that there would thus be taken from them the character of the holy sacraments. They did this, and also many other things which he does not recall, given to understand that this mandate had come from the Caydi and the other two who emitted fire from their extremities in the said estufa of Taos, and that they thereby returned to the state of their antiquity, as when they came from the lake of Copala; that this was the better life and the one they desired, because the God of the Spaniards was worth nothing and theirs was very strong, the Spaniard's God being rotten wood. These things were observed and obeyed by all except some who, moved by the zeal of Christians, opposed it, and such persons the said Popé caused to be killed immediately. . . .

Glossary

Caudi, Tilini, and Tleume: according to the historian Ramón Gutiérrez, three supernatural figures called katsina that visited the Puebloans regularly and gave them advice

custodia: an administrative area governed by religious houses, or conventos, which in this case housed Franciscan monks; several custodia made up a province

estufa: stove or kiva; a circular underground chamber used for religious or political gatherings

Hernando Ugarte y la Concha: Spanish governor of New Mexico from 1649 to 1653

Glossary

maguey fiber: fiber from the maguey, a plant also known as *Agave americana*, used for making rope, coarse cloth, and a form of paper in the pre-Columbian and colonial American Southwest

Queres nation: now usually spelled "Keres"; refers to any of seven different Native American Pueblo tribes in New Mexico, including the San Felipe Pueblo of which Pedro Naranjo was a member

lake of Copala: a mythical region to the north of the Pueblo area, believed by the Pueblos to mark their place of origin, where their ancestors first emerged from the underworld

pueblo of Los Taos: Taos Pueblo, just outside the modern city of Taos, New Mexico, considered to be one of the oldest continually inhabited settlements in the United States

Short-Answer Questions

1. How did Popé express his rejection of the Spanish conquistadors? Why does Pedro Naranjo associate him with the devil?

2. What were the aims of the Pueblos who revolted against the Spanish?

3. What symbolic steps did the Pueblos take in order to reject Spanish culture?