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COLONIAL CHIHUAHUA

Peoples and Frontiers in Flux



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In the middle of the eighteenth century, Juan Rodríguez de Albuérne, Marqués de Altamira and adviser to the Mexican viceroy on military issues, wrote a series of reports highly critical of Spanish frontier policy. He linked instability and the lack of sufficient economic productivity on the northern Mexican silver-mining frontier to Spain's failure to promulgate colonization by Spaniards or other *gente de razón* (non-Indians, literally people with reason). He lamented the low return on the high royal costs of subsidizing presidios and missions as the cornerstones of Spain's strategy for occupying the northern reaches of its colonial empire. With even a quarter of the funds spent on presidios guarding the royal road from Chihuahua to Mexico City (eight million pesos in the previous eighty years), he believed that the crown could have occupied the area with Spanish settlements and enterprises that would have been much more effective in persuading indigenous peoples to become efficient laborers and taxpayers. For peoples "who only comprehend what enters through the eyes," the habits of Spaniards were necessary to entice them from their "natural poverty" and "indolence."¹

Altamira's opinions, while anticipating the so-called rational reforms aimed at increasing productivity and returns to the Spanish Bourbon kings of the late eighteenth century, were also firmly anchored in medieval Spanish notions of a civilized state, which contrasted the backwardness of the countryside with the ideal of urban sophistication. His judgments had racial connotations as well. Not even 150 years of missionary guidance had been sufficient to educate Indians who lacked reason. The guidance by Spanish example that he advo-

cated could not overcome this "natural" state of affairs, but at least it could induce proper obedience.

The relative sizes of various ethnic groups figured prominently in late colonial official assessments of the north. The key to Spanish control was to tip the balance of power away from the native population through the proper demographic mix; increased Spanish presence in the midst of Indian groups would inevitably demonstrate the superiority of Spanish ways and produce a stable society.² If the argument appears simplistic to us today, it also misrepresents the complex evolution of the human landscape after initial contact between Indians and Europeans. Demographic factors did provide an important means for assessing the development of the northern frontier, although not in the ways officials would have recognized at the time. As we shall see, the flux in population movements in colonial Chihuahua has a corollary in the contentiousness of its social evolution.

The patterns of indigenous settlement observed as Spaniards began to arrive in the sixteenth century had already been evolving for centuries in reaction to cultural, ecological, and demographic factors. These patterns continued to *change after contact in response to similar factors, although the invasion of* Spanish microbes, soldiers, and ambitions added peculiar twists. It is possible to chronicle these shifts, at least from the early seventeenth century, when more detailed accounts began to be written by Spanish explorers, clergy, and officials.

The native population of Chihuahua at the time of Spanish arrival in Mexico in the early sixteenth century can only be roughly estimated, perhaps constituting between 200,000 and 300,000.³ A century later that number had declined by as much as 50 percent to about 150,000. The Sierra Madre Occidental of western Chihuahua was home to various indigenous peoples; the most populous mountain-dwelling groups were Tarahumaras (Rarámuris) and Tepehuanes, whose settlements also extended into the valleys and plains east of the sierra. After contact, the sierra groups were described as semisedentary, changing *ranchería*⁴ locations cyclically in accordance with cycles of agriculture and hunting and gathering. In the eastern semiarid plateau, more mobile Sumas-Juanos and Conchos also cultivated some corn. The easternmost desert of the Bolsón de Mapimí harbored band groups such as Tobosos, Salineros, and Chisos, who, like the Apaches who moved into Chihuahua later, became even more nomadic with the introduction of Spanish livestock.⁵

Hunter-gatherers and farmers evolved patterns of mutual dependence long before Spanish arrival, interacting either through trade or intertribal warfare. Those relations were gradually disrupted as Spaniards penetrated the area, to be replaced by warfare between Europeans and Indian groups as well as new

patterns of indigenous raiding on Spanish livestock, Spanish slave-raiding expeditions, and trade in European and Indian captives.⁶

Social organization varied somewhat between *ranchería* and band groups. *Ranchería* Indians used digging sticks to cultivate maize, beans, and squash along waterways. Although they hunted and collected wild plants, they did not depend as exclusively on these activities as did the band groups. Yet for all groups political organization was decentralized,⁷ without formal links across bands or *rancherías*. Individual bands were guided by a headman/war chief, while *ranchería* affairs were directed by elders (*principales*) using moral persuasion except in times of conflict, when chief warriors may have exercised more political authority. War leaders earned their positions through demonstrations of bravery. Ritual specialists employed magical powers to cure and predict; ritual practices were aimed at assuring material survival through agriculture and warfare. Dreams were a source of knowledge and power, as were certain sacred spaces of the natural world. Where agriculture was practiced, households had individual use rights on communal croplands, but extended families cooperated in economic activities. Both men and women performed agricultural and gathering tasks; only men hunted with bow and arrow. Women prepared food, cared for children, and made textiles, pots, and baskets. Gender roles were complementary in economic activities, but with the exception of some female shamans, women occupied subordinate political roles. There was little class differentiation in *ranchería* and band societies, although some elders may have accumulated surplus goods and wives in the former.⁸ These socioeconomic patterns changed after contact, depending upon the extent to which groups were incorporated into Spanish networks and institutions and the ways in which they were affected by the introduction of diseases brought by Europeans. *Ranchería* groups like the Tepehuanes, Tarahumaras, and some Conchos became more sedentary, practicing more intensive agriculture including stock-raising. Members of bands that escaped forced labor came to depend increasingly on raiding Spanish ranches. All groups were reduced by epidemic diseases, and some like the Conchos and Tobosos were eliminated as separate ethnicities.

What attracted Spaniards to Chihuahua? The principal lure was silver. The impressive discoveries in Zacatecas just before mid-century spurred explorations farther north. After founding Durango and several other mining towns (*reales*), Francisco de Ibarra directed the establishment of a mining camp in southeastern Chihuahua in the 1560s. This settlement, Santa Bárbara, and the nearby agricultural district of Valle de San Bartolomé (today Valle de Allende) became the northernmost outposts of the new province of Nueva Vizcaya and

the axis of subsequent colonization to the north.⁹ Silver continued to be the impetus for settlement in Chihuahua, with the next stage occurring in the environs of Parral after silver was discovered there in 1631. Later in the century silver drew prospectors into Tarahumara country surrounding Cusiuhiriáchic, and after 1702 Chihuahua became the preeminent locus of silver production in the eighteenth century.

What other patterns characterize these stages? Colonization was not a steadily advancing process from south to north since it tended to occur around silver mines and labor sources. Silver mines became towns and villas, which drew upon the same organizational and administrative practices of church and state already employed in more settled areas to the south. A highly stratified society developed, with a marked distinction between elites—Spanish miners, landowners, and merchants—and Indian and *casta* (mixed-blood) laborers. On the Chihuahua frontier, military service was an important requirement for obtaining elite status in the early years of any Spanish settlement, and it continued to confer status somewhat longer than was true for areas to the south. Nonetheless, the continued arrival of Spanish immigrants, many of them merchants, was also a key to elite composition. Agricultural development and commerce followed mining, and a variety of social and familial ties linked miners, landowners, and merchants. A shortage of mining and agricultural labor continued to foster forced-labor procurement, indigenous resistance, and a subservient but surly multiethnic labor force. The ever-present threat of hostilities from indigenous groups not yet dominated by Spaniards encouraged elite practices that mixed coercive and appeasing behaviors in dealing with subordinates. Introduction of Spanish ideals was partial at best, although some scholars have argued that the Spanish ethos of patriarchy, which stressed the importance of the father's dominance in the family and depreciated women's status, did acquire wide acceptance.¹⁰ The following historical sketch will elucidate these patterns and their demographic underpinnings.

From their sixteenth-century base in southeastern Chihuahua, Spaniards sought to establish a silver-mining economy. Royal officials extended considerable leeway in this endeavor, especially in allowing or overlooking coercive labor practices. Following well-established patterns of Spanish conquest in Mexico, conquistadors quickly seized local Indians, either through outright slavery or grants of *encomienda* (which distributed the labor of specified numbers of Indians to a Spanish *encomendero*), to supplement small retinues of workers (black slaves, Indians, and mixed-race mestizos and mulattos) brought from settled areas.

The deployment of *encomienda* faced obstacles in Chihuahua where neither band nor *ranchería* groups were accustomed to systems that compelled

them to provide tribute to overlords. Spaniards sought to overcome this impediment by using brute force, where their numbers permitted, and by establishing a system of missions designed to instill Spanish ways among indigenous peoples. Nearby Conchos and, to a lesser extent, Tepehuanes and natives captured from various band groups were brought in chain gangs to work in mines and farms around Santa Bárbara. The establishment of mission pueblos in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, first by Franciscans among Conchos and then by Jesuits in Tepehuán territory, created an Indian labor pool that facilitated the use of *repartimiento*, which gradually replaced *encomienda*. In this system of forced labor, work crews were drafted from villages and given fixed-term assignments in Spanish enterprises for which they were meagerly paid in kind. In Chihuahua, *repartimiento* was used primarily for seasonal agricultural tasks, but it also commonly provided labor for mining activities in the seventeenth century. Although laws that limited the numbers and duration of *repartimientos* were often ignored, this system was still insufficient to meet labor demands, which grew as Spanish colonization increased and as the Indian population declined due to epidemic disease. Spanish enterprises adapted to changing circumstances by using a variety of methods of labor recruitment, ranging from Indian and black slavery to *repartimiento*, to private contract labor (used mainly for more specialized tasks in mining or stock-raising).¹¹

Silver deposits were never substantial around Santa Bárbara, and its early years proved to be unstable as Indians resisted labor drafts and Spaniards sometimes used the town as a center of recruitment for further exploration (for example, Juan de Oñate's 1598 expedition to New Mexico drained off a substantial portion of settlers and Indian allies). Santa Bárbara survived primarily because its early settlers obtained land grants in nearby Valle de San Bartolomé, the main breadbasket for the entire northern province of Nueva Vizcaya (whose capital was located to the south, in Durango).

While the Spanish and casta population grew slowly, if at all, during the first fifty years (never more than a few hundred), native numbers plummeted. Epidemics of smallpox and measles in 1577, during the 1590s, and in the succeeding two decades reduced Conchos, Tepehuanes, and other Indians drawn into Santa Bárbara's orbit by well over half.¹² Warfare and flight also contributed to the decline of native populations, as Conchos, Chisos, Tepehuanes, and some eastern Tarahumaras intermittently fled or attacked missions and Spanish settlements. Indian resistance tended to be piecemeal until the Tepehuán rebellion of 1616, which mobilized thousands of Tepehuán warriors and allies from surrounding areas, severely disrupting Spanish economic activities in all of Nueva Vizcaya for more than two years.¹³ Conchos, some of

whom had rebelled earlier, for the most part showed allegiance to Spaniards, and many actually served as auxiliary troops to Spanish forces in crushing the Tepehuán rebellion. Since Conchos were less united in bands and geographically dispersed than Tepehuanes, there tended to be wide variability in their responses to Spanish intrusion.

The Tepehuán revolt was led by messianic leaders responding to catastrophic population loss and the dismantling of their social institutions. The mission system forced Indians to live in villages, to produce agricultural surpluses, and to provide labor for Spaniards. Christian doctrine called for the suppression of native ritual activity aimed at ensuring harmony, and insisted on monogamous marriages. Linking the arrival of Christianity to plague and calamity, Tepehuán leaders desperately sought to wipe out the intruders, predicting a utopian future in which even cactus would bear corn. Several hundred Spaniards and castas lost their lives, including Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries who were forced to witness the desecration of churches and religious ornamentation before they were murdered. The rebellion, suppressed brutally but with great difficulty by informally recruited militias, was testimony to the fragility of the Spanish presence.

The next silver cycle, which began in 1631 with discoveries at nearby San José de Parral, proved to be more sustaining for the Spaniards of southern Chihuahua. The Tepehuán rebellion had convinced Spanish officials of the need to expand the mission program and to provide more effective means of military defense, including the establishment of a presidio in northern Durango at Tepehuanes. Parral grew rapidly, drawing several thousand prospectors, merchants, and laborers within a decade.¹⁴ Although Durango remained the official provincial capital, governors resided in Parral, which became the hub of commercial activity for the rest of the seventeenth century.

The labor force was assembled haphazardly, comprising the same mix of free and unfree labor noted above for Santa Bárbara. Not by coincidence, Jesuits and Franciscans pushed farther north into Tarahumara and Concho territory, establishing several new missions in the 1630s and 1640s. In addition to Conchos, Tepehuanes, and Tarahumaras, Indians were brought from central Mexico, Sinaloa, and Sonora to work in the mines. Local repartimientos supplied some of the labor, but many workers were lured by the practice that allowed them to retain a part of the ore they mined (*pepena* or *partido*) and by the promise of credit advances. Black slaves, mestizos, and mulattos also toiled in mines.¹⁵

Parral's steady economic development fueled further agricultural production in the Valle de San Bartolomé, a related rise in labor drafts from Concho, Tepehuán, and Tarahumara missions, and renewed expeditions to capture Indian slaves in the Bolsón de Mapimí and New Mexico. Competition for

scarce labor escalated among Spanish entrepreneurs in the next few decades.¹⁶ The attendant pressures on Indian populations were made worse by epidemics in 1636, 1645–47, and 1650–52, and several years of drought beginning in 1645. Rebellion erupted once again, first in Concho territory in 1644, then in the Tarahumara, where Jesuit efforts to expand the mission frontier into the Papigochic river valley met with revolts in 1648, 1650, and 1652, effectively halting Jesuit expansion among the Rarámuri for the next twenty years. At the same time, Tobosos and other nomadic groups operating out of the Bolsón de Mapimí stepped up attacks on ranches along the Conchos and Florido rivers and on mule trains moving along the royal road.¹⁷

The following sad tale offers an idea of the chaos and uncertainty that plagued the times. In one of many similar incidents occurring in 1645, a band of Salinero Indians attacked a mule train carrying provisions from Mapimí to Parras. These Salineros had been resettled in the Jesuit mission of Tizonazo along with other bands and some Tepehuanes, but they had fled (perhaps because Tizonazo converts were being heavily recruited in repartimiento). Their leader had taken the name of Gerónimo Moranta, a Jesuit slain in the Tepehuán rebellion. The practice of assuming the names and titles of Spanish authorities as a way of taking on their power was common to many of the indigenous groups of the region.¹⁸

Traveling with the mule train were the wife and children of Antonio Pérez de Molina, a Portuguese immigrant and petty trader. After killing the Spanish freighters and seizing items of clothing and food, the Salineros carried off Doña Antonia Tremeño, her daughter, and three sons. The terrified woman was forced to watch as the Indians killed two of her sons. The remaining son and the fifteen-year-old daughter were handed over to two of the warriors. Doña Antonia became the slave of the leader, Moranta, and was ordered to carry water, gather firewood, and grind corn. With her hair cut short and dressed in deerskins, she was traded from owner to owner, eventually coming into the hands of a group of Tobosos. Meanwhile the daughter, now pregnant, was eventually released by her captor and made her way to the hacienda of Diego de Ontiveros on the Nazas River.

Many of the native raiders were reported by the missionaries to be relapsed converts, who preferred a life of freedom (which to Spaniards meant irresponsibility and moral laxity) to "honest" work as servants of the colonizers. Spanish soldiers who considered Indian tactics of war to be completely barbarous and fiendish nonetheless retaliated in kind, summarily executing captured Indians, including women. By the fall of 1645, Indian rebels and raiders had killed or robbed several thousand head of cattle in southern Chihuahua, but Spanish militias had succeeded in confining the Tobosos to the arid basin lands

east of the Valle de San Bartolomé, where they were running out of food. Their desert survival skills, which often astonished and repelled Spaniards who claimed they even ate their own excrement, were hard-pressed by drought. Several of the Toboso and Salinero leaders entreated for peace in October and, in return for supplies of flour and beef, promised to settle in the Franciscan mission of Atotonilco and to serve as Spanish allies. In the peace negotiations, the Spanish captain bartered for the return of Doña Antonia, but the Toboso chief reported that she had been set free earlier. Skeptical Spaniards surmised that she had been killed just before the peace negotiations concluded in order to keep her from testifying about rebel misdeeds. For Spaniard and Indian alike, the Chihuahua frontier offered a precarious existence, but women faced particularly harrowing perils.¹⁹

Sporadic hostilities continued throughout the 1660s while epidemics flared in 1662 and 1667, followed by another extended drought in 1667–68. Nonetheless, Parral's mines continued to operate, since silver mining received the highest priority from colonial officials; and because most local officials were directly involved in the mining economy. Labor coercion was at its height in the middle third of the seventeenth century as the last of the *encomenderos* battled with recipients of *repartimientos*, Nueva Vizcayan governors cooperated in the enslavement of Indians, and working conditions were extremely harsh. Not surprisingly, the ruthless tactics of Spanish officials contributed to the violence which exploded in the 1650s and 1660s: the tyranny of Spanish rule in Parral contrasted starkly with the disrespect shown to Spanish person and property outside urban or fortified areas. After persistent rebukes and threats of punishment from the Spanish crown, local officials ceased their direct participation in the slave trade and began to impose sanctions on employers who severely abused their workers.²⁰

These measures seem to have contributed to the easing of tensions in the 1670s. Furthermore, mining operations began to be seriously curtailed by problems of flooding early in the decade, reducing the demand for labor. Jesuits and Franciscans renewed their efforts in the western Tarahumara area, establishing a score of new missions while arguing over their respective jurisdictions.²¹ The first detailed count of Nueva Vizcaya's Jesuit mission population was made in 1678 by Father Juan Ortiz Zapata.²² When compared with contact-population estimates, it shows steep decline in the areas penetrated earliest by Spaniards. And although Chihuahua's non-Indian population was still relatively small, less than 5 percent of the total population, it was growing and it was ethnically diverse.

The mobility of the population as a whole is striking. Although it would be impossible to assess population movements with precision, several factors con-

tributed to mobility and contact among nonelite ethnic groups. The potential for profit on a mining frontier sparsely populated by Spaniards attracted Spanish immigrants. This also served as a motive for mixed-blood groups, for example for mestizos who might be able to "pass" as Spanish. Other castas fled to these remote regions in order to escape obligations or prosecution for criminal activities. And still others, including central Mexican Indians, went in search of paid labor. Once arrived in Parral, they found an established elite and an institutional structure that protected local notables.

Chief among the region's dignitaries was Valerio Cortés del Rey, who had arrived in Parral from Spain as a young man and assumed the post of royal assayer, the official who determined the quality of silver ores and tax valuations. Taking advantage of his position, he was able to accumulate a silver fortune of his own. Much of this wealth was invested in land, and by the 1660s he was the largest landowner in Chihuahua. On his holdings, which stretched for more than a hundred miles along the Río Conchos, Cortés del Rey raised thousands of sheep and cattle. His influence bought him favor with provincial governors and *audiencia* (high court) officials in Guadalajara, prompting him to boast that he was the key to the kingdom of Nueva Vizcaya.²³ In 1674, the Spanish crown granted him the right to found a *mayorazgo*, the only one to be established in the north.²⁴ Mayorazgos were large entailed estates that could not be subdivided or sold, but passed intact from the oldest son of one generation to the next, thus ensuring the family's social and economic prominence.

The power and wealth of Cortés del Rey presents many contrasts to the situation of Indian and other lower-status groups who worked for him and other landowners and miners. In many cases, elites' access to judicial officials allowed them to expand landholdings into areas claimed by Tepehuanes, Tarahumaras, and Conchos.²⁵ This process was helped by the decline in numbers of Indians, as Spanish hacendados could lay claim to lands they alleged were no longer in use by the indigenous population. Even when Indian lands were protected by titles registered and defended by missionaries, stock raisers presented a threat to unfenced boundaries. For example, in the mid-1660s, several Franciscan and Jesuit missions had croplands trampled by the expanding herds of Cortés del Rey. Although he was ordered to remove his cattle from Indian lands, other testimony charging him with extreme cruelty in "disciplining" Indians was ignored, and the loss of crops was irreversible.²⁶

In rare cases, indigenous or Spanish middlemen were able to take Indian grievances to the high court in Guadalajara and obtain favorable judgments. This was the case in 1670, when complaints from Concho Indians served as the stimulus that led to the final abolition of *encomienda* in the north.²⁷ But the primary means of avoiding Spanish abuses continued to be flight—a recourse

aided by long distances between settlements and empty spaces as well as labor shortages that facilitated geographic mobility and access to new jobs. Employers were loathe to ask many questions when a prospective laborer turned up; such a situation actually encouraged fugitivism and protected outlaws of all social categories.

The mix and volatility of social relationships among subordinate peoples is illustrated by a series of incidents that came to the attention of the Mexican Inquisition in 1673.²⁸ The local inquisitorial official, a priest in Parral, charged Nicolás de Guzmán, a mestizo who worked for a landowner near the Jesuit mission of Satevó, with the practice of witchcraft. The forty-seven-year-old Guzmán was arrested as he was walking along the road from his home on his way to work and charged with casting a spell on Mateo de Medrano, the mulatto-slave husband of Guzmán's niece Petrona, an Indian. The spell had made Medrano ill, and conventional remedies had not produced a cure. Mateo and Petrona were herders on the sheep holdings of Cortés del Rey. The charge of witchcraft had been presented to the Spanish overseer of the property, Alonso de Irigoyen, by two Indians, one from Sinaloa and the other a Tarahumara. They alleged that Petrona had asked her uncle to cast the spell on Mateo to punish him for his dalliance with María, a black slave who worked on a neighboring hacienda. Martín from Sinaloa claimed to have found the errant couple after they had been tied up by Guzmán, when he performed the act of inserting a small stone into Mateo's hip without breaking the skin. Such occurrences were commonly reported in Inquisition cases, and were accepted as plausible by Spanish priests who used prayer or exorcism to extract demonic objects and substances from the body as well as by many indigenous peoples who practiced sucking rituals to remove foreign objects from the body.²⁹

Deciding that the matter merited investigation, Irigoyen took Guzmán into custody with the aid of two of the ranch's cowboys, both mulatto slaves. In the course of the investigation, Guzmán, a native of Analco in Nueva Galicia who admitted that he had once broken the arm of a friar who attempted to discipline him, denied that he had ever practiced witchcraft. To the contrary, he alleged that one of his accusers, Martín from Sinaloa, was actually the culprit who had employed magic in attempting to cure Mateo. Several witnesses testified that Martín had in fact extracted foreign objects including hairs, a small piece of cloth, and a small snake from Mateo's body. Martín did admit to recognizing the signs that a spell had been cast, but he maintained that his role was merely to try to remove the spell or offending objects. Claiming to have special grace from God, Martín testified that he always knew when he was needed because a little bird would appear, accompanied by a voice directing him what to use for a cure.

When Mateo gave his version of events, he said that both Guzmán and Martín had attempted to cure him of what had begun as a case of typhus, but had mutated into a pain localized in his back where he could feel things moving under his skin. As the testimony unfolded, Nicolás Guzmán and Martín turned out to be only two in a parade of healers that also included a Spaniard, an unconverted Tarahumara, and an Indian from Sonora. Among the curing techniques mentioned in various testimonies were herbal potions to be swallowed, poultices applied to the back, sucking the wound through a hollow cane, attempts to induce sweating, and bleeding. The case, apparently not deemed worthy of further investigation from Mexico City, offers a picturesque glimpse into the multiethnic and often turbulent relationships and contacts that evolved in areas newly claimed by Spaniards.

The relative calm of the 1670s gave way to new troubles in the 1680s. News of the Pueblo rebellion in New Mexico reached groups to the south, certainly prompting Spanish fears that unrest might spread among them. Spanish authorities were also preoccupied by French incursions into Texas, near Matagorda Bay.³⁰ Whether or not they were encouraged by Spanish indecisiveness about retaking New Mexico, groups of Conchos and other bands went on the offensive in 1684, attacking Spanish settlements and silver shipments. In 1685, the crown reacted by establishing several new presidios along the royal road in eastern Durango and Chihuahua.³¹ Although these measures helped to quell the raids, a new disturbance followed silver strikes at Coyáchic and Cusihiuriá-chic in the mid-1680s. Jesuit missions in the upper Tarahumara area, barely a decade old, were a tempting source of labor, but once again Tarahumaras resisted coercion. Although some Tarahumaras had voluntarily traded corn and sold their labor in Spanish enterprises, others were determined to keep Spaniards from full-scale occupation of their lands. In 1690, Tarahumaras in almost all of the recently established missions joined unconverted Tarahumaras, who had been migrating northwest into rugged areas of the Sierra Madre, in rebellion. The presidial captain at Conchos, Juan Fernández de Retana, was able to quell the revolt (also joined by eastern Pimas and other serrano groups), but only after most of the new churches had been destroyed and two Jesuits killed.³²

Severe epidemics of smallpox and measles in 1692 and 1693 also put a damper on native unrest, as an estimated one-third of Nueva Vizcaya's Indian population succumbed. When drought and famine followed in 1693-94, Spanish mining operations in the Tarahumara were severely threatened.³³ In desperation and incited by millenarian prophecies, Rarámuri warriors seized the moment in 1696 to try one more time to drive out the Spaniards. Tarahumaras were particularly troubled over Jesuit attempts to reorganize their

social structure by insisting upon Christian marriage, imposing a governing hierarchy, and obstructing rituals of cooperative work that were followed by celebrations (*tesguinadas*) incorporating the uninhibited consumption of maize beer and dancing. This second rebellion was brutally suppressed by Spanish soldiers and militiamen who forced a surrender by burning Indian corn fields and then hanged hundreds of rebels.³⁴

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the Spanish presence was uneven, still concentrated in the southeastern portion of present-day Chihuahua. To the northwest, mining continued at Cusihiuriáchic and Jesuit missionaries renewed their efforts among the Tarahumara. Some of the latter returned to reconstructed missions, but others retreated farther into the Sierra Madre Occidental, intensifying a pattern already begun. Choosing remote mountain canyons and pastures, they avoided the Spanish orbit while paradoxically helping to assure their subsistence by raising Spanish sheep. Adopting a strategy similar to other groups like Pimas on the Sonoran side of the sierra and Tepehuanes in southwestern Chihuahua and northwestern Durango, they fashioned a blend of sheep raising, horticulture, hunting, gathering, and occasional raids that allowed them to resist incorporation until well after the end of the colonial period. The remaining Conchos, whose population was now much depleted, were reorganized in missions along the Conchos River and in the north . . . While the non-Indian population of all of Nueva Vizcaya had grown to approximately one-half that of the Indian by 1700, in Chihuahua Spaniards and castas still constituted less than a tenth of the total.³⁵ The eighteenth century would see a shift with the non-Indian population finally exceeding that of the natives by 1800. That story begins with the exploitation of silver near the present-day city of Chihuahua.

Although some attempts had been made earlier to mine silver there, and a few Spaniards had established cattle herds along the Sacramento and Chuvís-car rivers, Indian unrest inhibited Spanish exploitation of the area. Silver mining became more promising after Conchos and Tarahumaras were resettled nearby at the end of the seventeenth century, and when the new presidios provided more protection against raids by eastern bands. In the first decade of the eighteenth century, Spanish miners began to exploit the silver deposits at Santa Eulalia. Because this site lacked a sufficient water source, in 1708 the Spanish settlement was moved to its present location, where it attained the status of villa in 1718 with the name of San Felipe el Real de Chihuahua.³⁶

Chihuahua's mines quickly superseded production at Cusihiuriáchic, producing about a fourth of New Spain's silver for the next three decades.³⁷ The promise of riches followed earlier patterns in attracting Spanish miners and merchants from Cusihiuriáchic, Parral, and farther south. Officers from the

new presidios also took advantage of the new bonanza. Work crews were assembled haphazardly, encompassing an ethnic and geographic mix that included Tarahumaras, Yaquis, Apaches, mulatto slaves, and mestizos. Some were forced to work, but many came voluntarily, attracted by the *pepena*—at least until one of the wealthiest miners, Manuel San Juan y Santa Cruz (who had served as governor of Nueva Vizcaya from 1714 to 1720), began a campaign in 1730 to end this practice. In what was perhaps northern Mexico's first labor strike, hundreds of workers stopped work and threatened to storm the city unless the *pepena* was restored. Although authorities backed down temporarily, in the end the practice was curtailed, and employers found other means of procuring labor. Force continued to be used, but credit advances became the most common way to attract laborers. Where employers were more in need of laborers, workers were sometimes able to negotiate substantial advances even though salaries tended to be low. Compared with Mexico City, the relative buying power of workers in the north, where grain prices were normally double those of Mexico City, was low.³⁸

The population of the new mining area may have climbed over twenty thousand by the 1730s. After the richer surface ores became more depleted around 1740, mining declined and the population dropped, but probably not much below ten thousand.³⁹ Chihuahua remained an important commercial center controlling the supply of goods to New Mexico until the nineteenth century, although there were frequent disputes between officials of Chihuahua and Parral over the regulation of grain sales in the periodically drought-stricken region. Leading miners were usually merchants as well, and their ranks were reinforced by Spaniards who continued to immigrate throughout the century. These elites monopolized local government and kept the potentially unruly labor force in check, although Chihuahua's Indians and castas were not as servile as their employers would have liked, taking advantage of religious holidays to indulge in their favorite secular pastimes of cockfighting, gambling, drinking and dancing.⁴⁰

In the eighteenth century, except in the western Tarahumara area, Indian mission pueblos, which had supplied laborers to Parral, Chihuahua, other mining centers, and the farms and ranches of the Valle de San Bartolomé, became transformed. Some of their inhabitants chose to live permanently in their workplaces while outsiders moved into the missions, building houses and renting Indian lands that had not been lost already to expanding haciendas. Widespread drought in the 1730s and a severe epidemic of *matlazáhuatl* (probably typhus) in 1738–39 further eroded numbers of Indians and means of subsistence in the missions. In recognition of these demographic and economic changes, in the 1740s Jesuits relinquished their missions in southeastern

Chihuahua to the diocesan clergy. The transition from mission to parish was an acknowledgment of the lack of Indianness and the erosion of indigenous communal solidarity in these villages.⁴¹ By 1750, the non-Indian population had overtaken Indian numbers, by about four to one, in all but the western Tarahumara, where the situation was almost exactly the reverse. Jesuits claimed more than ten thousand Tarahumara and other serrano converts, but few actually lived permanently in the missions, preferring to choose between ranchería locations, where they could practice a variety of subsistence activities.⁴²

The unevenness of Spanish control remained the problem that the Marqués de Altamira contemplated at mid-century. The high degree of geographical mobility that has been noted for late eighteenth-century Nueva Vizcaya had always been the case in Chihuahua, but its proportions were particularly disturbing to officials who were more intent than ever on controlling behavior, at least in the areas of Spanish settlement.⁴³ Royal officials attributed a growing incidence of raiding, livestock theft, and highway robbery to the ease with which Indians could leave their villages. Repeated attempts to regulate travel by Indians and to prevent them from occupying unauthorized settlements failed.⁴⁴

Volatility on the Chihuahua frontier was certainly not a novelty, however, and officials might have begun to breathe easier since most of the eastern raiding groups had been eliminated or remnants of their bands incorporated into villages. But at mid-eighteenth century, another threat emerged. Apaches, having been pushed south and west since the seventeenth century by displacements of Plains Indians, now penetrated even farther into Nueva Vizcaya. When Comanches usurped their role as the primary traders of buffalo products and deerskins to Pueblos and Spaniards in New Mexico, various southern Apache bands resorted to another subsistence strategy. With their access to buffalo ranges blocked by Comanches, Apaches needed something to trade for buffalo meat, hides, and European goods. They found it in the livestock ranches of central and southern Chihuahua and northern Durango. From the late 1740s until the last decade of the eighteenth century, Apache bands entered this region through the Sierra Madre Occidental, from Paso del Norte and from the eastern deserts whose presidios had been closed down at mid-century, carrying out raids on Spanish haciendas and ranchos. Although they did take cattle at times, their primary objects were horses and mules, more easily moved to areas of refuge where they could be traded in a high-demand market. As the raids escalated, thousands of animals were stolen, many haciendas and ranchos were abandoned, and scores of people (predominantly herders and cowhands) were killed each year. Reprisals (including the taking of Apache captives who were virtually enslaved) from Spanish soldiers at newly established presidios in northwestern Chihuahua had the effect of escalating the violence, as retaliation

continued on both sides. Although Spaniards continued to use Indian allies to fight Apaches, a growing number of Indians who had once been sedentarized in missions or villages joined or imitated Apaches in raiding. The majority of these were Tarahumaras from former Jesuit missions, either those secularized in the 1740s or others that had come under Franciscan or diocesan control after the Jesuits were expelled in 1767.⁴⁵

The removal of the Jesuits from Spain's empire was only one of several so-called reform measures implemented by the Bourbon kings in the late eighteenth century to enhance royal control over colonial resources. Another was the creation in 1776 of a new administrative jurisdiction for northern Mexico, the Comandancia General de las Provincias Internas, designed to deal more effectively with foreign challenges to Spain in North America and to establish peace and security in the face of Indian hostilities. Chihuahua was the capital of the Provincias Internas for much of its existence; its administrative dominance was paralleled by the expansion of commerce. Although mining output had declined in the 1740s, Chihuahua's miner-merchant elites continued to profit, especially as they came to control trade with New Mexico. Chihuahua merchants charged high prices for goods (including tools, arms, clothing, sugar, tobacco, chocolate, liquor, and other items) imported from central Mexico and Spain and then exported to New Mexico.⁴⁶

Apache hostilities may have inhibited the growth of Chihuahua, especially during the 1760s and 1770s, when they were at their peak, but during the last decade of the eighteenth century new policies providing commodity subsidies to Apaches in return for promises of peace did succeed in reducing raids. The last three decades of colonial rule witnessed relative peace and prosperity for Spaniards, as mining revived slightly in Parral and Cusihuiriáchic, agricultural production increased, commerce grew, and the non-Indian population expanded through immigration, surpassing the total number of Indians by 1800.⁴⁷

By the time of Mexican independence in 1821, Chihuahua's population was approaching 100,000.⁴⁸ The Indian population was less than half of the total and increasingly isolated in the rugged mountain canyons of western Chihuahua, where it was more possible to avoid Spanish demands. These were primarily Tarahumaras, but also included a variety of smaller serrano groups and some Tepehuanes in the southwestern corner of the present state of Chihuahua. Franciscans took over the Jesuits' missions in the western Tarahumara after 1767, but very few natives resided in them year round. Even fewer Tarahumaras still dwelled in their old eastern homelands, now administered by Franciscans or parish priests, but much of their land had been acquired by Spaniards, either through subterfuge, purchase, or rent.⁴⁹

Chihuahua on the eve of Mexican independence looked a bit more like the

social composite the Marqués de Altamira had fancied three-quarters of a century earlier. In several populous towns, elite Spanish men controlled political, economic, and cultural life through institutions of the Spanish state and church. They owned the productive mines, haciendas, and commercial enterprises with ties in Mexico City and Guadalajara, and occupied important local offices of government. Although they could not completely control the behaviors of ethnic and economic subordinates, they effected and conserved a general stability. Male-female relations tended to follow Spanish patriarchal codes that demanded female submissiveness to fathers and husbands; these were accepted by and large across class and ethnic lines. Yet a substantial number of women headed households and engaged in economic activities to support their families.⁵⁰ Located in what was still a frontier province where indigenous peoples were incompletely incorporated, Chihuahua's urban officials and businessmen struggled to attain a level of civility that would command respect from the core areas to the south. Yet, in order to maintain control in often precarious frontier conditions, they had to be willing to negotiate with their social inferiors and to accommodate their aspirations to varying degrees.⁵¹ In some cases, this situation abetted social mobility, as in the example of the military colonists who continued to fight Apaches in northwestern Chihuahua. These mixed-race peoples were "whitened" by virtue of their marked differentiation from "barbarous" Apaches.⁵²

The countryside was less regulated than the towns. Haciendas expanded, sometimes incorporating ranches and remnants of former Jesuit missions. Other rural villages provided laborers and produce for urban areas. Where Indian government and communal solidarity had existed in former mission villages of central and southern Chihuahua, it was now a thing of the past. Elites were poised to accumulate and consolidate large landholdings in that region. Most of Chihuahua's original native groups had disappeared through warfare, disease, and racial mixing. Only Tarahumaras survived in substantial numbers, while a smaller number of Tepehuanes straddled the Chihuahua-Durango border. For a while, they would be left alone in their mountain and canyon homes, eschewing outsiders. Not until the late nineteenth century did Chihuahua's elites move to appropriate the timber and metal resources of the sierra. More interested in commercial opportunities opened up by U.S. westward expansion, they moved northward into the Chihuahua desert, only to confront reinvigorated Apache raiding societies after Mexican independence in 1821. For the next half-century, Chihuahua was virtually segregated in three distinct parts with little interaction. Only the force of the Porfirian state would integrate them at the turn of the twentieth century, at the same time dealing a decisive blow to indigenous autonomy.

TABLE I.I
Population Shifts in Colonial Chihuahua

	1550	1600	1650	1700	1750	1800
Non-Indians		400	2,100	5,800	30,300	42,500
All Indians	175,000	163,500	139,500	74,000	46,300	39,100
Tepehuanes & Tarahumaras	120,000	109,500	95,000	55,000	34,350	29,500

SOURCE: Estimates adapted from Peter Gerhard, *The North Frontier of New Spain*, rev. ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 170–200, and various estimates and censuses located in the Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City); Archivo Histórico de Hacienda, Temporalidades, legs. 279, 1126, 2009; Archivo de Hidalgo de Parral (microfilm), reels Durango, Varios, Año 1749; and *Documentos para la Historia de México* (Mexico, 1853–57), 4th series, vol. 3, 301–419.

NOTES

1. Altamira's advice to the viceroy is found in various reports from 1747 to 1749 in Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter cited as AGN), Archivo Histórico de Hacienda, Temporalidades, leg. 278, exp. 40; and Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla (hereafter cited as AGI), Audiencia de Guadalajara, leg. 191. See also María del Carmen Velázquez, *El Marqués de Altamira y las provincias internas de Nueva España* (Mexico City, 1976).
2. Viceroy to Council of the Indies, July 27, 1749, AGI, Guadalajara 301.
3. Peter Gerhard's total in *The North Frontier of New Spain*, rev. ed. (Norman, 1993), from the jurisdictions which make up modern-day Chihuahua, is just over 175,000; 170–71. Gerhard's estimates of contact population tend to be conservative, as noted in Chantal Cramaussel, *La provincia de Santa Bárbara en Nueva Vizcaya, 1563–1631* (Cd. Juárez, 1990), 86–88; and compared with estimates in Daniel T. Reff, *Disease, Depopulation and Culture Change in Northwestern New Spain, 1518–1764* (Salt Lake City, 1991).
4. Rancherías were dispersed settlements of a few to a hundred dwellings. Often located along water sources, their inhabitants practiced agriculture and engaged in hunting and gathering activities. Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533–1960* (Tucson, 1962), 12–13.
5. William B. Griffen, *Culture Change and Shifting Populations in Central Northern Mexico* (Tucson, 1969).
6. Thomas D. Hall, *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350–1880* (Lawrence, 1989), 50–109; Nancy P. Hickerson, *The Jumanos: Hunters and Traders of the South Plains* (Austin, 1994).
7. Some Tepehuanes may have lived in more stratified villages before the seventeenth century. George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, eds., *Obregón's History of the Sixteenth Century Exploration in Western America* (Los Angeles, 1928).
8. Susan M. Deeds, "Legacies of Resistance, Adaptation and Tenacity: History of the Native Peoples of Northwest Mexico," in *Cambridge History of Native Peoples of the Americas*, forthcoming.
9. Cramaussel, *La provincia de Santa Bárbara*, passim.
10. This idea is argued, in different ways, in Cheryl E. Martin, *Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, 1996), and Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson, 1995).
11. Labor practices are outlined in Susan M. Deeds, "Rural Work in Nueva Vizcaya: Forms of Labor Coercion on the Periphery," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 69:3 (1989), 425–49; and Chantal Cramaussel, "Encomiendas, repartimientos y conquista en Nueva Vizcaya," in *Actas del Segundo Congreso de Historia Regional Comparada* (Cd. Juárez, 1990), 139–60.
12. Gerhard, *North Frontier*, 170–71; Cramaussel, *La Provincia de Santa Bárbara*, 86–87; Jesuit cartas ánuas in AGN, Historia, vol. 19.
13. Susan M. Deeds, "Las rebeliones de los tepehuanes y tarahumaras durante el siglo

XVII en la Nueva Vizcaya," in Ysla Campbell, ed., *El contacto entre los españoles e indígenas en el norte de la Nueva España* (Cd. Juárez, 1992).

14. Robert C. West, *The Mining Community in Northern New Spain: The Parral Mining District* (Berkeley, 1947).

15. Ignacio del Río, "Sobre la aparición y desarrollo del trabajo libre asalariado en el norte de Nueva España (siglos xvi y xvii)," in Elsa Cecilia Frost Michael Meyer, and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, compilers, *El trabajo y los trabajadores en la historia de México* (Tucson, 1979), 92-111. For earlier use of the pepena in the north, see Andrés Pérez de Ribas, *Historia de los triunfos de nuestra santa fe entre las gentes más bárbaras del nuevo orbe* [1645] (Mexico City, 1992), book 8, chap. 3.

16. Deeds, "Rural Work," 435-38; Viceroy to Audiencia of Guadalajara, Apr. 25, 1659, Biblioteca Pública del Estado de Jalisco, Archivo Judicial de la Audiencia de Nueva Galicia (hereafter cited as BPEJ, AJANG), Civil, C-4-1 (39).

17. Series of reports on Indian depredations in AGN, Historia, vol. 19, fols. 121-166; relación de Diego de Medrano, Aug. 31, 1654, AGI, Guadalajara 68.

18. Relación de la guerra de los tepehuanes, P. Francisco Arista, Dec. 1617, AGN, Historia, vol. 311.

19. Information on these series of events can be found in a report of the Jesuit priest at San Miguel de las Bocas, Padre Nicolás de Zepeda, to the Jesuit provincial head, Apr. 18, 1645, AGN, Historia, vol. 19, fols. 136-166; and in military reports of the Spanish captain, Francisco Montañón de la Cueva, Oct. 1645, in Archivo de Hidalgo de Parral (hereafter cited as AHP), microfilm copy in University of Arizona Library, reel 1645a, frames 230-243.

20. Governor Antonio Oca de Sarmiento to Viceroy, Mar. 12, 1667, in Charles Hackett, *Historical Documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and approaches thereto, to 1773*, 3 vols. (Washington, 1923-37), 2:188-95; testimony on labor conditions in Nueva Vizcaya, 1670, BPEJ, AJANG, Civil, caja 12, exp. 2 (157).

21. Report of P. Tomás de Guadalajara, Matachic, Jul. 20, 1677, AGN, Misiones 26, fols. 237-8; F. Antonio de Valdés to P. Com. Gen., Parral, Jun. 17, 1677, Biblioteca Nacional (Mexico City), Archivo Franciscano (hereafter cited as BN, AF), Caja 12, 195-2.

22. AGN, Misiones 26, fols. 241-269.

23. Various reports in Hackett, *Historical Documents*, 2:188-95.

24. Francisco de Almada, *Resumen de historia del estado de Chihuahua* (Chihuahua, 1986), 72-79.

25. Susan M. Deeds, "Mission Villages and Agrarian Patterns in a Nueva Vizcayan Heartland, 1600-1750," *Journal of the Southwest* 33:3 (Autumn 1991), 345-65.

26. Testimony before Gov. Antonio de Oca Sarmiento, Satevó, Feb. 21, 1667, AHP, reel 1667 B, fr. 738-743.

27. Series of autos, 1670-71, in BPE, AJANG, Civil, C-12, exp. 2 (157).

28. Denuncia by Comisario del Santo Oficio Felipe de la Cueva Montañón Villamayor, Parral, Sept. 9, 1673, AGN, Inquisición, vol. 516, fols. 405-431.

29. Causa criminal . . . por indicios de hechicero, Mar. 1703, AHP, reel 1703, fr. 973-982.

30. Various autos, 1688-89, in Hackett, *Historical Documents*, 2:234-89.

31. Thomas H. Naylor and Charles W. Polzer, S.J., eds., *The Presidio and Militia on the Northern Frontier of New Spain, 1570-1700* (Tucson, 1986), 548-67.
32. Joseph Neumann, *Historia de las rebeliones de la sierra tarahumara, 1626-1724*, ed. Luis González Rodríguez (Chihuahua, 1991); Deeds, "Las rebeliones de los tepehuanes y los tarahumaras."
33. Report of Gov. Joseph Marín to Viceroy, Parral, Sept. 30, 1693, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 120; testimony regarding grain shortages, Sept. 1694, AHP, reel 1694A, fr. 48-125.
34. Documents on the Tarahumara rebellions in AGI, Patronato, leg. 236; and AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara, leg. 156.
35. Gerhard, *North Frontier*, 24, 170-71.
36. Martin, *Governance and Society*, 18-28; Philip L. Hadley, *Minería y sociedad en el centro minero de Santa Eulalia, Chihuahua, 1709-1750* (Mexico City, 1979).
37. Hadley, *Minería y sociedad*, 27-28.
38. Martin, *Governance and Society*, 47-73.
39. José Antonio Villaseñor y Sánchez, *Theatro americano: descripción general de los reynos, y provincias de la Nueva España y sus jurisdicciones* (Mexico City, 1952), 2: 352-63.
40. Cheryl E. Martin, "Public Celebrations, Popular Culture, and Labor Discipline in Eighteenth-Century Chihuahua," in William H. Beezley, Cheryl E. Martin, and William S. French, eds., *Rituals of Rule, Ritual of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington, Del., 1994), 95-114.
41. Susan M. Deeds, "Rendering unto Caesar: The Secularization of Jesuit Missions in Durango," (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1981), passim; report of Corregidor de Chihuahua, July 1, 1759, AGN, Alcaldías Mayores, vol. 6, fols. 184-189.
42. Reports of Jesuits in Tarahumara missions, 1757-8, AGN, Jesuitas, II-7, exps. 16-24.
43. Michael Swann, "Tierra Adentro": Settlement and Society in Colonial Durango (Boulder, 1982), 171-207.
44. Order of Governor Ignacio Francisco de Barrutia, June 18, 1729, marriage registers, Santiago Papasquiario, LDS microfilm 658011; P. Juan Antonio Balthasar to Viceroy, n.d. 1754, W. B. Stephens Collections, no. 1719, University of Texas Nettie Lee Benson Library.
45. William B. Griffen, *Apaches at War and Peace: The Janos Presidio, 1750-1858* (Albuquerque, 1988), 1-36; William L. Merrill, "Cultural Creativity and Raiding Bands in Eighteenth-Century Northern New Spain," in William B. Taylor and Franklin Pease G. Y., eds., *Violence, Resistance, and Survival in the Americas* (Washington, D.C., 1994), 124-52.
46. Oakah Jones, *Nueva Vizcaya: Heartland of the Spanish Frontier* (Albuquerque, 1988), 186-88; David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, 1992), 196-98.
47. Luis Aboites, *Breve historia de Chihuahua* (Mexico City, 1994), 69-73.
48. Padrones of 1804-6 and 1820 in AGN, AHH, Consulado, 917-2, and Biblioteca Nacional, AF, Caja 18/387, respectively.
49. Padrón de Santiago de Babonoyahua, 1778, BN, AF, caja 16, exp. 328.
50. Martin, *Governance and Society*, 149-83.
51. Ibid., Martin, *Governance and Society*, 184-195.
52. Alonso, *Thread of Blood*, 21-71.