Fanny Calderón de la Barca loved a good story, and in 1841 people in Mexico City were telling stories about Comanches. Early in the year, the wife of the Spanish minister would have heard astonishing reports about an army of the Indians attacking Coahuila’s state capital, Saltillo, and its surrounding towns, stealing sixteen hundred horses, taking two dozen captives, and killing one hundred and two Mexicans, including a former governor. Mexico City’s press ran hundreds of stories on the north’s indios bárbaros in 1841, and anyone claiming to have knowledge of them found an eager audience. Calderón met a colonel who thrilled her and her companions with “an account of his warfare against the Comanches, in which service he has been terribly wounded.” The colonel considered them “an exceedingly handsome, fine-looking race,” with remarkable resources in both trade and war. Calderón learned more from an old soldier covered in wounds from Santa Anna’s ill-fated Texas campaign. The veteran evinced a “devout horror” of Comanches, and stated “his firm conviction that we should see [them] on the streets of Mexico [City] one of these days.”

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1. Howard T. Fisher and Marion Hall, eds., Life in Mexico: The Letters of Fanny Calderón de la Barca (New York, 1966), 552, 509. For the hacienda, see Víctor Orozco Orozco, Las guerras indias en la historia de Chihuahua: Primeras fases (Mexico City, 1992), 153. For Saltillo, see “Estado que manifiesta las vic-
Thanks to a surge in scholarship during the past fifteen years, we now have a sophisticated picture of the people who so transfixed the scarred soldier’s “gaping audience.” This recent work has enriched our understanding of Comanche ethnogenesis, economic activity, diplomacy, kinship, spirituality and ritual, gender relations and labor, honor, territorial expansion, captive-taking, hunting and pastoralism, and politics. But Comanche specialists have been curiously disinterested in what their subjects did below the Rio Grande. Though the recent work often acknowledges that Comanches and their allies increasingly seized horses and captives from Mexican settlements in the 1830s and 1840s, plains scholars have not examined these activities through the source material in present-day Mexico. Partly this reflects a more general tendency to read the modern border backward into history. It is also the case that the extraordinarily violent raiding campaigns of these decades fit poorly with the dominant themes in prerreservation American Indian historiography—resistance to colonialism and, more recently, hybridity, interdependence, and mutual accommodation.²

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By recovering links between the southern plains and northern Mexico we can deepen our understanding of both regions. Consolidating and extending a small but important body of scholarship about Indian raiding in northern Mexico with research in Mexican archival and periodical sources, I have built a database tracking Comanche–Mexican conflict. In many ways the data from the late 1820s through the 1840s reinforce what we have come to expect from this relationship—hostilities erupting in one place while commerce and cooperation continue elsewhere. At the same time it is clear that Comanche raiding expanded and contracted in sharply defined stages. Intriguingly, these peaks and valleys coincide with well-known geopolitical events on and around the southern plains. Read alongside the often thin evidence that exists for scholars to interpret Comanche activities north of the river from the mid-1830s through the early 1840s, Mexican sources reveal striking interconnections between raiding in Mexico and events unfolding on the other frontiers of the Comanches’ wider world. By making peace with dangerous Indian and Texan neighbors over the course of a decade, Comanches and their allies obtained the security necessary to launch long-distance raiding campaigns into northern Mexico. Just as important, peace agreements produced new market connections that made campaigns increasingly lucrative. This realignment of frontier relationships reached maturation in the early 1840s, by which time southern plains men were traversing several Mexican states and fueling anxious conversation in Calderón’s Mexico City.3

3. The data referred to in this paragraph and elsewhere in the article come from the appendix to Brian DeLay, The War of a Thousand Deserts, forthcoming in 2008 from Yale University Press. That appendix builds upon existing scholarship, including the previously mentioned works of Smith and Vizcaya-Canales as well as William B. Griffen, Utmost Good Faith: Patterns of Apache–Mexican Hostilities in Northern Chihuahua Border Warfare, 1821–1848 (Albuquerque, NM, 1988); Víctor Orozco Orozco, Las guerras indias en la historia de Chihuahua: Antología (Ciudad Juárez, 1992); Martha Rodríguez, Historias de resistencia y exterminio: Los indios de Coahuila durante el siglo XIX (Mexico City, 1995); Cuauhtémoc José Velasco Avila, “La amenaza comanche en la frontera mexicana, 1800–1841” (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998). Among these authors, Velasco Avila has done the most to contextualize raiding through scholarship on plains Indians, and his work deserves a U.S. audience. Though he focuses on American rather than Indian traders, David J. Weber was the first to explore in detail connections between U.S. market forces and northern Mexico’s relations with independent Indians. See his seminal article, “American Westward Expansion and the Breakdown of Relations Between Pobladores and
Like borderlands scholarship, the broader historiographies of the U.S. and Mexico in the nineteenth century stand to gain from better understanding links between the southern plains and the Mexican north. Despite the existing work on raiding below the river, the Indians of the southern plains remain all but invisible in the national literature of nineteenth-century Mexico. Similarly, the recent advances in Comanche scholarship have had little influence on the historiography of the U.S. early republic. And yet it is clear that Comanches and their allies both reacted to and contributed to events of continental scope and significance. In the 1830s and 1840s native peoples on the southern plains faced three manifestations of U.S. expansion: Indian removal, colonization and independence in Texas, and the growing penetration of U.S. market forces into the trans-Mississippi west. These changes presented Indians in the region with dangers and opportunities. Comanches and their allies minimized the former and maximized the latter by realigning their various frontier relationships and steadily expanding their profitable raids against Mexicans. In the process they did much to shape the northern Mexico that American forces conquered in 1846. Raiding campaigns terrified most of the Mexican north, shattered vital sectors of its economy, and left its diminishing rural population divided and exhausted on the eve of the U.S. invasion.4

Thus, while the story of how southern plains Indians came to invade Mexico will not fit into any of our fragmented historiographic territories, it can be a bridge between them. This article explores frontier realignment on the southern plains both as a case study in flexible and ambitious Indian policy making and as an indirect but vital conduit linking U.S. and Mexican histories in the fifteen years before the two republics went to war.

4. The historiographic boundaries of the early republic are expanding. Recent forays into the West include Andrew C. Isenberg, “The Market Revolution in the Borderlands: George Champlin Sibley in Missouri and New Mexico, 1808–1826,” Journal of the Early Republic 21 (Fall 2001), 445–65; and Andrés Reséndez, “Getting Cured and Getting Drunk: State Versus Market in Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850,” Journal of the Early Republic 22 (Spring 2002), 77–104. See...
In the early 1830s, the southern plains were home to a large and dynamic coalition of Indian peoples. The most populous and diverse were the 10–12,000 Numic speakers called Comanches, subdivided into four tribes or divisions—Kotsotekas and Yamparikas in the west, and Tenewas and Hois in the east. In rebuilding their numbers following late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century epidemics, they had assimilated large numbers of Indian and Mexican captives, as well as Indians and non-Indians who voluntarily chose to become Comanche. Moreover, in the early nineteenth century they had made the extraordinary concession of allowing their former enemies the Kiowas and Kiowa Apaches to dwell beside them on the southern plains. Linguistically, sociopolitically, and ceremonially distinct from each other and from Comanches, the 1,500–2,000 people comprising these tribes nonetheless integrated themselves with their hosts—occasionally through marriage, often through camping and hunting together, and usually through cooperation against peoples their partners considered enemies.5

Like other plains Indians, Comanches and their allies depended on bison for food, trade goods, clothing, and shelter. But proximity to Mexico gave the inhabitants of the southern plains privileged access to horses, and this is what made them wealthy in comparison to their neighbors. While some Indians experimented with controlled breeding and tried to capture and break mustangs, in the early nineteenth century the ranches and haciendas of northern Mexico remained the indispensable source of horse wealth on the plains. Through trading and raiding, Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa Apaches had gradually come to possess more

Figure 1: Comanches and their neighbors, ca. 1830.
horses per capita than any other native people. Some of their richest men were said to own hundreds of animals each.\(^6\)

By the 1820s and 1830s, however, this great wealth had provoked a security crisis across *la comanchería*. Recently arrived Cheyennes threatened southern plains Indians from the north. During the late 1820s the southern Cheyennes and their allies, principally the Arapahos, had helped push the regular Comanche range south of the Arkansas River. Inspired by Blackfeet raiders who traveled great distances to plunder Comanche and Kiowa herds, the newcomers came to covet horses as well as hunting grounds. In 1826 the famous chief Yellow Wolf led one of the first Cheyenne raids into *la comanchería*, and other parties followed upon his success. These northern threats only worsened when the St. Louis traders Charles and William Bent developed an intimate alliance with Cheyennes and Arapahos and established a trading post on the Arkansas River in the early 1830s. According to George Bent, William’s son with the prominent Cheyenne Owl Woman, Comanches were “constantly being plundered” not only from the north but also from Pawnees and Osages to the east. Violence and killings often accompanied raids on Comanche herds. The botanist and traveler Jean Louis Berlandier reported that in January 1828 Osages executed thirty Comanche women and children they had taken captive in a previous raid. An extraordinary native source attests to this violence as well. From at least 1833 on, Kiowas recorded their history on calendars that memorialized two key events each year, one in summer and one in winter. The summer of 1833 is recorded as the “summer that they cut off their heads.” That year Osage raiders attacked and decapitated several Kiowas—men, women, and children—dropping their heads into brass buckets for kin to discover later.\(^7\)


\(^7\) George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written From His Letters* (Norman, OK, 1968), 37. For raiding more broadly, see ibid., 33–40. For an excellent treatment of Cheyenne history and culture, see John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne*
It seemed that these enemies would soon be outdone by new adversaries who were literally arriving every day. Wars, coercive treaties, and finally the formal policy of Indian removal compelled mass migrations of eastern woodlands peoples onto the prairies. Shawnees, Kickapoos, and Delawares sojourned out of the north and settled on the central prairies. Cherokees, Chickasaws, Creeks, Choctaws, and eventually Seminoles also tried to rebuild their lives and their fortunes in the west. Starting in the 1820s, smaller groups of southeastern Indians had embarked on another exodus into east Texas. While there is evidence of amicable trade between the newcomers and southern plains peoples in the early 1820s, by decade’s end the sources speak far more about conflict. In 1828, Berlandier noted that “almost all the peoples who came here originally from the United States of North America make war on the Comanches.” In 1830, an early Anglo-Texan newspaper reported on the outbreak of “a kind of exterminating war” between Cherokees, Shawnees, Delawares, and others against the Comanches and their allies. Immigrant Indians enjoyed the critical advantage of having more and better firearms than Indians on the southern plains, including many that came from U.S. government annuities given in return for ceded lands. In 1832, for example, twenty-nine well-armed Koasati Indians (a division of the Upper Creeks) fought one hundred and fifty Comanches, apparently killing or wounding upwards of one-half. That same year Shawnees attacked the party of a prominent Hois leader outside of San Antonio, killing many, and in 1833 another Koasati party reportedly brought back seventy scalps from Comanche country.8

8. Berlandier, Indians of Texas, 122; Texas Gazette (San Felipe de Austin), June 12, 1830. For the attack near San Antonio, see Kavanagh, Comanche Political History, 232–33. For the Koasati, whom Berlandier refers to as Cutchaté, see Jean
The same animals that lured enemies into their territory complicated efforts by southern plains Indians to organize an effective defense. Each day an average mustang needs ten to twelve gallons of water and enough grass to equal twenty-five pounds of hay. They also require a pound of salt per week. One study has found that a camp with a thousand horses in western Kansas would have consumed seven acres of grass each day during periods of average rainfall. In times of drought, horses could consume six times as much. The threat of illness and disease also led to dispersion of animals and their keepers, as did the requirements of hunting and simply surviving the rigors of winter. Though a populous people, Comanches and their allies necessarily spent most of the year in small residence groups vulnerable to enemy raiders. Southern plains Indians often organized retaliatory campaigns against Cheyennes, Pawnees, Osages, and others, but, with so many adversaries, absent men exposed their families to considerable risk. The Osage attack during the “summer they cut off their heads,” for example, occurred while Kiowa men were away fighting Utes.

Boxed in by enemies to the north and east, Comanches became uncomfortably dependent on a faltering relationship with Mexicans to the south and west. Following decades of intermittent warfare, Comanches had forged an alliance with Spanish authorities in the 1780s. While never

Louis Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826 to 1834*, trans. Sheila M. Ohlendorf, Josette M. Bigelow, and Mary M. Standifer (Austin, TX, 1980), 560–61; and Ewers’ identification in Berlandier, *Indians of Texas*, 124, note 167. For Comanche complaints about eastern Indian hostility, see David La Vere, *Contrary Neighbors: Southern Plains and Removed Indians in Indian Territory* (Norman, OK, 2000), 53. La Vere states that Comanches and Kiowas were the aggressors in these conflicts (p. 71), but the lure of southern plains bison and the sprawling Comanche herds, the fact that the immigrant Indians were far better armed, and the comments of observers on the southern plains all suggest that the newcomers were more often the instigators of these conflicts.

perfect, the peace proved remarkably stable over the next generation until Mexico’s War for Independence threw Spanish authority into disarray in the 1810s. At first certain Comanches campaigned with royalist forces, but, as confusion mounted and Indian diplomacy faltered, numbers of exiled rebels and American filibusters fled to Comanche camps and helped shift the dynamic. In 1814 and 1815, southern plains Indians launched punishing raiding campaigns against Texas, on the lower Rio Grande, and into Coahuila. Smaller parties of men continued sporadic raiding throughout the decade, often trading stolen animals to the Americans who were becoming increasingly active on the plains.10

After independence, many Comanche leaders had agreed to renew the peace and even sent envoys to Mexico City in 1822. But independent Mexico’s Indian policies proved to be less informed, consistent, and generous than Spanish policies of the late colonial period. Young men resumed animal raids in Chihuahua, Texas, the lower Rio Grande, and even New Mexico in the mid-1820s. This led to frantic talks and, over the next few years, to a round of treaty making in Chihuahua City, San Antonio, and Santa Fe. The negotiations produced another period of uneasy calm, but by the early 1830s small groups of southern plains raiders were again plundering herds and occasionally killing or capturing Mexicans in Chihuahua. Prominent Comanches kept visiting key towns and reiterating their goodwill, but the attacks and inconsistencies left Mexican authorities angry and impatient. They continued to mouth assurances of friendship, but viewed Comanches as increasingly haughty.

and dangerous and privately celebrated their conflicts with Indians from the United States.\textsuperscript{11}

The distinction would have meant little to those caught up in the fighting, but it is important to note that by gauges narrow and broad the violence of the 1810s and 1820s paled in comparison to what would follow in the next two decades. For example, Texas’s Spanish governor calculated that Indian raiders had killed sixty of his people in the seven years from 1813 through 1820; Comanches killed more than one hundred people in one afternoon in the 1841 attack on greater Saltillo. A careful student of the period has found a considerable increase in the population of northern Coahuila and an “explosive” growth in animal stocks during the 1820s, despite intermittent raiding. Well into the 1830s, in other words, prominent Comanches who advocated peace worked successfully to mitigate violence against Mexicans and their property.\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{12} For numbers killed in Texas, see Anderson, \textit{Indian Southwest}, 255. For growth in population and herds, see Velasco Avila, “La amenaza comanche,” 212–13.
Given the hostility they faced from other quarters, it is easy to see why. Southern plains leaders needed trade outlets where their people could exchange commodities like dressed skins, bear grease, horses, mules, and captives for agricultural goods, metal, textiles, and other manufactured products. Comanches had been the key figures in a flourishing regional trade system in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and growing numbers of American traders seemed to promise even more regular commercial connections. But as violence with other Indians escalated in the 1820s and early 1830s, and as men like the Bents established themselves among the Comanches’ adversaries, these connections withered. Harried by enemies from multiple directions, and lacking reliable conduits into dynamic American markets, southern plains families had to rely on dull if dependable Mexican markets to the west and south for the bulk of their trade. For this reason they continued welcoming New Mexican comancheros into their camps, and making visits to towns and villages in New Mexico, Texas, and all along the lower Rio Grande. These were not Comanche-Mexican relationships per se, but rather local, place-specific connections between southern plains families and members of individual Mexican settlements, what James Brooks calls “borderlands communities of interest.” Many of these local connections would endure no matter the broader state of affairs between Comanches and the Republic of Mexico.13

But by 1833 there were surely figures on the southern plains arguing that something had to change. Comanches and Kiowas saw the regional economy stagnating, their families under attack, their herds plundered, and their nominal Mexican allies increasingly distracted and disrespectful. Moreover, southern plains envoys had requested military assistance against their Indian enemies on at least two occasions, and Mexican authorities had refused both requests. The scattered raids of the early

13. James Brooks, ““This Evil Extends Especially to the Feminine Sex”: Captivity and Identity in New Mexico, 1700–1846,” Feminist Studies 22 (Summer 1996), 279–309, see p. 280. See also James F. Brooks, Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002). For earlier trade connections, see Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indian Trade System,” Western Historical Quarterly 29 (Winter 1998), 485–513. For commodities and for a glimpse of what trading visits looked like, see Berlandier, Indians of Texas, 47–48.
1830s reflected a growing desire within the southern plains coalition to rearrange its unprofitable constellation of frontier relationships.\textsuperscript{14}

The first opportunity to do so came from the East. Concerned that ongoing violence between immigrant Indians, Indians of the prairies, and the people of the southern plains might complicate the removal program, the U.S. war department dispatched a dragoon expedition to try and ease these tensions in the summer of 1834. Eight Cherokees, seven Senecas, six Delawares, and eleven Osages accompanied the expedition, as did three captives, including a Kiowa girl who had been captured during the brutal summer of 1833. The expedition crossed into Mexican Texas and made its way to a Wichita village. There the delegates held talks with Comanche, Kiowa, and Wichita representatives, returned the captives (to the delight of their kin), and proceeded to arrange for peace between all parties. Even the long-standing enmity between the Osages and the Comanches and Kiowas began to cool when southern plains representatives embraced their old enemies in council. More formal negotiations would take place over the next few years, and the peace had its strains. Disputes would arise over hunting rights, and, rarely, over acts of violence. Nonetheless, a basically cooperative relationship existed between southern plains Indians and their eastern and northeastern neighbors from the summer of 1834 onward, and trade was its foundation.\textsuperscript{15}

This development was the first of a series of frontier realignments that would transform the southern plains and northern Mexico alike. The peace took multiple and increasing threats and turned them into cautious commercial friendships. Peace with eastern Indians gave Comanches and their allies access to a wider variety and steadier supply of U.S. and European manufactured goods, guns and ammunition included. In turn, southern plains Indians offered processed hides and a seemingly in-

\textsuperscript{14} For the Comanche requests and Mexican refusals, see Joel R. Poinsett to Henry Clay, Mexico City, July 16, 1828, letter 145 in \textit{Despatches from United States Ministers to Mexico, 182–1906} (Microfilm, 179 reels, National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1955); Kavanagh, \textit{Comanche Political History}, 204–5.

\textsuperscript{15} For the dragoon expedition, see La Vere, \textit{Contrary Neighbors}, 72–78; Brad Agnew, \textit{Fort Gibson: Terminal on the Trail of Tears} (Norman, OK, 1980), 115–39. For later Comanche complaints over hunting and (in early 1845) over violence, see Kavanagh, \textit{Comanche Political History}, 242–43, 274.
exhaustible supply of horses and mules, animals that eastern Indians needed more than ever as they tried to rebuild their lives and fortunes in the west. Most trade would move through Indians, but two Americans, Holland Coffee and Auguste Pierre Chouteau, established trading posts east of Comanche country in 1834 and 1835, respectively. Finally, peace had dramatic implications for movement on the southern plains. In the several years before the truce, large numbers of Comanche and Kiowa men could not go on extended campaigns without endangering their families and fortunes. After 1834, more and more men could travel with confidence.¹⁶

Many took their newfound freedom of movement into Chihuahua. In October 1834, more than one hundred Comanche raiders stole horses from the eastern half of the state. Another more wide-ranging campaign unfolded two months later. Comanches and Kiowas continued attacking Chihuahuan ranches and haciendas every month from January through July of 1835, killing Mexicans, capturing women and children, stealing horses and mules, and destroying all kinds of property. The most dramatic campaign of 1835 took place in May, when more than eight hundred southern plains warriors invaded the eastern districts of Chihuahua. They laid waste to the Hacienda de las Animas, driving off horses and mules, sacking and burning houses, and destroying stores of beans and corn. They finally withdrew after killing six men and capturing thirty-nine women and children.¹⁷

Mexicans faced a variety of obstacles in responding to large groups of Indian raiders. Arid northern Mexico’s pastoral economy depended upon a dispersed population, and that made defense a losing strategy against numerous well-armed and highly mobile raiders. A string of presidios (garrisons) had contributed to security in the late colonial period,


¹⁷. For Comanche raids into Chihuahua in 1834 and 1835, see Griffen, *Utmost Good Faith*, 143. For references to the raid on the Hacienda de las Animas, see Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (1844; rep. Norman, OK, 1954), 250.
but empty treasuries and perpetual political crises consigned them to neglect after independence. Ranches and small towns sometimes bested Indian attackers, but they had no effective means to safeguard animal property and often failed even to protect their residents. Without effective defenses, northern Mexicans had to rely on diplomacy and trade to shield them against enemies and, failing that, had to send offensive campaigns into Indian territories. “Pursue them as they pursue us,” an observer from Coahuila once advised. “Threaten them as they threaten us. Rob them as they rob us. Capture them as they capture us. Frighten them as they frighten us. Alarm them as they alarm us.”

Doubtless this is what most northerners yearned to do. And yet Mexicans trying to organize campaigns into la comanchería faced daunting challenges. An effective force would have to be large, and organizers would find men reluctant to participate unless their families and property could be protected in their absence. A large force of Mexicans would likely find insufficient meat on the plains, and so, if they planned on being out for any length of time, would have to march with slow-moving cattle in tow. Water and pasturage for cattle and, especially, for large numbers of horses, would be reliable only during certain times of the year. Strategists also worried about Comanche herds drinking waterholes dry before Mexicans got there, or else finding water sources poisoned, “infested with dead horses, killed intentionally by Comanches.” Finally, southern plains families ranged seasonally over a huge territory and Mexicans themselves had seasonal peaks to their labor cycle, so it took tremendous resources, political capital, administrative skill, and, not least, luck, to coordinate and mobilize effective campaigns.


For a variety of reasons, then, northern Mexicans found it extremely difficult to strike at plains Indians from below the Rio Grande. New Mexico would have been the ideal place from which to launch such attacks. But the isolated New Mexicans enjoyed a brisk trade with these formidable peoples and refused to wage war on them, insisting that doing so would "bring complete ruin" to their state. Thus Texas had a unique role in the security of the Mexican north, and it became the focal point for Mexico's emerging efforts at reestablishing peace with Indians on the southern plains. In 1834, Mexican authorities intensified negotiations with Cherokees and other eastern Indians in Texas who wanted formal land titles from Mexico. These Indians had not been party to the recent peace, and agreed to strike against Comanches and their allies on the plains. Tejano authorities urged their constituents to contribute funds for the anticipated campaign. At the same time, Mexican officials sought a diplomatic breakthrough with specific eastern Comanche leaders that they might then leverage into a broader peace. The commander general of northeastern Mexico ordered the resumption of gifts for prominent Comanches, and authorities in San Antonio encouraged trade. Though high-ranking officials warned against buying stolen animals, it seems that locals looked the other way when Chihuahuan horses and mules wound up in Texan markets. Commerce led to conversation, talks got underway about a new treaty, and, by August 1835, three hundred Comanches had visited San Antonio with the intention of proceeding on to Matamoros to renew a peace agreement with the Mexican Republic. Obviously, these three hundred could not speak for everyone on the southern plains. But it was a start. After the terrible campaigns of late 1834 and early 1835, it seemed that Texas could be the entryway into a renewed Comanche–Mexican peace.  

96–97. For seasonal obstacles to campaigning, see the analysis in El Ancla (Matamoros), May 3, 1841.

20. Quote is from Manuel Armijo, in Weber, Mexican Frontier, 114–15. For a later elaboration on his concerns, see Manuel Armijo to the departmental assembly, June 27, 1845, MANM 38: 740–45. For Mexican attempts at aligning Mexicans, Anglos, and eastern Indians against Comanches, see John Holmes Jenkins, ed., The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835–1836 (10 vols., Austin, TX, 1973), 1: 44, 47, 55, 67; Velasco Avila, "La amenaza comanche," 272–75, 280. For resumption of gifts, see Martín Perfecto de Cos to Domingo de Ugartechea, May 8, 1835, frame 38, roll 165 of the Bexar Archives (microfilm) [hereafter BA]. For Chihuahuan mules being sold in Texas, see José J. Calvo to Luis Zuloaga, Chihuah-
The Texas Rebellion demolished these hopes. When Anglo-Texan colonists and certain Tejanos rebelled against the central government in late 1835, and then defeated and captured Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna in April 1836, Comanches disappeared from the list of Mexico City’s priorities. But Texan independence had profound and underappreciated implications for northern Mexico’s relationship with southern plains Indians. Most immediately, the centerpiece of Mexico’s plan for ending the current Comanche hostilities had suddenly and literally disappeared from the national map. The project of enlisting Cherokees and other eastern Indians in Texas against Comanches and their allies would now have to proceed quietly, in enemy territory, or not at all. And the peace negotiations that had been painstakingly nurtured in San Antonio had become irrelevant.21

The long-term consequences mattered more. For generations, San Antonio had been a key site of negotiation with plains Indians, and Tejanos like José Francisco Ruiz had been crucial intermediaries between these Indians and the Mexican government. Mexico lost these resources when it lost Texas. Most importantly, Texas had been Mexico’s only realistic staging ground for offensive campaigns against Comanches and their allies. The rebellion eliminated this possibility. Indeed, it erected yet another barrier to launching an offensive from elsewhere in the north. Any military campaign into la comanchería would now first have to march through the independent and belligerent Republic of Texas. The only effective defense against raiders was an effective offense, and the Texas Rebellion helped insure that Mexican soldiers would never again kill Comanches in their homelands.22

With Mexican authority vanished from Texas and distracted throughout the northeast, southern plains raiders shifted their attention away

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21. After 1836 Mexicans occasionally courted Cherokees for help against Texans. See for example D. W. Smith to U.S. Secretary of State, Matamoros, July 1, 1836, frames 585–96, reel 1 of Despatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826–1906 (Microfilm, 12 reels, National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1964) [hereafter Despatches].
from Chihuahua. In 1837, for the first time in more than a decade, huge campaigns began crossing the river into Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. In July Mexican authorities reported one thousand Comanches attacking points on the lower Rio Grande. This campaign and others like it transformed the region. In the aftermath of the Texas Rebellion, raiders took more than a thousand horses and mules from Laredo alone, including more than four-fifths of the horses possessed by the city and its hinterland. The raiders also slaughtered animals they had no interest in driving off. The number of sheep and goats owned by families in Laredo plummeted from nearly six thousand in late 1835 to a mere fifteen hundred in 1837. Indians burned huts and fields between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, compelling the ranching families lately established there to move back south of the great river. Meanwhile raids went deeper into Mexican territory, seeking untapped concentrations of animal wealth and probing defenses throughout the northeast.

The timing, frequency, and size of these dangerous campaigns speak to the formidable capacity of the people of the southern plains to organize themselves across families, bands, divisions, and even ethnic and linguistic lines in pursuit of shared goals. Averaging between ten and thirty people, the extended family was the most stable Comanche residence group. When attempting to raise men for a campaign, warriors could appeal to others in these family units and also to kin and affines within the larger rancherías or bands in which they spent much of the year. Band members were further connected through an institutionalized form of friendship, which imposed kinship obligations upon two people and also on their relatives. During summer, Comanches came together

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23. For consequences of raiding in Laredo, see Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa, A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo, 1755–1870 (College Station, TX, 1983), 50–52. For raids between the Nueces and Rio Grande, see D. W. Smith to U.S. Secretary of State, Matamoros, Aug. 4, 1837, in Despatches 1: 700. The abandonment of this little region would eventually help Texas recruit the Polk administration to its feeble but momentous claim to a Rio Grande boundary. Kiowas joined in the raids on the lower Rio Grande. The winter of 1836–37, “winter that Kinahiate was killed,” refers to a warrior’s death while fighting the “Timberless Country Mexicans” in Tamaulipas. See Mooney, Calendar, 271. For the 1,000-man raid, see Diario del Gobierno, Aug. 10, 1837; D. W. Smith to U.S. Secretary of State, Matamoros, Aug. 4, 1837, in Despatches, 1: 700. See also David M. Vigness, “Indian Raids on the Lower Rio Grande, 1836–1837,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 59 (July 1955), 15–23.
for divisional gatherings to renew social bonds, perform rituals of community integration, and hunt collectively. They generally married outside the band but inside the division, and so created kinship obligations and political support networks that bound different bands together at a variety of levels. Divisional gatherings gave leaders an opportunity to share information, mediate disputes, seek consensus on matters regarding outsiders, and, not least, organize ambitious campaigns. And though the four divisions were distinct, all Comanches moved freely throughout la comanchería. They traded throughout the larger region, sometimes moved across divisional lines, and commonly made pan-divisional appeals in times of war. An American observer who came to know them well considered Comanches “but one people” because of the way that men from different divisions cooperated in their Mexican campaigns. Finally, they could call on many non-Comanches when organizing raids. Most obviously they cooperated closely with Kiowas and Kiowa Apaches, but Comanches also occasionally campaigned with allies among the Wichitas and even with opportunistic Mexicans from eastern New Mexico and the lower Rio Grande.  

As the conflict intensified, more and more families found themselves mourning male relatives killed below the river. Kiowas memorialized several of the more prominent dead in their calendars. Emotion, honor, and tradition dictated that bereft kin seek revenge for such deaths, and protocols existed through which grieving family members could make appeals for assistance throughout the complicated social and political network on the southern plains. Ambitious young leaders seem to have championed these causes, folding revenge into the ongoing and escalating program of plundering animals and captives from the Mexican north. Many built formidable reputations doing so, capitalizing on their growing knowledge and on their reputations as effective and generous leaders to raise more and more campaigns. Among the Hois, for example, Potsanaquahip (known to Texans as Buffalo Hump) and a man we know only as Santa Anna attracted large followings and became well known for their profitable trips into Mexico. Their feats could translate into political capital; Potsanaquahip would eventually become principal chief of his division.\(^25\)

Effective campaigners like these often relied upon captives or else Mexican collaborators, people other Mexicans referred to as \textit{entregadores} or “deliverers,’’ to guide them through the complex terrain below the Rio Grande. Once they knew the best routes, places of refuge, and the whereabouts of sizable herds, Comanches found large-scale operations considerably easier below the river than above it. While it was difficult to combine hunting with major long-distance military operations on the plains, the fixed targets sought by Comanche campaigners in northern Mexico were also those places with the region’s highest concentration of nonequine meat. Old campsites littered with bones and, especially, the presence of thousands of slaughtered sheep, goats, pigs, and cows un-
used for food and rotting in heaps across the fields of northern Mexico testified to the superabundance of protein available to plains Indians on campaign below the river. Moreover, the Indians’ horses enjoyed better pasturage beneath the Rio Grande during much of the year, grazed on rich grass cover while traversing low mountain ranges, and occasionally would have had access to Mexican grain stores. Abundant resources for men and mounts enabled southern plains warriors to travel in armies large enough to stay in enemy territory for weeks at a time. Northern Mexico’s land, animals, and climate seemed to conspire with the raiders and magnify the sufferings of its own people.26

By early 1838, northern Mexicans had reason to despair. Many politicians talked about bringing the war to the enemy, but after the loss of Texas none would manage to do so. If offense was impossible, defense often seemed futile. Locals found the underfunded army more a curse than a blessing, and saw the raiders growing bolder each season. “God contain them,” wrote a group of citizens calling themselves the “sufferers,” “for our soldiers cannot!” The authorities seemed to agree. In April 1838, the governor of Nuevo León wrote to his superiors in Mexico City, assuring them that each raid brought his state “closer to its total destruction.” Everyone expected the raids to continue getting worse.27

26. For Mexican collaborators, see for example General-in-Chief of the Army of the North to Vicente Filisola, Matamoros, Dec. 11, 1837, in Diario del Gobierno, Jan. 3, 1838. For discoveries of mounds of animal remains where Comanches had made camp, see for example Registro Oficial, May 24, 1846. For animals slaughtered in raids, see J. M. Iglesias de Orduna to governor of Durango, Hacienda de San Salvador de Horta, Sept. 19, 1845, in Registro Oficial, Sept. 28, 1845. For mountain environments of Coahuila and Nuevo León, see Cornelius H. Muller, “Vegitation and Climate of Coahuila, Mexico,” Madroño 9 (1947), 33–57.
27. For the “sufferers,” see El Mercurio (Matamoros), Aug. 5, 1836 [supplement]. For the governor, see J. de Jesús D. y Prieto to the Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, Monterrey, April 1, 1838, C12, Correspondencia con la secretaría de Guerra y Marina, Archivo General del Estado de Nuevo León, Monterrey, Nuevo León [hereafter AGENL-MGM]. For tensions between civilians and military in northeastern Mexico, see Omar S. Valerio-Jíménez, “Neglected Citizens and Willing Traders: The Villas del Norte (Tamaulipas) in Mexico’s Northern Borderlands, 1749–1846,” Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos 18 (Summer 2002), 251–96, see pp. 289–95.
Remarkably, they did not. The raids in 1838 were if anything smaller than they had been the year before, and both the frequency and the scale of raiding contracted significantly in 1839 and during the first half of 1840. While few recognized it fully, northern Mexicans were bound together with southern plains Indians in a larger system, and changes on other frontiers of this wider world had again brought temporary respite to the towns and ranches of the Mexican north.

To the east, the Hois found themselves in sharp conflict with the newly independent Republic of Texas by the late 1830s. While President Sam Houston had championed coexistence with Indians, controversies over captives, territory, and raiding from both sides complicated Comanche–Texan relations. These tensions increased exponentially when the Indian-hater Mirabeau B. Lamar became president of Texas in late 1838 and initiated a program of active campaigning designed to drive Comanches west. In late January 1839, Lamar’s Lipan Apache spies discovered “the place where the women and children of the hostile Comanches are stationed.” The informants noted that the men were “absent on an excursion”; they may have been in Nuevo León participating in one of the few campaigns from that season. In mid-February, a Texan–Apache force attacked the Comanche village without warning, “throwing open the doors of the wigwams or pulling them down and slaughtering the enemy in their beds.” The Texan and Indian force boasted that they killed or wounded eighty to one hundred Comanches, but made little of the fact that women, children, and aged men made up most of the dead. All told, Texans sent a dozen organized raids against eastern Comanches and their allies between 1839 and 1841, inflicting grievous damage on families and property. Mexican observers must have been reminded of how much easier it was to attack Comanches from above the Rio Grande than below it.  

28. Quotes are from Telegraph and Texas Register, Jan. 30, 1839; J. H. Moore to Albert Sidney Johnston, LaGrange, Mar. 10, 1839, in Winfrey and Day, eds., Texas Indian Papers, 1: 57–59. For the Comanche campaign into Nuevo León in winter 1838–39, see Joaquín García to Ministro de Guerra y Marina, Dec. 9, 1838, C 12, E 44, AGENL-MGM; same to same, Mar. 23, 1839, C13, E 34, AGENL-MGM. For reports of Lipan scouts encouraging and guiding Texan raiding parties, see Telegraph and Texas Register for Jan. 2, 12, and 30, 1839. The history of Comanche–Texan relations in this period is best told in Gary Clayton
Kiowas, Kiowa Apaches, Yamparikas, and Kotsotekas struggled with their own crises and tragedies in the late 1830s. The sources that speak to their history in this period are thinner than those concerning the Hois and Tenewas. But the Kiowa calendar indicates that raids by southern Cheyennes and Arapahos worsened in the late 1830s. The key external events from mid-decade concerned the Mexican campaigns, but the period 1837–1839 is devoted entirely to enemies from the north. Kiowas called summer of 1837 “the summer that the Cheyenne were massacred,” and winter 1837–38 the “winter that they dragged the head.” Summer 1838 was the “summer that the Cheyenne attacked the camp on Wolf River,” an attack in which hundreds of Kiowa and Comanche men and women were said to have been killed. The winter of 1838–39 was remembered for yet another storied battle with the Arapaho. While the defenders garnered some significant victories in these years, the conflicts nonetheless kept Comanche and Kiowa families in a state of anxiety and alarm and made it exceedingly dangerous for men to leave on raiding campaigns into Mexico.29

There are two other factors that likely contributed to the lull in campaigns during the late 1830s. First, a good proportion of the men who had been eager raiders in the previous few years may have found that they had as many horses and mules as they could manage by late decade. A major trade outlet disappeared when Choteau’s posts were closed following his death in 1838. Those families who failed to dispose of excess trade animals had to expend labor caring for them and had to make difficult choices about camping in large, relatively safe groups and moving constantly, or staying in smaller, more manageable rancherías and hoping for the best. This dilemma became especially keen in winter, and could mean life or death so long as the region was harried by enemies. Second, the Kiowa calendar for winter 1839–40 depicts a man covered from head to foot in spots; that is, a man suffering from smallpox. Brought to the southern plains by Osage traders, this was the same epidemic that virtually destroyed the Mandans. As is so often the case


29. Kiowa dates come from Mooney, Calendar, 271–74. For the casualties during the attack on the camp at Wolf River (Creek), see Moore, The Cheyenne, 134–35.
during the 1830s and early 1840s, surviving sources tell us little of this event’s consequences in *la comanchería* but it is fair to assume that the tragedy sapped enthusiasm for campaigning. Reeling from loss and insecurity, southern plains Indians set out to change the regional dynamic. In the summer of 1840, Kiowas and Comanches made peace with their formidable southern Cheyenne and Arapaho enemies. The agreement was solemnized with an epic round of gifting. Cheyennes and Arapahos gave Comanches and Kiowas blankets, beads, calico, kettles, guns, and ammunition. Southern plains Indians gave their newfound allies—what else?—horses, so many horses that even “unimportant” Cheyenne and Arapaho men and women got four, five, six animals each. Perhaps there had indeed been a glut of horses on the southern plains. The agreement served multiple purposes. Most basically, it put an end to years of violence, freed families on both sides of the Arkansas from much suffering and uncertainty, and inaugurated an intense commercial relationship. Peace also meant secure hunting access to the buffalo-rich territory between the Platte and Arkansas Rivers and, as southern Cheyennes and Arapahos deepened their trading relationship with Bent’s Fort, this access seems to have been uppermost in their minds. Given the paucity of source material for fleshing out the Great Peace of 1840 (we do not even know in which month it took place), scholars seeking Comanche and Kiowa motivations have often speculated that southern plains negotiators were motivated by threats from Texans and immigrant tribes. However, the Kiowas, Kiowa Apaches, and western Comanches in closest communication with Cheyennes and Arapahos had little to fear from these eastern threats, and, with one possible exception, seem not to have turned their attentions eastward in the aftermath of the Great Peace.

30. For Choteau, see Janet Lecompte, “Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanches and Kiows,” *Colorado Magazine* 49 (1972), 273–93, see pp. 275–79. It is possible that the Panic of 1837 and the resulting depression in the U.S. had negative repercussions for southern plains trade. Still, the Panic of 1819 actually drove American merchants like William Becknell onto the plains and, temporarily at least, into the Indian trade. For smallpox, see Mooney, *Calendar*, 274–75. For the 1837 epidemic on the northern plains, see R. G. Robertson, *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell, ID, 2001).

31. For the gifting see George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman, OK, 1958), 63–69. For the bison “buffer zone” created by hostility between the Indians of the central and southern plains, and the significance of access to this
But they did look south. Soon after the celebrations on the Arkansas, northern Mexicans experienced what was for them the most terrifying winter in living memory. Hundreds of southern plains men struck Tamaulipas and eastern Nuevo León in September, Coahuila and western Nuevo León in October, Coahuila and the northern reaches of Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí in December and January, Chihuahua and Durango in February, and Nuevo León again in February and March. It is unclear whether Hois men participated in these campaigns, given their unresolved conflicts with Texans. But an election in late 1841 brought to power a new administration in Texas that put an end to state-sponsored raids. Tentative peace negotiations began soon after and finally culminated in formal treaty in October 1844, signed by Potsanaquahip and two other Comanche leaders. Here again, the Mexican data seem to register the change. Following a lull in raiding in 1842 and 1843, campaigns became more widespread and intense than ever starting in the winter of 1844.32

Emerging into places that none of their kinsmen had ever laid eyes on,
plains Indians became astonished at the animal wealth they discovered. Following a campaign into Zacatecas, for example, an escaped Mexican captive reported that these Indians had never before been this far south, and that one impressed warrior had exclaimed "we will go and bring more handsome lads and come back here, for there are many horses." Between 1840 and 1846, Comanches and Kiowas sent twenty-two major
raiding campaigns into Mexico, averaging nearly four hundred “handsome” men each. This was double the number of large campaigns that they had organized during the previous six years.33

As expeditions into Mexico made greater claims on Comanche and Kiowa time and labor, their communities moved to reconcile the Mexican conflict with other dimensions of their economy. Whereas half of all large campaigns from 1834 to 1840 occurred in summer, from 1840 through 1846 three-quarters left in late autumn and winter. This insured that men would be available for bison hunts in early summer, for harvesting of the virtually hairless “summer skins,” and again in late summer and early fall, when the animals came together during rut and their coats began filling out enough to use as robes. It is probably the case that southern plains men felt increasingly reluctant to miss these crucial hunting seasons because bison were becoming harder and harder to find. By 1843 or 1844, long-term overhunting for the hide trade, habitat destruction, and other factors seem to have reduced buffalo populations to the point that some Comanches and Kiowas had insufficient meat. Large-scale, long-distance raiding campaigns into Mexico therefore accounted for more and more of the region’s economic activity as bison harvests declined. The war that southern plains Indians initiated against Mexico in the mid-1830s had become an integrated feature of their yearly round by the early 1840s and an essential component of their collective livelihoods by mid-decade.34

33. For quote, see Antonio Sánchez Múquiz to Sr. Secretario del despacho del Superior Gobierno de Durango, Parras, Aug. 31, 1842, in Registro Oficial, Sept. 8, 1842. The line of transmission (from raider—presumably in Spanish—to captive to official to official) obviously opens this quote to question. But it is worth noting that Kiowas considered good looks to be an important quality in a man, regardless of age. It was assumed that all men of highest rank should be “handsome on a horse,” and in 1870 four of the twenty-five most prominent Kiowas made the list because they were handsome. See Mishkin, Rank and Warfare, 36, 54–55. Numbers of campaigns in this paragraph and comment on seasonality in the paragraph below are drawn from data in the appendix of DeLay, War of a Thousand Deserts.

34. For hunting seasons, see Frank Gilbert Roe, The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State (Toronto, ON, 1951), 116–18. For the suggestion that escalating Comanche raids into Mexico during the 1840s were driven in part by shrinking buffalo herds on the southern plains, see Flores, “Bison
Neither the southern plains nor northern Mexico can be understood adequately in isolation from the other during the 1830s and 1840s. The Mexican data reveal that southern plains Indians expanded their raiding activity below the Rio Grande in four dramatic stages. These expansions followed the initial 1834 peace with Osages and immigrant Indians, the 1836 Texas Rebellion, the Great Peace of 1840, and the treaty-signing with the Republic of Texas in 1844. The loss of Texas made it virtually impossible for Mexicans to launch reprisals against Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa Apaches on the plains, and, by enhancing security and creating hungry new markets, each of the three peace agreements made long-distance raids into Mexico safer and more profitable. As northern Mexico sank into insecurity and deepening poverty, most southern plains Indians experienced the exact reverse. Though it proved to be a very temporary accomplishment, by the early 1840s Comanches and their allies had nearly eliminated organized threats to their physical security. A violent, harried landscape only a decade before, the southern plains had become a plunderers' bazaar, dotted with new trading outposts at its margins and crisscrossed by Cheyennes, Arapahos, New Mexicans, Osages, Cherokees, Missourians, Creeks, Delawares, Texans, and Shawnees, all bartering for hides processed by southern plains women, and horses, mules, and captives seized by southern plains men.35

Ecology,” 480. See Pekka Härmääläinen, “The First Phase of Destruction: Killing the Southern Plains Buffalo, 1790–1840,” Great Plains Quarterly 21 (Spring 2001), 101–14, for the argument that such pressures were encouraging raiding as early as the 1820s. Particularly intense campaigning seasons in 1844 and 1845 may have reflected food shortages in la comanchería, but it is unlikely that declining herds had much to do with raiding before then. The timing of increased raiding into Mexico coincided with diplomatic and political developments that were, through the early 1840s at least, largely independent of changes in the bison herds. Indeed, the dramatic increase in raiding in the early 1840s came at a moment when Comanche and Kiowa hunters had just obtained safe access to dense bison populations on the high plains between the Arkansas and Platte Rivers. As Flores himself remarks, the Kiowa calendar for 1841 includes the rare notation “many bison.” See Flores, “Bison Ecology,” 483.

35. For a glimpse of the economic revival of the early 1840s, as well as its diverse participants, see J. C. Eldredge to Sam Houston, Washington on the Brazos, Dec. 8, 1843, in Winfrey and Day, eds., Texas Indian Papers, 1: 251–75. For continuing comanchero activity in this period, see Charles L. Kenner, The Comanchero Frontier: A History of New Mexican–Plains Indians Relations (1969; 2nd. ed., Norman, OK, 1994), 79–80; Brooks, Captives & Cousins, 221–22, 269–
Did Indian leaders engineer this outcome, strategically embracing opportunities for peace with the sole aim of expanding the profitable war against Mexico? The complexities of the period cannot be reduced to so simple a formulation. Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa Apaches had complicated and divergent motives for making peace with Indians and Texans in this period, these motives changed over the 1830s and 1840s, and not everyone in la comanchería supported the agreements in any case. The alliances may also be seen as part of a broader effort by Indian peoples across the Great Plains in this period to forge strong partnerships in the face of demographic, ecological, and economic change. Still, while the sources do not give us access to high-level deliberations about regional strategy, the convergence of events above and below the river strongly suggests that Mexico played an increasingly important role in the geopolitical decisions of the period. Surely southern plains leaders anticipated the ways in which security and expanded markets would facilitate raiding campaigns into Mexico. How else can we explain the speed with which so many of them capitalized on geopolitical change by leading their men below the Rio Grande, or the tremendous resources that they devoted to this dangerous, complicated, and labor-intensive project year after year?26

Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa Apaches made their decisions at a critical moment in the history of the continent. In the summer of 1846 American troops came to conquer the impoverished, divided, and exhausted people who had paid for the economic revival of the southern plains with fifteen years of terror and tragedy. American officers denounced the Indian raiders, who continued their campaigns throughout the war, and promised that the U.S would save Mexicans from the “savage Cumanches.” In truth it proved enormously beneficial to the U.S. invasion and resulting occupation that northern Mexico had already endured more than a decade of war. And, more broadly, the United States

70. For trading posts that the Bents established in western Comanche country in the early 1840s, see Lecompte, “Bent, St. Vrain and Company.” For Texan trading houses established in the early 1840s, see Henry C. Armbruster, “Torrey Trading Houses,” in The Handbook of Texas Online http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/TT/dft2.html, accessed Sept. 24, 2002.

36. For peace among high plains tribes, see West, The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, & the Rush to Colorado, 77; Brooks, Captives & Cousins, 263–64.
had been implicated in Comanche and Kiowa attacks upon Mexicans from the beginning. While the connections were neither as direct nor as sinister as Mexican commentators believed, the Americanization of Texas, the federal policy of Indian removal, and U.S. market penetration into the west all powerfully influenced the shifts in southern plains policy in the 1830s and 1840s.37

And yet there was nothing inevitable about these shifts. Given their vulnerable position at the beginning of this period, Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa Apaches might have been expected to be more cautious and safeguard their imperfect alliance with Mexico. They might have viewed Texan independence, for example, as an opportunity to play one republic off against the other and coax both onto a diplomatic and commercial middle ground. Instead, they concentrated on establishing market connections with other Indians, maintained a defiant posture towards Texas into the 1840s, and, over time, forged a broad consensus supporting a lucrative and extraordinarily aggressive war against Mexico.

Only a few years after this realignment came into maturity, Comanches and Kiowas found themselves living inside the United States. Though southern plains Indians would continue to raid along the Rio Grande through the 1870s, the size and ambition of their campaigns decreased sharply in the mid-1850s. Growing settlement and traffic on the margins of *la comanchería* and increased competition for diminishing bison undermined the security that had been prerequisite for large, long-distance campaigns. Just as importantly, southern plains men met growing resistance from the new international order that their devastating Mexican raids had indirectly helped to bring about. Newly established Mexican military colonies and American forts complicated raids, while diplomatic agreements with the U.S. government undermined the audacious, unified policies that had predominated before, during, and immediately after U.S.–Mexican War. By the late 1850s Comanches and Kiowas were more commonly sending small parties into Texas and into northernmost Mexico in search of horses and slow-moving cattle. These vestiges of their bold raiding campaigns declined into the early

1870s, when the U.S. government reduced all southern plains Indians to reservations and, in so doing, confined to memories the wider world of the handsome man.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} The change in raiding is best reflected in data assembled by a Mexican claims commission in the 1870s. See Informe de la comisión pesquisidora de la frontera del norte al ejecutivo de la unión, en cumplimiento del artículo 3 de la ley de 30 de septiembre de 1872, (Mexico City, 1874), appendix. See also testimony of Manuel Menchaca before that commission, in Velasco Avila, ed., En manos de los bárbaros, 119–24. Menchaca testified that Comanches changed their raiding patterns after 1848, crossing the river in smallish parties of fifty to seventy. For Mexican military colonies, see decree of July 19, 1846, in Manuel Dublán and José María Lozano, eds., Legislación Mexicana; ó Colección completa de las disposiciones legislativas expedidas desde la independencia de la República (22 vols., Mexico City, 1876–93), 5: 422–26. For an excellent review of Mexico’s efforts to fortify its frontier, see J. Fred Rippy, The United States and Mexico (New York, 1926), 76–80. For the 1853 treaty, see Mooney, Calendar, 173. For growing demand for cattle, see Brooks, Captives & Cousins, 336; and the increased reporting of stolen cattle in La comisión pesquisidora, appendix.