

Native Survival Part of Legacy

By Rubén Sáñez M. Historian



As the 400th anniversary of the founding of Hispanic New Mexico (1598-1998) comes to a close, we can review the results of the first European colony in what is now the United States of America and perhaps contrast them to (*the results of*) colonization by other Europeans.

Spanish speaking people introduced themselves to what is now New Mexico, along with Christianity, the wheel, the adobe, log housing, fireplaces, squash blossom jewelry and hornos (*outdoor ovens*) for the first time. New crops like chile, wheat, watermelon, lettuce, cabbage, peas, chick peas, cumin seed, carrots, turnips, garlic, onions, artichokes, radishes, cucumbers, various varieties of melons and new varieties of corn (*such as sweet corn and the large cob*), (*as well as*), stock animals like horses, mules, cows, sheep, goats and hogs were introduced by the Spanish.

There were negatives too, like European smallpox, which wasn't "introduced," but came anyway. Perhaps the supreme test of results of European settlement, in what is now the United States, is to consider the status of the people who were already here when Europeans showed up.

Hispanic people settled near San Juan Pueblo and that population still exists, along with 18 other "native" villages." One could debate what was the most important Hispanic contribution. Was it Christianity, technology like the wheel, foods like wheat and chile, or horses and cattle? All are of crucial importance, without a doubt, but if I had to hazard a choice, it would be the Hispanic people themselves, who introduced European aspects of living without exterminating "native" New Mexican populations in the process. By 1598, Spanish policy was to integrate aboriginal populations into the Christian community. That worked to preserve them and that is the principal reason the pueblo populations exist to this day.

Contrast this with policy in Jamestown, in Plymouth, or any area east of the Mississippi: coastal Indian nations were so completely enslaved to extinction that today most people can't even name the tribes who populated Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Michigan, etc. Not a single "native" village exists east of the Mississippi that was there when Englishmen settled in 1607.

There are many reasons for this, but historiographers have been inspired to ignore them. For example, around 1641, Dutch Governor William Kieft allowed payment for scalps (*when bringing in heads of "savages" proved too cumbersome*) and the practice of scalping was thus introduced in the Americas. (*See "Atlas of the North American Indian," by Carl Waldman.*)

English policy was one of enslavement or extermination. It was summed up by Sir Jeffrey Amherst (for whom the college was named) in 1763 during the war against

Pontiac: "Could it not be contrived to send the smallpox among... the Indians... the vilest race of beings that ever infested the earth and whose riddance from it must be esteemed a meritorious act, for the good of mankind..." (See "500 nations" by A.M. Josephy.)

When the United States took charge, it wanted to extinguish native title to the land and did so by treaty or war, whichever was necessary, culminating in the removal of all Indians from east of the Mississippi. President Andrew Jackson (*who is forever honored on the \$20 dollar bill*) sent in troops to drive all Indians out of their homelands even after John Marshall and the Supreme Court ruled that Indians had a right to their native lands. (*President Jackson thumbed his nose at the decision and said, "John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it."*) This is why so many Indian groups are living in Oklahoma today.

Theodore Roosevelt, who took Blue Lake from Taos Pueblo, wrote in "Winning of the West:" "The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages ... whether the whites won the land by treaty, by armed conquest, or, as was actually the case by a mixture of both, mattered comparatively little so long as the land was won." (*Roosevelt is enshrined on Mt. Rushmore.*)

To the eternal credit of New Mexicans, we still have 19 native villages of Indians who weren't enslaved to extinction or chased out of their homeland. Because of superior European weaponry in 1599, Don Juan de Oñate could have wiped the people of Acoma off the face of the earth the way the English did on the East Coast. With the atrocities of the Pueblo Revolt as an excuse, Don Diego de Vargas could have exterminated all the Pueblos in 1692 or any time thereafter, if that had been Hispanic policy.

But it wasn't, and that's why we have the New Mexico of today, despite the Herculean effort of Orwellian history that manipulates Hispanophobic items like "Spanish greed and cruelty," the Inquisition, etc., to hide the Star Chamber and Witch Finder General (*and I'll wager the latter are unknown to the ordinary person*), or the extermination and exile of populations native to what is now called the United States.

In another ironic twist of fortune, the Indian populations of New Mexico were somewhat protected by public opinion because if the pueblos (*who nevertheless still had to contend with realities like the Bursum Bill, the Dawes Act, etc.*) were exiled to "Indian Territory," then the United States would have been worse than the "cruel and greedy" Spaniards."

Is it possible to say that New Mexico would be a totally different place if it had not been for the Hispanic colony of 1595? Certainly. someone else would have introduced Christianity, the wheel, fireplaces, horses, etc. But if the English, the Dutch, or citizens of the United States had gotten here first there would be no "native" villages, just like there are no Comanches, who wanted lands in New Mexico so they could live close to their New Mexican friends.

The Army saw to it that they didn't get their wish. But for Oñate and 1598, the same would be true for the pueblos.

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