THE LAMAR SERIES IN WESTERN HISTORY

The Lamar Series in Western History includes scholarly books of general public interest that enhance the understanding of human affairs in the American West and contribute to a wider understanding of the West's significance in the political, social, and cultural life of America. Comprising works of the highest quality, the series aims to increase the range and vitality of Western American history, focusing on frontier places and people, Indian and ethnic communities, the urban West and the environment, and the art and illustrated history of the American West.

RECENT TITLES

Vicious, by Jon T. Coleman
The Comanche Empire, by Pekka Hämäläinen
Frontiers, by Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher
Revolution in Texas, by Benjamin Heber Johnson
Emerald City, by Matthew Klingle
Murder in Tombstone, by Steven Lubet
Making Indian Law, by Christian W. McMillen
Fugitive Landscapes, by Samuel Truett
Bárbaros, by David J. Weber

FORTHCOMING TITLES

The War of a Thousand Deserts, by Brian Delay
The Bourgeois Frontier, by Jay Gitlin
Defying the Odds, by Carole Goldberg and Gelya Frank
The Far West in the Twentieth Century, by Earl Pomeroy
César Chávez, by Stephen J. Pitti
Geronimo, by Robert Utley

THE COMANCHE EMPIRE

Pekka Hämäläinen

Published in Association with The William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, Southern Methodist University

Yale University Press
New Haven & London

Published with assistance from the Louis Stern Memorial Fund.

Set in Electra type by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.
Printed in the United States of America.

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:
Hämäläinen, Pekka, 1967–
The Comanche empire / Pekka Hämäläinen.
p. cm. — (The Lamar series in western history)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
"Published in association with the William P. Clements Center
for Southwest Studies, Southern Methodist University."
ISBN 978-0-300-12654-9 (cloth : alk. paper)
1. Comanche Indians—History. 2. Comanche Indians—Government relations.
3. United States—History—19th century. 4. Mexico—History—To 1810.
I. William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies. II. Title.
E99.C85.H27 2008
978.004'974572—dc22
2007041809

ISBN 978-0-300-15117-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).
It contains 30 percent postconsumer waste (PCW) and is certified
by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

10 9 8 7

INTRODUCTION

Reversed Colonialism

This book is about an American empire that, according to conventional histories, did not exist. It tells the familiar tale of expansion, resistance, conquest, and loss, but with a reversal of usual historical roles: it is a story in which Indians expand, dictate, and prosper, and European colonists resist, retreat, and struggle to survive.

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, the Comanches were a small tribe of hunter-gatherers living in the rugged canyonlands on the far northern frontier of the Spanish kingdom of New Mexico. They were newcomers to the region, having fled the political unrest and internal disputes in their old homelands on the central Great Plains, and they were struggling to rebuild their lives in a foreign land whose absorption into the Spanish world seemed imminent. It was here, at the advancing edge of the world's largest empire, that the Comanches launched an explosive expansion. They purchased and plundered horses from New Mexico, reinvented themselves as mounted fighters, and reenvisioned their place in the world. They forced their way onto the southern plains, shoved aside the Apaches and other residing nations, and over the course of three generations carved out a vast territory that was larger than the entire European-controlled area north of the Río Grande at the time. They became "Lords of the South Plains," ferocious horse-riding warriors who forestalled Euro-American intrusions into the American Southwest well into the late nineteenth century.[1]

The Comanches are usually portrayed in the existing literature as a formidable equestrian power that erected a daunting barrier of violence to colonial expansion.[2] Along with the Iroquois and Lakotas, they have been embedded in collective American memory as one of the few Native societies able to pose a significant challenge to the Euro-American conquest of North America. But the

idea of a Comanche barrier leaves out at least half of the story. For in the mid-eighteenth century Comanches reinvented themselves once more, this time as a hegemonic people who grew increasingly powerful and prosperous at the expense of the surrounding societies, Indian and Euro-American alike. Gradually, a momentous shift took shape. In the Southwest, European imperialism not only stalled in the face of indigenous resistance; it was eclipsed by indigenous imperialism.

That overturn of power relations was more than a historical glitch, a momentary rupture in the process of European colonization of indigenous America. For a century, roughly from 1750 to 1850, the Comanches were the dominant people in the Southwest, and they manipulated and exploited the colonial outposts in New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, and northern Mexico to increase their safety, prosperity, and power. They extracted resources and labor from their Euro-American and Indian neighbors through thievery and tribute and incorporated foreign ethnicities into their ranks as adopted kinspeople, slaves, workers, dependents, and vassals. The Comanche empire was powered by violence, but, like most viable empires, it was first and foremost an economic construction. At its core was an extensive commercial network that allowed Comanches to control nearby border markets and long-distance trade, swing surrounding groups into their political orbit, and spread their language and culture across the midcontinent. And as always, long-term foreign political dominance rested on dynamic internal development. To cope with the opportunities and challenges of their rapid expansion, Comanches created a centralized multilevel political system, a flourishing market economy, and a graded social organization that was flexible enough to sustain and survive the burdens of their external ambitions.

The Comanches, then, were an interregional power with imperial presence, and their politics divided the history of the Southwest and northern Mexico into two sharply contrasting trajectories. While Comanches reached unparalleled heights of political and economic influence, material wealth, and internal stability, the Spanish colonies, the subsequent Mexican provinces, and many indigenous agricultural societies suffered from a number of disruptions typical to peripheral regions in colonial worlds. Without fully recognizing it, the Spaniards, French, Mexicans, and Anglo-Americans were all restrained and overshadowed in the continent's center by an indigenous empire. That empire—its rise, anatomy, costs, and fall—is the subject of this book.

Great American Indian powers have captivated scholarly imagination since Hernán Cortés fought his way into Tenochtitlán and Francisco Pizarro marched into Cuzco. Over the years, historians and archaeologists have uncovered several imperialistic or quasi-imperialistic Native American polities that dominated other indigenous societies. The Aztecs, Incas, and other empire-builders in the precontact Americas come easily to mind, but one might, with a little more effort, also think of the Powhatans in early seventeenth-century Tidewater Virginia, Haudenosaunee—the Iroquois confederacy—in the seventeenth-century Northeast, or the Lakotas on the nineteenth-century northern plains.[3]

This book belongs to that genre while also stepping outside of it. Comanches, it shows, fought and subjugated other Native societies, but more important to their ascendancy was their ability to reduce Euro-American colonial regimes to building blocks of their own dominant position. Comanches achieved something quite exceptional: they built an imperial organization that subdued, exploited, marginalized, co-opted, and profoundly transformed near and distant colonial outposts, thereby reversing the conventional imperial trajectory in vast segments of North and Central America.[4]

Comanches, moreover, did that during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the high tide of imperial contestation when colonial powers jostled for preeminence across North America. The colonial Southwest was a setting for several dynamic and diverging imperial projects that converged and clashed in unexpected ways. As Spanish, French, British, and U.S. empires vied with one another over land, commerce, and raw materials, Comanches continued to expand their realm, profoundly frustrating European fantasies of superiority. The result was a colonial history that defies conventional wisdom. A long-standing notion has it that the course and contours of early American history were determined by the shifts in Euro-American power dynamics and the reactions of metropolitan headquarters in Madrid, London, Versailles, Mexico City, and Washington to those shifts. The Southwest, however, is a striking exception. Metropolitan visions mattered there, but they often mattered less than the policies and designs of Comanches, whose dominance eventually reached hemispheric dimensions, extending from the heart of North America deep into Mexico. Indeed, Comanche ascendancy is the missing component in the sweeping historical sequence that led to New Spain's failure to colonize the interior of North America, the erosion of Spanish imperial authority in the Southwest, and the precipitous decay of Mexican power in the north. Ultimately, the rise of the Comanche empire helps explain why Mexico's Far North is today the American Southwest.

Yet for all their strength and potential for expansion, Comanches never attempted to build a European-style imperial system. A creation of itinerant nomadic bands, the Comanche empire was not a rigid structure held together by a single central authority, nor was it an entity that could be displayed on a map

as a solid block with clear-cut borders. Unlike Euro-American imperial powers, Comanches did not seek to establish large-scale settlement colonies, and their vision of power was not direct rule over multiple subject peoples. They did not publicize their might with ostentatious art and architecture, and they left behind no imperial ruins to remind us of the extent of their power. Preferring informal rule over formal institutions for both cultural and strategic reasons, Comanches nevertheless created a deeply hierarchical and integrated intersocietal order that was unmistakably imperial in shape, scope, and substance. The numerous Comanche bands and divisions formed an internally fluid but externally coherent coalition that accomplished through a creative blending of violence, diplomacy, extortion, trade, and kinship politics what more rigidly structured empires have achieved through direct political control: they imposed their will upon neighboring polities, harnessed the economic potential of other societies for their own use, and persuaded their rivals to adopt and accept their customs and norms.

To understand the particular nature of Comanche imperialism, it is necessary to understand how Comanche ascendancy intertwined with other imperial expansions—New Spain's tenacious if erratic northward thrust from central Mexico, New France's endeavor to absorb the interior grasslands into its commercial realm, and the United States' quest for a transcontinental empire. Comanches, to simplify a complex multistage process, developed aggressive power policies in reaction to Euro-American invasions that had threatened their safety and autonomy from the moment they had entered the southern plains. Indeed, the fact that Comanche territory, Comanchería, was encircled throughout its existence by Euro-American settler colonies makes the Comanches an unlikely candidate for achieving regional primacy. But as the Comanches grew in numbers and power, that geopolitical layout became the very foundation of their dominance. Their overwhelming military force, so evident in their terror-inspiring mounted guerrilla attacks, would have allowed them to destroy many New Mexico and Texas settlements and drive most of the colonists out of their borders. Yet they never adopted such a policy of expulsion, preferring instead to have their borders lined with formally autonomous but economically subservient and dependent outposts that served as economic access points into the vast resources of the Spanish empire.

The Comanches, then, were an imperial power with a difference: their aim was not to conquer and colonize, but to coexist, control, and exploit. Whereas more traditional imperial powers ruled by making things rigid and predictable, Comanches ruled by keeping them fluid and malleable.[5] This informal, almost ambiguous nature of Comanches' politics not only makes their empire difficult to define; it sometimes makes it difficult to see. New Mexico and Texas existed side by side with Comanchería throughout the colonial era, and though often suffering under Comanche pressure, the twin colonies endured, allowing Spain to claim sweeping imperial command over the Southwest. Yet when examined closely, Spain's uncompromised imperial presence in the Southwest becomes a fiction that existed only in Spanish minds and on European maps, for Comanches controlled a large portion of those material things that could be controlled in New Mexico and Texas. The idea of land as a form of private, revenue-producing property was absent in Comanche culture, and livestock and slaves in a sense took the place of landed private property. This basic observation has enormous repercussions on how we should see the relationship between the Comanches and colonists. When Comanches subjected Texas and New Mexico to systematic raiding of horses, mules, and captives, draining wide sectors of those productive resources, they in effect turned the colonies into imperial possessions. That Spanish Texas and New Mexico remained unconquered by Comanches is not a historical fact; it is a matter of perspective.

In this book I examine the Comanche power complex as part of an emerging transatlantic web that had not yet consolidated into an encompassing world economy. Seen from this angle, the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Southwest and Mexican North emerge as a small-scale world-system that existed outside the controlling grip of Europe's overseas empires. Comanchería was its political and economic nucleus, a regional core surrounded by more or less peripheral societies and territories whose fortunes were linked to the Comanches through complex webs of cooperation, coercion, extortion, and dependence. The world-system approach to history has often been criticized for being overly strict and mechanistic, which it is. I have used its spatial language and metaphors selectively but also advisedly, fully aware that they convey a certain kind of rigidity and permanence. Viewed against the backdrop of constantly shifting frontiers of North America, the intersocietal space the Comanches occupied and eventually dominated was marked by unusually hard, enduring, and distinctive power hierarchies.[6]

This Comanche-centric world was by no means self-contained; it was anchored from its inception to the broader colonial world through the strong administrative and economic networks among New Mexico, Texas, northern Mexican provinces, and Mexico City. But these institutional linkages often had less impact on the colonies' internal development than Comanche policies did; the troubled and convoluted history of New Mexico, Texas, Coahuila, and Nueva Vizcaya may have had as much to do with the Comanches as with the ebbs and flows of New Spain's imperial fortunes. In fact, the systemic connec-

tions between Comanchería and northern New Spain gave the Comanches a modicum of exploitative power over the Spanish empire as a whole. When New Mexico was founded at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was expected to fuel Spain's imperial veins with raw materials and laborers, but by the eighteenth century the colony was leaking so much wealth into Comanchería that it could survive only by continuous financial backing from Mexico City. Texas functioned through much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a money-draining, often tributary defensive province against Comanche expansion. By subsidizing its far northern frontier, then, the Spanish empire in effect drained itself to feed and fend off an indigenous empire.

Although I focus on a particular place in time in this book, my arguments engage in the broader debates about colonialism, frontiers, and borderlands in the Americas. Over the past three decades, historians have conceived entirely new ways of thinking about Native Americans, Euro-Americans, and their tangled histories. Moving beyond conventional top-down narratives that depict Indians as bit players in imperial struggles or tragic victims of colonial expansion, today's scholarship portrays them as full-fledged historical actors who played a formative role in the making of early America. Rather than a seamless, preordained sequence, the colonization of the Americas is now seen as a dialectic process that created new worlds for all involved. Indigenous societies did not simply vanish in the face of Euro-American onslaught. Many adjusted and endured, rebuilding new economies and identities from the fragments of the old ones. Indians fought and resisted, but they also cooperated and coexisted with the newcomers, creating new hybrid worlds that were neither wholly Indian nor European. By foregrounding indigenous peoples and their intentions in the story of early America, recent scholarship has reinvigorated a field that only a generation ago was suffocating under its parochial and mythologizing tenets.[7]

Significant as this revisionist turn has been, it is not complete. Too often the alterations have been cosmetic rather than corrective. Historians have sanitized vocabularies and updated textbooks to illuminate the subtleties of colonial encounters, but the broad outlines of the story have largely remained intact. Outside a cadre of Native and early American specialists, the understanding of Indian–Euro-American relations is still limited by what Vine Deloria, Jr., called "the 'cameo' theory of history": indigenous peoples make dramatic entrances, stay briefly on the stage, and then fade out as the main saga of European expansion resumes, barely affected by the interruption. With too few exceptions, revisionist historians have limited themselves to retelling the story of colonial conquest from the Indian side of the frontier. They have probed how Native peoples

countered and coped with colonial expansion and have largely overlooked the other side of the dynamic—the impact of Indian policies on colonial societies. Such an approach reinforces the view of European powers as the principal driving force of history and tends to reduce indigenous actions to mere strategies of subversion and survival. To recover the full dimension of Indian agency in early American history, we must once again reevaluate the intersections among Native peoples, colonial powers, frontiers, and borderlands. We have to turn the telescope around and create models that allow us to look at Native policies toward colonial powers as more than defensive strategies of resistance and containment.[8]

This book offers new insights into that effort, and it does so by questioning some of the most basic assumptions about indigenous peoples, colonialism, and historical change. Instead of perceiving Native policies toward colonial powers simply as strategies of survival, it assumes that Indians, too, could wage war, exchange goods, make treaties, and absorb peoples in order to expand, extort, manipulate, and dominate. Instead of reading Indian dispossession back in time to structure the narrative of early America, it embraces the multiple possibilities and contingency of historical change. At its most fundamental level, it promotes a less linear reading of Indian-white relations in North America. After the initial contacts, when Indians usually held the upper hand over the invaders, the fate of indigenous cultures was not necessarily an irreversible slide toward dispossession, depopulation, and cultural declension. As the history of the Comanches illustrates, almost diametrically opposite trajectories were possible. Before their final defeat in the canyonlands of the Texas Panhandle in 1875, Comanches had experienced an astounding ascendancy from the margins of the colonial world into imperial prominence as a dominant people who thrived and expanded in the midst of Euro-American colonies for over a century.

The history of Indian–Euro-colonial relations, as we today understand them, is inseparable from the history of the frontier, which forms another theoretical thread of this study. Over the past fifteen years or so, the frontier has made a forceful reentry into the very center of North American historiography. Recast as a zone of cultural interpenetration, the frontier is finding new relevance among historians who not so long ago had rejected Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis as an ethnocentric and narcissistic rendition of the European takeover of North America. Instead of Turner's binary dividing line between civilization and savagery—or as seedbed of American virtues—historians have reenvisioned the frontier as a socially charged space where Indians and invaders competed for resources and land but also shared skills, foods, fashions, customs, languages, and beliefs. Indian-white frontiers, new work has revealed, were messy, eclectic

contact points where all protagonists are transformed—regardless of whether the power dynamics between them are evenly or unevenly balanced. This has brought the frontier closer to its rival concept, the borderland, which Herbert Eugene Bolton, the pioneering historian of Spanish North America, coined to challenge Turner's constricted Anglo-centric vision. Skepticism toward the nation-state as the main unit of historical analysis, a hemispheric vision, an appreciation of cultural and political mutability, and an emphasis on indigenous agency are the traditional strengths of borderlands history; today they are the strengths of frontier studies as well.[9]

This book makes use of several insights of new frontier-borderland studies. On a macrolevel, it shows how Comanches moved goods, ideas, and people across ecological, ethnic, and political boundaries, creating transnational (or transimperial) networks of violence and exchange that defied the more rigid spatial arrangements Euro-American powers hoped to implement in the Southwest. On a microlevel, it shows how Comanches forged intimate small-scale, face-to-face markets with Euro-Americans, creating nascent versions of what Daniel Usner has called "frontier exchange economies," self-sufficient trade systems that mostly existed outside of the burgeoning transatlantic economy. It describes how Comanches forced the colonizers to modify their aggressive ways and at the same time recalibrated some of their own practices to adjust to the Euro-American presence, engaging in the kind of process of mediation, mutual invention, and cultural production Richard White has called "the middle ground." Geopolitically, Comanches' Southwest would seem to fit into Jeremy Adelman's and Stephen Aron's recent redefinition of a borderland: it was a place where interimperial rivalries enhanced Native peoples' strategic options by permitting them to play off colonial powers against one another.[10]

And yet the new frontier-borderland studies can explain the world I am describing only partially. The Southwest depicted in this book is a violent and traumatic place where Natives and newcomers saw one another more as strangers and adversaries than as co-creators of a common world; it was only incidentally a place where frontier exchange economies or middle grounds could flourish. When Comanches and Euro-Americans met to discuss such contentious and conceptually slippery matters as war, peace, reciprocity, loyalty, and justice, they sometimes relied on creative and expedient misunderstandings that were so fundamental for the creation of middle grounds, but more often than not, they understood each other all too well and generally did not like what they saw. Euro-Americans deemed Comanches needy, pushy, oversensitive, and obstinate in their pagan beliefs, and in turn appeared greedy, arrogant, bigoted, and grotesquely boorish to Comanche sensibilities. In the end, most attempts at

meaningful cross-cultural mediation crumbled against the insolence of Euro-Americans and the impatience of Comanches. Negotiating from a position of growing physical and political power, Comanches adopted an increasingly assertive stance toward colonial powers. Their foreign policy became less a matter of accommodating Euro-American expectations than rejecting, reforming, or simply ignoring them.[11]

Viewed broadly, the Southwest under the Comanche regime becomes a case study of alternative frontier history. From a Comanche point of view, in fact, there were no frontiers. Where contemporary Euro-Americans (as well as later historians) saw or imagined solid imperial demarcations, Comanches saw multiple opportunities for commerce, gift exchanges, pillaging, slave raiding, ransoming, adoption, tribute extracting, and alliance making. By refusing to accept the Western notion of sovereign, undivided colonial realms, they shredded Euro-American frontiers into their component parts—colonial towns, presidios, missions, ranches, haciendas, Native villages—and dealt with each isolated unit separately, often pitting their interests against one another. In the colonial Southwest, it was Comanches, not Euro-Americans, who mastered the policies of divide and rule.

Similarly, Comanches' assertive and aggressive policies toward Euro-Americans were only secondarily a borderland product. Comanches certainly benefited from their location between competing colonial regimes, but they had little in common with the Indians found in most borderland histories. Rather than marginalized people balancing between rival colonial regimes to enact minor alleviations in imperial policies, Comanches were key players who often forced the would-be colonizers to compete for *their* military support and goodwill and navigate *their* initiatives and intentions. In character and logic, the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Southwest was unequivocally a Comanche creation, an indigenous world where intercolonial rivalries were often mere surface disturbances on the deeper, stronger undercurrent of Comanche imperialism.

In popular imagination, the American Southwest before the United States takeover in 1848 is a study in imperial failure. The overstretched and stiflingly bureaucratic Spanish empire, with its North American headquarters in Mexico City, had spread its resources too thinly across the Western Hemisphere to affix its northernmost provinces firmly into its imperial structure. The French, while more resourceful than their myopic Spanish rivals, were too erratic and too preoccupied with Old World power politics, the British colonies, and Canadian fur trade to do anything imperially impressive with Louisiana or the western interior. The fledgling Mexican Republic was so fragile and fractious that it lost

both New Mexico and Texas in less than three decades. Reduced to a caricature, the Southwest of the mainstream view appears a medley of politically weak and isolated Native tribes, exhausted empires, and dysfunctional republics, a fragmented world ripe to be absorbed by Anglo Americans who alone possessed the imagination, drive, and means to subjugate and control vast regions.[12] If weighed against such a background of imperial indifference and political impotence, Comanches' accomplishments would seem to diminish in significance: their ascendancy intersected with exceptional Euro-American vulnerability, and they became a dominant power by default.

I start with a different premise—far from an imperial backwater, the Southwest was a dynamic world of vibrant societies, and Comanches had to suppress and absorb vigorous imperial projects to achieve dominance—and draw on a string of pathbreaking studies that have given the history of the early Southwest a new look. Dismantling the long-standing stereotype of reactionary and unimaginative Spanish colonists, David Weber has demonstrated how high-ranking authorities in central Mexico and local officials in New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana constantly and creatively modified the empire's frontier policies to extend Spanish claims and power into the heart of North America. That same political and strategic dynamism, Weber has further shown, defined the Mexican Southwest, although the infant republic lacked the resources and expansionist ambitions of the Spanish empire. Ross Frank has demonstrated that Bourbon-era New Mexico was more tightly integrated into New Spain's imperial centers and consequently more dynamic and prosperous than has been assumed, and Andrés Reséndez has revealed a robust Mexican nation-building project in the north after 1821. Ned Blackhawk has drawn attention to the Spaniards' enormous capacity to employ—and endure—violence in advancing their imperial interests. In revisiting the history of the Comanches, ethnohistorians like Morris Foster and Thomas Kavanagh have dispelled the stereotype of a simple hunting society by uncovering elaborate political systems, social institutions, trade networks, and pastoral herding economies. Together, these and other new studies have demolished the old image of the Southwest as a world of innately passive peoples, frozen in time and disconnected from the main currents of American history.[13]

Historians have also begun to create new syntheses that illustrate how this rediscovered human ambition, energy, and ingenuity shaped the evolution of cross-cultural relations in the Southwest. Gary Clayton Anderson has examined the region as a contested and culturally elastic meeting ground where many Native groups resisted conquest through ethnogenesis, by constantly reshaping their economies, societies, and identities. In a seminal study, James Brooks has

recast the region as an ethnic mosaic connected by an intercultural exchange network that revolved around "kinship slavery" and blended indigenous and colonial traditions of servitude, violence, male honor, and retribution into a distinctive borderlands cultural economy. With such insights, the Southwest is now emerging as a vigorous world of enduring social subversion where Natives and newcomers remained roughly equal in power and where familiar dichotomies of Indians and Europeans, or masters and victims, often became meaningless.[14]

I also take a broad long-term look at intercultural relationships in the Southwest but draw a distinctive, two-pronged conclusion. I show how Comanches cooperated and compromised with other peoples but also argue that their relations with the Spaniards, Mexicans, Wichitas, and others remained grounded in conflict and exploitation. Comanchería's borders were sites of mutualistic trade and cultural fusion, but they were also sites of extortion, systematic violence, coerced exchange, political manipulation, and hardening racial attitudes. The key difference between the existing studies and this book centers on the question of power and its distribution. According to Brooks's landmark *Captives and Cousins*, for example, the intricate patterns of raiding, exchange, and captive-seizure knitted disparate peoples into intimate webs of interdependence, equalized wealth distinctions among groups, and worked against the emergence of asymmetrical power relations. The Southwest he—and others—portrays was a place of nondominant frontiers where neither colonists nor Natives possessed the power to rule over the other. My argument, in a sense, is more traditional: such actions as raiding, enslaving, ethnic absorption, and even exchange generally benefit some groups more than they do others. In the Southwest, moreover, that process toward inequality was a cumulative one. Once the Comanches secured their territorial control over the southern plains in the mid-eighteenth century, they entered into a spiral of growing power and influence that stemmed from their ability to extract political and material benefits from the urban-based societies in New Mexico, Texas, and the Great Plains.[15]

The conspicuous differences between earlier studies and this book rise from different conceptual framing and scaling. Recent works on Indian–Euro-American relations in the Southwest—as in North America in general—share a particular focus: they look at events through a local lens, stressing individual and small-group agency over the larger structural forces. Suffused with subaltern interpretations, they tend to focus on the fringe peoples living on the frontiers' edges and trace how they engaged in cross-cultural dialogue and came together to form new hybrid communities, gradually shading into one another. Occupied with the local, the specific, and the particular, they are less concerned with the broader political, economic, and cultural struggles. Hierarchies of power, privi-

lege, and wealth, while not ignored, are relegated to the background of the central story of cross-cultural cooperation and assimilation.[16]

In this book, in contrast, I examine the inhabitants of the Southwest in larger aggregates. While recognizing that ethnic and cultural boundaries were often porous, I look at those peoples as they identified and understood themselves: as distinct groups of Apaches, Comanches, Spaniards, French, Mexicans, and Anglo-Americans. With this shift in frame and focus, local arrangements may become somewhat blurred and lose some of their primacy, but the broader panorama opens a clearer view to the governing macroscale dynamics. It shows that the American Southwest, for all its wide-ranging cultural mixing, remained a polarized world where disparate ethnic groups clashed and competed bitterly with one another, where inequities of wealth and opportunity remained a tangible fact of life, and where resources, people, and power gravitated toward Comanchería.[17]

Besides adjusting the analytical scale, the reconstruction of Comanche power has entailed a basic visual reorientation. Instead of looking at events from colonial frontiers inward—a traditional approach that inevitably ties explanations to contemporary Western biases—this book looks at developments from Comanchería outward. Viewed from this angle, Comanche actions take on new shape and meaning. Acts that previously seemed arbitrary or impulsive fall into coherent patterns with their own internal logic and purpose. A foreign policy that previously appeared an opportunistic search for microlevel openings on white-controlled imperial frontiers now emerges as planned, synchronized, and domineering. We see how Comanches did not merely frequent colonial markets; they fashioned an imposing trading empire that mantled much of the Southwest and the Great Plains. They did not merely respond to political initiatives dictated from abroad, but actively sought and stipulated treaties. Far from being situational opportunists, they fused exchange, organized pilfering, and targeted destruction into a complex economy of violence, which allowed them to simultaneously enforce favorable trade agreements, create artificial demand for their exports, extort tribute payments from colonial outposts, and fuel a massive trade network with stolen horses, captives, and other marketable commodities. Seen from Mexico City, the far north often seemed chaotic and unsettling; seen from Comanchería, it appears nuanced, orderly, and reassuring.

Understanding Comanches' rise to power requires more than unearthing previously veiled patterns and structures: it also requires describing events and developments on Comanche terms. To capture the fundamental nature of the Comanche empire, we need to uncover meanings behind words, motives behind

actions, strategies behind policies, and, eventually, the cultural order that drove it all. This, however, is a daunting task because the available sources do not readily lend themselves to deep cultural analysis. Euro-American colonial records, the documentary spine of this book, address virtually every aspect of Comanche political economy from warfare, exchange, and diplomacy to material production, slavery, and social relations, but although the records are rich in depiction and detail, the picture they yield is nevertheless the one-dimensional view of an outsider. Government reports, captivity narratives, travelers' journals, and traders' accounts tell us a great deal about Comanche actions but rarely shed light on the cultural motives behind those actions. Few contemporary observers possessed the analytical tools to understand the subtleties between Native and non-Native cultural logic, and even fewer possessed the ability—or the inclination—to write down what they learned. The available sources are thus almost invariably infected with gaps, accidental misreadings, and intentional misconstructions, leaving historians to work with material that is fragmentary at best and outright erroneous at worst.

In my endeavor to recover Comanche motives and meanings from the flawed evidence, I have employed an array of historical and ethnohistorical methods. I have prioritized accounts that recount, even in a mutated form, Comanche voice—while keeping in mind that that voice is recorded through a cultural colander and that it belongs often to privileged headmen, seldom to the poor and deprived, and virtually never to women and the young. I have cross-checked Spanish, French, Mexican, and Anglo-American documents against one another to create more stereoscopic and, arguably, more accurate portrayals of Comanche intentions and objectives. Throughout the writing process, I have compared historical documents to ethnographic data, processing Euro-American-produced materials through an ethnohistorical filter. This has involved a cautious use of "upstreaming" whereby one works back from more recent and more complete ethnological observations to decipher practices and behaviors of earlier periods. Even more reluctantly, I have sometimes relied on "side-streaming," deducing interpretations about Comanche cultural values from generalized models of Native societies of the Great Plains and other regions.[18]

This kind of methodological layering and rotation of viewpoints helps outline the broad contours of Comanche cultural order, but the resulting picture is still only an approximate one. Regardless of their origin, all colonial records are marred with similar deep-seated biases, while upstreaming runs the risk of presentism, tainting analysis with a sense of static timelessness; it assumes that Native peoples and their traditions have somehow been immune to modernity and have somehow remained unchanged through centuries of dispossession,

population loss, and cultural genocide. Side-streaming threatens to submerge unique Comanche traits under crude blanket definitions of Indians in general and Plains Indians in particular. Shortcomings like these can produce what historian Frederick Hoxie has called "cookbook ethnohistory": complex cultures are collapsed into shorthand recipes, human behavior is reduced to a culturally or genetically determined reflex, and individual impulses become irrelevant. As an antidote against this kind of trivialization, Hoxie urges historians to describe societies in their own, inherently asymmetrical terms and create less linear stories that leave room for the surprising and the puzzling.[19]

Taking a cue from Hoxie, I have embraced rather than downplayed the contradictory aspects of Comanche behavior. The Comanches depicted in this book were empire-builders who did not possess a grand imperial strategy and conquerors who saw themselves more as guardians than governors of the land and its bounties. They were warriors who often favored barter over battle and traders who did not hesitate to rely on lethal violence to protect their interests. They were shrewd diplomats who at times eschewed formal political institutions and peacemakers who tortured enemies to demonstrate military and cultural supremacy. They were racially color-blind people who saw in almost every stranger a potential kinsperson, but they nevertheless built the largest slave economy in the colonial Southwest. Their war chiefs insulted, intimidated, and demeaned colonial agents with shockingly brutal words and gestures, but their peace leaders spoke eloquently of forgiveness, pity, and regret, using elaborate metaphors and ritual language to persuade their Euro-American counterparts. Above all, the Comanches were not a monolith obeying an unyielding cultural code but rather an assemblage of individuals with different and sometimes conflicting personalities, interests, and ambitions. They shared certain core values and objectives, but they also disagreed and quarreled over the methods, goals, and costs of their policies. The Comanche society, in short, was a complex one in which several standards of conduct coexisted simultaneously.

Historian Bruce Trigger has explained Native American behavior from a slightly different angle than Hoxie by focusing on the underlying mental processes of learning, judging, and reasoning. Assuming a middle course in the long, drawn-out debates over cross-cultural variations in human motivations, Trigger argues that while traditional cultural beliefs continued to shape Native American responses to European contact and colonialism, in the long run more universal pragmatic assessments and calculations came to play a dominant role. This kind of cognitive reorganization, Trigger maintains, occurred at all levels of behavior but was most visible in those areas that relate more directly to Indians' material well-being—technology and power. For Trigger, the outcome of colonial contact was not a makeover of Native Americans into "universal economic men," nor was it an unyielding persistence of otherness.[20]

Following Trigger, I pay particular attention to the changes that occurred over time in the underlying principles of Comanche behavior. The introduction of horses, guns, and other Old World technology arguably prompted Comanches to view their place and possibilities in the world in a different light, while close political and commercial interactions with colonial powers exposed them to the logic and laws of European diplomacy and the market. Comanches may have initially perceived European goods through the mold of their idiosyncratic traditions, but that did not prevent them from grasping the tremendous military and material advantages of horses, firearms, and metal—or from employing those advantages against Euro-Americans themselves. Similarly, like many other indigenous peoples, Comanches may have at first viewed the mounted, gun-using newcomers as all-powerful otherworldly beings, yet within years they learned to manipulate the Spaniards' all-too-human weaknesses to their own advantage. Within a generation or so after the first contact, Comanches had learned to distinguish between the motives and methods of the different colonial powers and to exploit those differences to advance their own political and economic agendas. Grounded in utilitarian calculations of self-interest, such behavior was rational in the sense most contemporary Euro-Americans and later historians would have understood the term.

And yet the yawning gulf separating Comanche and Euro-American cultural and mental worlds never disappeared—far from it. Regardless of their universal features, the actions and policies of Comanches remained embedded in a system of reality that was distinctly non-Western in nature. To the limited extent that it is possible to unveil the intentions that went into the actions of eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century Indians, it seems plain that the rationale of Comanche behavior remained worlds apart from that of Euro-Americans.

On the face of it, Comanche actions fell into unambiguous categories—trading, raiding, enslaving, and so forth—that were easily recognizable and understandable to contemporary Euro-Americans and modern historians alike. But the similarities are only skin deep; a more focused look reveals how Comanche actions time and again transcended familiar categories and defied easy labeling. Unlike Euro-Americans, Comanches did not separate trade from larger social relations but instead understood it as a form of sharing between relatives, either real or fictive. They considered theft a legitimate way of rectifying short-term imbalances in resource distribution rather than an antagonistic act that automatically canceled out future peaceful interactions. They killed, waged war, and dispossessed other societies, not necessarily to conquer, but to extract ven-

geance and to appease the spirits of their slain kin through dead enemy bodies. Capturing people from other ethnic groups did not necessarily signify a passage from freedom into slavery but a move from one kinship network to another. Even gift giving, the leitmotif of American Indian diplomacy, contained what appears at least on the surface a striking contradiction. Like most American Indians, Comanches considered gift exchanges a prerequisite for peaceful relations, yet they demanded one-sided gift distributions from Euro-American colonists, readily relying on violence if denied.[21]

Like many other imperial powers, then, Comanches employed aggressive power politics without necessarily considering their actions as such. They built a hierarchical intersocietal system with policies that were often geared toward securing gifts, conciliation, reciprocal services, and new relatives from peoples whom they may have considered as much kin and allies as strangers and enemies. Indeed, the fact that Comanches did things differently may well have been one of their greatest political assets. Their ability to move nimbly from raiding to trading, from diplomacy to violence, and from enslaving to adoption not only left their colonial rivals confused; it often left them helpless. Western insistence upon uniformity in principle and action, a disposition that manifested itself most clearly in centralized state bureaucracies, rendered their policies slow and heavy-handed in comparison to Comanches' strategic fluidity. Euro-Americans compartmentalized foreign relations into distinct, often mutually exclusive categories and found it exceedingly difficult to deal with peoples who refused to recognize such categories. Unable to dissect, classify, and comprehend the Comanches and their actions, colonial agents were also unable to contain them.

Herein lay the ultimate paradox. While initially Comanches adjusted their traditions, behaviors, and even beliefs to accommodate the arrival of Europeans and their technologies, they later turned the tables on Europe's colonial expansion by simply refusing to change. By preserving the essentials of their traditional ways—and by expecting others to conform to their cultural order—they forced the colonists to adjust to a world that was foreign, uncontrollable, and, increasingly, unlivable.

The chapters that follow tell two intertwined stories. The first story examines cross-cultural relations on the southern plains, in the Southwest, and in northern Mexico from the perspective of Comanches, exploring how this nation rose to dominance and how it constantly reinvented itself to sustain external expansion. The other story looks at events from the standpoint of the Spaniards, Mexicans, Apaches, and others who variously competed and cooperated with the Comanches but ultimately faced marginalization and dispossession in the

Comanche-controlled world. These two stories are woven into a single narrative thread, which in turn is embedded within the broader framework of Europe's overseas expansion. This contextual approach shows how local, regional, and global forces intersected to shape Comanche expansion and how Comanches both suffered and benefited from fluctuations and contingencies in the emerging transatlantic world. Comanche expansion lasted for a century and a half, but it was not a linear, uninterrupted process. There were surges, lulls, retreats, and regroupings, and the Comanche power complex went through repeated mutations, many of them epochs unto themselves. The chapters that follow are organized around those shifts and cycles, which both reflect and challenge the more traditional historical turning points in American history.

4

The Empire of the Plains

The first half of the nineteenth century was the era of American imperial expansion in the Southwest. Powered by burgeoning industrial, technological, and demographic growth and roused by the chauvinistic nationalism of Manifest Destiny, the United States purchased, fought, and annexed its way from the Mississippi valley to the Río Grande, infringing Spain's imperial claims, sweeping aside the Mexican Republic, and dispossessing dozens of indigenous societies. This expansion was set in motion in 1803 by the Louisiana Purchase, which roughly doubled the size of the nation, and was followed, in rapid succession, by the founding of the Anglo-dominated Republic of Texas in 1836, the annexation of that republic nine years later, and the market incorporation of Mexican New Mexico. The expansion culminated in the Mexican-American War in 1846–48, in the aftermath of which the United States bought New Mexico and California for fifteen million dollars and extended its territory to the Río Grande by assuming responsibility for the three million dollars its citizens claimed against Mexico. Finally, in 1853, the United States purchased a strip of land south of the Gila River from Mexico, thereby stretching its border to what today are southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico.

But growing American power alone does not define this era, for it also saw Comanches resuming their expansionist thrust. Intensifying and elaborating the foreign political strategies that had fueled their expansion before the hiatus of the mid-1780s, Comanches built in the early nineteenth century a loose but imposing empire on the southern plains and in the Southwest, in conjunction with the emerging American empire. In the late 1840s, just as the United States prepared to oust Mexico from the Southwest by war, Comanches reached the

zenith of their power. They had revived their defunct trade and alliance network and expanded it into a vast commercial empire, which allowed them to integrate foreign economies into their market circuits and control the flow of crucial commodities on the lower midcontinent. They had halted the expansionist Texas in its tracks and carved out a vast raiding domain in northern Mexico. They held several nearby peoples in a state of virtual servitude and their market-oriented and slavery-driven economy was booming. Comanchería itself had transformed into a dynamic, multiethnic imperial core that absorbed large numbers of voluntary immigrants from the weaker societies and radiated cultural influences across the midcontinent. Like the imperial Americans, Comanches were powerful actors who had the capacity to remake societies and reshape histories.

That may sound implausible. How could one region, even one as broad as the Southwest, accommodate two simultaneous and successful imperial projects? Would not the expansion of one power inevitably impinge upon, and eventually cancel out, the expansion of the other? But such traditional zero-sum logic does not necessarily apply to the early nineteenth-century Southwest, because the Comanche and U.S. expansions stemmed from disparate impulses and advanced on divergent levels. Comanche power politics were aimed at expanding the nation's access to hunting grounds, trading outlets, tributary gifts, and slaves, whereas U.S. expansion, shaped by a bitter sectional dispute over slavery, focused on securing formal territorial claims and extending the nation's boundary to the Pacific. Comanches desired the resources of the land, Americans wanted legal titles to it. Distinct in their objectives and strategies, Comanche and U.S. expansions posed a fatal threat to neither. In fact, as I argue in the next two chapters, the parallel expansions did not so much clash as *co-evolve*, feeding on one another's successes.

In this and the following chapter I flesh out the form and function of the Comanche empire, here examining Comanches' political, economic, and cultural power on the Great Plains, and in chapter 5 exploring their foreign policies in the Southwest. The chapters are based on the notion that U.S. expansion into the Southwest was built on a Comanche antecedent. Comanches are at the center of the story and the westward-pushing Americans remain in the sidelines, stepping in, often unknowingly, to seize territories that had already been subjugated and weakened by Comanches. The narrative does not ignore the vast imperial ambitions and resources of the United States, but it shows that the stunning success of American imperialism in the Southwest can be understood only if placed in the context of the indigenous imperialism that preceded it.

But in the beginning, at the turn of the eighteenth century, it seemed that the Southwest's imperial future belonged to neither the Comanches nor the United States. New Spain, revitalized by the Bourbon Reforms and bolstered by a dynamic Indian policy, was determined to control the region and its peoples. Spanish officials envisioned a great imperial extension to the interior, and they pinned their hopes on the Comanche nation. Like the Iroquois to the British, the Comanches were to Bourbon Spain the Indian proxy through which a vast continental empire could be claimed and commanded.

In 1800 Spanish authorities in New Mexico and Texas thought they had a firm hold over the Comanche nation. Border fairs thrived across the frontier from Taos to Natchitoches, and Comanche delegations often stayed for weeks in Santa Fe and San Antonio, interacting freely with the Hispanic and Indian residents. As they collected the annual treaty presents, Comanche chiefs routinely renewed their allegiance to New Spain, projecting the image of devoted allies. "In this tribe," New Mexico Governor Fernando de la Concha wrote in 1794, "one finds faith in the treaties that it acknowledges, true constancy, and hospitality, and modest customs. . . . The need for which we make them liberal grants of arms and ammunition makes them dependent upon us." Deplored as "inconstant and mistrustful" savages only a few years earlier, the Comanches were recast by early nineteenth-century Spanish officials into ideal allies, almost archetypal noble savages. Pedro Bautista Pino, New Mexico's representative in the Spanish Cortes, wrote a brief treatise on the "idea of the Comanche" in which he marveled at the "magnificent size," "graceful appearance," and "frank martial air" of a typical Comanche. After condemning the cruelty and obnoxiousness of the Apaches—the necessary dialectic counterpoint—Pino confidently declared that "the Comanche nation . . . would, with little effort on our part, unite with the Spaniards."[1]

For Spanish Texas, such a union was quite literally a matter of life and death, for it shielded the colony against Comanche raids, which had wreaked unimaginable havoc in the 1770s and early 1780s and nearly destroyed the all-important ranching industry. Ranching began to revive in the late eighteenth century under the Comanche peace, but the colonists lived in constant fear of renewed attacks. At a broader geostrategic level, the alliance with the Comanches shielded entire northern New Spain against a possible invasion from the young and expanding United States. In theory, the role of a buffer territory belonged to Louisiana, but that overextended, disjointed colony was utterly incapable of meeting the challenge. In fact, Louisiana had become more a magnet than a barrier for footloose Americans in the late eighteenth century when Spanish officials, after having failed to people the province with immigrants from other Spanish colonies, opened its borders to American settlers. By 1795 Madrid had concluded that at-

tempts to defend Louisiana from American takeover were futile and started the preparations for selling the money-draining colony to France. While Bourbon officials played the imperial board game with Louisiana, the role of buffer fell once again to Texas. To fulfill its lofty mission, the relatively sparsely populated colony needed to keep a critical mass of Indians under its influence in order to create a barrier of pro-Spanish Natives that would help offset growing American power. The alliance with the eastern Comanches, by far the most powerful Native group on the Texas borderlands, was the focal point of that barrier.[2]

But the Comanche alliance was more precarious than Spanish officials believed. Eastern Comanches—like their relatives in western Comanchería—had never given Spain the kind of loyalty Bourbon administrators expected from them. They offered the Spaniards their amity but not their compliance. They traded with the Spaniards and accepted their treaty presents, but they jealously guarded their political autonomy. This had begun to dawn on Spanish officials almost immediately after the 1785–86 treaties. Comanches refused to return Hispanic captives without ransom, turned down requests to participate in joint military campaigns that did not advance their interests, and made unauthorized raids into Apache reservations, jeopardizing the delicate peace process between Apaches and Spaniards. Such actions tested the consistency and limits of the alliance, but Spanish officials, careful not to alienate their vital allies, routinely ignored or forgave the transgressions. Indeed, Jacobo Ugarte, the commanding general of the Interior Provinces, had specifically advised the governor of New Mexico that "a case can occur in which it may be convenient to use clemency even when the crime has been committed against ourselves . . . when inflexibility on the part of your lordship could cause some important altercation. Prudence requires then that indulgence be preferred to satisfaction for the injury."[3]

A more subtle but ultimately more serious challenge to the Comanche-Spanish alliance emerged in the late 1790s, when American merchants and agents operating out of Spanish Louisiana began to push into the southern plains. Evading Louisiana's Spanish officials—and sometimes cooperating with them—itinerant American traders infiltrated the contested borderland space between Spanish Texas and the United States and then proceeded toward eastern Comanchería. Americans' arrival constituted a litmus test for the pact between eastern Comanches and Texas, for the treaty of 1785 had anticipated the United States' westward thrust and explicitly prohibited Comanches from dealing with American agents. Spanish officials expected eastern Comanches to honor the treaty, remain loyal to Texas, and banish the intruders. They expected that not only because Comanches had signed a political contract but also because Spanish gifts and generosity obliged them to do so.

The Americans, however, did not come as conquerors carrying guns and banners but as merchants carrying goods and gifts, and eastern Comanches eagerly embraced them as potential trading partners. Comanches simply viewed the linkage between presents and politics differently from Spaniards. Gifts, Bourbon administrators insisted, were contractual objects that created a political bond, an exclusive bilateral union, whereas for Comanches the meaning of gifts was primarily of a social nature. Bourbon officials insisted that Spanish gifts should forbid Comanches from trading with foreign nations, but this was a narrow interpretation of loyalty and friendship that did not easily translate into the Comanche worldview. If foreigners—American, French, or any other kind—who entered Comanchería were willing to adhere to Comanche customs and expectations, Comanches had no reason to reject them. Indeed, as the pages that follow will show, by demanding eastern Comanches to choose between devotion to Spain and hospitality to Americans, Texas officials eventually wrecked their alliance with the Comanche nation.

And so, by simply letting American newcomers in, eastern Comanches began to turn away from their fledgling, uneasy alliance with Spain and toward American markets and wealth. It was a momentous shift that changed the history of the Southwest. By establishing exchange ties with Americans, and by linking their pastoral horse-bison economy to the emerging capitalist economy of the United States, eastern Comanches set off a sustained commercial expansion that eventually swept across Comanchería. Spanish officials were slow to recognize this change and even slower to react to it. When José Cortés applauded Comanches' loyalty to Spain in 1799, eastern Comanches were already engaged in an active trade with the westering Americans, and when Pino echoed Cortés's praise thirteen years later, eastern Comanches had already turned their rancherías into a thriving gateway between the Southwest and the U.S. markets. By the time the Spanish colonial era came to an end in 1821, the entire Comanche nation had moved out of the Spanish orbit. They commanded a vast commercial empire that encompassed the Great Plains from the Río Grande valley to the Mississippi and Missouri river valleys, and they looked to the north and east for markets, wealth, allies, and power.

The first known American to test Comanchería's commercial waters was Philip Nolan, an aspiring Kentucky entrepreneur who had immigrated to New Orleans in the late 1780s, only to realize that greater economic opportunities loomed on the Great Pains to the west. He secured in 1791 a passport from Louisiana's governor to catch wild horses in Texas and during the next ten years led five major forays to the west, often setting out from Nacogdoches, a Texas-

Louisiana border town that developed into a major hub of contraband trade soon after its founding in 1779. Nolan carried large numbers of horses to Louisiana's markets and militia troops, but he also traded extensively with the Indians of the southern plains. In 1799 he returned with twelve hundred wild and Indian horses, infecting Natchez and other frontier settlements with a trading fever that sent large numbers of American merchants to the plains. But Nolan's activities also had political underpinnings. He was the protégé of General James Wilkinson, onetime Spanish spy and from 1798 on the commander of the U.S. Army's Southern Department. Although still conspiring with Spanish agents, Wilkinson keenly promoted U.S. exploration and filibustering in the Southwest under the sponsorship of Vice President Thomas Jefferson.[4]

Realizing the mistake they had made by admitting Nolan, Spanish officials stopped issuing passports by 1799, but neither that nor Nolan's death at the hands of Spanish troops in 1801 deterred the westward-pushing Americans who received strong support from Wilkinson and Washington, D.C. This support only intensified after the Louisiana Purchase, which left the boundary between Spanish Texas and U.S. Louisiana undetermined and, as Americans saw it, up for grabs. The 1806 Neutral Ground Agreement, in which Wilkinson and Lieutenant Colonel Simón de Herrera declared a demilitarized neutral zone between the Sabine River and the Arroyo Hondo near Natchitoches, only added to the confusion and contestation. Quietly urged on by Wilkinson—from 1805 the governor of the newly organized Louisiana Territory—and other U.S. agents, several American trading parties and individual merchants pushed into the disputed Red and Brazos river countries in the early years of the nineteenth century.[5]

Viewed from the Mississippi valley, the westward thrust of American traders gave rise to the "Texas Trading Frontier," a zone of bustling commercial activity stretching from the Arkansas River to the Gulf Coast. For eastern Comanches, however, the U.S. commercial expansion did not constitute anything as dramatic as a new frontier. Rather, it caused their old rivalry with the Wichitas over trading privileges to flare up. Earlier, in the late 1770s, eastern Comanches had been on the verge of replacing the Wichita confederacy as trade gateway to the Texas plains, but they had eased their pressure in the 1780s when smallpox devastated their rancherías and when the revolutionary convulsions in the East disrupted westbound trade from the Mississippi valley. By the late 1780s, Comanches were again interacting and trading peacefully with the Wichitas. The cessation of Comanche aggression allowed Wichitas to regain their former strength, and when American traders arrived, they were once more in the position to dominate the east-west commerce. From the late 1790s on, U.S. traders visited the Wichita villages along the Red River on an annual basis, bringing in

guns, metal weapons, and clothing; exchanging gifts; and creating strong political and kinship bonds.[6]

As in the 1770s, Wichitas locked the Comanches out of eastern markets, and as before, they demanded what Comanches considered excessive prices for serving as middleman traders. Unlike in the 1770s, however, Comanches were reluctant to rely on force, largely because an ominous military situation had developed on their northeastern border: the Osages had embarked on yet another expansionist round. This time, however, Osages' aggression in the west was triggered by their dispossession in the east. In the 1790s the expansion of Anglo-American settler frontiers in the Southeast exiled large numbers of Choctaws, Cherokees, Delawares, and Shawnees west of the Mississippi, where they clashed violently with Osages, forcing several villages to relocate closer to Comanchería. At the same time, Spain's liberal immigration policy in Louisiana lured thousands of Kentuckians and Tennesseans to the lower Missouri valley, where they established farmsteads on traditional Osage hunting grounds, compelling many Osages to withdraw toward Comanche and Wichita lands. Restraining these Osage encroachments remained a strategic priority for eastern Comanches through the 1830s and they needed Wichitas' military and material assistance to manage the task.[7]

Rather than trying to break the Wichita trade barrier with force, therefore, Comanches attempted to circumvent it through diplomacy. They rebuilt their alliance with the Wichitas during the 1790s and peacefully visited their villages for trade. Then, in 1807, they dispatched a large delegation to Natchitoches, the westernmost U.S. settlement within the Louisiana Purchase, hoping to persuade the agents to send traders among them. The delegation was enthusiastically welcomed by Doctor John Sibley, the Indian agent of "Orleans Territory and the region South of the Arkansas River," who had been commissioned by Congress to sweep the southern plains Indians from the Spanish orbit into the American one. Armed with a lavish budget of three thousand dollars to win over the Natives, Sibley staged a series of ritual performances to display the wealth, munificence, and attentiveness of the Americans. He gratified the Comanche visitors with guns, powder, lead, vermilion, blankets, metal gear, and officers' uniforms. Then, in the presence of Comanche, Wichita, Caddo, and Tonkawa headmen and with the "Calumet & Council fire lighted," he delivered a remarkable speech in which, through expedient historical amnesia, he claimed nativeness for Americans. "It is now so long since our Ancestors came from beyond the great Water that we have no remembrance of it," he asserted. "We ourselves are Natives of the Same land that you are, in other words white Indians, we therefore Should feel & live together like brothers & Good Neighbours." He also ad-

dressed the larger geopolitical context: "we are not at war with Spain, we therefore do not wish, or Ask you to be less their friends for being Ours, the World is wide enough for us all, and we Ought all of us to live in it like brothers."[8]

By proclaiming his readiness to treat Comanches as kin, by refraining from interfering with the relations between Comanches and Spaniards, and by exhibiting exceptional largesse, Sibley demonstrated the Americans' willingness to conform to the Comanche cultural order. One of the Comanche chiefs responded to him, declaring that he was "highly pleas'd" to see the Americans, "our New Neighbours." The practical matter of trade, however, was foremost in the Comanche agenda, and the chief promptly moved to explain how Comanches' desire for European technology created ready markets for American goods: "we are in want of Merchandize and Shall be Always Glad to trade with you on friendly terms. . . . You have every thing we want."[9]

Those wants were stimulated not only by the guns and powder that helped Comanches cordon off the Osages and other enemies. Having used European technology for generations, they had come to rely on its availability and consumption in countless everyday activities; from cutting meat to cooking it, and from keeping their bodies warm to beautifying them, they had grown dependent on imported products. Spanish Texas had failed to meet their expansive and complicated needs, and eastern Comanches now put their trust in the United States. To press the point to Sibley, Comanches let him understand that Spaniards had "imposed" their trade on the Comanches. Two months later, another Comanche party visited Natchitoches, hoping to jumpstart commerce. The head of the delegation (whose name went unrecorded) promised Sibley that American traders would "be well treated" and find the longer journeys to Comanche rancherías well worth the effort, because "Horses & Mules were to them like grass they had them in Such plenty," and because "they had likewise dress'd Buffalo Skins & knew where there was Silver Ore plenty."[10]

Eastern Comanches thus aggressively sought market relations with the United States and appeared to be willing to sacrifice their alliance with Spain to achieve their goal. One of their chiefs, Sibley exulted, had laid a Spanish flag at his feet, declaring that Comanches "were very desirous of having Our Flag and it was the Same to them whether Spain was pleas'd or displeas'd and if I would give him One it Should wave through all the Hietan Nation, and they would all die in defence of it before they would part with it." This, Sibley argued, was no small feat, for the Comanches dominated all lands from the vicinity of San Antonio to the Missouri River and, along the east-west axis, from the Wichita villages far beyond the Rocky Mountains. But Sibley's euphoria over his coup conceals a more somber reality. He had been assigned to persuade the Indians to shift

their loyalties from New Spain to the United States, but it was starting to seem that it was the Comanches who were calling the shots: they were pulling the United States westward into their vast sphere of power, which the Americans could barely comprehend let alone manipulate. Indeed, Wilkinson himself had argued two years earlier that if the United States hoped to win a foothold in the Southwest, it could happen only by forming a treaty with the Comanches, "the most powerfull Nation of Savages on this Continent [who] have in their power to facilitate or impede our march to New Mexico, should such movement ever become Necessary."[11]

In summer 1808, accordingly, Sibley outfitted and licensed Anthony Glass, a prominent Louisiana merchant, to lead an expedition of eleven men to the Red River country. Glass spent two months in the Wichita trading villages on the Red River, but in the late fall he decided to proceed farther west among the Comanches. Clinging to their privileged position, Wichitas first begged Americans not to proceed and then tried to misdirect their reconnaissance party away from Comanche rancherías. Glass and his men pushed forward, however, and had a profitable trading season in Comanchería. Moving from one ranchería to another, the Glass party was transformed into a movable fair that increased steadily in size as more Comanches joined the assembly. In the space of a month, Glass's mobile marketplace hosted several hundred Comanches who purchased all the goods the Americans had to offer. Glass's success lured in other American trader-agents, who were eager to tap into Comanchería's vast commercial potential. In 1810 Americans were reported to be operating a trading settlement on the Colorado River and interacting with several prominent eastern Comanche leaders.[12]

American merchants had thus already begun to bypass Wichita villages and move their operations into Comanchería when, in 1811, the Wichita confederacy suffered a paralyzing blow. Awahakei, longtime principal chief of the confederacy, died in a battle against the Osages. Unable to agree on Awahakei's successor and suffering under Osage pressure from the north, Wichitas abandoned their Red River villages and scattered across the southern prairies. Some moved westward and sought refuge among the Comanches, initiating a process of gradual merger of Comanche and Wichita communities. Other bands congregated into nine small villages along the Brazos, Navasota, and Trinity rivers and encircled themselves with large defensive dugouts and earthworks.[13]

As the Wichita blockade dissolved, Comanche commerce boomed. From the early 1810s on, American trading parties from the newly established state of Louisiana frequented eastern Comanche rancherías along the middle Red and Brazos rivers, now the focal point of U.S. commerce on the southern plains. In 1818, W. A. Trimble, commander of the western section of the 8th District of the

U.S. Army, reported that eastern Comanches "carry on, with traders from Red River, an extensive traffic, in horses and mules, which they catch in the plains or capture from the Spaniards." Another observer noted that eastern Comanches "are becoming quite expert in fire-arms within a few years, having been furnished by traders from the United States, by way of exchange, for horses and mules, which the Indians would, from time to time, plunder the Spanish settlements of." Governor Antonio Martínez of Texas, monitoring the developments from a different angle, reported in helpless frustration that "the traffic between the Comanches and the traders from the interior continues without interruption, and that arms, munitions, and other war supplies are being brought in."[14]

Comanches also established commercial ties with the Spanish-American filibusters and revolutionaries who, after a briefly successful revolt in Texas in 1812 and 1813, took refuge in Natchitoches, turning the frontier outpost into a quasi-autonomous political entity on the Comanche-Texas borderlands. Still determined to fight the Spanish regime, the refugee rebels began operating as middlemen between the Comanches and the American merchants, carrying guns, munitions, and powder to the west and horses and mules to the east. Nemesio Salcedo, commanding general of the Interior Provinces, lamented in 1813 that this contraband trade utterly undermined Spain's "national commerce" in Texas. By 1818, the traffic had created "a well worn road through the unsettled region towards Natchitoches."[15]

Then, in 1821, Spain's American empire collapsed, and the resulting confusion in the Southwest opened the floodgates for Comanche–U.S. commerce. Only a year later Stephen F. Austin reported that eastern Comanche rancherías had become the nexus point of three well-established trade routes that connected them to U.S. markets along the Mississippi valley. The northernmost route linked eastern Comanchería to St. Louis via a chain of Native middlemen traders. Below was the Red River channel, which funneled traders from Vicksburg, Natchez, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans into the heart of eastern Comanchería. The busiest of the trade routes was the southernmost one, leading from eastern Comanchería to Nacogdoches, which had nearly expired during the 1812–13 revolt in Texas and then, like Natchitoches, became a haven for American merchants and filibusters. With close ties to Natchitoches and New Orleans, Nacogdoches grew into a major trading community, boasting an annual trade of ninety thousand dollars in the early 1820s.[16]

The newly established Mexican government tried to keep American peddlers out of the land it considered Mexican soil, but controlling the porous Texas-Louisiana frontier was beyond its capacity. In 1823 two special investigators advised Mexico City to immediately deploy two hundred troops to Nacogdoches

to repel the burgeoning American contraband trade with Indians. The troops never came, and Anglo immigrants and merchants continued to pour into Nacogdoches and Comanchería. So lucrative was this illicit commerce that it attracted a large number of Yamparikas to relocate eastward. By the 1820s, those Comanche immigrants had assumed a new identity as Tenewas (Those Who Stay Downstream) and established a distinct political organization on the middle Red River, where they joined the eastern Kotsotekas in trading with the Americans.[17]

Eastern Comanche rancherías along the Red and Brazos rivers were now the gateway to and from the southern plains, a busy central place where the American homesteader frontier's seemingly inexhaustible demand for livestock met an equally boundless supply, the massive horse herds of the Southwest. Facing east, Comanche rancherías anchored an extensive, triangle-shaped hinterland that stretched across the southern prairies toward St. Louis and New Orleans and into the farms and plantations of Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Facing west, they were the tip of a wide-mouthed trade funnel that moved livestock toward eastern demand and wealth. As gateway traders, Comanches no longer had to travel to trade; they could simply wait in their rancherías for American trade convoys to arrive. This made a strong impression on the French scientist Jean Louis Berlandier, who visited Comanchería in the late 1820s, reporting how American traders "bring their merchandise right into the [Comanche] rancherías and . . . get from them not only the furs they have to sell, but also the mules and horses they have stolen from the townspeople [of Texas]."[18]

The eastern Comanche gateway also drew Native nations into its sphere. One such nation was the Panismahas, a three-thousand-member offshoot of the Pawnees that in the late eighteenth century had escaped Lakota expansion in the lower Missouri valley and fled to the middle Red River. Once relocated to the south, the Panismahas sought an alliance with the Wichitas, their linguistic and cultural relatives, but they soon gravitated toward the more powerful Comanches. They reportedly sent "600 well-armed men" to a peace ceremony in 1822, after which they began conducting regular trade journeys up the Red, Brazos, and Colorado rivers. Panismahas were a crucial addition to the Comanche trade network. While American traders furnished Comanches with guns, powder, shot, and clothing, Panismahas offered maize, squash, and other staple foods. Most important, Panismahas traded high-quality smoothbore British rifles, which they obtained from their Pawnee relatives, who in turn received the guns from British fur traders on the Missouri. Assessing eastern Comanches' commercial arrangements in the late 1820s, one visitor was struck by the complementary

nature of their trade links and the drawing power of their markets: "The Aguaje . . . sell guns made in Great Britain which are preferred by the Comanches. The Anglo-Americans supply the Comanches with ammunition. The Aguaje Indians come all the way to the Brazos River to deal with the Comanches. The latter do not visit the Aguaje settlements." According to another observer, the volume of this gun trade was enough to keep the Comanches "abundantly supplied with firearms" and make them "equally at home with the gun, the bow, and the lance."[19]

The eastern Comanche trade system operated steadily through the 1820s, but the next decade brought dramatic changes. With the passing of the Indian Removal Act in 1830, the United States government began a wholesale relocation of eastern Indians across the Mississippi valley—the proclaimed permanent Indian frontier—into Indian Territory in what today are Oklahoma and Kansas. The removal policy brought thousands of Indians into present-day Oklahoma and Kansas, creating a new and deeply volatile geopolitical entity on Comanchería's borders. The most populous of the transplanted peoples—the Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws—were placed in the southern and western sections of Indian Territory where, around the Wichita Mountains, their lands overlapped with Comanchería's eastern fringe. Hundreds of removed Cherokees, Delawares, Shawnees, and Kickapoos also moved across the Red River into Texas, where Mexican officials offered them legal land grants if they served as border sentinels to protect the province from Comanche raiders and to keep illegal American traders from entering Comanchería.[20]

A clash was immediate and, it seems, inevitable. Dismayed by the agricultural prospects in subhumid Oklahoma, many immigrant groups began to experiment with bison hunting. The westernmost bands of the Delawares, Kickapoos, and Shawnees developed a typical prairie economy of farming and foraging and started making regular hunting excursions to the plains, tapping into Comanchería's bison reserves. Comanches responded to these transgressions by attacking the intruders and by raiding deep into Indian Territory to exact revenge and to plunder maize, cattle, and captives. The death toll climbed on both sides. The fighting also disrupted the Comanche-American trade that had flourished for two decades on the southern plains. Unable to penetrate the wall of immigrant Indians and put off by the escalating violence, American traders gave up their ventures from the Mississippi valley into Comanchería.[21]

In moving across the Mississippi valley, the immigrant nations had encroached upon the Comanche realm but, more important, they had entered an ancient borderland where commercial gravity tended to pull peoples together. Their position between the livestock-rich Comanchería and the livestock-hungry Missouri and Arkansas territories invited the removed Indians to become middlemen who facilitated the movement of goods among the centers of wealth around them. Like the Wichitas, French, and Americans before them, several of the immigrant nations responded. A propitious diplomatic opportunity to attach themselves to the Comanche trade network opened to them in 1834 and 1835 when the U.S. government sponsored two large-scale political meetings among the Comanches, their allies, and the immigrant Indians, hoping to quell the violence that threatened to abort the entire Indian removal policy. In August 1835 some seven thousand Comanches and their Wichita allies gathered at Camp Holmes near the Canadian River, where nineteen Comanche chiefs signed a treaty and agreed to open their lands "west of the Cross Timber" to the immigrant tribes. In return, they expected trade.[22]

The immigrant Indians did not disappoint, and within a few years the border region between Comanchería and Indian Territory had become a site for thriving trade. Although uprooted and dislodged, the removed Indians could still generate impressive surpluses of manufactured and agricultural products, which they were keen to exchange for the plains products they needed to survive in their new homelands.[23] Comanches sponsored massive intertribal gatherings along the Red and Brazos rivers and on the Salt Plains of north-central Oklahoma, often sending messengers to Indian Territory to announce a forthcoming fair. Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole trading convoys frequented Comanche rancherías, bringing in maize, wheat, potatoes, tobacco, vermilion, wampum, beads, powder, lead, and government-issued rifles. In exchange, they received robes, skins, meat, salt, horses, and mules, a part of which they traded again to American settlers in Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Sometimes the seminomadic and more mobile Delawares, Kickapoos, and Shawnees served as intermediaries, moving commodities between Indian Territory and Comanchería. The thriving commerce also pulled more marginal groups to the Comanche orbit. Quapaws, who had found a refuge among the Cherokees, frequently attended the fairs, and in 1843 Omahas sent a trading delegation to eastern Comanchería from their villages in present-day Nebraska. Omahas were reported to have traded all their guns and bullets for Comanche horses, which they needed to defend themselves against the expanding Lakotas.

The dynamics of this exchange mirrored the direct Comanche-American trade it had supplanted, but there was an important new element: slave trade. The removed Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles had brought with them approximately five thousand black slaves, and the bondage institution persisted in Indian Territory as the planter-slaveholder elite set out to rebuild its exchange-oriented cotton and tobacco economy. This created secure

markets for Comanche slavers who now commanded extensive raiding domains in Texas and northern Mexico. More improvised than organized, the slave traffic offered multiple opportunities for its practitioners. Removed Indians purchased kidnapped Mexicans, Anglo-Americans, and black slaves from Comanches either to augment their own labor force or to resell them to American Indian agents, who generally ransomed the offered captives, especially if they had fair skin. At times Comanches bypassed the middlemen and took their captives directly to U.S. officials at Fort Gibson and other frontier posts, and sometimes they relied on comanchero intermediaries who then delivered the captives to American agents. Occasionally, Comanches even kidnapped black slaves from Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Creeks and then sold them to Delawares, Kickapoos, and Shawnees. They also captured black runaway slaves from Indian Territory and incorporated them into their ranks.[24]

Alongside the pacification of Comanche–eastern Indian relations, another critical peace process unfolded: eastern Comanches formed an alliance with the Osages with whom they had been at war since the early eighteenth century. The conciliation stemmed from Osages' suddenly plummeted fortunes. In the 1820s and early 1830s, after years of brutal fighting against the Cherokees, Osages surrendered most of their old homelands in present-day Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma and relocated their villages west, closer to Comanchería. Hemmed between two aggressive and expanding geopolitical entities—Comanchería and Indian Territory—Osages clustered in a narrow belt between the Verdigris and Arkansas rivers in northwestern Oklahoma. According to one observer, their diminished power was such an acute source of "anxiety" for Osages "that very often when they knew the Patoka [Comanches] were in the field around the Arkansas they changed the usual direction of their hunts in order not to cross this river, for on the other side they would be in a continuous state of warfare." Cornered and collapsing, Osages began to seek accommodation with the Comanches and found a diplomatic avenue in the peace talks the United States sponsored between the Comanches and the immigrant Indians. Comanche and Osage representatives met at Fort Gibson in 1834 and concluded a formal peace at Camp Holmes in 1835. "Half of my body belongs to the Osages and half to the Comanches," Comanche Chief Ishacoly declared at the council, evoking a sense of kinship between the long-standing enemies, "and the rest I will hold close to my heart."[25]

With peace came commerce. Eastern Comanches opened their eastern hunting ranges to Osages who in turn kept their access to the bison herds open by supplying their new allies with American goods. Although disease organisms and pressures from removed eastern Indians had eroded Osages' hegemony on the southern prairies, forcing them to abandon their old homelands near the Arkansas River, they still controlled trade at several American posts in Missouri. Like the immigrant Indians, Osages now became middlemen between U.S. and Comanche markets. In 1838 Victor Tixier, a French traveler, reported a flourishing exchange. Comanches, "no longer able to obtain any of the things manufactured by the whites . . . sought the friendship of the Osage, who had such frequent and easy dealings with the civilized people and obtained without difficulty what the Patoka needed. Trading was started after the war; every year the day of the full moon in July is the meeting time for the two nations. The Osage bring red paint, kitchen utensils, blankets, cloth, iron, and the Patoka give in return horses which they breed, mules stolen from Texans, all kinds of pelts, etc."[26]

Annual rendezvous were held at the junction of the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers and on the Big Salt River, a tributary of the Brazos, where in 1843 "the whole body" of the Comanches was reported to be waiting for Osage traders. The amount of goods exchanged at these meetings could be astounding. In 1845 the *Arkansas Intelligencer* reported that Osages had purchased twenty white captive children from Comanches, a transaction that would earn Osages several thousand dollars' worth of goods if they ransomed the children to American agents. Two years later Osages reportedly purchased fifteen hundred mules from eastern Comanches with a selection of guns, powder, ammunition, blankets, blue cloth, and strouding. The value of the transaction was estimated at sixty thousand dollars, several hundreds of thousands in modern equivalents. And as gateway traders, Comanches had yet another possibility for increasing profit margins; according to a U.S. Indian agent, they could resell Osage guns to their Mexican and Indian trading partners for three times the value. To put these transactions into perspective, the average annual volume of the Santa Fe trade, the largest single economic enterprise in the early nineteenth-century American West, was estimated in the 1840s at approximately two hundred thousand dollars.[27]

The stabilization of relations among Comanches, immigrant tribes, and Osages also made possible a restoration of direct commercial ties between eastern Comanches and Americans. As Comanchería's eastern border transformed from a contested into a commercial zone, American merchants returned. Among them were familiar itinerant traders like Josiah Gregg, but, unlike before, Americans now built permanent trading posts, hoping to tap into the booming commerce that was developing between the Comanches and their Native allies. Holland Coffee, an Anglo-Texan merchant, established a fortified trading house on the Red River just east of Comanchería and by the late 1830s traded regularly with Comanches, Cherokees, Choctaws, Delawares, and Shawnees. He was re-

ported to be handing munitions to Comanches on a daily basis and encouraging them to raid Mexican settlements for horses and mules. Auguste Chouteau, of the eminent St. Louis fur-trading family, built a post on the middle South Canadian River on Comanchería's eastern edge, and Abel Warren erected a trading house on Cache Creek within Comanchería's borders.[28]

The advent of these trading posts along and within Comanchería's borders opened a new chapter in the economic history of Comanches, the beginning of mass-scale market production of bison robes. The posts provided a secure outlet for hides, which found ready markets in Texas and the United States east of the Mississippi and were moved to those locations by regular supply trains. Comanches had traded bison meat and robes for generations, but that exchange had largely been limited to local subsistence bartering. Now Comanchería's bison became an animal of enterprise, slaughtered for its commodified hides and robes for distant industrial markets. It was not long before the herds started to show signs of overexploitation.[29]

If peace and commerce had undesired ecological ramifications, they also had unexpected and far-reaching geopolitical repercussions. Seen from the vantage point of Washington, D.C., the transformation of Comanchería's eastern front from a battlefield into a thriving trading zone meant that the removal of indigenous nations from the east into Indian Territory could continue. And with that, so too could continue the unrelenting westward march of the cotton kingdom and its settlement frontier.

In western Comanchería, meanwhile, a parallel commercial expansion was taking place, and as in eastern Comanchería, it was set off by the westward thrust of American merchants and markets. Trade between western Comanches and Americans probably began as an offshoot of eastern Comanche-American commerce: some of the Louisiana-based American traders who visited eastern Comanchería from the 1790s on continued farther west to open new markets for their products. But the upper western Comanche divisions, the Yamparikas and Jupes in the upper Arkansas basin, also attracted itinerant American traders directly from St. Louis and other settlements along the middle Mississippi and lower Missouri valleys. In 1796 a rumor reached Spanish officials in Natchitoches that a group of American traders had built a blockhouse among the Yamparikas, sparking fear that the United States was about to invade New Spain by way of Comanchería.[30]

The acquisition of Louisiana, which by Washington's sweeping interpretation extended all the way to the Río Grande and the Rockies, stirred up the

incipient American interest in the commercial possibilities of the Southwest. Scores of plains-bound American traders and Rockies-bound American trappers ascended the Arkansas, Canadian, and Red rivers into western Comanchería where their presence and products, especially guns and powder, were eagerly welcomed. Conducted under the watchful eye of Spanish officials, the burgeoning western Comanche–American trade became one of worst-kept secrets in the early nineteenth-century Southwest borderlands. In 1804, for example, Manuel Merino y Moreno, secretary of the Commandancy General of the Interior Provinces, reported that western Comanches bore guns with "markings that leave no doubt that they were manufactured in London"—a revealing sign of their connections to U.S. market circuits.[31]

Such reports alarmed the Spanish officials in Santa Fe who once again found themselves in the familiar quandary: a rival colonial power threatened Spanish interests by extending its commercial operations deep into Comanchería. Although American trade openly violated the 1786 treaty, Bourbon officials were reluctant to pressure the Comanches, fearing that force would push them closer to the United States. Instead, the officials kept the border fairs open and continued to offer favorable exchange rates and abundant gifts, hoping to retain whatever hold they could on the Comanches. Between 1790 and 1815 an average of some one hundred Comanches visited Santa Fe each year, collecting thousands of pesos worth of gifts. Comanche chiefs were provided with special guest quarters, and governors entertained Comanche elite at their table, serving them wine and sharing ritual food with them. The town maintained a general store where Comanches could purchase cloth, vermilion, and other luxuries, and the chiefs even received guns, which remained in short supply in New Mexico, as gifts.[32]

The presents, fairs, and favorable terms of exchange helped preserve diplomatic bonds between New Mexico and Comanchería, but on a more abstract level, they turned Spain's Indian policy into a caricature of its original intention. The gifts now had almost none of the meaning Spanish policymakers attributed to them. Rather than a political adhesive affixing Comanches to Spain as faithful allies, they became payments for loyalty Comanches were not willing to give. Yet, even against the mounting evidence, many Spanish officials refused to relinquish the idea of Comanche obedience. Writing in 1812, Pino insisted that "a continued state of peace and friendship of the greatest importance in checking other tribes has been the result of the small number of presents given them. At first the Comanches thought they had to reciprocate. They brought all the fine pelts they could collect in order to exceed the munificence of our presents.

When they were informed that favors given them in the name of our king should not be returned, they were greatly astonished. Thus they were placed under obligation to us."[33]

Pino's account underlines the unrealistic rationale of Spain's Indian policy, which had created a substantial one-way stream of gifts from New Mexico among the Comanches, who accepted the material goods but rejected their political implications. Two Spanish reports from 1818 reveal just how badly Spain's Comanche policy had fallen short of its objectives. In the first, New Mexico Governor Facundo Melgares complained bitterly how his hosting of a party of one thousand Comanches had required so many gifts that he did not have goods to gratify other Indian nations. But the gifts did little to bring the Comanches to Spain's exclusive embrace, as the second report illustrates. The Indians "who live to the east of the mountains on the waters of the Arkansas," an anonymous observer wrote, undoubtedly referring to Comanches, "have frequent communication with the English [i.e., Canadian traders] and Americans" and "are doing everything possible to allure the traders of these two nations to themselves." Spanish policymakers, he concluded, were caught in a delicate play-off situation and should commit themselves to searching "for means to furnishing" the Comanches: "For there is no doubt that in the hands of the one or the other governments, these savages would become either important means of defense or an important means of attack."[34]

Spanish authorities may have felt pressured to mete out more gifts to Comanchería in order to counterbalance American influence, but it is likely that no amount of presents would have persuaded Comanches to cut off their ties to those Americans who were willing to operate within Comanche cultural parameters and hand out gifts. The experiences of Thomas James, one of the pioneers of the Santa Fe Trail, is an illuminating case in point. James led his first commercial expedition to western Comanchería in 1821, traveling from St. Louis to the Texas Panhandle, where he encountered an assemblage of Comanche rancherías. James, at the request of Comanche chiefs, made several rounds of gift distributions, dispensing thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise. Oblivious to the intricacies of Comanche protocol, however, he tried to save the bulk of his goods for New Mexican markets and disregarded the chiefs' demands for further gifts. When James insisted on continuing to Santa Fe with his remaining goods, Comanches arrested him and his men and threatened to kill them. Yet despite repeated errors of judgment, the gifts had won James the trust of key Comanche leaders. He visited Comanchería again the next year, was ritually adopted by a powerful chief, and purchased more than three hundred high-quality animals, a transaction worth several thousand dollars in St. Louis.

James himself depicted his travels into Comanchería as a high adventure with repeated near brushes with death, but the real story is his submersion into a new cultural logic. Comanche chiefs were not so much extorting or abusing James as keenly—although not always patiently—teaching the newcomer how to negotiate the Comanche ritual forms and cultural etiquette.[35]

Despite Spanish protests, then, the trade between Comanches and Americans continued unabated, but the collapse of the Spanish empire in 1821 turned the trickle of American traders into a stream. Mexican authorities immediately lifted the restrictive trade laws of the Spanish empire and opened New Mexico to U.S. merchants and markets. The result was the Santa Fe trade, a burgeoning commercial enterprise that revolved around regular trading caravans between Missouri and New Mexico. The main artery of the trade, the Santa Fe Trail, ran across western Comanchería, along the Arkansas River to its headwaters before turning southwest toward New Mexico. In the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s, tens of thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise traveled through Comanchería each year, but a substantial part of it stayed there. Comanches demanded compensation for granting right-of-ways through their territory, and the overlanders routinely engaged in trade with them. Some, like Thomas James, found the horses and hides of Comanchería more enticing than the mules and furs of New Mexico and traveled to the west to trade specifically with the Comanches. James was back in western Comanchería in 1822 and this time capably maneuvered the Native protocol. The exchange, as he recounted, followed a rigorous structure, which made a clear distinction between gift giving and actual trade:

> I prepared for trading by making presents, according to custom, of knives, tobacco, cloths for breech garments, &c., which, though a large heap when together, made a small appearance when divided among all this band. The trade then began. They claimed twelve articles for a horse. I made four yards of British strouding at $5.50 per yard and two yards of calico at 62½ cents to count three, and a knife, flint, tobacco, looking-glass, and other small articles made up the compliment. They brought to me some horses for which I refused the stipulated price. They then produced others which were really fine animals, worth at least $100 each in St. Louis. I bought seventeen of these, but would not take any more at the same price, the rest being inferior. The refusal enraged the Chief, who said I must buy them, and on my persisting in my course, drove away the Indians from around me and left me alone. After a short time he returned with a request that I should buy some buffalo and beaver skins, to which I acceded. He went away and the women soon returned with the fur and skins, of which I bought a much larger quantity than I wished then to have on my hands.

James spent several days with the Comanches, participating in a series of similar fairs. He smoked the calumet with his hosts, was adopted as brother by one of the chiefs, and eventually returned to St. Louis with more than two thousand dollars' worth of horses, skins, and furs, a feat few, if any, New Mexico-bound American trading convoys could duplicate. James's commercial success was remarkable but not unique in the middle space between Mexican and American markets. In 1838, sixteen years after the opening of the Santa Fe trade, a Texas newspaper reported that several American merchants from Arkansas and Missouri were active in western Comanchería, tapping deeply into the "immense" horse wealth of Comanches. Far more than a thoroughfare, western Comanchería was an integral part of a flourishing multinational commercial institution that linked the economies of the United States, northern Mexico, and Comanchería.[36]

Yet despite the enduring links, New Mexico was becoming increasingly peripheral to Comanches. Just as American trade and markets had drawn the eastern Comanches away from Texas's sphere of influence, so too did American commerce cause western Comanches to turn away from New Mexico. And just as in eastern Comanchería, the political and economic reorientation of the western Comanches was accelerated by the emergence of new trading relations with other Plains Indian nations. In the early nineteenth century, at the same time as they forged ties with U.S. merchants, western Comanches also began restoring trade links with their Native neighbors, links that had become badly frayed during the intertribal wars of the 1780s. The first step to this end was the termination of the Pawnee wars, which had raged on for more than a decade and taken the lives of such prominent Comanche leaders as Ecueracapa and Hachaxas. The peace process began in 1793, when Encanguané, Ecueracapa's successor as western Comanche head chief, persuaded New Mexico Governor Fernando de la Concha to send Pedro Vial to the north to mediate a truce between the Comanches and the Pawnees. An experienced borderland ambassador, Vial traveled to the Pawnee villages on the Kansas River, where, according to Zenon Trudeau, lieutenant governor of Upper Louisiana, he "delivered a medal, a complete suit of clothes and other things to the [Pawnee] Chief." The gesture helped "cover" the deaths inflicted by Comanches and "caused peace to be made as . . . desired." Commerce apparently played a key role in the proceedings, and after the peace talks were concluded, Vial conducted a trade convoy from Pawnee country to Comanchería. Regular Pawnee trade journeys to the south commenced soon after, opening for western Comanches an access to the manufactured goods Pawnees obtained from Spanish and American traders who operated—and competed over Native customers—along the lower Missouri River. Although often interrupted by bouts of violence that required careful mediation, the Comanche-Pawnee connection endured into the 1840s.[37]

Meanwhile, western Comanches had already initiated peace talks with Kiowas and Naishan Apaches (also known as Kiowa Apaches or Plains Apaches), a small group of Athapascan speakers who, unlike most Apaches of the plains, fled Comanche expansion north to the Missouri valley, where they attached themselves to the Kiowa nation. Comanches and Kiowas had been trading partners in the 1760s and 1770s, but the alliance had unraveled during the tumultuous 1780s. Kiowa traditions relate that the restoration of peaceful relations began in 1790, but a broader peace process did not get under way until 1806, when Yamparika and Kiowa parties unexpectedly met at the New Mexican border town of San Miguel del Vado, where a Spanish settler brokered a meeting. According to Kiowa traditions, Guik'áte (Wolf Lying Down), the second highest ranking Kiowa chief, proclaimed his desire for peace. Päréiyä (Afraid of Water), the Yamparika leader, replied that the matter "would have to be considered by the whole tribe" and invited Guik'áte to visit the main Yamparika village on the Brazos River. Accompanied by a Comanche captive who had been with the Kiowa party, Guik'áte followed Päréiyä to the Yamparika ranchería, where he spent the summer hunting and feasting with his hosts. A Yamparika council guided by the village chief Tutsayatuhovit ratified the treaty. In the fall, a large Kiowa delegation arrived in the Yamparika ranchería, and the two parties made peace, which was sanctioned with elaborate gift exchanges and a three-day feast. Again, kinship secured the peace: Guik'áte married the daughter of Somiquaso, the newly elected Yamparika head chief, and moved his tipi among the Yamparikas. The peace process then shifted among other Comanche and Kiowa bands, each of which ratified the treaty.[38]

The alliance that resulted was the firmest and most durable in Comanche history. After the peace had been consolidated, Kiowas and Naishans moved from the central plains into north-central Comanchería, thereby gaining access to the milder climates and fertile horse pastures of the southern plains. For the Naishans, moreover, the alliance signified a return to the ancestral homelands of the southern plains, which they had abandoned almost a century before in the face of Comanche expansion. For Comanches the alliance offered obvious political advantages. Collaboration with the relatively small Kiowa and Naishan nations—approximately twelve and three hundred people, respectively—augmented their military and political weight without putting excessive pressure on Comanchería's resources. Comanches incorporated both groups in their protective border campaigns against the Utes in the west and the Osages in the east. Commerce, however, was the heart of the union. The three groups embarked on

an active exchange, which involved a distinct division of labor: Kiowas and Naishans acted as middlemen between the upper Arkansas-based Comanches and the Mandan-Hidatsa villages on the middle Missouri valley, carrying horses and mules to the north and metal goods and high-quality short-barreled British muskets back to Comanche rancherías. It was a lucrative arrangement for Comanches, whose livestock was in high demand in the horse-poor northern plains. In the early years of the nineteenth century the standard price of a stolen Spanish horse in the middle Missouri villages was "a gun, a hundred charges of powder and balls, a knife and other trifles."[39]

Western Comanches' northbound exchange channel soon became a main axis of the Plains Indian trade system, a central conduit that siphoned crucial commodities back and forth across the interior. But the thriving commerce also attracted competitors, most notably the allied Cheyennes and Arapahoes from the northern plains. Pushed out from their homelands near the Black Hills by the expanding Lakotas around 1800, several Cheyenne and Arapaho bands moved southward to the central plains, where they gradually ousted the Kiowas and Naishans from the middleman trading niche and entered the Comanches' expanding of alliance network of trade and peace. In 1820 a U.S. exploring expedition led by Stephen H. Long learned about a mixed western Comanche, Kiowa, Naishan, Cheyenne, and Arapaho camp on the upper Arkansas, and a year later, on the Big Timbers of the Arkansas, another American expedition led by Jacob Fowler came across a massive western Comanche-sponsored trade assembly that hosted some five thousand Kiowas, Naishans, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes as well as many Spanish traders from Taos. If anything, the shift in middlemen was favorable for western Comanches. Cheyennes emerged in the early nineteenth century as highly specialized middleman traders who carried Comanche horses not only to the upper Missouri villagers but among the powerful Blackfeet as well.[40]

Already bustling with activity, western Comanches' trade system received a further boost when they established commercial ties with their Shoshone relatives. Once a single people, Shoshones and Comanches had split in the late seventeenth century, when the former left the central plains and headed north and the latter moved toward the south. By 1800, however, Shoshones had pulled back from the northern plains under the pressure from well-armed Blackfeet and Crows and crossed the Continental Divide to the mountain ranges of Montana and Wyoming. Cut off from the Canadian fur trade and the northern plains buffalo country by their enemies, Shoshones turned to the south and sought to restore their ties with the Comanches. Both the Long and Fowler expeditions encountered Shoshones among the many groups who attended western

4. *Yamparika Comanche*. Watercolor by Lino Sánchez y Tapia, ca. 1836. A Comanche man displays his trade gun, gunpowder pouch, metal ax, and metal-tipped lance. Comanches' far-reaching trading empire gave them access to numerous market outlets and varied European manufactures, making them attractive commercial partners for near and distant Native groups. Courtesy of Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Comanche trade fairs in the upper Arkansas valley in the early 1820s. The chief attraction for Shoshones must have been Comanches' gun supply: in 1802 one traveler had found them hiding "in caverns from their enemies," unable to fight back the armed forces of Blackfeet with their small bows and stone war clubs. In exchange for the much-needed weapons, Shoshones were able to offer large

numbers of horses, for they maintained vast herds in the deep, protective valleys of their Rocky Mountain homelands. Shoshones were not the only far northern group drawn into Comanchería's commercial sphere. As the Mandan and Hidatsa trading villages on the middle Missouri River began to decline in the early nineteenth century, Crows, too, began to send trading convoys among the Comanches from their homelands on the northwestern plains.[41]

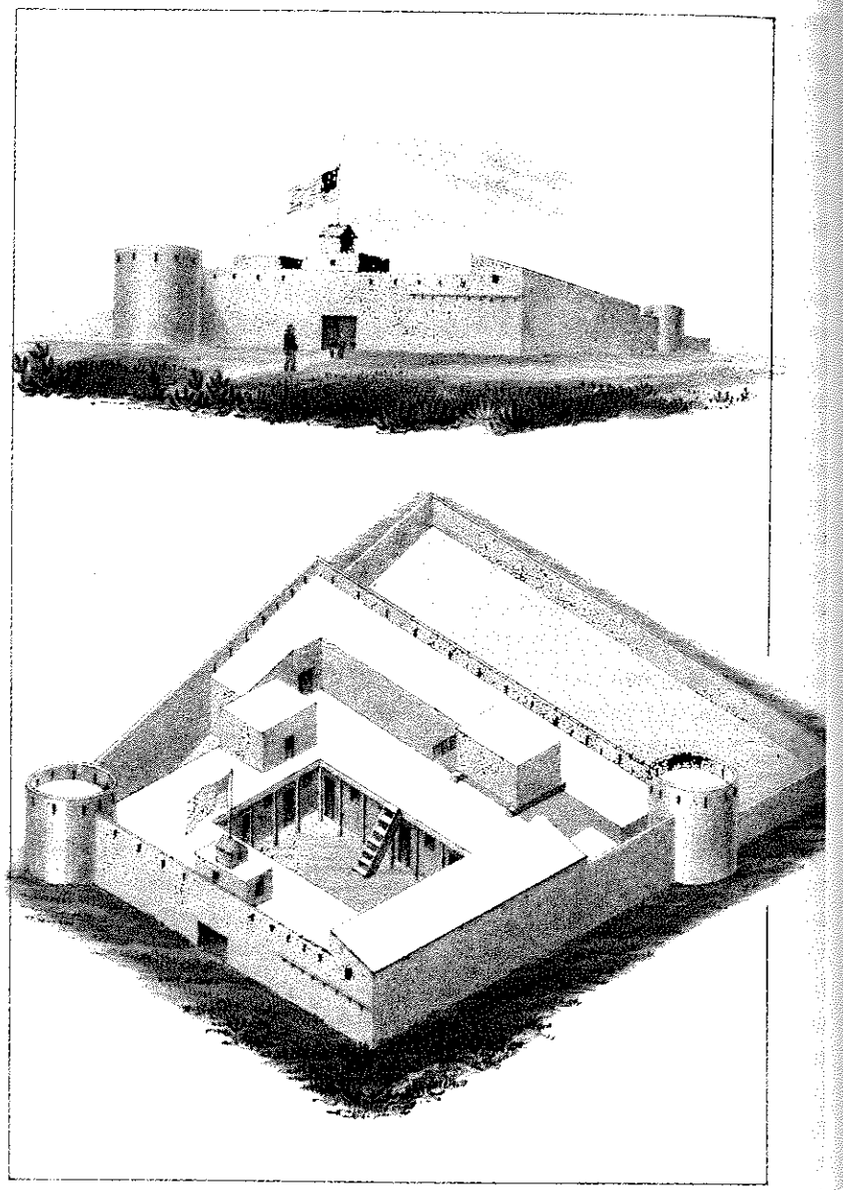
In the early nineteenth century, then, western Comanches once again ran a flourishing commercial center in the upper Arkansas basin, with exchange links fanning out over a vast area, connecting them to New Mexico, American market entrepôts along the Mississippi valley, the Mandan and Hidatsa trade citadels in the Missouri valley, and the rich horse reservoir of the Rocky Mountains. Pawnee, Kiowa, Naishan, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshone, Crow, American, and New Mexican trading convoys frequented western Comanche rancherías, which seasonally morphed into vibrant cosmopolitan marketplaces where Yamparikas, Jupes, and Kotsotekas could transmute their horses for guns, skins for fabrics, and meat for corn. Winter months, when Plains Indians gravitated to the south and west in search of warmth and the bison, were the main trading season, and in December, January, and February one could find massive trading villages spreading out for miles along the deep protective valley of the Arkansas River. Sites of intensely concentrated commercial activity, those trading villages were also symbols of an increasingly Comanche-centric economic configuration of the Great Plains.

But then, just as eastern Comanches faced an economic crisis in the aftermath of the Indian Removal, western Comanches too faced a sudden reversal of fortunes. In the late 1820s, Cheyennes and Arapahoes abruptly cut off diplomatic and commercial ties with western Comanches and forced their way into the upper Arkansas basin. They did so in part because their existing economic arrangements on the central plains could no longer sustain them. Repeated waves of disease epidemics and Lakota raids had pushed the Mandan and Hidatsa trading villages into a steep decline, which in turn cut into the profits the Cheyennes and Arapahoes could make operating as middlemen between the middle Missouri and Comanchería. Forced to search for new economic strategies, Cheyennes and Arapahoes began to push toward Comanche territory, lured by its powerful economic inducements: hospitable climate, lush horse pastures, and proximity to New Mexico's border markets. Cheyennes and Arapahoes were not alone in this bid to march into Comanchería. In around 1830 they forged an alliance with two prominent St. Louis merchants, Charles and William Bent, who ran a small fur-trading post near Pike's Peak. Yellow Wolf, a Cheyenne chief, approached the Bents and asked them to move their post near the Big Timbers of the Arkansas River. Fully aware of the region's history as a commercial hub, and persuaded by Yellow Wolf's promises to provide protection, the Bents joined the invasion into Comanchería as gun dealers for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes.[42]

Fighting lasted for several years, during which the Bents built an imposing two-story adobe fort on the north bank of the Arkansas River, a few miles upriver of the Big Timbers, just off the northwestern corner of Comanchería. But as on the Comanchería–Indian Territory border, mutual economic interests gradually steered the rival coalitions toward conciliation. In spring 1839, with death tolls mounting on both sides, the Cheyennes sued for peace, sending messengers among the Comanches and Kiowas, who in turn dispatched a Naishan delegation to establish an armistice. Preliminary talks were held the next year near the mouth of Two Butte Creek on the Arkansas, where the chiefs of the five nations smoked the calumet and buried the war. The final peace was concluded a few months later in a massive council near Bent's Fort. Trade, which before the outbreak of the hostilities had bound the five nations together, was the key discussion point. The negotiations lasted for two days and featured several rounds of elaborate gift giving during which Comanches and Kiowas gave away hundreds of horses and mules. The gifts placated mourners and covered the casualties of the war, but they also framed the future relations among the nations. With the gift exchanges completed, one of the Cheyenne chiefs announced: "Now, we have made peace, and we have finished making presents to one another; tomorrow we will begin to trade with each other. Your people can come here and try to trade for the things that you like, and my people will go to your camp to trade."[43]

The "Great Peace" of 1840 was a momentous diplomatic feat that spawned an enduring alliance among the Comanches, Kiowas, Naishans, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, reconfiguring the geopolitics of the southern and central Great Plains. As a territorial agreement, the accord established a joint occupancy of the Big Timbers of the Arkansas valley. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes retreated on the northern side of the Arkansas, keeping their home ranges on the central plains, but they retained a right to winter in the Big Timbers. As a political pact, the accord created a loose but lasting political coalition among the five nations, who in the mid and late nineteenth century would often fight together encroaching Texan settlers and the U.S. Army. As an economic agreement, the accord launched a thriving commercial partnership that eventually came to include the Bents as well.[44]

Under the new commercial arrangement, Comanches, Kiowas, and Naishans bartered horses and mules for the manufactured goods that Cheyennes and Arapahoes obtained from Fort Laramie, Fort Lupton, and other American



5. Bent's Fort. From Message from the president of the United States: in compliance with a resolution of the Senate, communicating a report of an expedition led by Lieutenant Abert, on the upper Arkansas and through the country of the Camanche Indians, in the fall of the year 1845, 29th Cong, 1st sess., S. Ex. Doc. 438. Courtesy of Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

trading posts that emerged on the central plains in the 1830 and 1840s after the collapse of the Rocky Mountain–based beaver trade. The peace also made possible direct trade between the Comanches and the Bents. The Bents had begun to shift to livestock trade since the economic panic of 1837 in the United States, and they were eager to expand their supply area into the horse-rich Comanchería. They maintained a moderately successful log post on the south fork of the Canadian River between 1842 and 1845 and a larger post, the "Adobe Walls," just north of the Canadian during the winter of 1845–46. Comanches, however, centered their activities on Bent's Fort, drawn by its abundant wares, standardized exchange rates, and multicultural social milieu. By 1841 the Bents expected fifteen hundred Comanches would visit their post.[45]

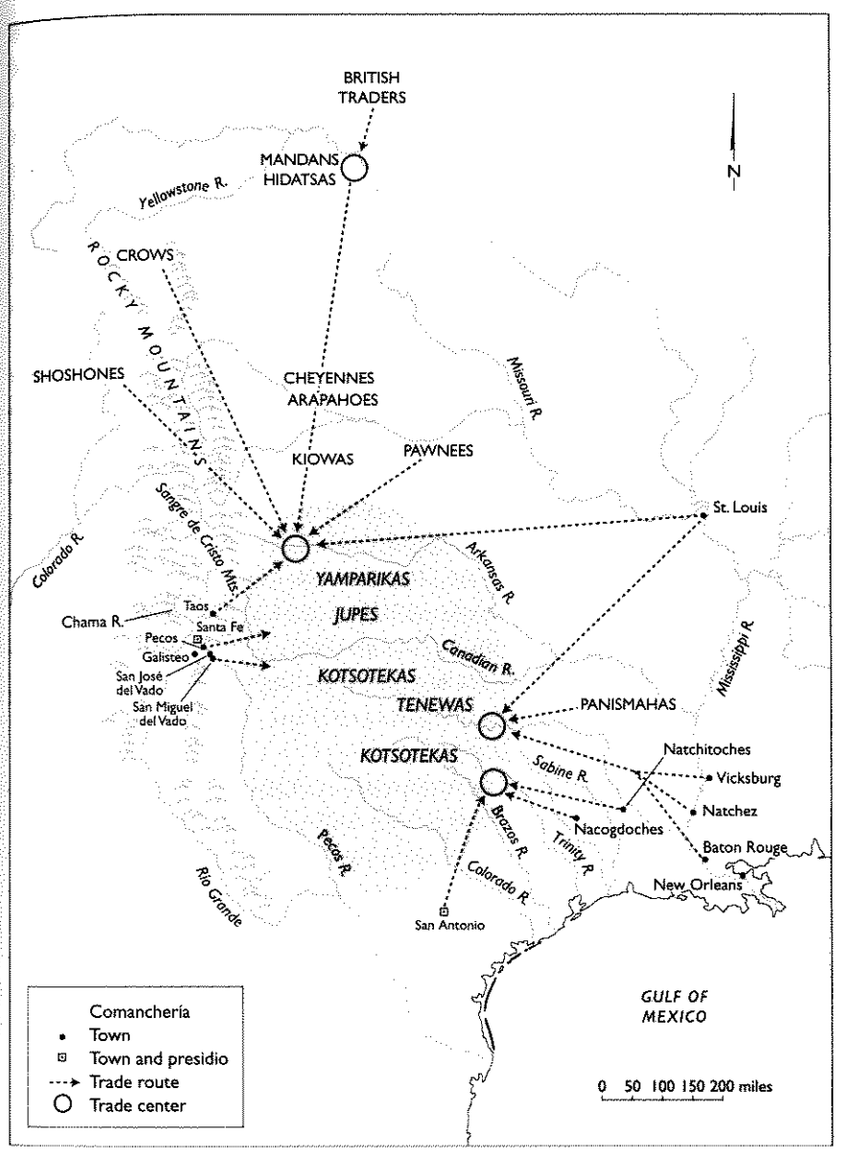
In America's historical memory, Bent's Fort stands as a vanguard of the westward expansion. It was the pioneering frontier post that introduced modern capitalist institutions and ideology to the Plains Indians and into Mexican New Mexico, preparing the ground for the U.S. takeover of the Southwest. For Comanches, however, Bent's Fort represented simply another commercial outlet, a conduit that facilitated the movement of goods between Comanchería and distant markets. Through Bent's Fort, the western Comanches gained a secure access to the vast American markets, and like their relatives in eastern Comanchería, they became the chief suppliers of an extended trade chain that channeled horses and mules to the expanding settler-farmer frontiers in Missouri, Arkansans, Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Comanches also traded Mexican captives, whom the Bents used as herders and laborers at the fort, as well as large volumes of buffalo robes, which found ready markets in eastern urban centers. That outpouring of livestock, robes, and captives was matched by a sizeable inflow of various staple products, craft items, and manufactured goods. Fed by regular supply trains from New Mexico and Missouri, Bent's Fort siphoned into Comanchería commodities from several distinct markets—Pueblo maize and Spanish shawls from New Mexico; blankets from Navajo country; beads from Iroquois villages; molasses from New Orleans; and coffee, flour, knives, kettles, pans, and hoop iron from all across the United States. Most important, Bent's Fort provided quantities of lead, powder, pistols, and high-quality British muskets—enough for Comanches to keep hundreds of warriors well armed and enough for them to extend their military hegemony from the Southwest deep into Mexico.[46]

The twin commercial networks of the eastern and western Comanches—the eastward-facing gateway of the former and the multibranched trade center of the latter—together formed an imposing trading empire. Featuring a thick web

of short, midrange, and long-distance exchange routes that arched across the midcontinent from the upper Río Grande valley toward the northern plains, the Mississippi valley, and Texas, the trading empire connected Comanchería to several different ecosystems, economies, and resource domains. And while the trade network reached outward to affix Comanchería to surrounding regions, it also opened inward, connecting Comanche groups to one another. Rancherías met regularly for exchange and social recreation, and summers saw thousands of Comanches gravitating toward Comanchería's center for massive community-wide political councils, which doubled as trade fairs. As a result, the imports that entered Comanchería at its various exchange points also circulated within Comanchería, ensuring that the tools and sources of power—guns, metal, and corn—were accessible across the realm.[47]

Commercial dominance brought prosperity and, predictably, security. Like other Native trade systems in the Americas, the Comanche trade network was embedded in a social nexus. Comanches feasted, smoked the calumet, and exchanged gifts with foreigners whom they considered more than trading partners: they were fictive kinspeople who were socially obliged to supply for each other's needs through material sharing. Affinity was the medium through which Comanches organized exchange across boundaries, and their trading empire can be seen as a vast kinship circle where ritual exchanges of words, food, gifts, and spouses stabilized intersocial spaces, creating a high threshold for intergroup violence. Comanches fought the removed eastern Indians as well as the Cheyenne-Arapaho coalition in the early 1830s, but the carnage of those years was exceptional: by standards of the age, early nineteenth-century Comanchería was a safe place to live. Like the Iroquois in the Northeast, the Comanches attached on their sphere numerous Native and non-Native groups as exchange partners, political allies, and metaphorical kin, enveloping themselves in a protective human web. This process had its most dramatic manifestation in the massive intergroup gatherings along the upper Arkansas valley, where thousands of Comanches, Kiowas, Naishans, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Shoshones, Americans, and New Mexican comancheros regularly gathered to trade, socialize, and mediate political issues, creating vast ephemeral multiethnic worlds on Comanchería's northern edge.[48]

Commerce and kinship helped build and maintain peace, but so too did power, coercion, and dependence. Comanches nurtured peace on their borders through active diplomacy, but they maintained stability also through their capacity to influence other societies and govern the relations among them. By dominating the major east-west and south-north trading arteries on the southern plains and in the Southwest, Comanches were able to regulate the flow of cru-



6. Comanche trading empire in the early nineteenth century. Map by Bill Nelson.

cial commodities over vast areas and extend their sphere of influence far beyond their borders. Numerous Native groups around Comanchería—Cheyennes, Pawnees, Mandans, and Hidatsas on the central and northern plains; Wichitas and Caddos on the southern prairies; and the immigrant nations in Indian Territory—needed a constant inflow of domesticated horses and mules for their economic survival, and they all looked toward Comanchería to meet that need. This put the Comanches in an extraordinarily powerful position: by controlling the diffusion of animals from the livestock-rich Southwest to the north and east, they could literally control the technological, economic, and military evolution in the North American interior.

Comanches' privileged position undoubtedly caused resentment among their allies, but it also fostered peaceful relations. In a stark contrast to the northern plains, which collapsed into long and bloody intertribal wars in the late eighteenth century when rival groups attempted to dominate the region's multiple trade chains, the southern plains remained relatively calm: except for the Cheyenne-Arapaho intrusion in the 1830s, Comanchería was not subjected to prolonged trade wars. The difference, it seems, was Comanches' monopolistic grip on horse trade. As much as their trading partners may have detested their dependence on Comanche suppliers, few were willing to jeopardize their access to Comanchería's livestock reserves by starting an uncertain trade war. Just as multipolarity fueled instability on the northern plains, apolarity promoted stability in and around Comanchería.[49]

Commercial hegemony shielded Comanchería against external aggression, and it allowed Comanches to project their influence outward from Comanchería, for hard political and economic power readily translated into softer and more subtle forms of cultural power. At once dependent on and dazzled by Comanchería's wealth, many bordering societies emulated and adopted aspects of Comanche culture. For example, Cheyenne traditions speak of extensive mimicking of the Comanches that ranged from equestrian lore to the basic techniques of nomadic culture. One story relates a meeting between the horse-mounted Comanches and still pedestrian Cheyennes. Cheyennes were at once astonished and hesitant at this singular moment: "We never heard of horses," said one Cheyenne priest. "Perhaps Maheo [All-Father Creator] wouldn't like for us to have them." Comanches, eager to open trade relations, assumed the role of a proponent: "'Why don't you ask him?' a Comanche said. 'We'll trade with you, if you're too afraid to go and get them [from New Mexico].'" Cheyennes did so and received Maheo's blessing for their decision, after which "Comanches stayed with the Cheyennes another four days, and their women showed the Cheyenne women what kind of wood to use for tipi poles, and how to cut and sew a tipi, and how to tie the poles to their horses, and load them with the tipis and the other things they needed."[50]

Such stories may not always have been literally accurate, but their significance lies elsewhere: more than of conventional facts, they speak of Indians' understanding of defining historical trends. Groups like the Cheyennes or the Poncas probably acquired their first horses from the nomadic middleman traders of the northern plains, but their stories emphasize the example and guidance of Comanches, whose spectacularly successful pastoral culture represented the ideal for the indigenous societies across the Great Plains.[51] Horses spread to the Great Plains from several sources—Texas, New Mexico, the Rocky Mountains, the Mississippi valley, even Canada—but the people tended to look south toward Comanchería for how to best put them in use.

Comanches' cultural influence was not limited to equestrian knowledge but affected things as diverse as religious ceremonies, military societies, clothing accessories, hairstyles, and weaponry. To contemporary Euro-Americans the most illuminating sign of Comanches' cultural power was the spread of their language across the Southwest and the Great Plains. By the turn of the eighteenth century, Comanches were able to conduct most of their business at New Mexico's border fairs in their own language, and many of the comancheros and ciboleros who visited Comanchería to trade and hunt were fluent in the Comanche language. The diffusion of the Comanche language accelerated in the early nineteenth century when Comanches extended their commercial reach across the midcontinent, connecting with a growing number of people. Several Euro-American observers noted matter-of-factly that the Indians of the southern and central Great Plains used the Comanche language in commercial and diplomatic interactions, and Native oral traditions attest that Comanche challenged sign language as the universal language of exchange. Comanche was thus to a large section of the middle North America what the Chinook Jargon was to the Northwest or Mobilian to the Mississippi valley: a trade lingua franca. When people and societies meet and intermingle on frontiers, their choice of language is often an accurate gauge of relative power dynamics between them: economically and politically weaker groups tend to adopt the words, phrases, and even syntaxes of stronger ones. So too does the ascendancy of the Comanche language denote a larger truth: having wielded unparalleled economic, political, and cultural influence, the Comanches were re-creating the midcontinent in their own image.[52]

Encircling Comanchería there thus lay an extensive sphere of cultural penetration that bore an unmistakable imprint of Comanche influence. The people inhabiting that zone were tied to the Comanche nation as allies, dependents,

and exchange partners and more or less willingly embraced elements of Comanche culture. But cultural diffusion was only one facet of a much more inclusive and intensive process of Comanchenization: a large portion of the foreign ethnicities attached to the Comanche orbit would eventually immigrate into Comanchería, seduced by its prosperity and security. The immigrants took many different roads into Comanchería, but all paths merged into a single process. Whether the newcomers blended into the Comanche society, becoming in effect naturalized Comanches, adopted a subordinate status as junior allies, or retained a larger measure of political and cultural autonomy, the net effect of their arrival was Comanchería's transformation from an ethnically homogenous national domain into a multicultural and politically stratified imperial realm.

Large-scale incorporation of foreign ethnicities into Comanchería began with the Kiowas and Naishans. The closely allied Kiowas and Naishans migrated into Comanchería during the first and second decades of the nineteenth century, after having lost their middleman trading niche on the central plains to Cheyennes and Arapahoes. They established residence on the upper Canadian and Red rivers where, at the very heart of Comanchería, they slowly began to blend in with the Comanches. The three groups camped and hunted together, intermarried extensively, and joined their forces in frequent raiding expeditions and defensive military campaigns. According to one observer, some Naishans "settled in Comanche villages" and the Kiowas were often mistaken for Comanches, "since they sometimes share their encampments." The three groups worshipped together and exchanged customs, rituals, and beliefs; Comanches, who apparently did not practice the Sun Dance before 1800, participated in the Kiowa ceremony and in time developed their own version of the Kiowa ritual.

A dearth of sources on the early nineteenth-century Kiowas and Naishans prevents determining how deeply the two nations were incorporated into the Comanche political system, but that dearth is also suggestive: Kiowas and Naishans, even while maintaining a separate political organization with tribal councils and chiefs, largely conformed to Comanches' political designs. While Comanches became increasingly involved in interimperial rivalries and power politics, Kiowas and Naishans remained more local actors who rarely figure in colonial powers' diplomatic considerations, especially during the first third of the nineteenth century. Kiowas sometimes played a central role in Indian-Indian diplomacy—they negotiated the great peace of 1840 side by side with Comanches—but Comanches often represented both the Naishans and Kiowas in high-level political meetings with colonial powers. Some Euro-American sources listed Kiowas and Naishans as simply one of the "tribes" or "peoples" of the Comanche nation or confederacy. As contemporary Euro-Americans understood it, Kiowas and Naishans resided on the southern plains under the auspices and partial domination of the Comanches. On an outward-extending gradient of privilege and participation, the Kiowas and Naishans were closest to the empire's core.[53]

Sometime after 1800 Comanches also accepted the Chariticas, an Arapaho group from the central plains, into its fold. As with many other groups that gravitated toward Comanchería, the immediate attraction for the Chariticas was the region's horse wealth and hospitable climate for animal husbandry. Before moving to the southern plains, the Chariticas had possessed few horses and used castrated dogs to pull their belongings, but they emerged in Comanchería "as good horsemen as their allies." In the course of the 1810s and 1820s, the Chariticas severed ties to the main Arapaho body, crossed the Arkansas River into Comanchería, and amalgamated into the Comanche nation. In 1828 General Manuel de Mier y Terán, then the leader of a scientific and boundary expedition into Texas, wrote that Chariticas had relocated some fifteen years earlier from the north, and "Comanches have admitted them. Today they are identical and live in mixed camps." Berlandier reported that Chariticas "often live among the Comanches . . . with whom they are very good friends," and that they "resemble the Comanche in their clothing and war ornaments but differ from them in their customs and their language, which is much harsher and without harmony." Ruíz emphasized the hierarchical nature of the relationship. "The Chariticas steal horses habitually; they are, in my opinion, the most barbarian of all people. Even their best friends are in danger when they visit a Charitica encampment if there are no Comanches present at that time. The Comanches exert certain influence over the Chariticas, and the latter do not dare do some things in their presence." By midcentury, the Chariticas were considered part of the Comanche nation.[54]

The Wichitas followed yet another path into Comanchería. Initially close commercial and military allies, Wichitas and Comanches clashed violently in the late eighteenth century over trading rights. But as Wichitas' power faded in the early 1810s, Comanches reversed their policy and sought cooperative relations. The Taovayas, Tawakonis, and Wacos gradually drew closer to Comanchería and entered a partnership that became increasingly unequal. Comanches traded with the three groups, supplying them with horses and bison products in exchange for farming produce, while at the same time curtailing their autonomy. They prevented the Wichitas from trading directly with Americans and represented them in political meetings with Spain, Mexico, and the Republic of Texas. By the 1840s, Wichita foreign policy had become subordinate to Comanche leadership. When Texas officials approached the Tawakonis in 1844 with the intention of negotiating a peace accord, their chief immediately recoiled: "I

can't say that I will make peace . . . until I see the Comanche, else I may tell a lie. My people will do as they do." Comanches also used Taovaya, Tawakoni, and Waco villages as supply depots, replenishing their food storages and recruiting warriors before launching raids into Texas, and some Mexican officials believed that Comanches pressured Tawakonis to raid for them. Taovaya, Tawakoni, and Waco villages also served Comanchería as buffers that cushioned the blows of colonial reprisals. Wichitas were widely deemed as irredeemable thieves and the "worst" Indians in Texas, a notion some Comanche leaders deliberately fostered. "The Wichita are like Dogs," Chief Pahayuko stated in 1845. "They will steal. You may feed a dog well at night and he will steal all your meat before morning. This is the way with the Wichitas." Although not nearly as effective raiders as the Comanches, the Wichitas suffered some of the bloodiest reprisals at the hands of Mexican troops and Anglo-Texas militia.[55]

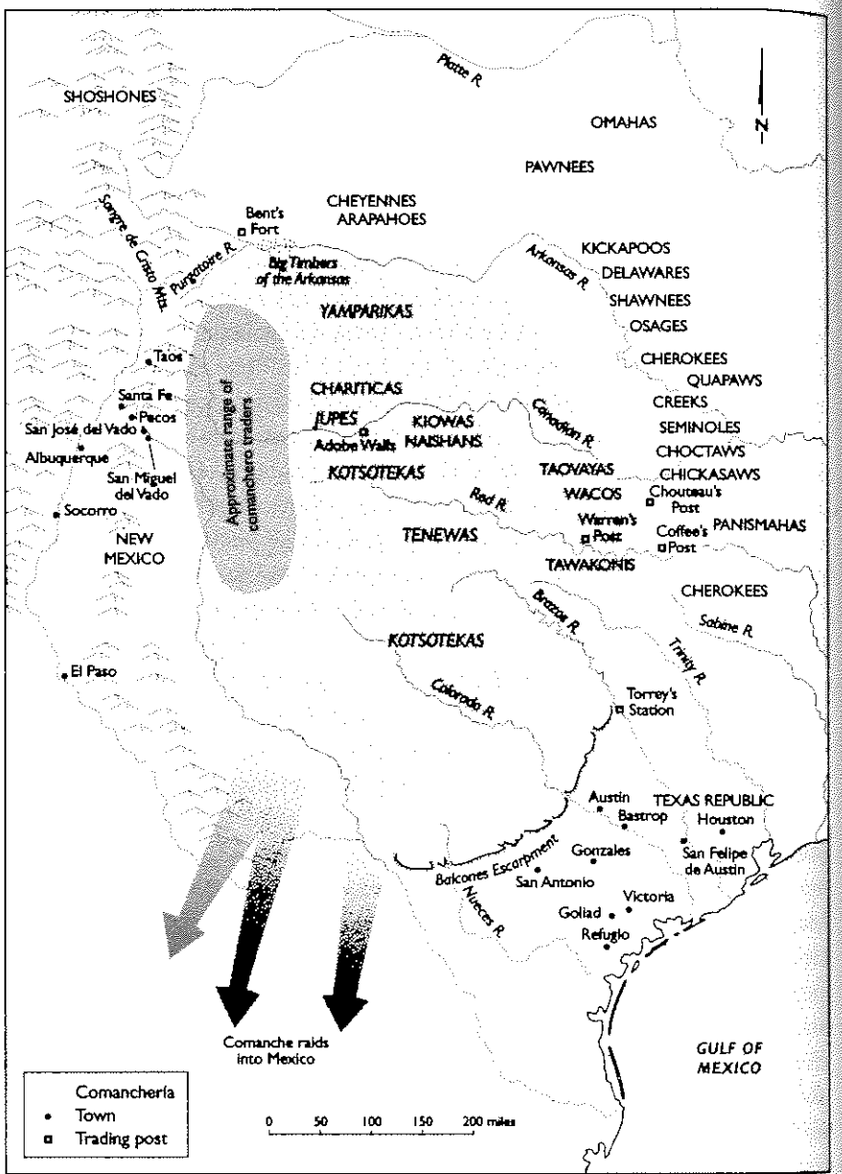
Over time, Comanches absorbed entire Wichita bands into their realm, which served two immediate purposes: it removed the last remnants of the Wichita trading barrier to eastern markets and allowed Comanches to recruit warriors against the Osages, their principal enemy. In 1811, after the collapse of the great Taovaya-Tawakoni villages on the Red River, John Sibley reported that a portion of Taovaya refugees "joined a wandering band" of Comanches. As the Wichitas' power declined in the ensuing years, nearly all their bands sought protection within Comanchería's expanding borders, conforming to Comanche leadership as junior allies and partially blending into the Comanche body politic. Berlandier listed three of the four Wichita tribes—the Taovayas, Tawakonis, and Wacos—as Comanches' subordinates, "lesser peoples whom poverty or fear has driven to seek their protection," and Mexican officials noted that the Comanche nation "is made very strong by the nine nations that are subordinate to it" (several of those nine nations undoubtedly were Wichita groups). Writing in the 1830s, Josiah Gregg noted that Comanches "generally remain on friendly terms with the petty tribes of the south, whom, indeed, they seem to hold as vassals," and the traveler Thomas J. Farnham reported that Comanches "stand in the relation of conquerors among the tribes in the south." Although Comanches themselves never explicitly called the Taovayas, Tawakonis, and Wacos "subordinates" or "vassals," the three groups had fallen under heavy Comanche influence. With their autonomy curtailed, geopolitical space narrowed, and economic opportunities compromised, they had become dependents of the Comanche empire.[56]

In addition to the wholesale incorporation of ethnic groups, there seems to have been a nearly constant stream of immigrants, refugees, renegades, and exiles from adjoining societies into Comanchería. Untold numbers of Wichitas, Caddos, Apaches, Pawnees, Shoshones, Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Delawares, Shawnees, Seminoles, Quapaws, and black slaves from Indian Territory voluntarily left their communities to join the increasingly multiethnic Comanche nation, evidently lured by its growing prosperity and security. Not even the Spanish colonies were immune to Comanchería's pull. Native subjects and *genízaros* escaped exploitation, harsh conditions, and curtailed opportunities in New Mexico and Texas by fleeing to Comanchería, as did a number of socially marginalized and impoverished Spanish citizens.

Little is known about the actual incorporation processes; unlike captives who sometimes were ransomed back to their relatives, voluntary immigrants tend to vanish from the historical record after entering Comanchería. It seems, however, that most of them married into Comanche families, adopted Comanche customs and language, relinquished outward signs of their former identity, and were eventually Comancheanized. Sometimes only physical traits remained, as Sibley realized in 1807, when he noticed among visiting Comanche rancherías several people of "light Brown or Auburn Hair & Blue or light Grey Eyes." A half century later voluntary immigration and ethnic incorporation had transformed the very fabric of Comanche society, prompting Texas Indian agent Robert S. Neighbors to write that "there are at the present time very few pure-blooded Comanches."[57]

In crudely materialist terms, the flow of immigrants into Comanchería is easy to explain. Whether one was looking in from the central Great Plains in the north, Wichita country or Indian Territory in the east, Spanish or Mexican Texas in the south, or New Mexico in the west, Comanchería appeared safe, dynamic, and prosperous. People from nearby societies, Post Oak Jim told an ethnographer in 1933, "frequently snuck into [Comanche rancherías] to give themselves up—they came from poor tribes where there was not enough food." Spaniards, Mexicans, and Pueblo Indians from New Mexico and Texas variously sought in Comanchería asylum from political persecution, religious oppression, poverty, and enslavement. People, in other words, exchanged themselves—their bodies and their labor—for the protection and wealth that kinship bonds with Comanches made available. But while grounded in material impulses, immigration was also a social and psychological process. That process is largely inaccessible to us for the sources fall silent—Spanish officials, for example, simply brushed off the problem of outward immigration by labeling the renegades who abandoned them to live with *salvajes* as "perverse"—but it is possible to delineate its approximate contours.[58]

A passage to Comanchería was not necessarily a trek to the unknown. Living within Comanchería's seductive cultural sphere, the Wichitas, Chariticas, Mexicans, and others who embarked into Comanchería were often preacclimatized



7. Imperial Comanchería and its alliance network in the 1830s and 1840s. Map by Bill Nelson.

to Comanche way of life, customs, traditions, and language. Nor did a move into Comanchería necessarily involve negotiating racial barriers, for Comanches did not define the world in terms of color lines. Race for early nineteenth-century Comanches was essentially a political conception. They talked about their mistrust and hatred toward the whites (*taiboo?s*), but it was always in a specific geopolitical context and generally directed toward the encroaching Anglo-Texan settlers. Behavior and beliefs, not blood lineages, determined who would be accepted into Comanchería and could become Comanche. If a newcomer of Hispanic, Anglo, Caddoan, or any other ethnic descent was willing and able to adopt the proper code of behavior, he or she would be accepted as a member of the community. Acting like a Comanche—honoring kinship obligations, respecting camp rules, obeying taboos, yielding to consensus rule, adhering to accepted gender roles, and contributing to communal affairs—was more important than looking like one. "When at war with us if Mexicans are in their camps," one Mexican observer wrote in 1828, "the Comanches will not harm them, showing that he who lives with them is their friend, regardless of his nationality."[59]

If Comanche society welcomed newcomers, it also sustained them after their entrance. Naturalized Comanche carried no visible stigma of their background and apparently faced few obstacles for social fulfillment and elevation. They could marry into Comanche families, enter kinship networks, and achieve positions of power. In 1834 the traveling American artist George Catlin visited Comanchería with a U.S. peace commission and painted a portrait of His-oo-san-ches, "one of the leading warriors of the tribe." It was only after finishing the painting that Catlin realized that his model was actually Jesús Sánchez, a progeny of a Comanche-Spanish union.[60] As stories like Jesús Sánchez's show, outsiders embraced Comanche identity precisely because that identity was at once distinctive, accommodating, and negotiable. Comanches may have used language that had nationalistic overtones and felt strong ethnic pride, but they were permissive in determining who could claim membership in their community. Later in the nineteenth century, when the U.S. expansion threatened their very existence, Comanches tried to build an anti-American pan-Indian alliance by appealing to race—a more exclusive concept than tribe or nation—but in the early part of the century they still believed that almost anyone could become Comanche.

Why, then, did Comanches open their borders for such a massive influx of new peoples and foreign practices, beliefs, and languages? Just as the many peoples who crossed the border into Comanchería displayed a multitude of motives for doing so, so too did Comanches accept them for a wide variety of reasons. The newcomers provided Comanches with information about distant

8. *His-oo-san-ches (Commanche Warrior).* Oil on canvas by George Catlin, 1834. Courtesy of Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

lands and markets, defense systems on colonial frontiers, and raiding opportunities within them. They introduced novel ideas about animal husbandry, explained the workings of exotic diseases and perhaps provided new cures, and offered new skills that could repair guns or heal the wounds inflicted by them. Some groups came to operate as middlemen traders, shuffling goods between Comanchería and faraway markets, while others produced maize and other necessities that were not available in Comanchería. Some, by simply moving into Comanchería, afforded Comanches a more direct access to surrounding markets and resources.

In the end, however, large-scale ethnic absorption was a necessity born less of strategic calculations than of shifting demographics. Comanches' far-reaching trading network opened their communities to new markets, but it also opened them to deadly microbes traveling with the traders who flocked in from all directions. After the first devastating outbreak of smallpox in 1780–81, the Comanches were hit by repeated waves of disease. Smallpox erupted into major epidemics

in 1799, 1808, 1816, 1839, 1848, and 1851, and a potent cholera virus washed over Comanchería in 1849. The epidemics claimed thousands of lives, grinding deep dents into Comanchería's demographic base. Comanche population may have peaked around forty thousand in the late 1770s, but most estimates in the 1820s and 1830s put it between twenty and thirty thousand. This drop, moreover, occurred when the communities around Comanchería experienced steady and at times explosive growth. Natural increase and immigration from the United States boosted New Mexico's population from thirty-one thousand in 1790 to forty-two thousand in 1821 and to some sixty-five thousand in 1846. In Texas, a deluge of American immigrants and their slaves swelled the province's population from approximately two thousand in the early 1820s to some forty thousand in 1836. Indian Territory, fed by constant removals, was home to some twenty thousand Indians by 1832.[61]

Under such conditions, incorporation of people, groups, and even entire nations into Comanchería became a matter of preserving political and economic power. On one hand, the newcomers were essential workers who sustained Comanchería's burgeoning pastoral economy as spouses who produced children for the community. Comanches themselves believed, one mid-nineteenth-century observer wrote, that "they have increased greatly in numbers . . . by the connexion with other small prairie bands." On the other hand, the new nations residing within Comanchería acted as allies in wars and buffers when those wars swept back into Comanchería. Wichita villages cushioned Comanchería's eastern border against Osage raids and its southern border against Anglo-Texan soldier-settlers, while the Kiowas bore a disproportionate brunt of the Cheyenne and Arapaho attacks during the struggles over the Arkansas basin. More abstractly, the sheer mass of peoples under their auspices gave Comanches substantial esteem and leverage in their diplomatic dealings with Euro-Americans—a point not lost on colonial agents, Comanches themselves, and the people caught between them. As many Euro-Americans saw it, negotiating with Comanches often meant yielding to their demands or risking a clash with a broad Comanche-led intertribal coalition.[62]

The willingness of other peoples to become Comanche is a striking manifestation of Comanches' international power and prestige. It made a deep impression on American visitors like Josiah Gregg, who claimed that Comanches "acknowledge no boundaries, but call themselves the lords of the entire prairies—all others are but 'tenants at will.'" For the resident Spaniards and Mexicans, however, Comanchería's gravitational pull was a source of fear and envy. In 1828, following the signing of a boundary treaty with the United States earlier

that year, the Mexican government dispatched a Comisión de Límites (Boundary Commission) under General Manuel de Mier y Terán to determine the northern and eastern borders of Texas. The commission was also assigned to survey the attitudes of Texas tribes and explore the possibilities of incorporating the Plains Indians into "the Mexican family" and, if they settled down and embraced Catholicism, as citizens of the republic.

The situation in Texas shocked the commission. American immigrants were flooding in from the east, blurring the boundary line between Texas and Louisiana, and Comanches were incorporating Mexico's prospective Indian allies across the entire province. "The weaker tribes that cause the Comanches no concern are added through alliance," Terán noted. "By allowing them to live independently distributed into camps of two or three hundred persons, the Comanches teach them their own martial habits and help to improve their condition." Lieutenant José María Sánchez found Mexican presence in Texas weak and reported in disbelief how the Comanches systematically absorbed and assimilated other Native societies into their ranks. To him, the Comanches appeared an expanding hegemonic people who imposed their identity on other groups whom they kept under paternalistic rule. The "desire to increase their tribe," he wrote, "makes the Comanches very considerate of the small tribes with which they have friendly relations, protecting them, teaching them their habits and customs, and finally amalgamating them into their nation. For this reason the Comanches are the most numerous of those [indigenous nations] found in Texas."[63]

5

GREATER COMANCHERÍA

Like most empires, the Comanche empire had many faces. Viewed from the north and east, it was an empire of commerce and diplomacy, an expanding transnational nexus that radiated prestige and power, absorbed foreign ethnicities into its multicultural fold, and brought neighboring societies into its sphere as allies and dependents. Viewed from the Southwest and Mexico, however, the Comanches showed a different kind of face. Here their empire brushed directly against Euro-colonial frontiers, and its tactics were often grounded in violence and exploitation. This was an empire that marginalized, isolated, and divided Spanish and Mexican colonies, demoting them, in a sense, from imperial to peripheral status. But while distinctive, the opposite faces of the Comanche empire were connected, parts of an integrated whole. Comanches knitted the deep sinews of their power by looking north and east toward the vast political and economic resources of the Great Plains and the cis-Mississippi east. It was there, in landscapes far removed from the opportunities and dangers of the colonial Southwest, that they found the allies, subordinates, and markets on which they built their imperial ascendancy in the Southwest and northern Mexico.

In this chapter I explore how Comanches' plains hegemony shaped their policies toward the colonial regimes. Sustained more by mediation and cultural sway than force and coercion, Comanches' far-flung trading and alliance network pacified their northern and eastern borders, liberating resources to confront the expansionist Bourbon Spain in the west and south. They subjected Texas to systematic stock-and-slave raiding and tribute extortion, bringing the colony on the verge of collapse, but they traded peacefully in New Mexico, using the colony as a source of political gifts and an outlet for surplus stock. These policies aborted the promising developments of the Bourbon era and ultimately dis-

solved Spain's imperial system in the far north. Isolated from the interior and its resources by the Comanches, New Mexico gravitated economically, politically, and even culturally toward Comanchería even as Texas nearly expired under Comanche pressure.

Independent Mexico inherited in 1821 a badly fragmented frontier in its far north, and the fledgling nation failed to put it back together. New Mexico continued its drift toward Comanchería, distancing itself from the rest of Mexico, while Texas, in a doomed attempt at self-preservation, opened its borders to U.S. immigration. The founding of the Republic of Texas posed a grave threat to Comanches, but ironically, it also spurred one of the most dramatic extensions of their regime. While struggling to secure their border with the Lone Star Republic through war and diplomacy, Comanches shifted their market-driven raiding operations south of the Río Grande, turning much of northern Mexico into a vast hinterland of extractive raiding. That subjugated hinterland was what the United States Army invaded and conquered in 1846–48.

This chapter, then, is about how Comanches harnessed and exercised power but it is also about how they imagined, managed, and produced space. Comanches refused to recognize national and international boundaries as Euro-Americans defined them. They treated New Spain and Mexico not as undivided imperial realms but as collections of discrete entities, devising distinct policies toward New Mexico, Texas, and other colonial states. By doing so, they imposed an alternative spatial geometry on what historians have called the Spanish and Mexican borderlands. Spanish and Mexican mapmakers invariably depicted the far north as intact and cohesive, an inseparable part of New Spain or Mexico, but it is also possible to view New Mexico and Texas as a part of an expanding Comanche dominion, or the Greater Comanchería. Whether through violent exploitation, coercive diplomacy, economic dependence, or intimate cultural ties, New Mexico and Texas were irrevocably bound to Comanchería, whose effective sphere of influence, if not actual political boundaries, extended far to the south and west of its southern plains core area. The composition of this chapter is designed to highlight this hidden geographic reality. Rather than following the orthodox temporal organization of dividing the early nineteenth-century Southwest into Spanish, Mexican, and American periods, I adopt a spatial approach in order to make visible the geopolitical structures, divides, and continuities enforced by Comanches. Doing so reveals the blueprint of the Comanche empire.

In spring 1803, when the Louisiana Purchase raised the specter of a U. S. invasion into Spain's North American empire, the frontier province of Texas was already gripped by fear. Eastern Comanches, who had entered into a formal alliance with the colony in 1785 and honored the peace for a decade, were raiding again. Attacks had continued for eight years, spreading terror across the province. Comanche chiefs frequented San Antonio to apologize for the raids and to return an occasional stolen horse, but they seemed either unwilling or unable to stop the violence.

Part of the problem was that the violence had become personal. In 1801 Spaniards had killed the son of Chief Blanco, a local Yamparika leader, near San Antonio, and Blanco had been carrying out a private vendetta against Texans ever since. The situation had spiraled out of control in spring 1802, when Blanco's followers attacked a Spanish hunting party on the plains. The fleeing hunters exacted arbitrary vengeance on a lone Comanche they accidentally met and brought his scalp to Governor Juan Bautista Elguézabal in San Antonio. In March 1803 Elguézabal tried to diffuse tension by inviting Comanche leaders to a council in San Antonio, but the meeting ended uneasily. The shipment of goods from the south was late that year, and the governor was able to offer the chiefs only few gifts.[1]

A month later the United States purchased Louisiana from France, which sparked off a bitter quarrel over the boundaries of the purchased area. Spain insisted that Louisiana comprised no more than the west bank of the Mississippi and the cities of New Orleans and St. Louis, while the United States asserted that it extended to the crest of the Rockies and to the Río Grande, encompassing half of New Mexico and all of Texas. Spanish authorities had feared for some time that Philip Nolan and other American trader-agents operating on the southern plains had fomented anti-Spanish sentiments, and the Louisiana dispute elevated the anxiety to a fever pitch. With the United States disputing Spanish imperial claims north of the Río Grande and with Comanches raiding again along the frontier, Texas suddenly became the most valuable and vulnerable of Spain's American colonies.[2]

The escalating violence in an uncertain geopolitical situation caused deep anxiety in Texas, where the carnage of the previous outbreak of Comanche raiding was still fresh in memory. The officials seemed powerless. They not only lacked the military muscle to repel the raids but knew that hard-line policies ran the risk of alienating the Comanches and pushing them toward Americans. In the end, Spanish administrators had only one feasible option: to channel a large portion of the much-needed funds that the Bourbon Reforms had made available into Comanche gifting in the hope of generating enough goodwill to avoid bloodshed. Fueled by fear, the volume of Indian gifting in Texas escalated to the point that in 1810 the colony invested almost four thousand pesos in Indian di-

plomacy, handing out presents—weapons, metal utensils, cloth, tobacco, food, vermilion—to more than thirteen hundred Comanche visitors. Such liberal distributions, which nearly bankrupted San Antonio's treasury, prompting one governor to accuse Comanches of an insatiable "lust for lucre," did help curb raids for short periods. But they also locked Texas into a tricky dynamic: for the next half century, Comanches would step up and cut back raiding in the province in line with the availability of gifts. Under the ever-present possibility of violence, offerings of diplomatic presents became fixed tribute payments to protect the exposed colony.[3]

Most Spanish officials refused to acknowledge this unsettling reversal of power relations and insisted on calling the payments presents or charity, and the Comanches, who thought that gifts symbolized social bonds, never explicitly articulated the connection between peace and gifting. Yet, resting on the knife-edge of violence, the relationship was unmistakably tributary in nature. In summer 1803, after two years of fear-inducing attacks across Texas, more than eleven hundred Comanches visited San Antonio to trade and collect presents. Generous gifting continued through the next two years, and in 1806 Spaniards gratified more than two thousand Comanches in San Antonio. In 1808 Texas ordered seven thousand pesos worth of Indian gifts from Mexico City. In return for liberal presents, Comanche chiefs pressured their followers to curtail raiding and even offered assistance to Spain in a possible border conflict with the United States. One powerful leader, Sargento, attached the name of the Texas governor to his own and as Sargento-Cordero traveled around Comanchería endorsing peace and retrieving stolen horses. What the Comanches did not do was to reciprocate Spain's generosity. Their recompense was the absence of violence. Holding a pronounced power advantage over Texas, they seem to have placed the Spaniards in an ambiguous social space where they were not quite friends nor outright enemies.[4]

The peace lasted only as long as gift distributions did. The outbreak of the Hidalgo Revolt in Mexico in the fall of 1810 disrupted the flow of funds to the northern provinces, undermining Texas's policy of buying peace. As the gift distributions dwindled, Comanches resumed attacks, raiding and extorting tribute across the colony from the San Sabá River to the Río Grande. Spanish officials made desperate efforts to amass enough gifts to restore good relations, and in the summer and fall of 1811 Comanche chiefs Sargento-Cordero, Chihuahua, Paruaquita, and Yzazat visited San Antonio, sustaining Spanish beliefs that peace would be possible. Then, however, the officials committed a diplomatic gaffe that alienated the entire Comanche nation. El Sordo (The Deaf One), a renowned Tenewa war leader with close ties to Tawakonis and Taovayas, went to

San Antonio to report on the raiding activities of his rival Wichita leaders. El Sordo arrived unarmed with his family and under a banner of truce, but Spanish officials, betraying a deepening panic, arrested and jailed him. The diplomatic breach killed the artificial peace. Even Sargento-Cordero abandoned his pro-Spanish stance and joined the other Comanche rancherías in attacking Texas. He reentered the historical record—simply as Cordero—in 1817 at Natchitoches where he tried to open diplomatic and commercial relations with the Americans.[5]

The collapse of Comanche-Spanish peace occurred just as the livestock trade between the Comanches and Americans was becoming big business, and the consequences were disastrous for Texas. American traders had a seemingly insatiable demand for horses and mules, and the collapse of the Spanish alliance allowed the Comanches to pillage Texas with impunity to meet that demand. Systematic pillaging began in winter 1811–12 when Comanches "collected a great number of animals both horses and mules, leaving horror and devastation in this industry in the Province of Texas and on the frontiers of the other Provinces." Although Nemesio Salcedo, the commanding general of the Interior Provinces, had managed to recruit several hundred militiamen, the presidial forces of Texas failed to the seal the frontier. In early August, after the Comanches had carried off more than two hundred horses from San Marcos, Texas Governor Manuel María de Salcedo proposed a series of campaigns against them—only to be denied by his uncle the commanding general who insisted that "war against the Comanches had always been considered the greatest evil that could befall the province."[6]

The elder Salcedo managed to deflect the evil of full-blown Comanche war, but he could not foresee another evil that was about to fall on Texas. In August 1812, as the Salcedos debated the Comanche situation, a detachment of Mexican and American revolutionaries and filibusterers invaded Nacogdoches to launch a popular revolt against the Spanish regime. Suddenly Texans found themselves caught in a two-front conflict. The revolt that would eventually fail lasted for a year, and its aftermath left Texas vulnerable and exposed to Comanche raiders. The victorious royal army carried out violent purges in San Antonio and Nacogdoches, reducing the colony's manpower by hundreds, and the Spanish crown prohibited settlers from carrying arms, inadvertently compromising their ability to defend the province against Indian assaults. And then, disastrously, the money ran out. The repercussions of the 1808 Napoleonic invasion of Iberia and the subsequent rebellions throughout New Spain had tied up resources, forcing the officials in Texas to scale down Comanche gifting. With the Comanche-American livestock trade now booming, this condemned Texas to ruination.

Soon Comanches were raiding from San Antonio all the way down to the Río Grande, attacking supply convoys, razing ranches, killing farmers in the field, and slaughtering entire herds of cattle. By 1814, Texas was expiring. Having lost tens of thousands of animals to Comanchería, it was nearly destitute of livestock, and the governor ordered the ranches around San Antonio to be abandoned. Food was scarce, soldiers were left without supplies and pay, and settlers began to flee the colony.[7]

The year 1816 brought more alarming news: Comanches had made a truce with the Lipan Apache group led by El Cojo, ending more than sixty years of on-and-off warfare. Spanish officials had worked since the 1770s to weaken the Lipans by isolating them from the other Native groups in southern Texas and northern Coahuila. They had feared that an alliance with a powerful Native group could turn the strategically located Lipan villages on both sides of the Río Grande into an invasion point into the soft underbelly of Texas, and the accord with the Comanches realized their worst fears. The Comanche-Lipan alliance would not survive beyond the early 1820s, but the few years of its existence allowed Comanches to subject almost all of Texas to wholesale pillaging.[8]

With the truce, El Cojo's Lipans won hunting privileges in southern Comanchería and in return opened their territories to Comanches, who swiftly extended their stock and slave raids to the lower Río Grande valley and its many villages and haciendas. Lipans, one observer noted, also "served as guides to the Comanche, since they knew the roads, the villages, and the arms, to the great detriment of all the populations along the Rio Bravo del Norte." Texas was struck with constant attacks in the summer, and in the following year a massive raiding party of more than one thousand warriors—probably a joint Comanche-Lipan effort—ran over the town of Refugio near the Gulf Coast, stealing some ten thousand horses and mules, slaughtering cattle, sheep, and goats, and killing several settlers. In 1818 Texas Governor Antonio Martínez despaired that "not a single day passes without their [Comanches] making some depredation or attack."

Spanish militia and presidial troops were powerless against Comanche guerrilla tactics. Capitalizing on their superior mobility and knowledge of the terrain, Comanches concentrated overwhelming force against a target and escaped before a counteroffensive was organized, sometimes setting the grass on fire to thwart pursuing presidial troops. They regrouped at a safe distance and then attacked another target. Since they hunted while moving about, they could repeat the cycle several times before retreating into the immensity of Comanchería. The only way to contain them would have been to bring the war to their home range, but Spain's northern army, debilitated by lack of resources, had consigned itself to a wholly defensive stance: no Spanish military expedition had penetrated Comanchería since Juan Bautista de Anza's 1779 offensive. The council of San Antonio pleaded in vain with the provincial officials to organize a large punitive campaign against the Comanches.[9]

Texas spent its last years under Spanish rule as a raiding hinterland of the Comanches, who used it as a stockroom for their export-oriented livestock production system. The province, for all practical purposes, had ceased to function as a Spanish colony. Its connections to the rest of New Spain were frequently cut off, as traders and travelers refused to use the roads in the fear of running into Comanche war parties. Its once-flourishing ranching and farming economies lay in waste, and the colonists were reduced to operating at subsistence level. Cattle were left unbranded and abandoned because the settlers lacked horses for roundups and because animal concentrations attracted Comanche raiders. Leather, textile, and sugar industries disappeared altogether. The number of Hispanic settlers dropped from approximately four thousand in 1803 to roughly two thousand in 1821. Nacogdoches was hanging in by a thread, and San Antonio, the economic heart of the colony, was besieged by the Comanche-Lipan coalition.[10]

Comanches had a virtual monopoly on violence in their dealings with Texas. Spanish troops were demoralized by constant "attacks of the savages who each time become more daring," and they were kept in "continuous movement" along the frontier, which left their horses in "deplorable condition," "so weak and exhausted that they cannot even be saddled." Without massive reinforcements from Mexico City, Governor Martínez warned in 1819, "this province will be destroyed unwittingly by lack of inhabitants . . . because no one wishes to live in the province for fear and danger and because the few inhabitants now existing are being killed gradually by the savages." The destruction left a lingering legacy in Texas, as one Mexican officer noted in the mid 1830s: "early in 1810 there was a terrible invasion of wild Indians that destroyed the greater part of the cattle and even property, razing to the ground many of the establishments located at a distance from the centers of population. The decline of Bexar, Bahia del Espíritu Santo [Goliad], and Nacogdoches, the only Mexican settlements that have been able to subsist amidst the calamities that beset them, dates from that time and unless their misfortunes are remedied they will disappear entirely."[11]

Destruction of such magnitude requires explanation. Why did Comanches adopt such a relentlessly aggressive policy toward Texas and why did they nearly destroy a colony that posed virtually no military or political threat to them? They did not consider Texans racially or culturally inferior people and had in fact once considered them allies and kin, so why were they so willing to divest them of all

possessions? The prevailing contemporary explanation was both perceptive and mechanistic: Comanche violence was fueled by the gifts, goods, and guns that flowed into Comanchería from the United States. Spanish officials came to believe that it was American markets and American machinations that alienated Comanches from Spaniards and fomented the violence in Texas. The idea that the near-destruction of Texas was ultimately the work of American borderland agents who provided Comanches with the motive (the market for livestock) and the means (guns) to raid became in time etched in the common Texas consciousness. Empresario Stephen F. Austin, casting himself as a victim of Anglo rapaciousness, condemned Comanche–U.S. trade as a "species of land Piracy" whereby "traders from the United States fit out expeditions to the Comanches . . . who are at war with this nation [Texas], and not only furnish them with arms and ammunition to carry on the war, but hire them to pillage the frontiers by purchasing the fruits of that pillage." Seeing American intent behind every Comanche action, the contemporaries thus relegated Comanche dominance in Texas to a mere by-product of the United States capitalist expansion.[12]

Although Comanches did gravitate actively and at times aggressively toward American markets—thereby inadvertently abetting the United States' southwestern encroachment—the link between markets and raids was not as straightforward as contemporary accounts suggest. Where colonists saw American goods and gifts as methods of a proxy war that sent Comanche warriors into Texas, Comanches understood those items as symbols of social bonds. If American wealth did persuade them to attack Texas, the cause and effect was articulated through the cultural politics of kinship, cooperation, and violence. Liberal trade and lavish gifts drew Comanches toward Americans, who acted like genuine kinspeople—and away from Spaniards, who failed to match Americans' generosity. In comparison to the American traders who offered high-quality guns, powder, and ammunition, Spaniards appeared stingy, disrespectful, uncommitted, and unloving.

In 1808, a year after the U.S. agent John Sibley had courted Comanches in Natchitoches and Comanches had replaced their Spanish flag with an American one, Spanish officials in San Antonio sensed that their ties to the Comanche nation were in jeopardy. Governor Manuel Antonio Cordero y Bustamente dispatched Captain Francisco Amangual, a sixty-nine-year-old veteran officer, to resuscitate the alliance. Amangual met with Sofais, a prominent eastern Comanche chief, on the Colorado River, and delivered a passionate speech. He reaffirmed "the love of our king and father" toward the Comanches and urged them to retain their "loyalty and fidelity" to the king. He advised that the Comanches "not trade with any other nation that may come to induce them, for their object is none other than that of afterward turning them from their loyalty to us." The Comanches responded that "they considered themselves Spaniards," and Amangual, whatever reservations he may have had about its sincerity, carried the message to San Antonio. But such a sentiment of affinity had to be constantly nourished with acts of generosity, which gave tangible meaning to abstractions like loyalty and love, and Comanches found Spanish acts increasingly wanting.[13]

Comanches were particularly offended by the Spaniards' failure to provide guns, which not only had enormous military value but were treasured as important prestige items and symbols of chiefly authority. Gun shipments from Mexico City to Texas were often unreliable. In 1806, for example, the rifles intended for Indian allies were of larger caliber than usual and Comanches refused to accept them because they were difficult to handle on horseback. To offset such problems, the Spanish government licensed much of Nacogdoches' Indian trade to the trading house of William Barr and Samuel Davenport, two former U.S. citizens who acquired the bulk of their gun supply from Natchitoches. But in 1808, as the rivalry between Spain and the United States intensified, Natchitoches's American agents cut off Barr's and Davenport's supply line, leaving them unable to provide guns to Spain's Indian allies. When visiting San Antonio two years later, two eastern Comanche chiefs, Chihuahua and El Sordo, bluntly told Governor Salcedo that they were disappointed in the Spaniards because they did not "give them rifles" and because they did not "let them trade with the Americans." They warned the governor that people who displayed such indifference to their needs were not "friends." By failing to act the role of generous kinspeople, Spanish officials had unknowingly alienated the Comanches, and when they tried to prevent the Comanches from trading with the Americans who did offer liberal gifts and goods, the already thinned attachment snapped.[14]

But the American success among the Comanches is open to a second, more mundane interpretation. Americans did not necessarily read Comanche culture any better than Spaniards did. Instead, their fuller adherence to Comanche conventions may have been—at least in part—a fortuitous accident made possible by the ways in which their commerce with the Comanches was structured. The trade between the Comanches and Spanish Texas took place mainly in San Antonio and Nacogdoches, where Comanches visited fairs and trading houses that, until the troubled 1810s, abounded with merchandise. When Comanche visitors departed, Spanish merchants were likely to still have plenty of goods left. Comanche-American trade, by contrast, rested on itinerant American traders who ventured into Comanchería from distant frontier outposts and spent long periods of time in Comanche rancherías, hoping to sell all their goods before

returning home. Thus, the basic logistics of their business directed the Americans to behave like true kin. Unlike Spanish officials, they lived, traveled, ate, and slept with Comanches, and unlike Spanish merchants, they shared without restraint.[15]

Comanche violence in Texas, then, had a distinctive sociocultural component that was articulated through kinship politics. And yet contemporary observers were right in that the raids were materially motivated. Comanches may have been provoked to punish the Texans for being bad relatives, for failing to respect their sense of cultural order, but their principal reason to raid Texas was commercial: they needed a steady access to horses and mules in order to maintain their privileged access to the United States markets, the only reliable source of manufactured imports in the early nineteenth-century Southwest.

But yet again things were not so simple. Why raid Texas when Comanchería itself swarmed with massive herds of feral horses and offered one of the best conditions in North America for horse breeding? Comanches did take advantage of this ecological potential and built massive domestic horse herds, but they still preferred to fuel much of their trade with plundered animals. There were compelling economic, ecological, and cultural reasons for this. Feral horses could be turned into superior hunting mounts, but their taming was a difficult and time-consuming process, whereas raiding supplied domesticated, ready-to-sell horses that commanded high prices in eastern markets. Raiding also yielded mules which, thanks to their endurance and resilience to heat, were the preferred draft animal in the Deep South, where a large portion of Comanche livestock was eventually sold.[16]

So close, in fact, was the association between livestock raiding and trading that Comanches kept two separate sets of animals that served different economic and cultural needs. They channeled the stolen horses and mules swiftly into trading routes, but rarely sold processed mustangs or domestically raised animals, which had been specifically trained for various tasks from pulling travois to bison hunting and war. Such animals were treated almost like family members, as one American official found out in the early 1850s. Sanaco, an eastern Comanche chief, refused to sell his favorite horse to the American, explaining that trading the animal "would prove a calamity to his whole band, as it often required the speed of this animal to insure success in the buffalo chase. . . . Moreover, he said (patting his favorite on the neck), 'I love him very much.'"[17]

When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, it inherited in Texas a bankrupt province whose ruinous state endangered the very existence of the infant nation. As the buffer province of Texas teetered toward collapse under

Comanche pressure, northern Mexico lay exposed to an invasion from the United States, whose citizens had already infringed on the border areas along the Sabine and Red rivers. Although preoccupied with the nation's turbulent center, Mexico City realized the urgency of rebuilding of Texas and ordered frontier officials to seek appeasement with the Comanches.[18]

And so, in September 1821 at a Wichita village on the Brazos River, a delegation of Mexican officials met with Comanche chiefs Barbaquista, Pisinampe, and Quenoc. The chiefs listened as the emissaries explained the shift of power in Mexico City but, unimpressed with their gifts, refused to a sign a treaty. Mexican authorities tried again two months later when José Francisco Ruíz, now as an officer of the Mexican Army, journeyed to eastern Comanchería and presented a peace offer to a grand council presided over by principal chiefs and attended by some five thousand Comanches. The council reached consensus after three days' deliberation, and in summer 1822 the "ancient" Pisinampe, the "father" of the eastern Comanches, led a delegation of chiefs to San Antonio to formalize a truce. Later that year Ojos Colorados, "a general of the Comanche nation," signed a treaty with Nuevo Vizcaya Governor Mariano Urrea and recognized Mexico's new government. Mexico's diplomatic cajoling culminated in fall 1822, when its troops escorted a Comanche delegation led by Chief Guonique to Mexico City. Guonique attended Agustín Iturbide's coronation as emperor and later signed a formal treaty between "the Mexican Empire and the Comanche Nation."[19]

The grandiose title notwithstanding, the treaty bespoke Mexico City's desperate need to reach a settlement with the Comanches, who controlled the balance of power in Mexico's far northern borderlands. The government offered Comanches duty-free trade in "silk, wool, cotton, hardware, food supplies, hides, tools for various crafts, all types of hand work, horses, mules, bulls, sheep, and goats" in San Antonio and, in reference to the Americans, asked them to notify Mexican officials about "people who come into their territory to explore it." Comanches were asked to return Mexican prisoners, "excepting those who wish to stay," and they were invited to send "twelve youths every four years, so that they may be educated at this Court in sciences and arts to which they are most suited." The treaty granted Comanches a right to round up wild horses near the Mexican settlements and even promised them a standing reward for "any iron-shod horses" they might end up capturing in the process. Finally, the Comanche nation was assigned an emissary-interpreter who would be in permanent residence in San Antonio and have direct access to the Mexican secretary of state. Pleased with the generous terms, Chief Guonique promised that if Spain would attempt to recapture Mexico—a threat that remained acute

throughout the 1820s—Comanches would squash the attempt with "the rifle, the lance, and the arrow." To make clear to the Mexicans who held sway over the Southwest, he boasted that the eastern Comanches could mobilize "within six months . . . a body of twenty-seven thousand man" to protect Mexico against its enemies.[20]

The treaty spawned one of the recurring but fleeting attempts at accommodation on the Comanche-colonial borders. Comanche chiefs collected gifts and even accepted honorary ranks in the Mexican militia, Mexican officials such as Ruíz visited Comanchería to nourish the all-important personal ties between the two nations, and border trade thrived in San Antonio and Nacogdoches. The French scientist-traveler Jean Louis Berlandier reported how eastern Comanches visited the Nacogdoches presidio "in caravans of several hundred, provided they are at peace with the garrison, to sell their buffalo hides (covered with painting), bear grease, smoked and dried meat, and, above all, furs. . . . It is like a little fair to see a town square covered with the tents of a tribe, with all the hustle and bustle of a bazaar going on among them."[21]

But as Berlandier's report suggests, raiding continued. Mexicans assumed that the treaty covered all their communities; Comanches did not. Replicating their policies toward Spanish New Mexico in the 1760s and 1770s and Spanish Texas in the 1800s and 1810s, Comanches alternated raiding and trading with Mexican Texas. They plundered farms and ranches for livestock and captives, but traded peacefully in San Antonio and Nacogdoches. Seeing little contradiction in their actions, they expected Mexicans to follow the Comanche protocol in its intricate details whenever they visited the province for trade. To Berlandier, it seemed that they expected to be treated with the honors and courtesies due to a supreme power:

> As many as two or three hundred of these natives arrived at a time, bringing their wives and very young children. Whenever they came like this, bringing their offspring, the visit was a proof of peace, of friendship, and of trust; whereas, when they had only a few women with them, it was because they were at war. . . . When such a band of natives approaches a presidio, they make a camp a league away and send a courier with notice of their arrival and a request for permission to enter. Sometimes the garrison troops mount and go out to escort them. The formal entry then is something quite singular. As the bugles sound, you can see all the natives, holding themselves very proudly, riding in between the ranks of cavalry drawn up with sabers flashing in salute. I have seen one such group of Comanches take umbrage because no escort went to meet them. This slight was enough to make them decide not to enter the presidio at all.[22]

In the course of the 1820s the balance between accommodation and antagonism tipped toward the latter. This was in part due to Mexico's inconsistent Indian policy. Despite the lavish outlays of gifts and extensive promises of further presents during treaty talks, Mexico City procrastinated in sending the necessary moneys to the north, moving the governor of the recently unified states of Texas and Coahuila, Rafael González, to warn in 1824 that the lack of gifts and goods in the province was about to bring "a total collapse of the peace." Soon Comanches and their allies were raiding all across Texas and Coahuila, turning the lower Río Grande settlements into a dreadful world "where widows and orphans weep for dear ones slain" and "for sons and daughters carried into captivity." More funds became available for northern provinces in the late 1820s, but the politically unstable and economically impoverished Mexican republic struggled to keep the subsidies steady and sufficient. As the gift flow fluctuated, so too did the frontier relations; Comanches intensified and cut back their raiding activities in proportion to the availability of presents.[23]

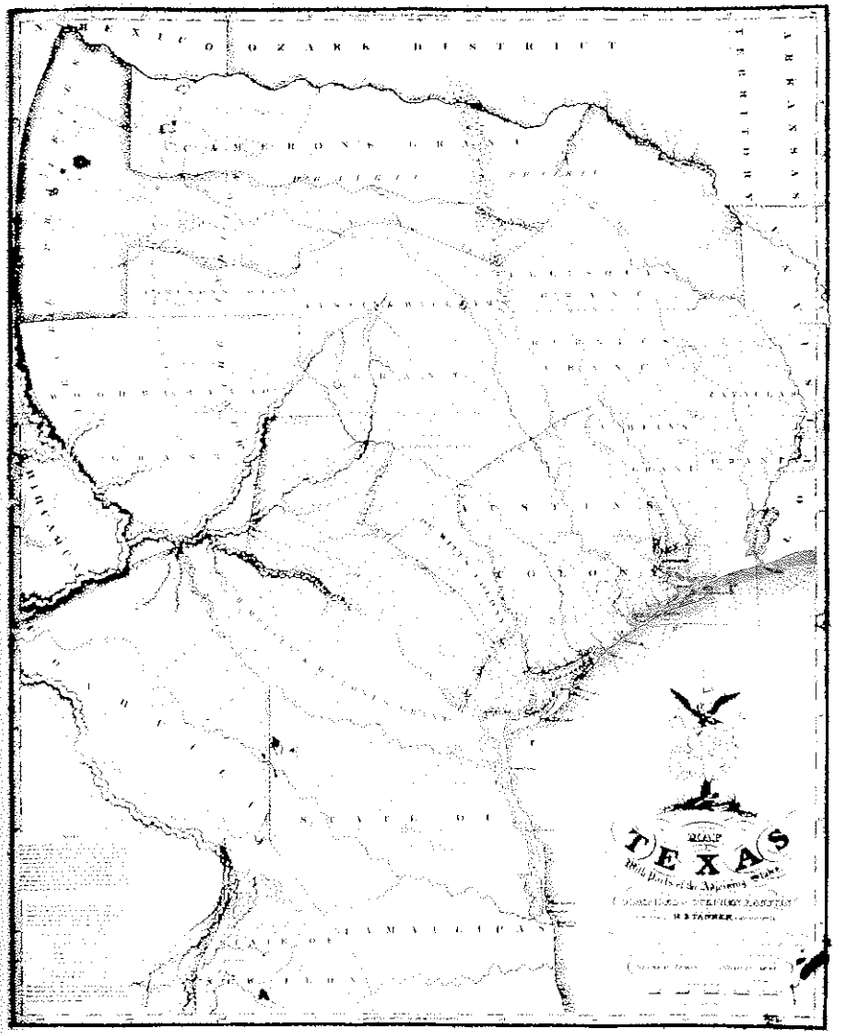
But as during the Spanish era, the raids were also stimulated by the Comanches' need to supply their trading economy, which in the 1820s became increasingly enmeshed with the United States markets and grew rapidly. In 1826 the *Natchitoches Courier* reported matter-of-factly that the Americans were engaged in "an extensive and often very lucrative trade" with Comanches, who "are supported with goods, in return for the horses and mules, of which they rob the inhabitants of the province [of Texas]." Itinerant American peddlers provided Comanches with nearly bottomless markets for stolen stock while supplying them with weapons that made raiding more effective. Acutely aware of the linkage between American trade and Comanche raids in Texas, Mexico's secretary of state in 1826 asked the United States minister in Mexico to suppress the livestock trade, calling the westering Americans "traders of blood who put instruments of death in the hands of those barbarians."[24]

Like their Spanish predecessors, Mexican officials simplified Comanche violence and reduced it to mere subset of American imperialism. It was a misconception that led to a massive miscalculation. As the authorities in San Antonio, Saltillo, and Mexico City saw it, the relentless Comanche attacks in Texas threatened to turn the province into an easy catch for the United States, which clamored for western lands to accommodate its growing population and its seemingly bottomless demand for raw materials. Faced with what it saw as an entangled threat of Comanche aggression and American expansion, the Mexican Congress adopted in the fall of 1824 a desperate measure: it opened the northern provinces to foreign immigration, hoping to solve both outstanding frontier threats at once.

Behind the new policy was the calculation that generous land grants and tax exemptions would turn the encroaching *norteamericanos* into loyal Mexican subjects. Mexico tried, in other words, to counter American colonization by absorbing the colonizers themselves into its national body. In March 1825 the legislature of Coahuila y Texas implemented the new law, opening its borders to all foreigners willing to accept Mexican rule and worship the Christian god. In short order, the state signed some two dozen contracts with *empresarios*, immigration agents who were responsible for selecting and bringing in the colonists, allocating lands, and enforcing Mexican laws. The other objective of the immigration law was to use the American colonies as shields against Comanches. The designated empresario grants covered almost all of Texas to the west, north, and east of San Antonio, sheltering—at least in theory—the state's vital parts from Comanche invasions. The largest of the empresario colonies, Stephen F. Austin's cluster of five adjacent grants, would eventually extend from the Gulf Coast to some two hundred miles northeast of San Antonio.[25]

Far from imposing frontier buffers, the new Anglo colonies were in their early years weak and exposed. Established on sprawling grants, they were scattered, isolated, and an easy prey for the mobile Comanche war parties. Rather than shields against Comanche raids, they became targets for them. Discouraged by the prospects of his settlement plans—and fully aware of the geopolitical dynamics of the Comanche trading-and-raiding economy—Austin in 1830 complained to the Mexican government that peace with the Comanches would be impossible as long as there was a market in the United States for horses stolen from Texas. By purchasing Comanche livestock, he bristled, American traders had effectively "hired" Comanches "to prosecute a pillaging war against the frontiers of Texas, Quahuila, and Nuevo Sentender, robbing those Provinces of Horses and Mules." But even Austin himself was not aware just how vulnerable his colony was: Texas officials suspected that some of Austin's own settlers were engaged in contraband livestock and arms trade with Indians.[26]

The wealthy and well-connected Austin eventually managed to organize effective militia or "ranger" units, which provided a measure of protection against Comanche attacks, and in the mid-1830s his colony boasted more than eight thousand settlers, extensive cotton plantations, regular mail service, and a dynamic capital, San Felipe de Austin, with three thousand residents and four schools. The vast majority of American immigrants, however, quickly learned to shun the violent interior of Texas and instead established themselves near the Nacogdoches region and along the Gulf Coast. This left the Mexican-controlled Tejano Texas around San Antonio wide open to Comanche raiders, whose mili-

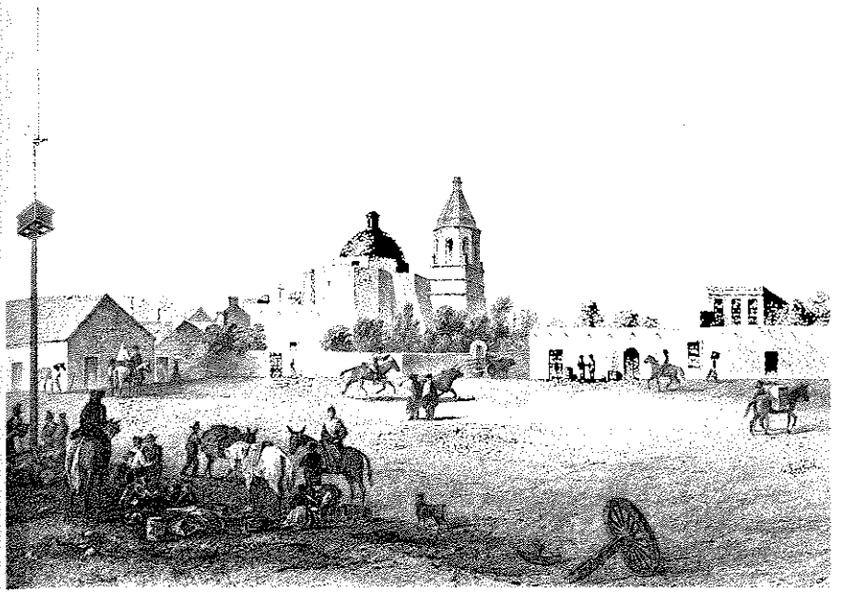


9. Map of Texas by Stephen F. Austin, 1835. Published by H. S. Tanner. This map captures the process of "cartographic dispossession." Euro-Americans diminished and delegitimized the power and territorial claims of indigenous inhabitants through map making. Although Comanches dominated much of the territory shown on Austin's map, they are depicted as almost landless: Comanchería has dissolved into Anglo-Texan empresario grants and Comanches seem to float above the southern plains, unattached to land and the political landscape. Courtesy of the Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

tary complex now had an international reach. They fought with American and British guns and enlisted auxiliaries among the Kiowas, Naishans, Apaches, Wichitas, and removed Indians. They used the Wichitas' Brazos River villages as staging areas for long-distance plundering forays, and their numerous Mexican captives provided crucial intelligence about those unfamiliar lands.[27]

From the mid-1820s on Comanches held much of Mexican Texas as a colonial appendage. In 1824 and 1825 several multiethnic war bands from Comanchería raided across Texas and into Coahuila, seeking horses and captives and killing resisting settlers. Many bands were reported to be using captured Mexican peasants as guides. San Antonio descended from helplessness to humiliation: in June 1825 a party of 330 Comanche men, women, and children rode into the capital and leisurely looted the town for six days. Attacks continued through the following year, but in 1827, in San Antonio, Comanche leaders buried the war with General Anastasio Bustamante, the military commander of the Eastern Interior Provinces. Mexican officials worked frantically to secure enough gifts to expand the truce into a peace, and when Tenewa Chief Paruakevitsi (Little Bear) visited San Antonio the next year to "renew the bonds of amity," the officials "showered [him] with gifts." Comanches embarked on an active border trade, visiting settlements from Nacogdoches to Aguaverde, and their chiefs frequented San Antonio to collect gifts and profess peace.[28]

But mirroring the developments during the late Spanish era, gift distributions soon morphed into tribute payments, for Comanches kept the peace only as long as presents were available. Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar, the future president of the Republic of Texas, remarked how the Mexicans "used to have to purchase peace from the Comanchees, who came to Bexar [San Antonio] regularly every year to get their annual tribute." The arrangement reached a nadir for San Antonio in 1832, when a party of five hundred Comanches entered the capital and extorted and tormented its citizens for several days, undisturbed by the Mexican troops in the nearby garrison who failed to intervene. Upon leaving, moreover, Comanches forced the disgraced soldiers to escort them back to Comanchería, for a Shawnee war party was in the neighborhood. This incident exhausted San Antonio's funds for gifting, and Comanches responded with a prolonged raiding spree that lasted until 1834, when presents again became available, producing a brief interlude of tranquility. Gift payments, in short, had become the condition for peace, turning Texans into tributaries of the imperial Comanches. Tadeo Ortiz, a Mexican reformer-colonizer, considered the arrangement intolerable, "an insult and degradation to the honor of the nation." "Millions of *pesos* are being spent on . . . impossible truces," he bristled, "which under the name of peace, are ignominiously formed. . . . [Indians'] good will is won with numerous presents at the expense of the people whom they continually insult, murder, and despoil of their property."[29]



10. *Military Plaza—San Antonio, Texas.* Steel engraving by James D. Smillie from drawing by Arthur Schott. Before the U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845, San Antonio lingered for decades in virtual tributary vassalage under the Comanche empire. From U.S. Department of the Interior, *Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey, Made under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior, by William H. Emory, Major First Cavalry and the United States Commissioner,* 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Cornelius Wendell, 1857–59), vol. 1. Courtesy of Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Although it yielded only imperfect protection, the policy of paying for peace gave the vital Tejano regions of Texas much-needed if tenuous respites from violence. Settlers who had sought protection in urban centers began to move back into the countryside, revitalizing the province's ranching industry, which had nearly expired under Comanche raids between 1811 and 1821. The number of active ranches along the San Antonio–Goliad corridor rose from eleven in 1825 to eighty in 1833, and several Tejano oligarchs built large estates with multiple buildings and elaborate fortifications. But the policy also had the unintended effect of redirecting Comanche raids into other northern Mexican departments.

In 1830, with Comanches trading peacefully in San Antonio, municipalities along the lower Río Grande reported intense Comanche attacks. In 1833, Berlandier reported, Comanches "launched a dreadful war against the peaceable inhabitants of the state of Chihuahua." They "overran several haciendas in Nuevo Leon, in the immediate vicinity of the capital. Around Matamoros they have pushed as far as the banks of the Rio Bravo, where they perpetrated a number of atrocities." Comanche leaders routinely disassociated themselves from the raids in the south to keep their access to the gifts open, but sometimes their stratagems were exposed. In 1834 Berlandier met in San Antonio a Comanche chief who blamed "a few hotheads" for the raids in Chihuahua, but he soon discovered that the chief too had been raiding in Chihuahua, "for every one of his horses had been stolen from the haciendas of the region he just had warned me away from."[30]

By the mid-1830s, it was clear that the Indian policy of Texas was a complete failure. The decision to open the province to American immigrants had backfired. Rather than moving to the interior to shield the province's core areas around San Antonio from Comanche attacks, most Americans stayed east of the Colorado River, beyond the Comanche range and within an easy reach of Louisiana, their main commercial outlet. The result was a splintering of Texas into two distinct and increasingly detached halves. The Anglo-dominated eastern half experienced steady growth, developing a flourishing export-oriented cotton industry and spawning nearly twenty new urban centers by 1835. This half was part of Mexico only in name. Its main economic and political ties extended eastward to the powerful mercantile houses of New Orleans, and its settlers often spoke no Spanish, held slaves in spite of a widespread aversion toward the institution in Mexico, and harbored separatist sentiments.[31]

The Tejano-dominated western half, meanwhile, descended into underdevelopment. As raids and violence engulfed vast portions of western and southern Texas during the early 1830s, basic economic functions began to shut down. Villages and farms were stripped of livestock and the reviving ranching industry faltered once again. Agriculture deteriorated as farmers refused to work on fields where they were exposed to attacks. Laredo on the lower Río Grande lost one-sixth of its population between 1828 and 1831 to Comanche attacks and smallpox, and Goliad, already weakened by Comanche raids, nearly expired during a cholera outbreak in 1834. Settlers lived in perpetual fear and near-starvation even in San Antonio, where, in the words of one observer, "nothing can be planted on account of the Comanches and Tahuacanos [Tawakonis] who frequently harass the city even in time of peace." Villages curled inward and grew isolated, for settlers "seldom venture more than a mile from town on account of the Indians." Major roads leading to San Antonio were frequently cut off, and Berlandier traveled on deserted roads lined with crosses marking places "where the Comanches had massacred travellers or herdsmen." The road from Coahuila to Texas crossed "an uninhabited country" where Indian raiders ruled, and commercial and political links between Texas and New Mexico existed only on paper. When assessing the long-term impact of Comanche raids on western and southern Texas, Berlandier depicted a decaying, psychologically disfigured captive territory: "Their war against the Creoles in Mexico, when they were allied with the Lipans, spread terror among the settlers up and down the border. . . . Their raids then became almost continuous and the garrisons were always besieged. The fields were left to run wild, and often even the solitary farmers were massacred in the midst of their households. The Comanche so thoroughly devastated most of the eastern interior states that many families there are still poverty stricken."[32]

It was this divided Texas that in 1835 rebelled against the central government and in 1836 became an independent republic with close ties to the United States. The Texas Revolution was the product of several long-simmering problems, which came to a head in 1834 and 1835 when the military strongman Antonio López de Santa Anna assumed dictatorial powers in Mexico City and imposed a conservative national charter known as Las Siete Leyes. Las Siete Leyes ended the federalist era in Mexico and ushered in a centralist regime bent on curtailing states' rights and sovereignty. The momentous shift galvanized Texas, turning the smoldering tensions over slavery, tariff exemptions, and immigration (further immigration from the United States had been banned in 1830) acute and then violent. When centralist forces marched into Texas in fall 1835 to rein in the renegade province, they faced unified resistance that included the vast majority of Anglo colonists and many prominent members of the Tejano elite. In November, delegations from twelve Texas communities met at San Felipe de Austin, declared allegiance to the federalist constitution of 1824, and cut off ties to the centralist regime.

Texan independence may have been predetermined by geography—Texas was simply too far from Mexico City and too close to the United States—but the event can be fully understood only in a larger context that takes into account the overwhelming power and presence of the Comanches in the province in the years leading to the revolt. The need to protect northern Mexico against Comanche attacks had been a central factor behind the 1824 and 1825 colonization laws, which opened the floodgates for American immigration into Texas, and the Comanche threat remained a burning concern into the 1830s, when Texas severed its ties to Mexico. In 1832, when delegates from Texas communi-

ties met at San Felipe de Austin and petitioned Mexico City for the separation of Texas and Coahuila—a move that bordered on treason—they complained bitterly about the utter inability of the distant state capital in Saltillo to deal with the Comanche question: "These communities [Jáen, San Marcos, Trinidad, and San Sabá Presidio] have disappeared entirely; in some of them the residents dying to the last man. . . . Many early settlers and their descendants have been sacrificed to the barbarians. . . . Every last one of us is probably threatened with total extermination by the new Comanche uprising."[33]

Many Tejano oligarchs shared those concerns, for their economic well-being had become dependent on the Anglo-Texas cotton industry and unrestricted access to U.S. markets. They were deeply incensed with the federal government's failure to provide the funds and soldiers with which Texas could have protected itself against Indian raids. Santa Anna's centralist government not only disregarded these sentiments but moved ahead with its plan to dissolve state militias, the safeguard of state sovereignty. That plan, if successful, would have left much of Texas wide open to Comanche attacks, and the federal government's resolve with the issue alienated many Tejano leaders and pushed them to support the revolt. Separation from Mexico remained an alien, even unpalatable idea to most Tejanos, who had no illusions about their political position in an independent Texas, but the centralist government's policy forced them to revolt to save themselves.[34]

Comanches represented a potentially fatal threat to American colonists, but more abstractly, they also constituted a useful political foil for American newcomers to justify their revolt against Mexican authority and the subsequent takeover of Texas. Like the Anglo-Texan conviction that Tejanos passively submitted to Santa Anna's dictatorial policies, Mexico's failure to fend off the Comanches were for Anglo-Texans signs of degradation of the Mexican character—its supposed stupidity, docility, lethargy, and lack of masculine vitality. Anglo-Texans denounced Mexican men guilty of numerous irredeemable defects: they had failed to protect property against Comanche raiders, they had paid tribute to heathen savages to save themselves, they had lost women and children to Indian captivity, and they had left Texas soil in the hands of primitives and thus in the state of wilderness. These failures, the Anglo-Texans argued, conveyed a moral and manifest path for history: Mexico neither could nor deserved to keep Texas. And predictably, the list of Mexican failures read as an inverse list of Anglo virtues. William H. Wharton, a leading Anglo-Texan politician, wrote in the early days of the revolt a pamphlet subtitled "Exposition of the Causes which have induced the Existing War with Mexico." In it he rationalized the revolt by explaining that Anglo immigrants had not so much received land grants from Mexico as conquered an underused wilderness from the Indians. Where the "lazy" and fearful Mexicans "could not be induced to venture into the wilderness of Texas," the robust Anglo pioneers had pushed ahead. And so, "under the smiles of a benignant heaven," the Anglo colonists "triumphed over all natural obstacles, expelled the savages by whom the country was infested, reduced the forest into cultivation, and made the desert smile. From this it must appear that the lands of Texas, although nominally given, were in fact really and clearly bought."[35]

In the emergent national mythology of the Texas Republic, Anglo immigrants *earned* Texas because they alone possessed the masculine and martial vigor to wrestle the land away from the Comanches and savagery. (This view conveniently neglected the fact that Anglo colonies had by and large steered clear of Comanche range; it also neglected the fact that after the catastrophe at the Alamo, Sam Houston had frantically tried to win over the Comanches and persuade them to block Santa Anna's advance.) When the uprising led to independence, the conviction that Mexicans had lost claim to Texas through their failure to defend it against Indians solidified into a dogma. "Mexico can never conquer Texas!" wrote Mary Austin Holley, cousin of Stephen Austin and the author of the first known English-language history of Texas in 1836. "The wilderness of Texas has been redeemed by American blood and enterprise. . . . I repeat it again and again. Mexico can never conquer Texas."[36]

On the borderlands of New Mexico, meanwhile, the relations between Comanches and colonial powers followed a different trajectory. While violence and exploitation came to define eastern Comanches' policies toward Spanish and Mexican Texas, western Comanches kept an unbroken peace with New Mexico from 1786 until the end of the Spanish colonial era. But this does not mean that the relations between Spanish New Mexico and western Comanches had become cleansed of contention, for beneath a thin veneer of tranquility the Comanches and colonists were engaged in an intense rivalry. That rivalry was only incidentally a typical Indian-white struggle for subjugation, survival, and territorial control; it was instead a multilayered, essentially imperial rivalry over political sway, the control of labor and resources, and spheres of cultural influence. The result was widespread economic, political, and cultural amalgamation across ethnic lines, amalgamation that was actively embraced by the Comanches and the great New Mexican masses but abhorred by the Spanish and, later, Mexican elites.

After the landmark treaty of 1786 between Chief Ecueracapa and Governor Juan Bautista de Anza, Spanish officials believed that the complete subjugation of the western Comanches was but a matter time. The architects of New

Mexico's Indian policy had a specific plan for the western Comanches who were to be made dependent on Spanish gifts and goods, isolated from the United States, and, eventually, Hispanized. Once this was achieved, even grander imperial schemes would become attainable. Bourbon officials meant to use the Comanche alliance to extend Spain's reach deep into the North American interior to prevent the United States from expanding its realm westward. They envisioned North America's heartland as the setting for a human web that was firmly anchored in New Mexico through the powerful yet obedient Comanches.[37]

In the course of the early nineteenth century, however, an almost diametric dynamic would emerge: it was New Mexico that would became dependent, isolated, and culturally transformed under rising Comanche power. Rather than becoming an instrument for Spain's imperial extension, the western Comanches became a hindrance to it. They detached themselves from Spain's restrictive embrace, refused to accept the role of a subordinate ally, and continued to maneuver independently and on their own terms. They forged ties with American merchants and built an imposing trade and alliance system that gradually mantled the midcontinent. By 1810, the real nerve center of the Southwest was not Santa Fe but the western Comanche rancherías along the upper Arkansas, Red, and Brazos valleys, where peoples from numerous nations congregated to exchange goods, forge and maintain political alliances, and organize large-scale multiethnic military campaigns. New Mexico's economic and political ties to Comanchería endured, but they had come to reflect its dependence on, not control over, the Comanche nation.

Comanches' ascendancy over New Mexico was in many ways a straightforward matter of economic size and reach. Comanchería dwarfed the densely populated but spatially unimposing colony, and Comanches' thick and far-reaching exchange network isolated New Mexico almost completely from North America's interior. Standing next to Comanchería, New Mexico appeared diminished and detached. Its political and economic reach extended no farther to the continental plains than Comanchería's edge, and it was shallow even there. Spain's weak control over the North American interior was betrayed by its officials' hazy geographic knowledge of the Great Plains. In 1804, when the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark expedition fomented fears of Anglo expansion, Spanish officials anguished that U.S. agents prepared to invade northern New Spain through the Missouri River, which they believed provided an easy access to New Mexico. As the American threat forced Spanish geopolitical imaginings into a sharper focus, the notion of a Spanish-controlled interior suddenly appeared a mere fallacy, as Charles Dehault Delassus reported from St. Louis, now a U.S. city: "perhaps it will result that those Indians who are the friends of the Spaniards [now], will become enemies, incited by the Americans."[38]

Moreover, in a reversal of Spanish designs, New Mexico grew increasingly dependent on Comanchería for basic resources. A vigorous border trade bound the New Mexican and Comanche economies together: both relied on each other's products and both experienced steady growth. Comanche exports—horses, mules, meat, hides, slaves, and salt—revived New Mexico's subsistence economy, and the many improvements that the Bourbon Reforms spawned in New Mexico opened new commercial prospects for Comanches. A booming trade with Chihuahua brought unforeseen quantities of Spanish products to New Mexico, allowing its inhabitants to supply Comanches with high-quality manufactured goods. New Mexicans also built a dynamic craft industry that produced woolen stockings, blankets, and textiles for both Chihuahua and Comanche markets. Perhaps most important, Comanche peace allowed New Mexicans to reclaim and rebuild villages, farms, and pasturelands that had been destroyed or abandoned during the prolonged raiding onslaught in the 1760s and 1770s. Pecos experienced a phoenix-like revival, and other vibrant population centers emerged in the Mora valley and around Taos, Abiquiu, and Albuquerque. Genuine borderland creations, these communities produced large quantities of maize, beans, and horses for domestic use as well as for Comanche trade.[39]

But the mutualism of the Comanche–New Mexican relations faltered after 1800. Western Comanches' commercial expansion on the plains simultaneously lessened their reliance on New Mexican markets and isolated the colony from the grasslands and its resources. The carefully laid out Spanish plans to induce dependence among the Comanches through the sale of inferior technology crumbled when Comanches extended their trade networks across the plains and gained access to high-quality British guns. And the trade links that attached Comanchería to distant markets in the east and north also worked to isolate New Mexico from the interior. In the early nineteenth century, Comanches had a virtual monopoly over New Mexico's eastbound trade, for the only Plains Indian groups trading in New Mexico were the Kiowas and Naishans, and even they did so only sporadically and likely under Comanche control. This put New Mexico's Spaniards in a bind: they needed Comanches' trade more than Comanches needed theirs. Spanish New Mexico, like the Pueblo communities that it subsumed, had always relied heavily on the products of the plains, but now the colony depended almost entirely on the Comanches for its access to those exports. Across the eastern frontier, from Taos to Albuquerque, the border towns looked to Comanchería for the necessities that kept them alive.

Perhaps the most tangible sign of Comanches' growing economic sway was

the changing commercial geography on the Comanche–New Mexico border. At first Comanche trade convoys frequented New Mexico's border towns, but in time the trade began to shift from Taos, Pecos, and Picurís toward Comanchería. The declining commercial pull of the Río Grande valley became apparent during the first decade of the nineteenth century when the number of Comanche visits to Pecos and Santa Fe dropped sharply. Comanches shifted their commercial activities farther east and closer to their own rancherías, dividing their trade among new border villages that rose on the eastern side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. In 1803 Governor Fernando Chacón described these border villages as sites of bustling exchange: "The products traded by the Spaniards to said nomad Indians are horses, saddlebags, *anqueras* (leather skirt covering the horse's rump), bits, hatchets, war axes, lances, knives, scissors, scarlet cloth, serapes, cloaks, woolens, indigo, vermilion, mirrors . . . loaf sugar, native tobacco, corn in flour and on the ear, bread, and green or dried fruit. In exchange, the nomads give captives of both sexes, mules, moccasins, colts, mustangs, all kinds of hides and buffalo meat."[40]

By 1810, San Miguel del Vado and San José del Vado along the Pecos and Mora valleys had replaced Taos and Pecos as New Mexico's main gateways to Comanchería. Besides their easy accessibility, Comanches were drawn to these eastern villages by their distinctive ethnic makeup. Many of their inhabitants were *genízaros*, who had lived in captivity among the Comanches before being ransomed by New Mexicans. Although nominally Spanish subjects, *genízaros* often maintained attachments to their former masters. Seized as children and raised in captivity by Comanches, they saw Comanches as lost relatives, and that sentiment led many to form new kinship ties: marriages between *genízaras* and Comanche men were common and several Comanches moved to live in San Miguel del Vado in the early nineteenth century. Wedded to Comanchería by deep historical, familial, and economic ties, San Miguel del Vado, San José del Vado, La Cuesta, and other eastern settlements were only superficially part of colonial New Mexico. When authorizing their grants, Spanish officials had envisioned them as vanguards that would shield the province against the Comanches and project Spanish power to the interior, but such designs soon dissipated. The rise of *genízaro* settlements did not signify New Mexico's expansion into the Comanche realm but rather the colony's persisting gravitation toward the economic and cultural power of Comanchería.[41]

Indeed, as the relations between the new villages and Comanches solidified, the trails that carried Comanches westward to New Mexico transformed into avenues for eastbound trading expeditions from New Mexico to Comanchería. In 1789 Governor Fernando de la Concha had authorized New Mexicans to visit

Comanches for trade, hoping that such interactions would allow Spanish officials to better monitor developments inside Comanchería, but it was not until the early nineteenth century that the comanchero commerce emerged as a distinct economic enterprise. The early comanchero trade was a fluid, often improvised affair that saw small New Mexican parties roaming the trackless Llano Estacado with their *carretas*, hoping to find some of the migratory Comanche bands, but the exchange could be brisk nevertheless. In 1814, for example, two comancheros traveled two months around the Llano Estacado, bartering forty-six serapes, five hundred pounds of provisions, and large quantities of tobacco for twenty horses and mules and six to eight hundred pounds of meat and lard. Most comancheros headed to the Canadian and Red rivers, which were easily accessible from San Miguel del Vado and other eastern villages, but they also frequented the western Comanche trade center in the upper Arkansas. In 1810, for example, more than two hundred New Mexicans traveled to the Arkansas, and ten years later the Stephen H. Long expedition found a well-marked trail leading from the upper Arkansas toward Taos along the Purgatoire valley.[42]

The comanchero trade was a borderland institution that rose to meet the needs of two societies across a narrowing cultural gulf. For Comanches, the trade offered several advantages. It shortened the distance they had to travel for trade and allowed them to avoid the microbe pools that prospered in New Mexico's urban centers. By concentrating trade in their own rancherías, Comanches could also exert greater control over the terms, mechanics, and forms of exchange. As for New Mexicans, trading in Comanchería opened a more direct access to the enormous wealth that circulated within the Comanches' commercial network. By taking their trade to the plains, New Mexicans could also shun government control, avoid taxes, and engage in illicit forms of exchange, such as smuggling branded livestock Comanches had stolen from Texas and Nueva Vizcaya. This kind of underground trade rarely shows up in the New Mexican records, but one American observer noted in the late 1810s that Comanches "carry on a small traffic with the Spaniards of Santa Fe, from whom they receive blankets, knives, and tobacco, in exchange for mules and horses which they capture from the Spaniards of the adjacent Provinces" of Texas and Nueva Vizcaya.[43]

The deepening linkages between eastern New Mexico and western Comanchería evoked panic among Spanish administrators, who feared that the border trade to Comanchería had the potential of disfiguring the entire economic structure of the colony. When Governor Chacón conducted an inspection of New Mexico's economic conditions in 1803, he was appalled to learn that the strongest economic ties of many local settlements extended eastward to Comanchería. This was a disturbing development to the Spanish elites who hoped to build an

ordered surplus-producing economy in New Mexico and then plug that economy to the market centers in Chihuahua and Mexico City. But as Chacón found out, much of New Mexico's wealth did not flow southward along the Chihuahua Trail but leaked eastward into Comanchería. Disgusted, he contrasted the chaos of the official provincial commerce with the orderliness of the Comanche trade: "The internal commerce [of New Mexico] is in the hands of twelve to fourteen [local] merchants who are neither properly licensed nor well versed in business matters. . . . The rest of the citizenry are so many petty merchants who are continuously dealing and bartering with whatever products they have at hand. Territorial magistrates are forced to mediate these exchanges [which are attended by] malicious and deceitful behavior and bad faith. Only does formality prevail in the trading carried on with the nomad Indians (*Naciones gentiles*), that being a give-and-take business conducted in sign language."[44]

Spanish officials, however, fretted more over the Comanches' social and cultural influence over New Mexico than their economic sway. At the same time that some administrators still entertained plans for the Hispanization of the Comanches, eastern New Mexico was rapidly blending into Comanchería. By the early nineteenth century, Comanche was widely spoken in New Mexico's eastern frontier, and in such border towns as Taos and San Miguel del Vado one often heard Comanche phrases mixed with Spanish. Also, the subsistence patterns in eastern New Mexico bore a strong Comanche imprint. When Spanish administrators bestowed land grants to new settlements in eastern New Mexico in the early and mid-eighteenth century, they conceived them as nuclei for what would become urban, Spanish-style agricultural centers with straight streets and central plazas. But the 1803 survey of the province's economy startled the officials; except for the Pueblo Indians, New Mexicans were "little dedicated to farming." In eastern New Mexico, bison hunting was taking over. By the early 1810s, the eastern villagers were harvesting between ten and twelve thousand bison a year from the Llano Estacado—enough to meet the subsistence needs of several thousand people—and the bison hunter, cibolero, was emerging as the cultural embodiment of frontier New Mexico. Mostly commoners with no access to raised meats, ciboleros made two annual hunting excursions to the plains. The first one in June was a relatively quick effort, but the fall hunt after the corn harvest was a large-scale operation that often included entire families and could take several months.[45]

The long trading and hunting trips into Comanchería inevitably promoted intimate ties with the Comanches, leading to extensive cultural borrowing. The ciboleros lived essentially like nomadic Indians, following the bison in massive caravans. The American trader Josiah Gregg described how they hunted, "like

wild Indians, chiefly on horseback, and with bow and arrow, or lance, with which they soon load their carts and mules. They find no difficulty in curing their meat even in mid-summer, by slicing it thin and spreading or suspending it in the sun; or, if in haste, it is slightly barbequed. During the curing operation they often follow the Indian practice of beating or kneading the slices with their feet, which they contend contributes to its preservation." Comancheros, too, fell under Comanche influence. When visiting the western Comanches trade fair on the upper Arkansas in 1821, Jacob Fowler encountered a "Spanish" comanchero party whose members "were painted like the Indians the day they traded." Many nineteenth-century observers found it impossible to differentiate ciboleros, comancheros, and Comanches from one another.[46]

In the minds of the Spanish officials, the extensive material and cultural borrowing was but the first step in a deeper corruption of New Mexico. Governor Concha had little but scorn for the colony's eastern villagers whom he saw as unreliable aliens impregnated by Comanche culture. "Under a simulated appearance of ignorance or rusticity they conceal the most refined malice. He is a rare one in whom the vices of robbing and lying do not occur together." As the governor saw it, this character degeneration was caused by "the dispersion of their settlements, the bad upbringing resulting from this, [and] the proximity and trade of the barbarous tribes in which they are involved."[47]

Most disturbingly, Concha believed that the villagers harbored separatist sentiments. When authorizing new villages in Comanchería's proximity, Spanish officials had expected the settlers to organize militias to defend the frontier against possible Comanche raids. Concha's investigation revealed a different reality. He noted that as many as two thousand eastern villagers defied royal authority and attributed this to their "desire to live without subjection and in a complete liberty, *in imitation of the wild tribes which they see nearby.*" "They love distance which makes them independent," he continued, "and if they recognize the advantages of union [with Spanish New Mexico], they pretend not to understand them, in order to adapt the liberty and slovenliness which they see and note in their neighbors the wild Indians." Looking east from Santa Fe, Concha found it difficult to say where New Mexico ended and Comanchería began. Betraying his anxiety, he recommended an extreme remedy: "the removal of more than two thousand laborers to another area would be very useful to society and the state." In early nineteenth-century New Mexico, the fundamental Spanish fear of being culturally consumed by the *bárbaros* seemed on the verge of becoming reality.[48]

Just how tight the economic and cultural bonds between eastern New Mexico and the Comanches were—and, conversely, how thin the links between the fron-

tier settlements and Santa Fe had become—dawned on Spanish administrators in 1805, when the newly appointed governor Joachín del Real Alencaster tried to both control and tap into the Comanche–New Mexican commerce by implementing a new license and taxation system. Furious over this meddling with their livelihood, the settlers of San Miguel del Vado and San José del Vado contrived to challenge the governor, mount a trading expedition into Comanchería as an act of defiance, and, if necessary, unite with other border villages against Santa Fe. Some reportedly even traveled to Comanchería to incite Comanches to rise up against Spanish authorities. The conspirators were captured before they could take further action, but their arrest only aroused more uproar. A mob of angry settlers from several villages moved to Santa Fe and threatened to start a rebellion, forcing the humiliated Alencaster to cancel his policy. Alencaster's successor, Alberto Maynez, further loosened the regulations and issued a slack passport system that allowed New Mexican traders to venture into Comanchería virtually unhindered.[49]

New Mexico's final decade as a Spanish colony was marked by mounting Comanche influence within its borders. As revolutionary spasms gripped the empire's core areas after 1810, compromising Mexico City's ability to support the frontier provinces, New Mexico grew increasingly dependent on the Comanches for resources and protection. Its settlers traded in Comanchería with such fervor that their long absences from home exposed the border to Ute and Apache attacks, and its officials gratified Comanche delegations with lavish gifts the colony really could not afford, fearing that a cessation of payments would prompt the Comanches to resume raiding and perhaps join the Americans for a feared invasion into Mexico.[50]

This unflinching pro-Comanche stance set New Mexico apart from the other Spanish colonies. While New Mexican communities clung to Comanchería, replicating its culture and economy like a double helix, Comanche raiders exploited and devastated large tracts of Texas, northern Coahuila, and northern Nuevo Santander. Gradually, Comanches divided the vast span of northern New Spain from the Nueces River to the upper Río Grande into distinct zones: they raided in one region, drew tribute in another, traded in the third, and peddled stolen Spanish goods in the fourth. Spanish administrators never managed to develop a uniform response to this onslaught, a failure that both denoted New Spain's helplessness in the face of Comanche power and exposed it to further exploitation. By the late 1810s, one observer noted, Comanche politics had fragmented New Spain's northern frontier almost to the point of nonexistence: "The Comanches have made themselves so redoubtable to the Spaniards that the governors of the different provinces of the frontiers have found it necessary to treat

separately with them. Often they are at war with one province and at peace with another; and returning, loaded with spoil, from massacring and pillaging the frontiers of one province, driving before them the horses and frequently even prisoners whom they have made, they come into another to receive presents, taking only the precaution of leaving a part of the spoil, above all the prisoners, at some distance from the establishments."[51]

Liberal gifts and a clandestine trade that did not exclude stolen Spanish property allowed New Mexicans to maintain stable relations with the Comanches until the end of the Spanish period, but the transfer to Mexican rule brought about a dramatic change. After having maintained an uninterrupted peace with New Mexico for thirty-five years, Comanches began raiding in the province again. The first flash of violence occurred in August 1821, only months after Mexico's independence, and its causes are revealing. Mexican authorities in Santa Fe denied a visiting Comanche delegation the customary annual gifts—which Comanches apparently had become to view as a perpetual privilege—and the disgruntled Comanche party took revenge on nearby settlements, pillaging several houses, killing sheep and cows, and raping two women. Governor Facundo Melgares pressed other districts to make donations for Indian gifting lest "desolation and death" follow, but such emergency measures did little to remove the larger structural problem. Lacking movable funds, the new Mexican nation failed to keep up the gift distributions that had helped maintain the peace during the Spanish era. Acutely aware of the connection between presents and peace, Mexican officials struggled to scrape together enough money for gifting, but their efforts were undermined by the meager support they received from the central government, which was preoccupied with the internal power struggles among the self-designated Emperor Iturbide, the congress, and the insurrectionists led by Generals Santa Anna and Guadalupe Victoria. By 1822, officials in Santa Fe had been forced to borrow more than six thousand pesos from the private sector for Indian gifts but received no compensatory funds from Mexico City.[52]

As gift flow from New Mexico to Comanchería ebbed and flowed in the following years, so too did the tempo and intensity of Comanche attacks in the province. The relations continued to deteriorate through the early 1820s, and by mid-decade the situation became so bad that the federal government had a reason to fear that New Mexicans might revolt if they did not receive better protection against the Indians. Santa Fe received in 1826 less than seven hundred pesos for gifts—not nearly enough to gratify New Mexico's many Indian neighbors—and the next year Comanches raided the border from Taos to Abiquiu.

But in 1827, in the aftermath of the failed Fredonian Rebellion in Texas, General Anastasio Bustamante extended a proclamation of truce to the Comanches. In August 1828 New Mexican ambassadors met with some six hundred western Comanches on the Gallians River and witnessed how they elected Toro Echicero (Sorcerer Bull) as head chief and ratified a formal treaty. Comanches promised to refrain from raiding on the condition that gifts would be made available in New Mexico, and in 1829 Paruakevitsi, the prominent Tenewa chief, met with Mexican officials near Bosque Redondo, endorsed Bustamante's peace declaration, and received generous gifts. But in 1830 funds were once again scarce, forcing Governor José Antonio Cháves to plead with Comanche chiefs to accept inferior gifts and honor the peace, but to no avail. A wave of violence of such force swept over New Mexico and the neighboring Chihuahua that the Mexican authorities cut all commercial ties to Comanchería and declared a general war on the Comanches.[53]

It was at this juncture of escalating Comanche violence that New Mexico began to cut loose from Mexico City. The colony had began to turn from central Mexico toward the power and wealth of Comanchería during the late Spanish era, and the rise of the American-dominated Santa Fe trade after 1822 had accelerated that eastern reorientation. But it was not until after 1830 that New Mexico began to disentangle itself politically from the rest of Mexico. Terrified by the prospect of a full-scale raiding war, New Mexicans put self-interest first and continued to bestow gifts on and trade with Comanches, ignoring the fact that their actions fueled violence elsewhere in Mexico. Comanches took this as a license to raid Chihuahua and Coahuila for horses and mules and then trade the animals to New Mexicans, who seemed determined to keep their commercial lines to Comanchería open. In 1831, after a violent episode at a trade rendezvous on the Comanche border, Mexican officials in Santa Fe banned the comanchero trade as "detrimental to order," but the embargo did little to suppress the institution that had become an integral part of New Mexico's economic and social world. Indeed, only a year later Captain José María Ronquillo insisted that the purchase of horses from Comanchería should be made an official policy on the grounds that New Mexico needed more horses to defend itself against Navajo raiders on the province's northwestern frontier. Ronquillo was fully aware that Comanches were engaged in livestock raiding in Chihuahua and that buying horses from them might further encourage those raids, but he promoted the commerce regardless. New Mexicans had resigned themselves to purchasing peace from the Comanches, even if it meant inflicting death and suffering for the rest of northern Mexico.[54]

This independent maneuvering ran up against Mexico City's ambitious

nation-building project, which gathered momentum after 1830. In 1835 political power in Mexico City moved from liberal federalists to conservative centralists, a momentous shift that immediately sparked a secessionist revolt in Texas and a federalist revolt in California. New Mexico followed suit in August 1837 when an armed rebellion erupted in Río Arriba. Sparked in part by class inequalities, the Chimayó Rebellion was a full-fledged popular revolt against the centralists' plans to impose direct national taxation and introduce nationwide religious reforms. There was also a borderlands element to the revolt, for direct taxation would have interfered with the eastern villagers' lifeblood, the Comanche trade. The rebels, mostly poor *vecinos*, *mestizos*, Creoles, and Pueblo Indians, captured and beheaded Governor Albino Pérez and named José Gonzalez, a cibolero hunter from Taos, as governor. They managed to take over most of northern New Mexico before being crushed by a "Liberating Army" led by Manuel Armijo. The repression of the Chimayó movement, together with Mexico's loss of Texas a year before, resulted in an outpouring of patriotic rhetoric in New Mexico and launched a nationalist campaign to preserve Catholicism and the Mexican culture.[55] But that campaign did not draw the province any closer to the rest of Mexico politically or economically.

If anything, in fact, the chasm only widened, for the 1830s also saw the escalation of the comanchero trade into a major economic institution that wedded New Mexico's economy firmly to that of Comanchería and inexorably pulled the province further apart from the rest of Mexico. This expansion of the comanchero trade stemmed from changing geopolitics in Comanchería: western Comanches had temporarily lost their control of the lucrative upper Arkansas trade center to the invading Cheyenne-Arapaho-American bloc and turned to New Mexico as an alternative source of crucial imports. New Mexicans seized the opportunity, and the 1830s and early 1840s saw comancheros making regular annual trips into Comanchería, traveling along well-marked trails, and bringing in guns, powder, serapes, brown sugar, corn, wheat tortillas, and specially baked hard bread. In return for the all-important weapons and foodstuffs, Comanches offered bison robes, bear skins, and, above all, horses and mules, which were in high demand among the New Mexicans who had embarked on a large-scale overland trade with the United States. Comancheros, many of them *genízaros* with strong cultural ties to Comanchería, had few qualms with doing business in stolen animals with Mexican brands. By decade's end, Comanches routinely used New Mexico as an outlet for war spoils taken elsewhere in northern Mexico. "Though at continual war with the south of the republic," Josiah Gregg wrote, "for many years the Comanches have cultivated peace with the New Mexicans . . . because it is desirable . . . to retain some friendly point with which to keep amicable inter-

course and traffic. Parties of them have therefore sometimes entered the settlements of New Mexico for trading purposes; while every season numerous bands of New Mexicans, known as *Comancheros*, supplied with arms, ammunitions, trinkets, provisions and other necessities, launch upon the Prairies to barter for mules, and the different fruits of their ravages upon the South."[56]

It was as if New Mexico had developed a certain immunity to Mexico City's designs and decrees, a condition that in 1840 took on concrete political shape at the highest level. In that year federal officials ordered New Mexico Governor Manuel Armijo to cancel the livestock trade with the province's bordering Indians, including the Comanches. Armijo summarily refused the order, condemning it as unreasonable. If trade was banned, he argued, Comanches would lose their interest in maintaining peace with New Mexico and launch open war, something the province could not endure. Moreover, he warned, the livestock trade was New Mexico's prime outlet for cash crops and so crucial for the Pueblo Indians that canceling it would risk igniting a general revolt. The ban was quietly forgotten, but a year later General Mariano Arista ordered Armijo to join Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila in a united—and unprecedented—campaign against the Comanches. The ambitious plan involved taking the war into Comanchería with two thousand troops while concurrently soliciting an armistice with Texas rebels. Again Armijo refused, insisting that New Mexico would not survive an all-out war against the Comanches, and once more the federal authorities capitulated.[57]

By now New Mexico had distanced itself from Mexico City to a point where its political ties to Comanchería began to seem tighter. In 1844 a Comanche delegation visited Santa Fe and told Mariano Martínez, now governor of New Mexico, that three hundred Comanche warriors were about to invade Chihuahua. Instead of trying to pressure the chiefs to call off the raid, Martínez sent them away with presents and dispatched a letter warning his counterpart in Chihuahua of the imminent assault. A year later New Mexico's administrators refused yet another call for a general campaign against the Comanches, making their disassociation from Mexico City and its Indian policy complete. In their efforts to protect the vulnerable province—and their own positions within it—New Mexican elites had been forced to choose between appeasing one of two imperial cores and, in more cases than not, they chose Comanchería.[58]

Viewed in context, the story of Mexican New Mexico becomes a dramatic counterpoint to that of Mexican Texas. Whereas Texas violently dismembered itself from Mexico starting in 1835, New Mexico remained within the Mexican fold until the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. The Chimayó Rebellion tested the federal government's mettle in New Mexico, and the Anglo-

dominated Santa Fe trade served as a vanguard for "the unconscious process of economic conquest," yet neither development spawned a strong secessionist movement. The divergent trajectories of Texas and New Mexico as Mexican provinces owed much to geography and demographics: New Mexico was shielded from the expansionist embrace of the United States by its relative isolation, which made it less attractive a destination for American immigrants, and by its larger Hispanic population, which ensured that the Americans who did immigrate remained a minority. Indeed, even if American entrepreneurs did serve as agents of capitalist expansion, anticipating the U.S. absorption of New Mexico, many of them married into the local gentry, integrating themselves into Mexican kinship networks and becoming something quite different from the color-conscious and isolationist "Texians," who casually labeled Mexicans "a mongrel race, inferior even to negroes." More broadly, New Mexico's relative immunity against American influence reflected the enduring power of the Catholic Church, which maintained a strong position in the territory and emerged as a potent national agent that regulated foreign-born residents' access to marriage, citizenship, and land.[59]

But while compelling, the dichotomy of wavering Texas and steadfast New Mexico is a simplification, for it neglects the penetrating, if often unspoken, influence of Comanches over New Mexicans. Intimate, violent, exploitative, and mutualistic all at once, New Mexicans' ties with Comanches both forced and seduced them to act and organize themselves in ways that were often deplorable and at times disastrous to the rest of Mexico. Indeed, it seems justifiable to ask to what extent the New Mexicans who paid tribute to a Comanche nation at war with the rest of northern Mexico, who made profit by trafficking in goods Comanches had stolen from other Mexican departments, who openly defied federal orders to sever unsanctioned ties to Comanchería, and whose way of life was permeated by Comanche influences were still Mexican subjects?

On March 2, 1836, at Washington-on-the-Brazos, delegates from more than forty Texas communities voted to separate from Mexico. Mexican officials had anticipated the rebellion, as official forces and Texas revolutionaries had clashed violently several times during the previous nine months, and at the time the declaration of independence occurred, General Antonio López de Santa Anna was besieging the San Antonio garrison with more than two thousand troops. A series of battles ensued—at the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto—but the Texan forces prevailed, and on May 14, Santa Anna signed the Treaty of Velasco, in which he recognized the independence of Texas and promised to withdraw Mexican troops below the Río Grande. The government of Mexico refused to ratify the

treaty and continued the war for nine more years, but Texas considered itself an independent republic. The future of the Southwest suddenly lay wide open. Could Mexico recapture Texas and restore its national unity? Could it hold on to New Mexico and fend off the Texans who claimed that their republic's western border extended to the Río Grande? Would Texas be annexed by the United States or would there be two Anglo nations west of the Mississippi? And how would the new republic solve what was perhaps its most pressing problem—the war against the Comanches that it had inherited from Mexico?

The Republic of Texas was a political anomaly, an independent nation that did not expect—or much want—to remain as such. Anticipating fast annexation by the United States, it kept its eastern border open and took in thousands of American immigrants each year. Its government, modeled after that of the United States, was strong only on paper and soon proved incapable of accommodating the prodigious demographic and material growth. There was no treasury to speak of, no functioning taxation system, and no money economy. Geographically, the republic was a patchwork of disparate and in many ways incompatible parts. Its division into a flourishing Anglo cotton kingdom and a poor Tejano Texas clustered around San Antonio and Goliad prevailed, but in the late 1830s, as the immigrant flow from the United States swelled, yet another distinctive subsection emerged: a restless northern frontier of poor, land-hungry subsistence farmers. Texas, in short, was disjointed, expansionist, volatile, and potentially self-destructive. Those were also the attributes of its Indian policy.[60]

The relations between the Lone Star Republic and Comanches were erratic from the outset. Sam Houston, the first regularly elected president, believed that the republic's fate hinged on the Indian question. He first tried to foment a general Indian war to bring the U.S. Army into Texas and to expedite annexation, but when that scheme fell through, he worked passionately to formalize the relations with Indians. Unlike most prominent Texan officials, Houston, who had married a mixed-blood Cherokee woman and lived for years in Indian Territory, believed that Texas could have peace only if the republic made concessions to Indian nations. He signed treaties with the Cherokees and Shawnees in fall 1836 and in December of that year sent messengers into Comanchería. Well versed in Indian diplomacy, he promised Comanches the three perquisites of peaceful relations: gifts, trade, and face-to-face diplomacy. "You can let us have horses, mules and buffalo robes in change for our paints, tobacco, blankets and other things which will make you happy" his message promised. "When the grass rises in the Spring, you must come with your Chiefs to see me and I will make you and them presents."[61]

But as Houston was trying to win over the Comanches through diplomacy, the Texas Congress opened all Indian lands to white settlement, overriding the president's veto. The settler frontier leaped up the Brazos, Colorado, and Guadalupe rivers toward Comanche hunting ranges, and the relations between Texas and Comanches degenerated into violence. Comanches raided the new farms, killing settlers and taking horses, mules, and captives, and Texas militia units patrolled the frontier, killing Comanches. Attempting to restore peace, Houston dispatched commissioners into Comanchería in March 1838. Alarmed by the republic's palpable zeal and capacity for expansion, Comanches now deviated from their traditional notion of fluid borders and demanded that the territories of the two nations should be separated by a fixed boundary line guaranteed by a treaty. "They claim," the commissioners reported, "all the territory North and West of the Guadalupe mountains, extending from Red river to the Rio Grande, the area of which is nearly equal to one fourth of the domain of Texas." Forbidden by Texas law to yield any lands claimed by the republic, the commissioners evaded the issue and the talks remained inconclusive. Yet trading parties from Texas visited Comanchería during the spring, and in May Comanches signed a "Treaty of Peace and Amity" in the newly established town of Houston.[62]

In late 1838, however, Houston lost the election for president to Mirabeau B. Lamar who summarily renounced his predecessor's conciliatory Indian policy. Envisioning an independent empire that would eventually expand to the Pacific Ocean, he authorized the Texan Santa Fe Expedition to divert a portion of the U.S. overland trade from Santa Fe to Texas and, if possible, to occupy the eastern half of New Mexico. To solve the Indian problem, Lamar recruited nine companies of mounted volunteers and rangers, which routed the Cherokees, Shawnees, Delawares, and Kickapoos north of the Red River. On the northwestern front, Lamar sent surveyors into Indian lands and moved the capital to Waterloo (soon to be renamed Austin) at the fringes of Comanche territory. Driven in part by land-hunger and in part by virulent fears and hatred of all things Mexican and Indian, Texas launched a genocidal war against the Comanches. The first non-Indians to bring the war to Comanchería since Juan Bautista de Anza's invasion in 1779, Lamar's soldiers hunted down Comanche bands, often indiscriminately killing men, women, and children. Comanches retaliated by razing farms, slaughtering cattle, seizing captives, and killing settlers and mutilating their bodies. They raided deep into Texas and put San Antonio under siege. A wave of toxic racism washed over the Texas frontier, where Indians became branded as "red niggers" or "wild cannibals of the woods."[63]

In January 1840, after a destructive smallpox epidemic swept Comanchería, Comanches sued for peace and sent representatives to San Antonio. To evoke sympathy, they returned a white boy and explained that their nation had "rejected the offers of the [Mexican] Centralists, who have emissaries among them, striving to stir up a general revolt." Texas officials pressured Comanches to return all white captives and invited their principal chiefs to visit. Meanwhile, Texas Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston instructed the officials in San Antonio to impress on Comanches that they were to avoid all Texas settlements and allow Texas officials to "dictate the conditions" of their residence. He ordered the officials to take the Comanche delegates as hostages if they failed to deliver captives. In March, Muguara, a powerful eastern Comanche chief, led sixty-five men, women, and children to San Antonio, but they brought only one captive, a sixteen-year-old white girl. The chiefs and captains were taken to the local jail that had a council room. When Chief Muguara refused to deliver more captives on the grounds that they were held in the rancherías of other chiefs, soldiers opened fire at point-blank range and killed twelve. Twenty-three more Comanches were shot on the streets of San Antonio and thirty were taken captive.[64]

In the following weeks Comanches exchanged Anglo and Mexican captives for their own in San Antonio, but the massacre had left them distraught and enraged. Midsummer brought retaliation. Some five to seven hundred warriors, led by Potsanaquahip (Buffalo Hump) and possibly armed with guns obtained from Bent's Fort, swept down the Guadalupe River, killing, plundering, and burning their way down to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, where they sacked and looted the towns of Victoria and Linnville. On their way back, the party was intercepted at Plum Creek by Texas Rangers and their Indian auxiliaries. Armed with Colt revolvers, the rangers gunned down several warriors. In October, Texas volunteers ambushed a Comanche ranchería north of the Colorado River, killed 140 men, women, and children, and seized 500 horses. By the winter, most Comanches had retreated north, leaving thousands of square miles open for settlers from Texas.[65]

But then the pendulum of Texas Indian policy swung again. The war had exhausted Texans as much as it had Comanches. Lamar's three-year campaign had taken countless lives, drained the republic's treasury, and ruined its credit. There were rumors that Mexican agents had instigated the Comanche march to the Gulf Coast and were trying to join forces with the Plains Indians to invade Texas. And although the Texas frontier had penetrated Comanchería, it was clear that the frontier would not be safe without a solid peace with the Comanches, who could tear through Texas and siege and sack its largest cities. Lamar, whose popularity had plummeted among the proannexation section as well as the planter-merchant elite who carried the financial burden of Indian wars, lost the 1841 election to Houston. Houston embarked on restoring diplomatic ties with Comanches. He sent peace feelers into Comanchería and established several government-sponsored trading houses in Austin, San Antonio, and New Braunfels, and near present-day Waco, where Comanches could obtain manufactured goods, ransom Anglo captives for handsome profits, and collect gifts that helped cover the dead and maintain peace. He moved the capital from Austin to Houston, farther away from Comanchería, and dismantled most ranger companies, which put the plans for frontier expansion on hold, allowing Comanches to reclaim lost territories. Out of the bloodshed, horror, and hate of the Lamar years a fragile compromise emerged, which saw both sides, for their particular strategic purposes, reaching toward accommodation.[66]

Forging a formal treaty proved more difficult, however, because the Council House massacre had left the Comanches guarded and cynical. They declined in early 1843 an invitation to talks by declaring that "the bones of their brothers that had been massacred at San Antonio had appeared on the Road and obstructed their passage," and they were now adamant that a defined boundary line should separate Texas from Comanchería. But in the late fall Chief Mopechucope (Old Owl) dispatched a message detailing that any treaty would have to include a boundary line running from the Cross Timbers to the confluence of the Colorado and the San Sabá rivers and "from thence in a direct line to the Río Grande." It was a demand that no Texas official could concede, for Texas law did not recognize land titles to Indians, but Houston, skirting the law, responded that he was willing to discuss the proposed line. In fall 1844 Comanches finally met Houston and his representatives at Tehuacana Creek near the Torreys' trading post. In attendance were also representatives from the Cherokees, Delawares, Shawnees, Caddos, Wacos, and Lipans, whom Houston wanted to include in treaty relations.[67]

When the talks began, Comanches set the course and tone. Potsanaquahip, the principal Comanche delegate, proclaimed his desire for peace, but, to Houston's shock, he also wanted a new border line: the boundary Mopechucope had proposed earlier was "too far up the country." Potsanaquahip demanded a new line that started at the southern tip of the Cross Timbers, a "good days ride" above Austin, then ran southwestward skirting San Antonio, and finally followed the San Antonio Road to the Río Grande. The chief, in other words, claimed all of Texas except for a 125-mile belt along the Gulf Coast, insisting that his people needed the land for their bison and wild horses. But Potsanaquahip also had a more imperial agenda. "I want my friends," he stated, "these other Indians, to settle on the line and raise corn and I can often come down among them"—an

apparent attempt to create buffer villages that would shield Comanchería from Texas while simultaneously serving it as supply depots.[68]

Potsanaquahip's expansive demands outraged Houston, forcing him to leave out the border clause from the final treaty, which mentions the border line only in the future tense: it was "to be marked and run." But Potsanaquahip's maximalist approach may have been a premeditated negotiating tactic aimed at securing what Comanches had for a long time considered theirs. The Treaty of Tehuacana Creek did not specify an exact boundary, but it implicitly states that the string of Indian trading houses at the Comanche Peak and on the middle Brazos and lower San Sabá rivers were to be considered a demarcation line separating the two nations. That line was farther north and west than Potsanaquahip's proposed boundary, but it followed closely the historical southern border of Comanchería, securing Comanches their traditional plains core territory.[69]

The Treaty of Tehuacana Creek ushered in a delicate imperial détente between the Comanche empire and Texas. Texas continued to sponsor licensed trading houses where Comanches could sell their surplus stock; purchase ironware, fabrics, and flour; and have their guns repaired by blacksmiths. The Texas government invested vast sums in gifting and obliged its merchants to obey Comanche protocols, and Comanches largely refrained from raiding in Texas. With Delawares serving as messengers, Comanches and Texans met in frequent councils to forge new geopolitical arrangements that would meet the needs of their nascent alliance. Mopechucope promised to exert his power to prevent the Wichitas from raiding in Texas and suggested a new policy toward the Lipans, whose presence around San Antonio drew Comanche war bands below the boundary line: all Lipans should be removed north into Comanchería, where they would live under Comanche control. Texas officials, in turn, issued passports that allowed Comanche war parties to travel undisturbed through Texas into Mexico. When the United States and Texas moved toward annexation in winter 1844–45, the Comanche question loomed large in the process: the western counties of the republic voted for annexation largely out of hope that the U.S. Army would neutralize the Comanches and expell them from the state. Yet in May 1846, three months after a formal transfer of authority from the republic to the newly founded state, U.S. delegates signed a treaty with the Comanches, pledging to continue gift distributions in Texas. In June a Comanche commission led by Chief Santa Anna visited Washington, and the next year Texas Governor James Pinckney Henderson ratified the boundary by establishing a neutral zone thirty miles above the state's northernmost settlements.[70]

In 1847, then, Comanchería's southern border stood almost exactly where it had been ten years before. By enforcing a formal boundary line, Comanches had drawn a major concession from the far richer and far more populous Texas: although official maps failed to show it, Texans had signed away nearly half of their claimed territory to the Comanche nation. But Comanches, too, had compromised. When they imposed a fixed border, they in effect gave up their arrogated privilege to raid Texas for livestock and slaves and extort it for tribute, privileges that had sustained their economic growth for nearly a century. Texas transformed, even if briefly, from a fluid tributary and raiding frontier into bordered land of international coexistence with well-demarcated lines. It was a concession from Comanches but one they could well afford to make, for they had already built a new and much larger raiding hinterland below the Río Grande.

After their conquest of the southern plains in the eighteenth century, Comanches expanded their domain slowly and in small increments. Their systematic stock-and-captive raiding in Texas and New Mexico could be seen as a kind of territorial expansion, as it allowed them to control a good deal of the revenue-generating assets of the colonial Southwest, but the attacks never transformed into permanent occupation. Comanches did experiment in other fronts with extending their range beyond the grasslands, most notably in the 1770s when they pushed deep into Ute territory beyond the Rockies, but such campaigns did not have lasting success and were invariably abandoned. The Comanches, it seems, had reached the natural limits of expansion. All the things they had grown to need—hunting ranges, pasturelands, market outlets, raiding domains—were close at hand, making further expansion unnecessary and potentially counterproductive.

But then, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Comanchería burst out of its plains confines. Through remote operations and measured mass violence, Comanches created a new raiding economy in northern Mexico below the Río Grande. They escalated the range and scope of their plundering operations until vast expanses of Mexico's Far North had been turned into an extractive raiding domain: their war bands harnessed the region's transportable resources—horses, mules, cattle, and captives—so thoroughly and suppressed local resistance so completely that, in economic and military terms, much of northern Mexico became an extension of Greater Comanchería. By the 1830s contemporaries started to speak of northern Mexico as a Comanche colonial possession. "Comanches," the Indian officials of the Republic of Texas concluded in 1837, "[are] the natural enemies of the Mexicans whom they contemptuously discriminate their *stockkeepers* and out which nation they procure slaves." "They declare," another observer wrote, "that they only spare the whole nation [of Mexicans] from destruction because they answer to supply them with

horses. The assertion seems to be fully carried out in practice, for it is no uncommon occurrence for a party of Comanches to cross the Rio Grande and after spreading terror wherever they go to drive off large numbers of animals."[71]

Comanche war parties first pushed south of the Río Grande in the late 1770s and for the next four decades raided the region intermittently. Various motives drew them this far south. Some raids seem to have been destroy-and-kill operations aimed at weakening the Apache villages in southern New Mexico and Texas and preventing Lipan and Mescalero hunting and war parties from entering the contested raiding and trading grounds around San Antonio. Comanches also seized Apache captives, who fetched high prices in San Antonio, Santa Fe, and Nacogdoches, and whose enslavement underwrote the Comanche-Spanish alliance. Some Comanche war parties targeted Spanish outposts and extracted gifts from the Spanish presidios along the Río Grande, thereby extending their tributary hinterland far to the south of their borders. For western Comanches, who had kept an uninterrupted peace with New Mexico between 1786 and 1821, the forays opened the possibility of forging a new raiding economy in the south.[72]

The raids increased markedly in 1816, when Comanches and Lipans formed a short-lived alliance. The truce gave Comanches virtually unrestricted access to the lower Río Grande valley and the Spanish settlements along and beyond it. For several years, Comanches and Lipans raided Laredo, Revilla, and other villages along the Río Grande for horses and captives, sometimes plunging south of the valley to attack the wealthy haciendas in Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila. Texas became a thoroughfare for Comanche war parties. "The Comanches are obliged to cross this country to go to pillage the frontiers of the Provincias Internas," one observer wrote in 1818, noting the established nature of the operations: "They have there some regular camping grounds at places where they find water and some pasturage for their horses. This trail is known under the name of *Chemin de Guerre des Comanches*. The war parties, which are rarely less than two hundred to three hundred men, leave it but little." Then, however, the raids into Mexico slowed down. In 1822 Comanches signed a national treaty in Mexico City and a provincial treaty in San Antonio and for a while refrained from raiding Mexican settlements. The Comanche-Lipan alliance unraveled the same year when Lipans, for unknown reasons, killed several Comanche men who had married into Lipan villages. For the next few years Comanches were preoccupied with a "bitter warfare" against the Lipans.[73]

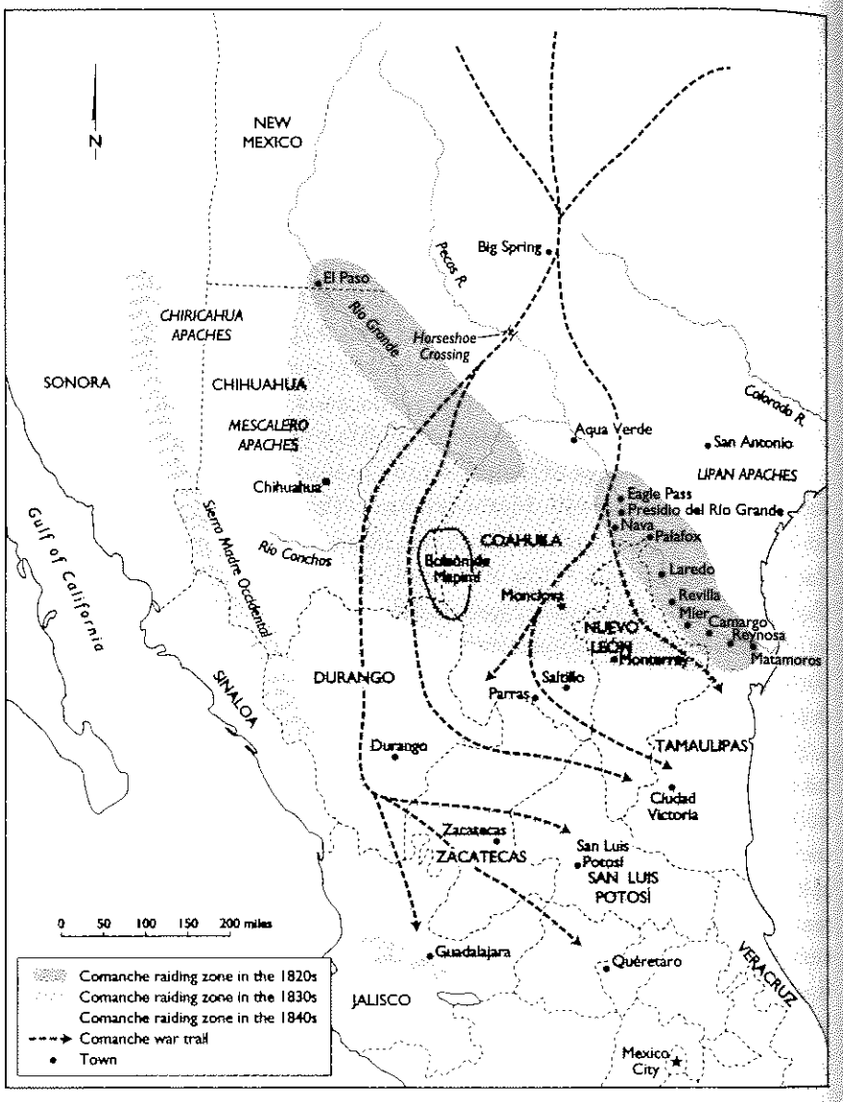
Large-scale raiding resumed in 1825 and 1826. Accompanied by Kiowas and apparently guided by Mexican captives, western and eastern Comanches sent several war parties to the south, lashing the Río Grande frontier from El Paso

to Coahuila. From there on, the raids escalated steadily, eventually engulfing much of northern Mexico. In 1828 Comanches razed the recently built military town of Palafox on the lower Río Grande, killing most of its inhabitants. A few years later, "emboldened by the slack defensive system of the Mexicans," their war parties crossed the Río Grande in several places. They seized control of Apache war trails from Matamoros to northern Chihuahua, forcing the Lipans and Mescaleros to shift their raiding operations west, south, and north.

By the late 1830s, Comanches were making "continual inroads upon the whole eastern frontier of Mexico, from Chihuahua to the coast; driving off immense numbers of horses and mules, and killing the citizens they may encounter, or making them prisoners." Moving through Texas at will, they claimed its entire western part down to the Rio Grande—"the most healthy, fertile, and desirable portion of the republic," as one Anglo-Texan put it—as their own. There was still another upsurge of raiding activity in 1840 and 1841 when large-scale war parties struck deep into Mexico, and soon the Comanche raiding network covered much of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Durango, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí. When the Mexican-American War broke out in 1846, Comanche war bands ranged into the Mexican tropics. They were active in Jalisco and attacked at least once the city of Querétaro, which lies 135 miles north of Mexico City, and their war trails extended 1,000 miles—almost fifteen degrees of latitude—south of Comanchería's center.[74]

It is not difficult to read strategic intention into such a dramatic expansion. Like most imperial powers, Comanches strove to separate the zones of conflict from the zones of peace within their realm. By shifting the geographic focus of their raiding operations far to the south—and far from their borders—they were able to decrease the possibility of punitive campaigns into Comanchería. In this sense, the expansion could be seen as a defensive measure, an attempt to render violence remote. The deeper into Mexico the Comanches pushed, the safer they could feel at home.[75]

Seen from a different angle, Comanches' thrust into northern Mexico stemmed from the simultaneous vitality and vulnerability of their power complex. Early nineteenth-century Comanchería was a dense and dynamic marketplace, the center of a far-flung trading empire that covered much of North America's heartland. The Comanche trade pump sent massive amounts of horses and mules to the north and east—enough to support the numerous equestrian societies on the central, northern, and eastern Great Plains and enough to contribute to the westward expansion of the American settlement frontier. In return for their extensive commercial services, Comanches imported enough horticultural produce to sustain a population of twenty to thirty thousand and enough guns,



11. Comanche raiding hinterland in northern Mexico. Map by Bill Nelson.

lead, and powder to defend a vast territory against Native enemies as well as the growing, expansionist Republic of Texas.

But that thriving exchange system was rapidly approaching the limits of its productive foundation. Since Comanches reserved the bulk of domestically raised horses for their own use, the viability of their trading network depended on continuous livestock raiding. But by the 1820s, the traditional raiding domains had become either exhausted or unavailable. Decades of on-and-off pillaging had wrecked the pastoral economy of Texas, whereas New Mexico, the site of intense raiding in the 1760s and 1770s, had attached itself to Comanchería through a tribute relationship. Comanches continued sporadic raiding in Texas through the 1820s and 1830s, but the returns failed to meet their expansive livestock demand, which skyrocketed in the late 1830s and early 1840s when they opened trade with the populous nations of Indian Territory. To keep their commercial system running, Comanches needed new, unexhausted raiding fields, and they found them in northern Mexico. U.S. Army Captain Randolph B. Marcy saw a direct link between the trade with removed Indians and the raids into Mexico. "A number of Delawares, Shawnees, and Kickapoos," he noted in 1849, "have for several years past been engaged in a traffic with the prairie Indians, which has a tendency to defeat the efforts of the military authorities in checking their depredations upon the citizens of the northern provinces of Mexico."[76]

In addition to livestock, Comanches pushed south of the Río Grande in search of Apache and Mexican slaves. The old eastbound slave traffic had all but collapsed with the U.S. takeover of Louisiana and the subsequent advent of large-scale black chattel slavery in the province, but Comanches could still find profitable markets for captive women and children in New Mexico and Texas. Moreover, devastated by three successive smallpox epidemics in 1799, 1808, and 1816, Comanches needed to supplement their workforce with systematic coerced labor drafts. They transformed themselves into large-scale slaveholders, and they did so by combing northern Mexico for captives (see chapter 6). According to Miguel Ramos Arizpe, a well-informed priest and diplomat, Mexico's northern provinces lost more than two thousand men, women, and children to Indian captivity between 1816 and 1821. Comanches, another observer noted, "are exceedingly fond of stealing the objects of their enemies' affection. Female children are sought with greatest avidity, and adopted or married."[77]

Comanche raiding thus generated a massive northward flow of property from Mexico into Comanchería and its trade channels, a development promoted by many interest groups in North America. The Bent brothers encouraged Comanches to raid Mexican settlements, as did Holland Coffee, who "advised them to go to the interior and kill Mexicans and bring their horses and mules to him." By the late 1830s it had become a common belief that "enterprising [American] capitalists" had established trading posts on the Comanche-Texas border in order to tap the "immense booty" that the Comanches, "the most wealthy as well as the most powerful of the most savage nations of North America," were hauling from northern Mexico. Texas officials provided Comanche war parties free ac-

cess through their state, hoping to direct the raids to Mexico, and even supplied southbound war bands with beef and other provisions. By the mid-1840s, the arrangement had solidified to the point that Chief Pahayuko (Amorous Man) could ask Texas Rangers to go with his band "to war agenst [*sic*] the Mexicans." New Mexico's officials routinely turned a blind eye to the fact that their subjects traded in horses and mules taken from other Mexican provinces, and some New Mexicans were even rumored to be joining Comanche war parties south of the Río Grande. From the vantage point of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, or Tamaulipas, it easily seemed that a depraved North American coalition of Indians, Americans, and New Mexicans had emerged to exploit and enfeeble northern Mexico.[78]

Comanche raiding in northern Mexico was a veritable industry. By the 1830s, the single path across Texas had evolved into a grid of well-trodden war trails. The trails started at the present-day Big Spring, a pool of artesian water near the headwaters of the Colorado River, which served as a staging area where Comanche and Kiowa parties from all across Comanchería gathered in spring to rest and water their horses before heading south. From the Big Spring two trunk lines carried raiders south. The two lines forked into four near the Río Grande and then plunged deep into Mexico, skirting major cities and military forts. Leading from the main prongs there were numerous lateral lines, which webbed across much of northern Mexico, allowing Comanches to adjust to variations in weather, availability of game, and Apache competitors. Along and around the trails, Comanches knew numerous waterholes, lookout points, way stations, and prime campsites with winter pasturage.[79]

Once south of the Río Grande, Comanche war parties often camped and rendezvoused at the Bolsón de Mapimí, a lightly populated desert plateau nestled amidst the jagged mountain ranges and sierra forests of southeastern Chihuahua, western Coahuila, and northern Durango. The Bolsón was easily accessible from the western and central trails and offered Comanches and their herds a sanctuary of mild weather, natural springs, clear streams, seasonal lakes, and protective rock entrenchments for camping. From the 1830s on, the raids into Mexico began to take the shape of seasonal migrations. Comanche war bands started to bring entire families with them and extend their sojourns over several seasons, turning the previously desolate Bolsón into a permanent, self-sustaining settlement colony. As in Comanchería proper, Comanches spent their days hunting local game for subsistence, collecting wild foods, and bearing and rearing children, and like the southern plains, the Bolsón was dotted with large, slowly migrating Comanche rancherías that lined streams and river valleys with massive horse herds. Comanches walled their favorite campsites like Laguna de

Jaco with parapets, and their large horse and mule herds cut wide roads into the terrain. For the occasional American or Mexican visitors, the region had an eerie feel of a colonized landscape. "In the fall and winter season," one observer wrote, "their home is . . . in the *Bolson de Mapimi*, a vast basin shut in by high mountains at the west. Here they enjoy uninterrupted possession of a wide extent of country, whence they make their sallies into the heart of Mexico."[80]

Part settlement colony and part staging area, the Bolsón plateau was the nest from which Comanche war parties fanned out westward, eastward, and southward, launching wide-ranging campaigns across northern Mexico. Sometimes in small parties, sometimes in big war bands, they moved from one target to another, living off the land while sacking ranches, haciendas, villages, towns, and mining communities. They drove off entire horse and mule herds; captured women and children; and butchered cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats for food. To suppress resistance, they killed Mexican men, burned houses, destroyed food storages, and slaughtered animals they could not take or did not need. Once the parties had accumulated booty, they returned to winter in the Bolsón, waiting for grass to grow along the trails to sustain their massive herds.

The excursions were carefully planned and organized. In 1847 Chief Potsanaquahip stunned a U.S. Indian official by explaining how he was going to take his band to Parras, Chihuahua, and by identifying in detail the villages he would raid on the return journey. Several Mexican observers remarked that the Comanche war parties that moved in seemingly random patterns were in fact highly disciplined units, organized under "generals" and "captains" who exercised complete authority over their followers during the campaign. "When the march is in war formation," Berlandier wrote, "the scouts and spies ride ahead, then the chief of the tribe at the front of his people, with the women staying behind. If the enemy makes a surprise attack on a trail camp the women protect their offspring, if necessary with bows and knives, fighting to the death if they cannot take flight. Warhorses are never ridden on the trail, except at the approach of the enemy. Each Comanche fighting man has three or four horses for the trail." After an attack, Comanche war bands often dispersed to confuse pursuing parties. Disappearing into the countless canyons of the Sierra Madres, they later reunited in the Bolsón de Mapimí. If they faced superior forces and could not escape, the war parties used captives to negotiate safe return into Comanchería.[81]

The operations could be extraordinarily profitable. Although Apaches had pillaged northern Mexico for decades, many areas had been spared and now offered largely untapped targets for Comanche raiders. In a nine-day stretch in January 1835, for example, Comanches pilfered two thousand horses from Chihuahua City and its hinterland, and in June, after repeated attacks through-

out the spring, several hundred Comanche warriors "laid waste" Rancho de las Animas near Parral, burning several buildings, destroying food bins, and taking thirty-nine captives. In all, eastern Chihuahua lost several thousand horses and hundreds of captives in the space of five months. Chihuahua's governor raised one thousand volunteers for a pursuit but failed to capture the culprits. A similar sequence unfolded in northern Nuevo León and Tamaulipas in the aftermath of the Texas Revolution. With Mexican troops preoccupied with the Texas rebels, Comanches orchestrated a flurry of raids. They depleted the horse and mule herds of Laredo and Matamoros; seized numerous captives; burned houses and fields; and slaughtered entire herds of cattle, sheep, and goats. They drove off the residents of newly built Mexican ranches from the strategically sensitive strip between the Río Grande and Nueces River, which both Mexico and the Texas Republic claimed. The attacks continued through the late 1830s, reducing the lower Río Grande villages to a "sad and disgraceful condition" by 1841.[82]

By the late 1830s, raiding had become big business across northern Mexico. One report stated that Coahuila alone lost nearly four hundred captives and some thirty-five thousand head of livestock to Indian raiders between 1835 and 1845, while almost twelve hundred died defending their lives and livelihood. Another report, from 1841, asserted that a Comanche war party of two to three hundred had made it to north of the Río Grande with eighteen thousand head of Mexican livestock, leaving behind three hundred casualties. This report may have been hyperbolic, but other evidence suggests that Comanches frequently returned from Mexico with oversized herds that were all but unmanageable. The Horseshoe Crossing on the Pecos River, the favorite camping site of the returning Comanche parties, was littered with horse and mule skeletons. Exhausted by the long travel and unguarded by the outnumbered herders, the animals overdrank and died by the hundreds.[83]

Far from passive victims, Mexican *fronterizos* (borderlanders) fought relentlessly—both with weapons and words—to protect their lives, lands, and property. Northern officials rejected national policymakers' wildly unrealistic aspirations of incorporating the Comanches into the "Mexican family" and instead recast them as alien others, animalistic barbarians who had to be erased in the name of civilization, religion, and national honor. Wealthy northerners turned their haciendas into veritable fortresses and organized private mini-armies, local militias patrolled roads and town limits, and provincial troops staged ambushes along Comanche trails, sometimes inflicting heavy losses on the enemy; in 1844 alone, Comanches lost some 150 men in four separate engagements with Mexican troops. And while individual departments labored with local defenses, the federal government tried to formulate broader strategic solutions. Mexico City

appointed three commanding generals to coordinate the defenses in northern Mexico and sent a military detachment to Nacogdoches to expel American peddlers whose goods fomented Comanche raids in Mexico. It offered small land grants and tax exemptions for citizen soldiers who showed bravery in battle, and it tried to recruit Lipans to fight the Comanches. In 1843 Santa Anna even invited Jesuits back to Mexico so that they would rebuild missions across the northern frontier and exert a civilizing influence over the marauding Indians.[84]

Yet in the end, the Comanches' avalanche-like expansion below the Río Grande mirrored Mexico's weakness. For all their creative countermeasures, the Mexicans were often powerless against Comanche guerrilla tactics. Most farms, ranches, and villages in northern Mexico were small, isolated, and poorly manned—sitting ducks for highly mobile, well-organized mounted raiders. The large haciendas, too, were vulnerable, their sheer size making them difficult to defend against fast hit-and-run assaults. The Hacienda de la Encarnación in southern Coahuila lost six hundred horses and mules between 1840 and 1845, and the heavily fortified La Zarca rancho in northern Durango lost six hundred horses in March 1844 alone. Frontier defenses across northern Mexico were in pitiable condition. Volunteer militia units were ill-fed, ill-trained, and often undisciplined, and provincial troops suffered from chronic shortages of quality horses, guns, and munitions. The antiquated presidio system, a leftover from the Spanish era, was decaying, undermined by Mexico City's preference to reinforce the nation's core at the expense of its perimeters. The popularity of army service collapsed in the far north, forcing the presidios to fill their ranks with convicts and vagabonds. Local officials pleaded with Mexico City to revive the presidial system and send more soldiers, horses, and weapons to the north, but the chronically bankrupt federal government was slow to react. The result of this federal neglect was pitiful scenes of *fronterizos* going against heavily armed Comanche war bands with bows and arrows and slings and stones.[85]

From a military standpoint, then, much of the Mexican Far North remained an open field for the Comanches. Josiah Gregg, who had a cuttingly low opinion of the Mexicans' military prowess, remarked that Mexican troops were hesitant to engage with the more mobile and better-armed Comanches and that pursuits were sometimes made only for appearances. "It has been credibly asserted," he wrote, "that, during one of these 'bold pursuits,' a band of Comanches stopped in the suburbs of a village on Rio Conchos, turned their horses into the wheatfields, and took a comfortable *siesta*—desirous, it seemed, to behold their pursuers face to face; yet, after remaining most of the day, they departed without enjoying that pleasure." Contemporaries believed that Comanches spared northern Mexico from utter destruction only because it supplied them with horses.[86]

It was out of desperation, therefore, when Sonora, Chihuahua, and Durango passed bills offering bounty prices for Indian scalps. The bills provided scaled bounty payments with prices ranging between twenty-five and one hundred pesos, depending on the victim's sex and age, and stated that the booty from slain Indians would be awarded to the vanquishers. State officials contracted foreigners residing in Mexican territory to kill Indian raiders with such frequency that by the late 1830s virtual bounty wars raged across northern Mexico. Mexico City condemned the scalp bounties as an excessive, unsavory measure but was powerless—or perhaps unwilling—to the stop the practice. The scalp wars devastated the Apaches who, unlike the Comanches, could not evade mercenary scalping squads by escaping far to the north. James Kirker, the most notorious of the soldiers of fortune, focused his business-style operations almost solely on Apaches, delivering almost five hundred Apache scalps to Chihuahuan authorities by 1847, but he largely avoided the more mobile and better-armed Comanches. In fact, as scalp payments became an established practice in Chihuahua in the late 1830s, Comanches, too, began to hunt Apaches for the standard bounty prize, a crown with an ear on each end.[87]

The only viable way to fend off the Comanches, whose operations in northern Mexico amounted to an imperial extension, would have been coordinated interstate campaigns targeting Comanche rancherías in Mexico as well as in Comanchería proper. But national policymakers, though swamped with bitter, desperate reports from the north, refused to consider the Comanche invasion a threat to the regime. Fearing that both the United States and Great Britain entertained plans of invading and capturing Mexico, they saw Indian attacks as a local problem that required local solutions. Mexico City urged the *fronterizos* to provide their own defenses and made only sporadic attempts to confront Comanches with a more unified front. The most ambitious of these efforts, General Arista's 1841 plan of a grand invasion into Comanchería, was also one of the most illuminating in its futility. The campaign never got off ground largely because New Mexico Governor Manuel Armijo, fearing Comanche retribution, refused to take part in the campaign. Mexico City neither reprimanded nor removed Armijo.[88]

In fact, the federal government not only relegated the escalating Indian problem to the local level but also obstructed, even if inadvertently, local attempts to organize effective defense. Many *fronterizo* communities tried to pool their meager resources by organizing joint defensive and punitive operations only to have federal policies undermine their efforts. The northern villages of Tamaulipas experimented with collective campaigns in the early 1830s, but such efforts became increasingly difficult after the Texas Revolution. In the late 1830s, for

example, the officials of Matamoros complained bitterly that the town had supplied so many horses, steers, carts, and servants to the campaigns against the Texas rebels that its residents had difficulties in carrying out basic subsistence tasks, not to mention mounting effective defense against Indians. Such disputes over military priorities sometimes occurred within states. In 1841 the northern villages of Tamaulipas petitioned the state legislature for an exemption from military service on the grounds that they formed the front line against Comanche attacks. The state government denied their appeal and also refused all aid in fighting the Indians, causing deep resentment in the hard-pressed frontier communities.[89]

As it became clear that the federal government could not or would not offer a comprehensive solution to the Indian problem, the northern departments began to follow independent policies. They tried to fend off Comanche aggression any way they could, which often meant adopting strategies that merely deflected the violence. New Mexico set the precedent for this in the early 1820s, when it began to purchase peace from Comanches with commerce and gifts, and other departments soon followed suit. In 1824 the Presidio del Río Grande in Coahuila began collecting foodstuffs from the surrounding settlements to placate the Comanche war parties that were just starting to invade northern Mexico. This policy bought northern Coahuila a measure of protection, but it redirected Comanche raids into the neighboring Chihuahua, triggering a destructive chain reaction that eventually nearly obliterated that province.[90]

By 1826, raiding had taken a hard toll in northern Chihuahua, prompting Commanding General Gaspar Ochoa to invite Comanche chiefs Paruaquita and Cordero to peace talks in Chihuahua City. Ochoa proposed an accord "to end the horrors of war within the great expanse of our borders," and Paruaquita and Cordero accepted it. Desperate to protect the tormented province, Ochoa promised Comanches annual gifts in Santa Fe and San Antonio and asked them to obtain passports before entering Chihuahua. But Ochoa's efforts were undermined by Coahuila and Texas, whose citizens continued to traffic in stolen Chihuahuan goods. Texas officials tried to smother the contraband trade by forbidding their subjects from purchasing branded livestock from Comanches; at times, however, they engaged in the illegal traffic themselves. To spin their actions, the officials asserted that Comanches did not sell but "returned" Chihuahuan booty and deserved to be rewarded with gifts for their "good faith." Coahuila's move to Comanche orbit became complete in 1830, when Saltillo began supplying Comanche war bands with money, food, clothes, and tobacco. Like Santa Fe and San Antonio before it, Saltillo acceded to pay tribute to Comanches to escape violence. In 1834, Chihuahua finally joined New Mexico, Texas, and Coa-

huila in tributary collaboration. Its officials signed a treaty with the Comanches in El Paso and promised them military aid against the Apaches in the hope of diverting the violence. The attempt met with only partial success. Comanches launched a raiding war against the Mescalero and Coyotero Apaches in northwestern Chihuahua, giving the region's Mexican settlers a respite, but they also moved to raid the Mexican settlements in central and southern Chihuahua.[91]

The independence of Texas in 1836 changed the geostrategic context in which northern Mexicans operated, but it did not change their Comanche policies, which remained embedded in self-interest. In the aftermath of the Texas Revolution, Coahuilan officials signed two more treaties with the Comanches, hoping to harness their military might against the rebel republic. The first treaty, in 1838, designated the village of Nava as a trading outlet, and the second one, five years later, opened Aguaverde in Coahuila and Laredo in northern Tamaulipas to Comanche traders. Comanches also gained extensive hunting privileges in Coahuila. Contrary to Mexican designs, however, the treaties and concessions did not redirect Comanche warfare northward into Texas but southward into central Mexico. Comanches extended their raids into southern Coahuila, Durango, and Zacatecas and then disposed the plundered stock at Nava, Aguaverde, and Laredo. By fall 1844, the raids had become so severe that General Arista decreed trading with the Comanches a capital offense. Some *fronterizo* communities obeyed the law, thus exposing themselves to Comanche reprisals: in late 1845 Chief Santa Anna explained to Texas officials "that the cause of the [recent] war with Mexico was the Spaniards breaking a treaty that was made some years since."[92]

Comanches raided northern Mexico for nearly a century, but the early and mid-1840s saw the climax. Not coincidentally, those years also marked the pinnacle of their plains-based trading empire. Eastern Comanches absorbed several removed nations of Indian Territory into their trade network, launched a lucrative commercial partnership with the Osages, and accepted Anglo-American trading posts on their borders. Western Comanches made peace and opened trade with Cheyennes and Arapahoes, embarked on large-scale exchange at Bent's Fort, and turned the comanchero trade into a major commercial institution. All these exchange circuits centered on horses and mules, creating an almost insatiable demand for stolen Mexican stock. "Nearly all these [traded] animals are pilfered from the Mexicans," Captain Marcy observed, "and as the number they traffic away must be replaced by new levies upon their victims, of course all that the traders obtain causes a corresponding increase in the amount of depredations." The trading boom on the plains, moreover, coincided with the appeasement of Comanche-Texas relations, which prevented Comanches from

rustling in the Lone Star Republic and liberated men and resources for long-distance raiding south of the Río Grande.[93]

The result was an "incessant and destructive war" in northern Mexico. Starting in 1840 Comanches, together with their Kiowa allies, each year dispatched several major expeditions below the Río Grande. These campaigns were noticeably larger than in the previous years, typically involving between two hundred and one thousand fighting men. Massive war bands ranged wider than ever before, hitting Corpus Christi some 150 miles north of the Río Grande, then penetrating deep into southern Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, and Jalisco, where they entered a new world of jungles and high sierras. Perhaps to debilitate local defenses, the first excursions to the far south were unusually destructive; the fall of 1840 saw some three hundred Mexican deaths. After such spectacular demonstrations of power, a grinding routine set in. With their lines greatly elongated, Comanches lived off the enemy, slaughtering cattle and sheep and attacking pack and merchant trains loaded with supplies and ore. Their deep, looping maneuvers cut off vital lines of communication and commerce; imperiled the mining towns in Durango, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí; and ravaged the countryside to the extent that tending fields became difficult. Communities from northern Nuevo León to southern Durango were reduced to operate near or below subsistence level.[94]

Comanches now treated northern Mexico and its fabulously wealthy ranches as virtual warehouses. In 1846 James Josiah Webb, a Missouri trader, witnessed how they rounded up twenty-five thousand head of livestock in the city of Durango, "threatening and attacking the soldiers who remained behind their barricades on the defensive." George Ruxton, an English explorer and travel writer who got much of his information from the Mexicans, reported that Comanche war bands moved across seven Mexican states virtually unopposed. Having traveled unused roads "overgrown with grass" and flanked by endless "deserts of the frontier," regions that were "annually laid waste by the Comanches," he stopped to wonder: "It appears incredible that no steps are taken to protect the country from this invasion, which does not take its inhabitants on a sudden or unawares, but at certain and regular seasons and from known points. Troops are certainly employed *nominally* to check the Indians, but very rarely attack them, although the Comanches give every opportunity."[95]

If Ruxton lacked answers, it was because he could not see the big picture: Comanches had turned a large section of Mexico into a semicolonized landscape of extraction from which they could mine resources with little cost. "Beyond the immediate purlieus of the towns," Gregg reported, "the whole country from New Mexico to the borders of Durango is almost entirely depopulated.

The haciendas and ranchos have been mostly abandoned, and the people chiefly confined to the towns and cities." Another report stated that Comanche war parties had invaded Durango "in all of its extremities," reducing its citizens to a "most grave and deplorable condition." Saltillo and its environs lost 1,149 horses, 1,062 head of cattle, and 46 people in 1841, and the Chihuahua legislature lamented that "we travel along the roads . . . at their whim; we cultivate the land where they wish and in amount that they wish, we use sparingly things that they have left to us until the moment that it strikes their appetite to take them for themselves, and we occupy the land while the savages permit us." The all-important Chihuahua road had become an Indian plunder trail, commerce was paralyzed, and mines languished unused. Writing in 1846, Ruxton reported that the Comanches "are now . . . overrunning the whole department of Durango and Chihuahua, have cut off all communication, and defeated in two pitched battles the regular troops sent against them. Upwards of ten thousand head of horses and mules have already been carried off [between fall 1845 and fall 1846], and scarcely has a hacienda or rancho on the frontier been unvisited, and everywhere the people have been killed or captured. The roads are impassable, all traffic is stopped, the ranchos barricaded, and the inhabitants afraid to venture out of their doors. The posts and expresses travel at night, avoiding the roads, and the intelligence is brought in daily of massacres and harryings."[96]

When Comanche war parties finally returned home with trains of captives, horses, and mules, the war trails that had carried them south served them as commercial highways. They could stop in Mexican towns, ranches, and presidios in northern Coahuila, Chihuahua, and New Mexico and peacefully trade fresh Mexican booty for food, guns, and manufactured goods. All across Chihuahua, southern New Mexico, and southern Texas, they could also sell stolen livestock to American contraband traders and gunrunners, who pushed south from Santa Fe, El Paso, San Antonio, and Goliad, hoping to tap into the enormous northbound current of wealth from Mexico.[97]

The decades of Comanche raiding in Texas and northern Mexico—which from the late 1820s on coincided with increasing Apache pillaging in Sonora, Chihuahua, and Durango—had a lasting hemispheric legacy. The escalating violence left Mexico dangerously weakened during critical years in its history, for it overlapped with mounting U.S. pressure on Mexico's borders. The consequences were disastrous to the fledgling republic: between 1835 and 1848, Mexico lost more than half of its territory to the United States. Historians have customarily attributed Mexico's capitulation to the overt material and military superiority of the United States, but they have missed a crucial element: the

Native American expansion that paved the way for the Anglo-American one. The U.S. takeover of the Southwest was significantly assisted by the fact that Comanches and Apaches had already destabilized Mexico's Far North. Apaches had devastated vast stretches of northwestern Mexico, but Comanches left the deepest imprint. In each major stage of its expansion, the United States absorbed lands that had been made ripe for conquest by Comanches, who themselves were not interested in direct political control over foreign territories.[98]

After the Texas Revolution, Mexico City refused to accept the loss of Texas and considered it a Mexican department under the temporary rule of a rebel government. But just as the Comanche threat had propelled Texas to allow immigration from the United States, ushering it into Anglo-dominated independence, Comanche violence now blocked Mexico's attempts to recover its lost dominion. Mexico made several attempts at reconquest, but the turmoil of Comanche raiding in the bordering states—Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas—and particularly in the disputed Nueces Strip prevented the Mexican Army from organizing sustained campaigns. The officials of the Texas Republic, fully aware of these dynamics, offered Comanche war parties unrestricted travel through their lands. Comanche violence also thwarted Mexico's hopes of recapturing Texas from within. The citizens in the Río Grande villages had grown alienated from the central government that had failed to protect them from Comanche incursions and repeatedly refused to provide men, horses, and food for federal operations. In late 1839, moreover, just as Mexico attempted to launch a campaign into Texas, Antonio Canales, the commander of the federalist forces in Tamaulipas, instigated an anticentralist revolt to create an independent border republic out of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, and southern Texas. The scheme won wide support among the embittered *fronterizos*, and the centralist troops did not manage to crush it until the spring of 1840. The Mexican Army, then, was forced to wage a war of reconquest from a decimated and rebellious war zone, an attempt that was doomed from the outset.[99]

The linkages between Comanche power politics and U.S. expansion culminated in the Mexican-American War, a war so one-sided that Ulysses S. Grant called it "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." Grant's candid statement meant to acknowledge the staggering power imbalance between the two republics—the war pitted a rapidly industrializing nation of some 18 million people against a young agrarian nation riddled by chronic political instability and fragile local economies—but it missed the underlying fact that the Comanches had exacerbated nearly all of Mexico's weaknesses through their power policies along and below the Río Grande. When U.S. troops marched south of that river in 1846, they did so alongside Comanche

warriors who had raided there for decades, sabotaging Mexico's nation-building project in the far north and unintentionally preparing the ground for the American invasion. This is a point often missing from modern accounts of the war but not lost to the contemporaries. In 1848, for example, the Chihuahua legislature explained Mexico's defeat by noting that its northern half had been ravaged for years by Indian war bands. This wasteland of plunder, it derided, was a "worthy stage" indeed for the United States to display its might.[100]

As much as Americans despised the Mexicans for yielding to savage rule, their own self-styled civilizing campaign into Mexico was closely intertwined with Comanche power politics. At the outbreak of the war in spring 1846, Mexico's principal military initiative was not building defenses against the impending U.S. assault but rather a failed attempt to build a line of forts from Matamoros to El Paso to contain Comanche incursions. In the fall of 1845, moreover, Comanches staged a series of destructive raids deep into Durango and Zacatecas, tying up Mexican forces toward the nation's center at a time they were needed at its borders. The United States' and Mexico's lopsided capacities to wage war came into sharp relief in March 1846, when General Zachary Taylor led U.S. troops from Corpus Christi to the north bank of the Río Grande and asserted American sovereignty over the disputed Nueces Strip. Mexico protested fiercely, insisting that Taylor's Army of Occupation had entered Mexican soil the moment it crossed the Nueces, but there was no meaningful Mexican presence above the Río Grande to bolster that claim. Taylor had stepped into a power vacuum created by the Comanches, and Mexico would have to face the invading army not on the Nueces but amidst vulnerable civil settlements on the Río Grande.[101]

When U.S. troops pushed deeper into northern Mexico in the summer and fall of 1846, they entered the shatterbelt of Native American power. The U.S. Army marched south on abandoned roads littered with corpses, moving through a ghost landscape of ruined villages, decaying fields, horseless corrals, and deserted cattle herds. It faced Mexican cavalries mounted on "miserable little half-starved horses" and Mexican troops who lacked horses and mules to set up supply trains and move artillery. The few presidios dotting this wasteland were all but defunct. Their failure to curb Indian depredations had further diminished Mexico City's interest in supporting them, and the morale of the troops was dreadful, corrupted by wretched living conditions, food shortages, poor salaries, and mortal terror of Comanche attacks. The two hundred soldiers of the Presidio del Río Grande withdrew to Monclova without resistance, letting U.S. troops cross the Río Grande undisturbed near Eagle Pass, a key Comanche entryway into Mexico. It was as if northern Mexico had already been vanquished

when the U.S. invasion got underway. If Mexico's collapse in 1847 was quick and complete, it was because the nation had to fight two invading powers at once.[102]

If Comanche power politics made northern Mexico militarily and materially vulnerable to the U.S. invasion, they also rendered it politically and psychologically susceptible for the U.S. occupation. Decades of unremitting exploitation and manipulation by Comanches had critically weakened the northern departments as well as Mexico City's hold on them. On the eve of the U.S. invasion, the Mexican North was destabilized, drained, and, it seems, unresponsive to the orders of federal officials, who had refused to treat Comanche raids as a national crisis that required a national response. War-torn northern Mexico was also deeply divided, so much so that it can be asked whether Mexico itself had become a mere collection of semiautonomous provinces. Most northern provinces put little value in the policies emanating from the distant, neglectful Mexico City and harbored deep-seated antipathies toward one another. This antagonism had crystallized during the long decades of Comanche violence when most provinces adopted self-interested policies, which often brought destruction to neighboring communities. (Comanches themselves seem to have been well aware of these developments: an Anglo captive held in Comanchería reported how Comanches, when planning a large-scale invasion into Mexico in the late 1830s, "expected to be joined by a large number of Mexicans who are disaffected by the government.") All this ate away at the already fragile sense of common identity, to the point that it was not unusual for high-ranking officers to openly rejoice when Comanche war parties left their departments for the neighboring ones. By 1846, northern Mexico was a compilation of disconnected communities with ambivalent identities and loyalties.[103]

It is not surprising, then, that U.S. troops faced little local resistance on their march south. Building on a long tradition forged under Comanche violence, many northern Mexican communities put self-preservation first and cooperated with the invaders. They sold U.S. troops supplies, rented out lands for camping, and served as guides. The Mexican Army fought fiercely at Resaca de la Palma and Buena Vista, but Matamoros, Monclova, Parras, Mier, Camargo, and Santa Fe all surrendered without a fight. In occupied Matamoros, U.S. Army officials dined at the homes of middle-class Mexicans and soldiers took Spanish lessons from the townspeople. In the lower Río Grande villas of Reynosa and Mier, Mexican officials requested General Taylor to send American troops to protect the settlements against Comanche raiders, and in Chihuahua, General William Worth dispatched dragoons to protect villages from Comanche depredations. In

Tamaulipas, U.S. troops ran into Antonio Canales who was still trying to carve out an independent republic of northeastern Mexico, thereby encumbering Mexico's war effort.

Behind northern Mexicans' rebellious fraternizing with invaders was a virulent bitterness toward the federal government, which had been unable and, as it seemed in the north, unwilling to invest resources to solidify the frontier against Indian incursions. They perceived the unchecked growth of Comanche power as a sign of Mexico City's indifference, which it was. The centralist regime that assumed power in 1835 had never taken the Indian threat seriously and had actually reduced the armaments and manpower of local militias to weaken state power, effectively abandoning the north to the mercy of Indian raiders. So when the distressed Mexico City appealed to the northerners in 1846 and 1847, many refused to join the fight against the Americans.[104]

Realizing this, U.S. policymakers and commanders proclaimed themselves as liberators from Comanche oppression. The war department assigned General Taylor to read in conquered cities a proclamation—simultaneously translated into Spanish—whose key passages evoked Mexicans' long suffering under Comanche terror and Mexico City's failure to alleviate their misery: "Your army and rulers extort from the people, by grievous taxation, by forced loans, and military seizures, the very money that sustains the usurpers in power. Being disarmed, you are left defenceless, an easy prey to the savage Cumanches, who not only destroy your lives and property, but drive into captivity, more horrible than death itself, your wives and children. It is your military rulers who have reduced you to this deplorable condition. . . . It is our wish to see you liberated from despots, to drive back the savage Cumanches, to prevent the renewal of their assaults, and to compel them to restore to you from captivity your long lost wives and children." Laced with allusions to female debasement and injured masculine honor, Taylor's proclamation echoed the rhetoric of beleaguered *norteño* elites, who felt abandoned and victimized by Mexico City. In June 1846, unaware that President James K. Polk had already declared war on Mexico, Donaciano Vigil addressed the New Mexico assembly, detailing the horrors that Mexico City's neglect had produced in the northern provinces: "I have heard reports regarding the barbaric tribes: of the number of Mexican captives, and especially of young Mexican women who serve the bestial pleasures of the barbaric Indians; of the brutal treatment they receive. . . . Those reports make me tremble with horror. . . . The more so when I contemplate what the fate will be of many people whom I esteem, if timely measures are not taken to guard against such degrading misfortunes."[105]

Whatever the real impact of the U.S. Army's proclamations, widespread popular insurgencies against *norteamericanos* broke out in northern Mexico only after the occupation had become a fact, and they were almost invariably inspired by the excesses and meddling of U.S. officials. But the liberation rhetoric was not aimed at the Mexicans alone. Its real audience, in a sense, was the Americans themselves, who were being steered to see the war through a morally tilted racial lens. The United States, its top officials insisted, was justified and indeed obliged to usurp territory from the mongrelized and inept Mexicans who not only had failed to civilize the land but lost much of it to savage Comanches. The conquest of Mexico, as scripted and sold by U.S. policymakers, morphed into an ideological crusade to stop the advance of savagery, to extend the dominions of peace, and to purify a racially defiled landscape.[106]

The signature event of the United States–Mexican War was not the Battle of Buena Vista or the Battle of Mexico City, but the bloodless takeover of New Mexico. By the time General Stephen W. Kearny's Army of the West marched into Santa Fe in August 1846—unopposed by Governor Armijo, who fled to Chihuahua, and four thousand New Mexican volunteers, who disbanded immediately after Armijo's escape—New Mexico was in many ways a Mexican province in name only. Its postmortem revealed an orphaned province, abandoned by Spain and neglected by the Mexican government, "a very mean step-mother to us," as one of the residents put it. Ignored and isolated, New Mexico had, as it were, turned its back on central Mexico and embraced foreign wealth and foreign influences, entering the path that eventually led to Santa Fe's peaceful surrender in 1846.[107]

But contrary to the conventional view, New Mexico's separation from the rest of Mexico did not begin in 1821, when it opened its borders to American merchandise and markets; it had begun three and a half decades earlier, in 1786, when New Spain formed a broad diplomatic and commercial alliance with the Comanches. That alliance wedded New Mexico to Comanchería through intimate political, economic, and cultural ties and increasingly set it apart from other Spanish colonies. While Texas languished during the late Spanish period as a virtual tributary state of the Comanche empire, New Mexico's border communities drew closer and closer to Comanchería. They plugged their lagging economy to Comanchería's expansive market circuits, adopted Comanche cultural influences, did business in stolen Texas and Coahuilan livestock, and fiercely defended their ties with the Comanches against Mexico City's or Santa Fe's interference.

In 1821 New Mexico was by far the most populous and prosperous of Spain's North American colonies, and it owed much of its privileged position to its special bond with the Comanches. Already partly disconnected from the rest of

Mexico in 1821, New Mexico accelerated its drift from Mexico City's orbit during the Mexican era, when it was subjected to the pressures and pull of *both* Comanchería and the United States. Once Comanches began systematic raiding in northern Mexico in the mid-1820s, and as New Mexicans adopted the policy of purchasing peace to protect themselves, the province began a gradual but irrevocable parting from the Mexican body politic. During the quarter-century of Mexican rule, New Mexicans went to great lengths to protect their alliance with the Comanches and in doing so alienated themselves from other northern Mexican provinces that were at war with the Comanches.

That erosion of political ties went hand in hand with a sweeping economic realignment that saw New Mexico shifting its commercial system from south to east. Comanche raiding south of the Río Grande dissolved old economic lifelines between Mexico City and the northern frontier, pushing New Mexico to intensify its reliance on the markets and goods of Comanchería and the United States. Mexico City fought this development, trying to infuse the northern frontier with national institutions, rules, and rituals, but it was powerless to offset the combined gravitational power of Comanchería and the United States. By the mid-1840s, just prior to the Mexican-American War, New Mexicans across the social strata had grown openly defiant toward Mexico City's centralist government, whose nation-building project they thought was at odds with their economic and political interests, which had long ago become affixed to the power and wealth flowing in from the east.