A
History of
New Mexico
Since Statehood
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Preface

Welcome, new historians! The authors of this textbook are excited to have you join us on a journey that we began many years ago—learning about New Mexico history! Like many historians, we love history and hope that after reading this book, you will enjoy it, too.

Some people think that learning history means memorizing names, dates, places, and events. You will learn some, but you will also learn a lot about the stories behind them—because history is a collection of stories pieced together from many different places (archives, oral traditions, books, images, and much more). In order to find the stories that accompany those names, dates, places, and events, the authors of this textbook spent a lot of time doing research, collecting and then synthesizing information into a logical format, and finally writing (and rewriting) the story in a way that brings these facts together in an interesting manner.

The first step in “doing” history is figuring out what story needs to be told. Sometimes that involves asking questions like “Why do people say Governor Clyde Tingley liked power too much?” or “How did Frijoles Canyon become Bandelier National Monument?” The next step is doing background research. Kind of like on the new show History Detectives (on PBS), historians first have to know something about the event or person about which (or whom) they want to write. Historians have to know a basic story line so they will know where to begin looking for information to tell the story. Asking thoughtful questions is important, questions such as: Which people were most important to New Mexico’s history and why? What events were turning points in New Mexico or had some impact on how people lived? How did people interact with others who came from different places?
cultures? How did people live? Once historians have questions and know what story they want to tell, they must find out where to look for information that will help tell that story.

What kind of information do historians use? We use secondary sources such as books, academic journal articles, and pamphlets, as well as informational brochures about places or people. Historians also must use primary sources (written documents or oral history told by people who actually witnessed the events). Some primary sources we used to write this book included stories that people told us or wrote down many years ago (oral history); letters between family, friends, and acquaintances; letters between officials of the church, military, and governmental agents; newspaper articles; government reports; laws; wills; and other government documents like the census, land-grant records, or legislative and other governmental official records. And believe it or not, we even used political cartoons! Historians use a wide variety of sources to help us tell the story. We do not find information in just one place and begin writing. A good historian must make sure the information is correct by corroborating it with other sources.

Having a wide variety of sources is very important because historians have to make sure they are not just telling one side of the story. Imagine finding a document from the first half of the 1700s about the establishment of outlier towns (such as Abiquiú or Belén) and the author wrote about the “marauding and dangerous nomadic tribes such as the Navajo, Ute, and Comanche” who constantly raided, killed, and stole from the Spanish people. Is this true? Is there another point of view? Why did the author write this? What is the author’s training, background, or bias? As important, why does it matter today how the nomadic tribes were perceived three hundred years ago? These are some of the many questions researchers must ask to make sure the story they tell is as unbiased as possible. Using a solid combination of primary and secondary sources, as well as sources from many different views, is the goal of good historians—and should be yours, too.

Once historians have collected all this information about the story by doing research (research should take up about 80 percent of your time in preparing a research paper), they have to figure out how to piece the story together. Chronological organization is often the key to presenting information in the most coherent fashion but not always. Most important, however, is the ability of the researcher to make history relevant and meaningful to those who read it. Why does it matter where the CCC camps were located and what they did? How does that affect students today? Just because Los Alamos became a secret scientific facility that developed the first atomic bomb and was important in the 1940s, why should students today have to study about it? Does it really matter that Bruce King served more than one term as governor? What did he accomplish, and why is that important to students now? Does it really matter if students in Hobbs know where Mount Taylor is or if students in Farmington know where Carlsbad Caverns are? Why is it such a big deal that President Theodore Roosevelt took the Taos’ sacred lake away and put it into the National Forest system—only to be given back to Taos Pueblo during President Richard M. Nixon’s years? What did each of those decisions hope to achieve, and what was the end result?

Research often emanates from a question researchers might have (or from an assignment their teacher gave them). No single history book will answer every single question about a particular topic. As you read through this textbook, think about what questions you might want to ask about New Mexico history. When you read about Governor Clyde Tingley, did you wonder about his relationship with his wife, Carrie Tingley, and what they did after he did not win a third term as governor? What did he do? That could be an interesting research paper. Historians not only try to answer questions about an individual’s political career but also about their personal lives. By doing so, historians make the individual seem more relevant to the reader. More important, historians try to do research to find out why people make the decisions they do. Many decisions people make are based on their own past, their family life, their heritage, or something they learned along the way. Therefore, it is important for historians to look at far more than just what a governor did in office and try to see the character behind the man. Also, historians must look beyond male political leaders—they must understand the points of view of women and minorities, environmental issues or concerns, and local and national issues as well. In other words, studying history means studying everything from politics to geography, science to cultural studies, and agronomy to immigration. Good history is multifaceted, well balanced, and broadly supported. Good history can be really fun to read.

Most important, though, learning history is important. Perhaps Spanish philosopher George Santayana said it best: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”
Introduction

New Mexico had been part of the Spanish empire for more than two hundred years (1598–1821) and part of the independent country of Mexico for another twenty-five years (1821–46) before the United States conquered it in the Mexican–American War of 1846–48. Almost as soon as Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny led his U.S. Army of the West into Santa Fe on August 15, 1846, many New Mexicans looked forward to the day their homeland would become a state of the United States.

New Mexicans were made to wait another sixty-six years before finally achieving statehood on January 6, 1912. Incredibly, twenty western territories achieved statehood during the sixty-six years New Mexico was made to wait for this higher political status within the United States. The only legal requirements to become a state were that a territory have a population of at least 60,000 residents, write a state constitution, and be approved by a majority vote in the U.S. Congress. New Mexico had a population of 61,547 in 1850, the first year it had applied for statehood. Further, New Mexico’s population was much higher than many other territories, like Montana and Wyoming, when they became states between 1864 and 1912.

Since the territory was often confused with Old Mexico, New Mexicans went so far as to consider changing its name to increase their chances for statehood. At one time or another, New Mexicans considered changing the territory’s name to Acoma, Sierra, or Lincoln, among several suggestions. Fortunately, New Mexico’s name has never changed.

TIMELINE

1846
- American Army invades and captures New Mexico in the Mexican–American War
- The U.S. suppresses the Santa Fe Revolt
1848
- The Mexican–American War ends with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
- As part of the Compromise of 1850, New Mexico becomes a territory of the United States
1861
- The Civil War begins; Confederate troops occupy southern New Mexico
- Confederate troops advance into northern New Mexico, but, once defeated at Glorieta Pass, retreat home to Texas
1865
- Kit Carson defeats the Navajo, who are then forced on the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo
1866
- The San Carlos Indian reservation is founded
1867
- The disastrous reservation at Bosque Redondo is closed as the Navajo sign a treaty and return to their homeland in northwestern New Mexico
1871
- The San Carlos Indian reservation is founded in southeastern Arizona; thousands of Apaches will be forced to relocate to this distant location far from their homeland
1878
- John Tunstall is killed, starting the Lincoln County War
1880
- The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad builds the first tracks into New Mexico
1881
- Sheriff Pat Garrett kills Billy the Kid, essentially ending the Lincoln County War
1896
- New Mexicans prove their loyalty to the United States by serving heroically in the Spanish–American War, especially as members of a cavalry unit known as the Rough Riders
1901
- Arizona voters reject a plan to enter the Union as a single state with New Mexico
1912
- New Mexico achieves statehood at last
What had prevented New Mexico from becoming a state? Despite consistent efforts by New Mexico leaders and the support of most residents, there were five main reasons for New Mexico’s long, frustrating delay.

First, early efforts were hampered by a general ignorance about the territory and unfair suspicion about its citizens. People in other parts of the United States often opposed statehood because New Mexico’s largely Hispanic and Native American population was considered too “foreign” in language, culture, and religion to ever be a state in the Union. People also asked whether New Mexicans, who had lived under Spanish and Mexican rule for so long, would be loyal to the United States, especially if the United States ever went to war against New Mexico’s former governing countries.

Second, territorial politics also hurt New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state. A corrupt band of politicians and businessmen dominated the territory’s government and economy for most of the late 1800s. Observing this corruption, leaders in other parts of the country (where corruption was, ironically, as bad, if not worse) criticized New Mexico and did everything in their power to prevent New Mexico from reaching statehood.

Third, national politics often interfered in New Mexico’s progress in becoming a state. National issues that often had little to do with New Mexico took priority at key moments, often delaying New Mexico’s goal of statehood for years at a time.

Fourth, New Mexico took so long to become a state because its Indian wars were so costly and so long, perpetuating the territory’s image as a place dominated by a largely violent, “primitive” population. While the U.S. Army had defeated Indian resistance in most of the West by the 1870s, Native American warriors like Geronimo fought off thousands of U.S. troops in the Southwest until 1886. The Chicago Tribune declared that New Mexico’s Indians “can never be eligible to... become citizens. It would [be ridiculous] to allow... them to form a state... on the same level as the more prosperous and enlightened [states of the East].”

Finally, New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state were hurt by the territory’s image as one of the last lawless enclaves of the “Wild West.” When Easterners read about New Mexico in newspapers, magazines, and novels, they usually read of notorious outlaws like Billy the Kid—hardly responsible, law-abiding citizens of a potential state. An editorial in the New York Times went so far as to call New Mexico “the heart of our worst civilization.”

The purpose of this introduction is
- to teach more about the five main reasons why it took New Mexico so long to become a state;
- and to reveal how these problems were largely overcome, leading to final victory and statehood in 1912.

The U.S. Invasion and the “Revolt of 1847”

First, let’s consider the question of New Mexico’s loyalty to the United States in the mid-1800s.

Brig. Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny and his U.S. Army of the West swept into New Mexico and captured Santa Fe without firing a shot in 1846. Kearny raised the U.S. flag in Santa Fe and declared that all New Mexicans were now citizens of the United States. This hardly meant that everyone in New Mexico was pleased by the Americans’ bloodless conquest of their homeland, though. New Mexicans were, after all, still citizens of the Republic of Mexico, and their country was still at war with the United States in the Mexican-American War. By December 1846, rumors of a rebellion were serious enough that Charles Bent, the first U.S. governor of New Mexico, had several suspected rebel leaders arrested.

Despite the arrests, planning for an uprising continued. On January 19, 1847, a large group of New Mexicans converged on Governor Bent’s home in Taos. Before the day was over, Bent and several other Anglos and individuals sympathetic to the new U.S. government lay dead. A second group of rebels killed at least five Americans in Mora, on the east side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. More than a thousand insurrectionists advanced toward Santa Fe, intent on recapturing New Mexico from the Americans.

Within days, the insurrection, referred to as the Revolt of 1847, had spread through much of northern New Mexico. On January 23, a force of nearly four hundred U.S. troops, accompanied by Anglo friends of Bent and the others who had been killed, marched north to quell the
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authority of an American court to try a Mexican citizen for treason while the United States was still at war with Mexico.

General Kearny’s superiors in Washington agreed. Just because General Kearny had announced that New Mexicans were citizens of the United States when he occupied the territory in August 1846 did not make it so. Granting citizenship is a right reserved to Congress, and, since the United States and Mexico were still at war, Congress had not yet granted that right. New Mexicans were, therefore, still citizens of the Republic of Mexico. The court had no jurisdiction to try anyone for treason, and Trujillo was released.

If Antonio Trujillo was not a rebel, then the battles he and his fellow New Mexicans fought against the United States could not be called a rebellion. For years, though, many U.S. citizens still thought of the events of early 1847 as a rebellion and proof that New Mexicans could not be trusted as loyal American citizens. This perception lingered throughout New Mexico’s prolonged fight for statehood. As late as 1902 a congressional committee in Washington, D.C., met to review the “rebellion” and use it against the territory in its struggle for statehood.

Ending the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

While U.S. troops occupied New Mexico and suppressed the so-called Revolt of 1847, the Mexican-American War raged in Mexico to the far south. In March 1847 ten thousand U.S. troops landed at the Mexican port of Veracruz and, after a series of bloody but decisive battles, reached Mexico City by late summer. On September 13, U.S. troops stormed the citadel of Chapultepec (the “Halls of Montezuma” referred to in the U.S. Marine Corps song), and by the following day Mexico City was in American hands. The war was over. Now it was time to negotiate the peace.

U.S. Pres. James K. Polk appointed Nicholas P. Trist to negotiate a peace treaty with Mexico. After several months, Trist succeeded in negotiating an agreement in the community of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a suburb of Mexico City. The U.S. and Mexican governments officially signed the agreement, known as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, on May 30, 1848.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did much more than end the Mexican-American War. It also had a tremendous impact on New Mexico’s international boundary with Mexico, the issue of citizenship, and the question of land ownership in the Southwest.
The treaty established a new boundary between the United States and Mexico, forever changing the map of North America. The new boundary began at the Gulf of Mexico and proceeded west and north along the Rio Grande to a point approximately where Truth or Consequences (Hot Springs) is located today. The boundary then went west to the Gila River and on to California and the Pacific Ocean. As a result of the treaty, Mexico ceded, or transferred ownership, of nearly half its territory to the United States. This territory included all or part of the current states of New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah.

The treaty also allowed Mexican citizens in the ceded territories to keep their Mexican citizenship, even if they remained in the United States. The treaty also allowed Mexican citizens who did not want to stay in the ceded territories to move to Mexico if they chose to do so. Several hundred families moved to the Mesilla Valley and northern Chihuahua, where they received land grants from the Mexican government. Doña Ana, Mesilla, Refugio, and Santo Tomás were among the new settlements established by those who chose to leave.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo included a controversial extension called the Protocol of Querétaro. This extension seemed to protect the property rights of former Mexican citizens who had received land grants from the Spanish or Mexican governments. A protocol does not have the same force of law as a formal treaty, however. As a result, all former citizens of Mexico who had land grants in New Mexico had to prove ownership of their land before a court established by the United States. Proving ownership was difficult to do, and many individuals and communities eventually lost their land once New Mexico became a part of the United States.
Despite the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Protocol of Querétaro, Hispanic New Mexicans often lost their land grants, frequently to Anglo lawyers and businessmen known as the Santa Fe Ring during the U.S. territorial period. Under Spanish and Mexican rule, disputes over land ownership were usually settled locally, according to local custom. Under U.S. law, land disputes required more exacting proof of ownership. To resolve these disputes in U.S. courts, Hispanics often hired Anglo lawyers, including such men as Thomas Catron, Stephen B. Elkins, and Samuel Axtell. If lacking cash, Hispanic clients paid these attorneys with portions of the very land the lawyers had been hired to defend. In this way, attorneys became owners of vast amounts of land, creating bitterness among Hispanics, who argued that much of their land grants had been stolen from them. Attorney Thomas Catron, the suspected leader of the Santa Fe Ring, became the largest landowner not only in New Mexico but also in the entire United States. By the end of the 1860s it is estimated that Hispanic land owners had lost as much as two-thirds of the land they had been granted under Spanish or Mexican rule.

New Mexico Becomes a U.S. Territory

A convention of representatives met to write a New Mexico state constitution to submit to Congress for approval just two years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed. On June 20, 1850, the citizens of New Mexico overwhelmingly ratified the new constitution by a vote of 8,371 to 39. Elections held at the same time selected Henry Connelly as governor and Manuel Alvarez as lieutenant governor. That summer a “state legislature” met in Santa Fe to draw up laws for the new state of New Mexico.

The U.S. Congress, though, rejected every action taken in New Mexico. The federal government ruled that New Mexico had acted without proper authority and would have to wait for official permission from Congress before it could organize a state government. New Mexico’s future status would have to wait until Congress negotiated an important national agreement called the Compromise of 1850.

The Compromise of 1850 resolved several major issues, including some regarding New Mexico. The most serious was slavery. In 1850 slavery was still legal in the United States, although many who opposed slavery fought to limit its expansion into the new Western territories, including New Mexico. Pro-slavery southerners fought just as hard to allow slavery to expand into Western territories that might someday become states. New Mexicans joined the debate, although there were few black slaves in New Mexico, mostly servants of Southern officers temporarily stationed in Southwestern forts.

The second issue regarded Texas’s claims to eastern New Mexico. Texas had won its independence from Mexico and established the Republic of Texas in 1836. The Republic of Texas claimed that its western border
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for themselves whether to allow slavery within their borders when and if they became states at some future date.

Eleven years after the Compromise of 1850 was reached, the United States was torn apart in the bloodiest conflict in our history, the Civil War. Unfortunately, New Mexico's chance at statehood had been lost as Congress dealt with a national issue, Black slavery, which had little real importance in New Mexico. This was the first of many times that New Mexico's chance for statehood was lost in the shuffle as the United States dealt with larger national events and crises first.

extended to the Rio Grande, meaning that Texas claimed all of New Mexico east of the river. Texas went so far as to send a military force to secure its claim to much of New Mexico, although this small army was easily defeated in 1841.

The Compromise of 1850 helped settle these national and regional issues. The United States government agreed to pay Texas $10 million to drop its claim to New Mexico land east of the Rio Grande. In another part of the compromise, Utah and New Mexico (which included Arizona from 1850 to 1863) were admitted as territories and allowed to decide

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The Civil War in New Mexico

In 1861 the United States faced its greatest challenge as a nation when eleven states seceded from the Union over slavery, states’ rights, and slavery in the western territories to form a new country called the Confederate States of America. Texas was among the states that chose to join the Confederate cause.

The first military action of the Civil War in the far West was directed at New Mexico. The Confederacy saw New Mexico as a land bridge to California, with its valuable ports and gold fields to the west, and Colorado, with its gold and silver mines to the north.

In the summer of 1861, a force of Texas volunteers invaded southern New Mexico. By the end of 1861, the Confederacy was in firm control of southern New Mexico and Arizona. The region was organized as the “Confederate Territory of Arizona,” with its capital at Mesilla.

In early 1862, a force of more than three thousand Texans under the command of General Henry H. Sibley marched northward up the Rio Grande Valley. The commander of the Union forces in New Mexico was Colonel Edward R. Canby. He commanded more than four thousand U.S. soldiers as well as more than two thousand New Mexico volunteers and militia.

Thirteen hundred Colorado volunteers, known as the Colorado Column, rushed to New Mexico to help fight the Tejanos. Another fourteen hundred volunteers, known as the California Column, headed to New Mexico from the West Coast.

On February 20, 1861, the Union and Confederate armies met about sixty miles south of Socorro in the Battle of Valverde. By the end of a bloody, two-day battle, the rebel army claimed victory, causing Union forces to retreat to nearby Fort Craig. Despite this victory, the Confederates found themselves with many casualties and dangerously few supplies. They continued north, though, occupying Albuquerque and Santa Fe en route to Fort Union, a U.S. military post filled with valuable supplies, northeast of Las Vegas.

The battle that ended Confederate ambitions in the far West began on March 26, 1862, when Union and Confederate forces met at Glorieta Pass, between Santa Fe and Las Vegas. By the second day of the battle, the Confederates seemed ready to crush Union forces. A group of Colorado volunteers, though, guided by Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Chávez of the New Mexico volunteers, discovered the Confederate supply train and destroyed the Confederates’ last store of supplies.
Introduction

The U.S. government attempted to defeat the warring Indians using two principal strategies. First, the federal government built military forts throughout the territory to help the U.S. Army respond to raids more quickly, before the raiding warriors could retreat to their familiar homelands. Next, the U.S. government created a series of Indian agencies located at or near where the Indians lived. Indian agents assigned to these outposts stayed in contact with the various tribes, providing them with goods and services and making it less likely they would resort to raiding to meet their needs. As of 1857 a superintendent of Indian affairs was put in charge of dealing with all the Indian tribes in the territory, including the nomadic Navajos, Utes, and Apaches.

Elkins’s Handshake

In 1874 New Mexico’s Congressional Delegate Stephen B. Elkins submitted a new request for the U.S. Congress to consider New Mexico statehood. Elkins’s official request pointed out that New Mexico’s population had reached 135,000, more than twice the 60,000 required for a territory to become a state. Well aware of the question of New Mexico’s loyalty, Elkins emphasized his territory’s loyalty to the Union in the Civil War. He also mentioned the territory’s improved schools and healthy climate.

Elkins received strong support in Congress for his statehood proposal, and it appeared the territory was on the verge of finally achieving full membership in the American Union. Just then, a “fateful handshake” intervened.

One day in March 1876 members of the U.S. House of Representatives were engaged in a heated debate over an issue regarding the outcome of the Civil War. Congressman Julius Caesar Burrows of Michigan was speaking in support of a measure the northern states supported and the South strongly opposed. Burrows’s words reportedly “grilled the Southerners from head to foot.”

As Burrows was ending his speech, New Mexico delegate Elkins walked onto the floor of the House. Unaware of how Burrows’s words angered southern congressmen, Elkins applauded the speech and rushed to the head of the line to shake Burrow’s hand. Seeing Elkins’s handshake, southern congressmen assumed that Elkins—and therefore all New Mexicans—favored the north rather than the south on all issues that still divided the nation more than a decade after the Civil War had ended. Southerners quickly withdrew their support for New Mexico statehood, and the territory’s latest bid for higher political status went down in defeat. A national issue, division between the north and the south, had interfered with New Mexico’s statehood chances—again.

The Indian Wars in New Mexico

New Mexico’s Indian wars began as early as 1598 when the Acoma Indians had attempted to defy Spanish rule in rebellion with disastrous results for Acoma Pueblo and its people. Less than a century later the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico united in the Rebellion of 1680 to kill more than four hundred Spanish colonists and expel two thousand Spanish survivors. The Spaniards regrouped to reconquer New Mexico after twelve years in dismal exile.

Nomadic Indian raids plagued the pueblos and white settlements throughout the Spanish, Mexican, and early U.S. territorial periods. Realizing the death and destruction of these frequent raids, General Kearny had promised the people of New Mexico that the U.S. Army would defeat the raiding tribes once New Mexico was made part of the United States.

Defeat of the Navajo and Mescalero Apaches

The American strategies worked to a large degree, creating a general peace with most of the Ute and Jicarilla Apache tribes. Navajo warriors, by contrast, continued their raids on New Mexico’s western frontier. The
U.S. Army sent troops to defeat the raiders as early as two months after General Kearny’s entry into Santa Fe, but this and later campaigns proved frustratingly futile through the 1850s.

It was not until the following decade that Gov. Henry Connelly and military commander General James H. Carleton devised a plan to pacify the Navajo. In early 1863, the government delivered a powerful message: the Navajos had until July to surrender peacefully or face U.S. troops and New Mexico volunteers under Colonel Christopher “Kit” Carson, who would be ordered to destroy all Indian crops and livestock.

When the Navajo did not surrender, Carson’s forces attacked Navajo settlements in western New Mexico and at Canyon de Chelly, the tribe’s stronghold in eastern Arizona, destroying their dwellings, burning their crops, and chopping down their fruit orchards. The starvation policy was so complete and, in Indian memory, so unmerciful that by early 1864 more than two thousand Navajo had surrendered and been rounded up at Fort Canby, Arizona. The government’s goal was to take the Navajo far from their homeland, strip them of their traditional culture, and force them to accept American ways while living as farmers in a distant valley. The vain hope was that with these changes the Navajo would lead peaceful lives, ending their frequent raids and warfare.

On March 5, 1864, Navajo prisoners formed a long, thin column and began the five-hundred-mile trek from their homeland to Bosque Redondo, a small piece of land on the Pecos River in eastern New Mexico. The historian William A. Keleher described the trek as a “funeral-like procession, in twos and fours, silent, grim and gloomy.” No one knows for certain how many hundreds of Navajo died from disease, starvation, and broken hearts. Soldiers reportedly shot some people if they grew sick and fell behind. The trek, known as the Navajo Long Walk, unfairly punished men, women, and children, most of who had never participated in raids, much less taken up arms against the U.S. Army.

The Bosque Redondo experiment was a disaster. Poor funding, fraud, crop failures, lack of shelter, and bad weather contributed to this tragedy. Of the approximately 8,000 Navajo held at Bosque Redondo, many died of disease and starvation. Problems were made worse by the government’s decision to place about 525 imprisoned Mescalero Apaches alongside the Navajo at Bosque Redondo. Conflicts between these traditional enemies confined in a small space made life miserable for members of both tribes. On November 3, 1865, the Mescalero Apaches escaped from Bosque Redondo, heading south. Eight years later Pres. Ulysses S. Grant established the Mescalero Indian Reservation in the tribe’s traditional homeland in the Sacramento Mountains.

By 1868 the U.S. government realized that its attempt to Americanize the Navajo at Bosque Redondo had failed. After entering into a new treaty, in which they promised to never raid again, the Navajo began their return trek to their homeland to the northwest on June 18, 1868. Navajo tears of agony in 1864 had turned to tears of joy in 1868. The treaty of 1868 established a reservation of more than 3 million acres, making it the largest reservation in the country to this day. True to their word, the Navajo stopped their raids and returned to their traditional ways, focusing on raising livestock, especially sheep, and making crafts, especially Navajo rugs and jewelry.

Other Apache Tribes of the Southwest

In addition to the Mescalero, other Apache tribes lived in the Southwest. These included the Jicarilla, the Lipan, and the Chiricahua of southwest New Mexico and northern Chihuahua. Each tribe was divided into clans of about a hundred families who hunted, raided, and migrated in the rugged terrain of their region. Individual clans, rather than the entire Apache tribe, waged war against the U.S. Army until the late 1800s.

After many years of fighting, the U.S. Army forced about four thousand Apaches to relocate to a reservation in southeastern Arizona called San Carlos. The goal was the same as at Bosque Redondo: strip the Indians of their native cultures and impose white culture in their
Law and Disorder in the Territory

Newspapers, magazines, and novels of the late 1800s also portrayed New Mexico as a lawless territory filled with Wild West gunslingers like William, “Billy the Kid” Bonney. These accounts fired the popular imagination but damaged New Mexico’s reputation among potential settlers, investors, and those who might have favored statehood in Congress.

Violence was rampant in many parts of the American West after 1865. Murders, bank robberies, stagecoach holdups, and cattle rustling were common in western states and territories alike. Historians have revealed complex reasons for this violence, including rapid population growth, ethnic diversity, the easy availability of alcohol, a prevailing gun culture, and social instability in new expanding communities, known as boomtowns.

All these elements were present in New Mexico from the 1870s through the 1890s. The territory experienced a rapid increase in population after the Civil War. Its major towns sprouted saloons and dance halls at every corner, and nearly every male carried a gun. While almost all newcomers to the territory were peaceful men and women who came to make better lives for themselves, by the 1870s a much rougher crowd had also made its way into the territory. New Mexico’s lawmen, courts, and jails were nearly overwhelmed by a wave of violent crimes.

Individual bad men or infamous gangs caused much of this lawlessness. By the 1880s, however, violence had escalated to the point that whole counties were at war, with competing political and economic factions arming themselves to win absolute local control.

In the most famous of these conflicts, known as the Lincoln County War, competing leaders sought control of profitable contracts to supply the military posts and Indian reservations of southeastern New Mexico. Newcomer John T. Tunstall, an Englishman who had established a ranch and a mercantile business in Lincoln, led one side of the conflict. The powerful local boss Lawrence G. Murphy, a suspected member of the Santa Fe Ring, dominated the other faction. According to a U.S. special agent sent to New Mexico to investigate the conflict, each side recruited the “most desperate cut-throats in the territory.” Among those Tunstall hired was the soon-to-be-famous William “Billy the Kid” Bonney. The war began when Tunstall was murdered on February 18, 1878, and ended only after Sheriff Pat Garrett killed Billy the Kid at Fort Sumner on July 14, 1881.

Above: Geronimo; Right: Buffalo Soldiers at Diamond Creek

Individual Indian warriors, many of whom had led raids against whites during the Indian Wars, continued to raid the region, particularly in the remote western parts of the state. The most notable of these was the Apache leader Geronimo, who led a group of Apaches from San Carlos to their homeland in southeastern Arizona. Although Geronimo surrendered to U.S. forces on September 4, 1886, the Indian Wars continued to have a negative impact on New Mexico’s statehood chances.

The Indian wars hurt New Mexico’s statehood chances because many easterners mistakenly thought of the Southwest as a vast battleground populated by “wild, primitive” Indians who attacked innocent white settlers, hardly the image most Americans had of a peaceful territory ready for statehood. Sensational newspaper reports, magazine articles, and cheap novels reinforced this image even after Geronimo’s surrender in 1886.
Opponents to New Mexico statehood asked how the territory could be governed with the rule of law if whole counties were split by lawless factions, as in Lincoln. Further, how could New Mexico be fit for statehood when its citizens had so little trust in its courts that they resorted to lynching at least sixty-nine suspected outlaws in the 1880s alone? Clearly, New Mexico would have to control its spreading lawlessness and guarantee law and order if it were ever to become a state.

Overcoming the Obstacles to Statehood

Five major obstacles caused New Mexico’s statehood struggle: the territory’s poor image, political corruption, national politics, Indian wars, and lawlessness. How, then, was New Mexico able to largely overcome these considerable obstacles and finally win its long battle for statehood?

First, New Mexico’s image as a “foreign,” distant region of the United States began to change with the coming of the railroad to the territory in 1880. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad tied New Mexico to the rest of the country with faster, vastly improved transportation and communication. Travelers from outside the territory began to learn more about New Mexico and its value as a potential state. Other Americans moved to New Mexico by train, often imposing Anglo culture, values, religion, and language on the territory. These changes gradually impressed those who had previously thought New Mexico was too different from the rest of the nation to ever become a state.

New Mexico also dealt with its image as a “foreign” region of the United States by proving its loyalty to the country in the Spanish-American War of 1898. When the United States declared war on Spain on April 20, 1898, Gov. Miguel A. Otero began receiving telegrams from other parts of the country asking whether Hispanics in New Mexico would be loyal to the United States or to their former ruling country, Spain. In the new conflict. Outraged that their loyalty would be questioned, the governor and most New Mexicans were quick to respond. Appearing at one of many patriotic rallies held in the territory, Governor Otero spoke for most Hispanic New Mexicans when he proclaimed, “I am a New Mexican, and in saying that I am saying that I am an American. We have a war on our hands now, and we want [nothing] to interfere with its successful prosecution. Let us all be Americans.” The rally came to a rousing close as a military band played the “Star Spangled Banner.”

Hundreds of New Mexicans also proved their loyalty to the United States by volunteering to serve in the U.S. Army. Maximiliano Luna and other young men joined the most famous fighting unit in the war, a cavalry regiment best known as the Rough Riders. New Mexicans fought bravely throughout the conflict and returned to a heroes’ welcome that included a private visit with Pres. William McKinley in Washington, D.C. Few now doubted whether New Mexico would be a loyal state, if admitted to the Union.

The issue of political corruption in New Mexico was largely overcome after 1900 with the decline of the once-dominant Santa Fe Ring. By the early 1900s most leaders of the ring had been exposed, had retired, or had passed on. Charges of corruption still surfaced in the territorial government but nothing like it had existed before.

Next, national politics did not interfere with New Mexico’s chances for statehood in the first decade of the twentieth century. Furthermore, New Mexico’s congressional delegates were careful not to alienate factions or regions of the nation divided on issues having little to do with the territory. In other words, they avoided additional Elkins’s handshakes or similarly costly political mistakes.

New Mexico’s Indian wars were less of an obstacle to statehood by the beginning of the twentieth century following Geronimo’s surrender in 1886 and death in 1909. If Geronimo reminded Americans of Indian warfare in New Mexico, his confinement in Oklahoma and newspaper photos of his gradual aging reminded the public that this once-great warrior was no longer a threat to anyone in the Southwest.

Finally, violence in New Mexico subsided by the early twentieth century with improvements in the territory’s legal system. Many outlaws were captured and punished, often in New Mexico’s first penitentiary, opened in Santa Fe in 1885. Respect for the law increased, as reflected in a sharp decline in the number of lynchings, from sixty-nine in the 1880s to eight in the 1890s, and a significant rise in the number of legal executions, from only three in the 1870s to fourteen in the 1890s.

The Final Climb to Statehood

Despite these promising developments, New Mexico still faced stiff opposition to statehood from 1900 to 1910. Indiana Sen. Albert Beveridge, the chairman of the U.S. Senate’s key Committee on Territories, opposed New Mexico statehood so much that he once hid in an
attic rather than let his committee meet and possibly approve statehood for the territory. Not even his committee’s ten-day tour of New Mexico in 1902 changed Beveridge’s stubborn mind.

Trying a new strategy, most New Mexicans favored joining with Arizona and applying for statehood as a single state, to be called Arizona. Known as the *jointure* movement, this idea was presented to the citizens of New Mexico and Arizona in an election held in 1906. The voters of New Mexico approved the proposition by a two-to-one margin, but the voters of Arizona defeated it by an equally large majority. After this disappointing effort to enter the Union as one, the neighboring territories would have to enter statehood separately or not at all.

So the territories pursued statehood on their own. By 1910 the political path was sufficiently cleared of obstacles to allow both New Mexico and Arizona to begin their final preparations for statehood in early 1912. The long struggle for statehood had ended in triumph at last.

**TIME TO DRAW YOUR OWN CONCLUSIONS**

1. List five main reasons why it took New Mexico so long to become a state.
2. Explain how the so-called Revolt of 1847 hurt New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.
3. Explain how political corruption and the Santa Fe Ring hurt New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.
4. Explain how national political issues like slavery hurt New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.
5. Explain how the Indian wars hurt New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.
6. Explain how crime and lawlessness hurt New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.
7. Explain how New Mexico was eventually seen as less “foreign” and how this change in perception helped the territory become a state.
8. Explain how the coming of the railroad helped New Mexico become a state.
9. Explain how New Mexico’s political corruption was largely overcome, allowing New Mexico to become a state.
10. Explain how national issues became less of an obstacle to New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.
11. Explain how the end of the Indian wars helped New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.
12. Explain how a decline of lawlessness helped New Mexico’s chances of becoming a state.