SPANISH LA JUNTA DE LOS RIOS: THE INSTITUTIONAL HISPANICIZATION
OF AN INDIAN COMMUNITY ALONG NEW SPAIN’S
NORTHERN FRONTIER, 1535-1821

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Throughout the colonial period, the Spanish attempted to Hispanicize the Indians along the northern frontier of New Spain. The conquistador, the missionary, the civilian settler, and the presidial soldier all took part in this effort. At La Junta de los Rios, a fertile area inhabited by both sedentary and semi-sedentary Indians, each of these institutions played a part in fundamentally changing the region and its occupants. This research, relying primarily on published Spanish source documents, sets the effort to Hispanicize La Junta in the broader sphere of Spain’s frontier policy.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Spanish designs on North America and its Indian population changed over time. From their initial arrival in the New World to the early 1600s, Spaniards hoped to discover kingdoms like those of the Incas and the Aztecs, in which they could subjugate the people of the area and implement Spanish rule through military superiority. After the conquest of New Mexico, Spain’s hopes of finding another Indian kingdom began to fade and new methods of gaining wealth were explored. Frequently, these plans included exploiting Indians in mines and on haciendas. To meet growing labor demands and to expand their borders, the Spanish attempted to Hispanicize and Christianize the natives of the New World. The methods they employed to reach this goal evolved in response to the ever-changing dynamics of the frontier.¹

Herbert Eugene Bolton, whom many consider to be the father of Spanish borderlands history, believed that the conquistador, the presidial soldier, and the missionary were responsible for extending and maintaining the frontiers of Spanish America. Initially, conquistadors entered and explored new areas, then used military might to subjugate any Indian populations they encountered. Missionaries journeyed to the frontier with the intention of teaching natives Catholicism and Spanish customs. Presidios were built to support missions and encourage civilian settlement. Once an area was relatively secure, entrepreneurial settlers moved in and used the local Indian

¹ For a comprehensive overview of the Spanish frontier, see David J. Weber. *The Spanish Frontier in North America.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Weber’s work will be used extensively throughout the text as it is the best general study of the frontier of Northern New Spain.
population as laborers in ventures such as mining, ranching, and farming.²

When interacting with North America’s natives, each of these groups promoted the Spanish way of life. They taught Indians to wear European-style clothing, to live in houses, to subsist on agriculture and ranching, and to pay homage to the Spanish Crown. Success meant that Indians became more attached to the Spanish way of life than to that of their previous culture, and were more likely to be loyal to Spain than to other native groups. The process of Hispanicizing Indians was vital to the survival of Spain’s empire, as there were simply not enough persons of direct Spanish heritage to populate and work the vast territory of the New World.³

Along the frontier, a loyal Hispanicized Indian served Spain’s interests in many ways. Most often, they were employed as laborers by missionaries or Spanish civilians, who required a large workforce to support their endeavors. When necessary, a Hispanicized Indian also acted as a soldier or auxiliary in military campaigns. Also, the mere presence of a population of Hispanicized Indians provided a buffer against Indian raids and incursions by foreign powers.⁴

The systematic Hispanicization of Indians worked in many parts of the Americas. Weighing their options, several Indian groups chose to accept the tenets of Spanish life. In New Mexico, where Pueblo Indians lived a sedentary agriculturalist lifestyle, Spain’s policies met with relative success. Revolts occurred, but due to the Pueblo’s inability to defeat the Spanish militarily, they were forced to accept outside rule. In places like

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⁴ Weber, Spanish Frontier, Chapters 4-5.
California and South Texas, non-sedentary Indians often willingly chose to enter the mission system without threat of violence. In general, these groups believed their lives would be improved with Spanish protection and a greater access to European goods. Over time, these Indians adopted Spanish customs and became acculturated to a new way of life.\(^5\)

With many native groups, namely the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes of the North American Plains, Hispanicization was rejected. A strong desire to avoid the sedentary lifestyle promoted by the Spanish, coupled with the ability to wage guerrilla-style warfare allowed these groups to successfully avoid Spain’s control for centuries. After repeated failure to either subjugate these Indians militarily or bring them into missions, Spain devised new tactics. It built presidios, formed complex alliances, and developed a reservation system.\(^6\)

Simply stated, Spaniards hoped to Hispanicize as many of North America’s Indians as possible. They attempted to do this through threat of force, interaction with civilian settlers, and the introduction of missionaries. The reasons for these efforts vary, but their belief in a superior religion and way of life, their need of a buffer against foreign threat, and their desire for profit dominated much of their thinking. Making conscious decisions based on their own desires and their ability to resist, the various Indian groups decided whether to accept or rebel against the Spanish. With few exceptions, sedentary-agriculturalist Indians became a part of the Spanish world, while non-sedentary hunter-gatherers resisted the Spanish. In most areas along New Spain’s northern frontier, Indians fell into one or the other of these two groups. One such place

\(^6\) Ibid.
that did not, and was home to both types of Indians, was the area known as La Junta de los Rios.⁷

La Junta de los Rios is a region that lies at the confluence of the Rio Conchos and the Rio Grande. While surrounded on all sides by inhospitable mountains and the Chihuahua Desert, the fertile soil and abundance of water in La Junta made the region suitable for permanent human habitation. Because of unique geography and topography, the cultures that developed in La Junta were wholly unlike those of the surrounding desert. When the Spanish arrived at La Junta, they found a society that bore a resemblance to both the Pueblos of New Mexico and the Plains Indians of Texas. Many of the people of La Junta were agriculturalists, while others were predominantly nomadic and hunted buffalo on the plains. This unique mixture of sedentary and semi-sedentary Indians would continue to be a characteristic of La Junta throughout the Spanish colonial period.

La Junta, roughly meaning “the juncture” or “the joining,” proved to be the meeting place of two rivers and many different frontier institutions. Throughout the colonial period, the Spanish view of La Junta changed drastically. The area was sometimes seen as friendly to colonial power, while at other times it was viewed as a haven for rebelling Indians. The Spanish had a difficult time adapting its policies to deal with La Junta during the colonial period, and they were forced to experiment with various methods of Hispanicizing the area’s inhabitants. At different times in the Spanish Colonial Era, La Junta was visited by conquistadors, missionaries, soldiers, and civilians. Each of these groups had a different objective in mind upon entering La

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Junta, but they all participated in the process of Hispanicizing the region. Some of these Spaniards interacted with the Indians of La Junta with the express purpose of Hispanicizing them, while others simply Hispanicized inadvertently. By the end of the colonial period, La Junta was home to a population that was decidedly more Spanish than Indian. The path that led to this development was long and arduous and in no way ideal for the Spanish.

Although it is a relatively small area, La Junta had a special importance as a part of the Spanish frontier for a number of reasons. La Junta was unique because the Indians that inhabited the region were both sedentary and nomadic, and over time they varied in their tribal designation and degree of mobility. Due to disease, warfare, and migration, some Indian tribes vanished from La Junta altogether, while newer groups moved in and made the region their home. The geographical location of La Junta, both as a part of the Spanish frontier and a center for Indian trade, makes the region a unique place to study. La Junta was a hub for Plains Indians who traded goods with the Caddos to the East, Pueblos to the West, and Spaniards to the South. Also, because the cropland of La Junta was the only location in a considerable distance where large-scale farming was viable, the corn, melons, and beans of the region were a desired commodity.

Because La Junta does not neatly fit into Texas, Nueva Vizcaya, or New Mexico history, it has often been overlooked or ignored in historical literature on Spain in the Americas. In spite of its being a part of modern Texas, books on Spanish Texas devote only a few pages to La Junta. New Mexico histories also ignore La Junta, although the area’s sedentary Indians bore a cultural resemblance to the Pueblos. Even most Nueva
Vizcaya texts, where La Junta officially resided during the colonial era, gloss over the region.8

The histories that have been written on La Junta are primarily devoted to understanding the Indians of the region. The identity and nature of La Junta’s Indian inhabitants have vexed historians since the earliest study of the region. Even Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, the leader of the first Europeans to visit La Junta, did not seem to be able to understand the relationship between the hunter-gatherer Indians and the Indians who farmed the area. J. Charles Kelley, known for being the first to devote major study to the La Junta’s inhabitants, termed the inability to determine the Indians’ identity “the Jumano Problem,” and historians have been seeking an answer to this mystery for years.9

One of the fathers of Spanish frontier history was Herbert Eugene Bolton who spent most of his career as a professor at the University of California at Berkley. Bolton heralded a new era of historical interpretation that was characterized by an admiration for colonial Spanish North America. He also translated and published many of the known Spanish primary source documents relating to La Junta.10

Charles Wilson Hackett took up Bolton’s work in 1937. Hackett was a Latin-American historian who graduated from the University of California and taught at the University of Texas. Hackett wrote on La Junta in the introduction to Historical Documents Relating to New Mexico. From the brief passages Hackett devoted to La

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8 As an example, Donald E. Chipman’s Spanish Texas, the best treatment of the Spanish colonial era in Texas and the inspiration behind the title of this thesis, lists only 12 of its 260 pages as containing references to La Junta. Donald E. Chipman, Spanish Texas 1519-1821 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).


Junta, it appears that he believed Spanish designs on the area changed with their policies for the frontier as a whole. First, they looked for gold, treasure, or exploitable labor. Next they sought to Hispanicize the Indians. And finally, they looked to use the area as a defensive barrier against the nomadic bands of the southern plains. Hackett said that La Junta was “of great significance for the northern frontier in the eighteenth century.”

J. Charles Kelley began his lifelong study of La Junta in 1947 when he published his dissertation at Cambridge University entitled *Jumano and Patarabueye: Relations at La Junta de los Rios*. In this work, Kelley questioned the nature of La Junta’s Indians. Namely, he explored the relationship between the sedentary and nomadic Indians of La Junta. He called the sedentary group Patarabueyes and believed them to be only linguistically tied to the semi-nomadic group, whom he called the Jumanos. He said that the two tribes only shared the fact that they both inhabited La Junta, but otherwise they were distinct of one another. This worked focused primarily on La Junta’s Indian groups rather than the Spanish presence in the area.

In 1952, Kelley published two articles for the *New Mexico Historical Review*. In the first, “Historic Pueblos of La Junta de los Rios,” Kelley analyzed every available Spanish primary source document relating to La Junta in order to determine the location and population of each Indian village in the region. Kelley’s follow up essay to “Historic Pueblos” was “Juan Sabeata and Diffusion in Aboriginal Texas.” Here, the historian studied one Jumano chief and the changing nature of Indian life on the Spanish frontier.

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12 Kelley, *Jumano and Patarbueye*. 
Kelley is also known for having led a series of archeological expeditions to La Junta. Kelley’s work is cited in nearly every study of La Junta, and it could be said that he was the father of La Junta history.\textsuperscript{13}

Working in the same time frame as Kelley, James Manly Daniel wrote about La Junta for his thesis and dissertation for the University of Texas. Daniel placed La Junta in the sphere of Nueva Vizcaya, and said it was part of the despoblado. He described the despoblado as a region of Northern Mexico that was known for being a haven of rebellious Indians. For his works, Daniel performed significant archival research and discovered previously unknown documents that reference La Junta. Daniel’s work only covers the period from 1680-1760, in which Spain began to make plans for a presidio at La Junta.\textsuperscript{14}

La Junta history was largely ignored for the next few decades, but has seen a recent resurgence. In 1994, Nancy Hickerson published \textit{The Jumanos: Hunters and Traders of the South Plains}. The book was the first major work to focus entirely on the Jumanos since Kelley’s study fifty years earlier. However, because the Jumanos’ connection to La Junta de los Rios was tentative after early Spanish contact, only the first few chapters focused on the region. Hickerson’s work collected all the previous theories about Jumano Indians put forth by Kelley and others. She stated that the Jumano Indians that lived at La Junta in the 1700s and beyond bore little resemblance to the Jumanos of Cabeza de Vaca’s time. She believed that this group inherited the


\textsuperscript{14} James Manly Daniel, “La Junta de los Rios and the Despoblado, 1680-1760” (M. A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1948). Daniel used the term despoblado to describe the sparsely populated areas in northern New Spain that remained free of Spanish control during the colonial period.
propensity to trade from their buffalo-hunting predecessors, but they used a different language and were more Hispanicized. Hickerson believed that La Junta stayed outside of Spanish influence because of its inhabitants effectiveness as traders and because they never presented a major threat to the colonial power.15

Historian Gary Anderson reinforced the belief that the Jumanos’s survival was due in part to their effectiveness as traders in his book, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention*. Anderson’s work is based on the concept of ethnogenesis. In this theory, the Indians of the Southwest were decimated due to disease and Spanish incursions and soon tribes became too small to function and joined other bands for survival. The lines between cultures blurred as traditions collided and miscegenation occurred. Along with this, apostates escaping the Spanish mission system joined these bands and brought with them practices learned from the European nation. The process of ethnogenesis resulted in the disappearance of some Indian cultures in Texas, and the creation of new unique bands that were defined by both Indian and Spanish characteristics. Anderson devoted the first few chapters of his book to describing the process of ethnogenesis as it occurred at La Junta. He stated, like Hickerson, that the original inhabitants of La Junta virtually died out, only to be slowly replaced by other groups of Indians looking to escape the Spanish. This fear of the Spanish, according to Anderson, led the Indians of La Junta to resist European influence in any way possible. He characterized La Junta as a guerrilla sanctuary, where Indians found refuge after raiding Spanish possessions. Anderson said that, “the region became a center for native resistance movements and the Spanish were

unwelcome there.” He believed the Indians of La Junta successfully resisted the Spanish until the Apaches began to enter the region with frequency.16

Recent times have seen even greater attention focused on the La Junta region. Dissertations and theses involving La Junta as a topic have become more commonplace. One such dissertation was written by Nancy Kenmatsu, who believed that the relationship between the sedentary and non-sedentary Indians of La Junta was based on the concept of mutualism. They were culturally distinct, but relied on one another for basic needs—primarily food. The *Journal of Big Bend Studies* has also added to the knowledge of La Junta by printing several articles concerning the region’s history. Scholars from Sul Ross University and archeologists like Richard Malouf have also performed archeological digs in the La Junta region, and have added to current scholarship. Additionally, amateur historians such as Enrique Madrid and Jefferson Morganthaler have published extensive works based on La Junta.17

In 2004, Morganthaler published a history of La Junta; *The River has Never Divided Us: A Borderlands History of La Junta de los Rios*. This history focused primarily on La Junta after Mexico’s independence. It offered only a small amount of information on La Junta during the Spanish colonial period before moving on to the region’s Mexican and United States periods. However, in 2007, Morganthaler published *La Junta de los Rios: The Life, Death, and Resurrection of an Ancient Desert*

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17 Nancy Adele Kenmotsu, “Helping Each Other Out: A Study of the Mutualistic Relations of Small Scale Foragers and Cultivators in La Junta de los Rios Region, Texas and Mexico” (Ph. D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1994); Jefferson Morganthaler. *The River has Never Divided Us: A Border History of La Junta de los Rios* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Morganthaler, *La Junta de los Rios*. Madrid has been cited as a participating member of numerous archeological digs in La Junta, was mentioned in Morganthaler’s books, and has contributed articles to the *Journal of Big Bend Studies*. 
Community in the Big Bend Region of Texas. The basic premise of La Junta de los Ríos is that La Junta went through periods where the culture and ethnicity of its population changed due to disease, warfare, and miscegenation.\textsuperscript{18}

While these histories help to clear the mysteries surrounding the history of La Junta, many questions remain. The purpose of this thesis is to explain the evolution of Spanish frontier policy and how these changes affected La Junta and its Indian inhabitants. This thesis subscribes to the idea that the northern frontier of New Spain was expanded and maintained by the conquistador, the missionary, the presidial soldier, and the civilian settler. Because these groups often acted in concert and during the same periods, chapters are arranged topically rather than chronologically. With the exception of the first chapter, each section will have a description of the Spanish institution’s role on the frontier as a whole. This will be followed by a history of their interactions with La Junta, and whether or not they were successful in the process of Hispanicization. While this thesis will encompass the whole of the Spanish Colonial Era, particular attention is placed on the region before it was largely depopulated and used as an Apache \textit{establecimiento}.\textsuperscript{19}

In the process of telling this history, this thesis will answer some of the questions that arise when studying La Junta as a part of the Spanish frontier. For example, how did the relationship between La Junta and the Spanish change over time? What factors led to these changes? How did changes in frontier policy affect the relationship between the Spanish and the Indians of La Junta? Conversely, how did the changing

\textsuperscript{18}Jefferson Morgenthaler. \textit{The River}; Morgenthaler, \textit{La Junta de los Ríos}.

\textsuperscript{19}An \textit{establecimiento} was a form of Indian reservation used by the Spanish in the late colonial era. At an \textit{establecimiento}, Indians were expected to give up their nomadic ways in exchange for Spanish assistance and knowledge. See Chapter 6 for more on \textit{establecimientos} at La Junta.
demographics of La Junta affect Spanish policy toward the region? What role did the conquistador, the civilian settler, the missionary, and the presidial soldier play in the Hispanicization of La Junta? Which of these groups had success, and why? Finally, how did La Junta evolve from an Indian town on the Spanish frontier, to an area that is still decidedly Hispanicized today?

These questions will be answered by comparing Spanish primary source documents concerning La Junta with Spanish frontier policy as a whole. Because there have been few newly discovered Spanish documents on La Junta, all primary sources are from previously published works. Secondary sources were consulted based primarily on accreditation. Date of publication was also a consideration, with more recent works receiving the most attention. Studies by David Weber, particularly *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, are frequently cited, due to the author’s comprehensive study of Spanish frontier history.

The body of this thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter focuses on the environment of La Junta and the state of the region prior to the arrival of the Spanish. Much of La Junta’s history is a product of its unique environment; because of this, there will be discussion of the region’s geography, topography, climate, flora, and fauna. An overview of the people who inhabited La Junta before the arrival of Europeans will follow in this section. The distinctive blend of nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentary Indians that populated La Junta was not seen anywhere else on New Spain’s northern frontier, and this dynamic caused the Spanish to have a difficult time Hispanicizing the region’s inhabitants.

The following chapter focuses on the conquistadors that made their way to La
Junta and how they introduced Spanish customs to the Indians of the area. Cabeza de Vaca and his companions were the first Spaniards to see La Junta. When they arrived they provided the La Juntans with their first, albeit distorted, glimpse of Spanish society, including the basics of Christianity. Later expeditions aimed at reaching the perceived kingdom of New Mexico arrived in La Junta. They too gave the region’s Indians insight into Spanish society, but because they sought gold and their own kingdom, they did not remain long in the area. With Juan de Oñates’ arrival and settlement of New Mexico, the period of the conquistador ended, and a new route to New Mexico bypassed La Junta.

Spanish civilians began moving north of Mexico City shortly after silver was discovered in Zacatecas. In Nueva Vizcaya they established mines and haciendas. Here, the encomienda system, free labor, and outright slavery were used in order to find Indian laborers for these ventures. Some of these Indians came from La Junta. In time, the native population of Nueva Vizcaya grew to resent the Spanish, due in part to their mistreatment at the hands of Spanish civilian employers. Because of this, Indians at places like La Junta revolted, nearly resulting in Spain’s expulsion from the Southwest. The third chapter focuses on the Spanish civilian settler, and the uprisings that resulted from their presence in Nueva Vizcaya.

The missionary is highlighted in the fourth chapter. Missionaries were the main tool used by the Spanish to Hispanicize North America’s Indians. Missions were built near La Junta, but an attempt to establish a mission within the region did not occur until 1670. This first attempt, and those that followed shortly thereafter, met with disaster as missionaries were consistently ejected from the region. In 1715, permanent missions were established, but these too were frequently abandoned. Missions would remain in
La Junta until their secularization in the 1790s.

The final chapter of the main body focuses on the role presidios held in the Hispanicization of La Junta. As missionary efforts failed, Spain began to utilize presidios as its weapon of choice in its war on nomadic and semi-nomadic Indians. La Junta was frequently chosen as a site of a presidio, but it would be a long, arduous process before one would actually be built in the region. Construction finally began only when Apache attacks began to overwhelm Spanish settlers in Nueva Vizcaya. This first presidio, and one built shortly after it, would eventually be abandoned, but not before fundamentally changing the region and its inhabitants.

The epilogue and conclusion are devoted to the legacy of the Spanish in the La Junta region following Mexico’s independence. The roles of the conquistador, the missionary, the civilian, and the soldier will be discussed as each pertains to the process of La Junta’s Hispanicization. Finally, there will be a summation of the material presented, as well as an overview of La Junta as it stands today.

For clarity, a discussion on terminology is warranted. The term “Spain” as it is used when discussing Spanish policy will not always refer to orders coming directly from the Crown, but could also imply edicts from other government officials or general trends of the Spanish in the New World. Also, the terms Spanish and Spaniard will not refer solely to whites coming from Spain, but will also refer to creoles and mestizos were raised in the Spanish system and bear greater cultural resemblance to Spaniards than to Indians.

The term Indian will be used as a general term for the peoples who populated the Americas prior to Columbus’s arrival in the New World. When specifics are needed,
these Indians will be referred to by the tribe with which they were most closely associated. Historians have had trouble classifying the Indians of La Junta due to lack of consistency in Spanish sources. This, as well as ethnogenesis as defined by Gary Anderson, have created confusion in classifying La Junta’s Indian population. Because of this, La Junta’s Indians will be referred to by the name that the consensus of historians has agreed upon. The generic term “La Juntan” will be used when discussing the people of La Junta as a whole, or when source material does not make clear the specific tribal designation of an Indian group.

Finally, it should be pointed out that while this thesis deals with Spanish policy toward La Junta, it in no way intends to indicate that the Indians of the region were merely passive role players in the Spanish system. They were independent people who sought to fulfill their own needs and desires to the best of their ability. With the arrival of the Spanish, they reacted in ways they believed best suited their interests. Sometimes they were rewarded for their efforts; other times their way of life was negatively impacted. However, in spite of any efforts to avoid it, life in La Junta was fundamentally and irreversibly transformed during the Spanish Colonial Period.
THE INDIANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment of La Junta de los Rios is one of the factors that make the area unique. It has been called an “oasis” by some historians due to its relative fertility when compared with the surrounding Chihuahua Desert. This view is supported by many of the first Europeans to see the La Junta, who after traveling through the surrounding harsh wilderness, were delighted to see the region’s lush fields and abundant water. Others disagree with these positive assessments, noting the region’s extremes. In the opening to his geographical study of the area, Russell Gardinier said that La Junta is, “too hot, too dry, too remote, too poor, too wild, too far from God, [and] too close to the Devil.” As beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the perception of La Junta was different to different people at different times.¹

The Rio Grande is formed when streams of mountain runoff combine at the base of Canby Mountain in central Colorado. From this point, the river flows south through Albuquerque, New Mexico, and continues on to El Paso where it turns southeast. It runs along this route until it reaches the Big Bend region of Texas and Mexico, where it winds its way through the region’s mountainous territory. Once clear of the Big Bend, the river heads southwest until it flows into the Gulf of Mexico between the cities of Brownsville and Matamoros. The Rio Conchos forms at the base of the Sierra Madre Occidental, a mountain range crossing much of western Mexico. From this point it takes a roughly westward path until reaching the modern day city of Camargo, where it veers

north. It then takes a northwestern turn, and continues until it flows into the Rio Grande.²

![Map of La Junta de los Rios](image)

Fig 2.1. Satellite composite of La Junta de los Rios. The Rio Grande is the dark line that begins in the upper left portion of the image and ends in the lower right. It is met halfway by the Rio Conchos. The darker area near the junction of the rivers is cropland. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

The Rio Conchos meets the Rio Grande at 29 degrees latitude and 104 degrees longitude, between the modern day cities of Presidio, Texas, and Ojinaga, Chihuahua. In 1582, a Spanish explorer deemed this point “La Junta de los Rios,” or, the juncture of the rivers. Soon however, the term “La Junta de los Rios” came to mean not only the point where the rivers met, but also the region of fertile cropland that extends up the banks of the two rivers. J. Charles Kelley defined La Junta as a roughly triangular area with its center at the juncture of the rivers. Using this definition, the triangle’s points are located thirty miles to the west of the junction on the Rio Conchos and thirty-five miles to the north and eighteen miles to the south on the Rio Grande. This roughly

La Junta is surrounded by the Chihuahua desert and the Southern Rocky Mountains. The elevation at the juncture of the rivers is approximately 2,500 feet above sea level, while the elevation of the surrounding area is higher, at 3,000-4,500 feet. The mountains that surround La Junta form a natural barrier to the outside world, making past efforts at reaching the region difficult and dangerous. Today, La Junta is considered to be a part of the Trans-Pecos Mountains and Basins ecological area of

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Texas and the Conchos Basin region of Mexico.  

Temperatures at La Junta vary drastically from summer to winter. In the three hottest summer months, the temperature regularly exceeds 100°F and averages in the mid-80s. In 1960, a weather station in Presidio, Texas, recorded a temperature of 117°F. While this high temperature has made human occupation of the region difficult during summer months, a very low humidity level allows for rapid evaporation of perspiration, thereby providing some relief for the area’s inhabitants. The extreme heat of the summer is contrasted by a cool winter that sees average temperatures below 50°F. Frosts can sometimes occur as late as April and although infrequent, snow is sometimes seen in the region.

La Junta is unique because, unlike the surrounding desert, it is able to sustain agriculture at a level that permits permanent human habitation. While rainfall is infrequent at La Junta, averaging less than eight inches per year, water for farming is available from the Rio Conchos and the Rio Grande. Flooding in the area is a regular occurrence, and provides irrigation for the crop-friendly Glendale Anthony Toyah-type soil that extends up to one mile inland along the sides of the two rivers. The fertile soil and continuous water sources are complemented by a 238-day growing season that permits multiple harvests. In addition to farming, La Junta is capable of supporting ranching. The crop friendly area along the river banks is surrounded by Nickel Canuto soil that grows vegetation edible to livestock. Today, this area is most often used as grazing lands for cattle and horses.

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A wide range of crops have been grown at La Junta since agriculture was originally introduced to the region. At the time of Cabeza de Vaca’s arrival in La Junta, the area’s inhabitants grew corn, beans, and a variety of squashes. Shortly after contact with the Spanish, La Junta’s Indians introduced European staples such as wheat and other grains. After the United States annexed Texas, the La Junta area gained some notoriety for growing onions and watermelons. At one point the city of Presidio claimed to be the onion capital of the world. While recent border restrictions have somewhat decreased La Junta’s importance as an agricultural center on the United States side of the Rio Grande, farming is still an important part of the economy on the river’s Mexican side, and many of La Junta’s residents still grow foodstuffs for personal consumption.7

From the first occupation of the region to today, the vitality of the residents of La Junta, has largely been dependent on agriculture, and therefore dependent on rain. Droughts have occurred many times in the region’s history, and may account for population shifts in the area. When Cabeza de Vaca arrived, La Junta’s residents complained that it had not rained for two years. This is mirrored by other Spanish accounts of the Southwest. There are even reports of the Rio Grande having dried up before reaching La Junta due to lack of rainfall.8

The natural vegetation of La Junta and surrounding areas has adapted to survive in the dry environment. Among the edible plants of the region are prickly-pear cactus, yucca, and various types of nuts. Other non-edible plants that dot La Junta’s landscape are forms of cactus, grama, grass, weed, and bush. Few trees grow in the area, and of

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7 Gardinier, “Physical Geography,” 25-50; Morganthaler, The River, Chapter 31; For an overview of farming at La Junta, see Enrique Rede Madrid, “Native American and Mestizo Farming at La Junta de los Rios,” Journal of Big Bend Studies 8 (1996), 15-32.
8 Gardinier, “Physical Geography,” 40-41.
those that do, most grow alongside La Junta’s rivers and creeks where water is plentiful.9

Surrounding vegetative zones are incapable of supporting large-scale agriculture, and vegetation is scarce. These zones are known as Creosotebush-Lechuguilla Shrub, Tobosa Black Grama Grasslands, and Mesquite Saltcedar Brush/Woods. The most prevalent of these is Creosotebush-Lechuguilla Shrub. Creosotebush-Lechuguilla Shrub is marked in appearance by loose, rocky sand interspersed with dark green shrubbery. Tobosa-Black Grama Grasslands, existing primarily to the north of La Junta, has a sandy appearance interspersed with low-lying fields of grass. Few trees grow in these areas due to lack of precipitation and poor soil. Along the Rio Grande and the Rio Conchos past La Junta is Mesquite-Saltcedar Brush/Woods. This zone is distinguishable by small trees growing alongside the riverbanks.10

Because of the extreme variations in temperature and rainfall at La Junta and the surrounding area, only certain types of non-domesticated animals are capable of surviving in the region. Fauna that enter the area and are unable to survive long periods without moisture or short periods of freezing temperatures quickly die off or migrate. Among those type of animals that are capable of surviving and make their home at La Junta are mountain lions, raccoons, javelinas, deer, bears, antelope, badgers, wildcats, lynx, coyotes, wolves, foxes, squirrels, hares, rattlesnakes, various other types of reptiles, and rabbits. The plains just to the north of La Junta once were home to herds of

9 McMahan, Frye, Brown, Vegetation Types, 4, 7, 15.
10 Ibid.
bison, but periods of little rainfall and human predation saw their disappearance from the area.¹¹

In his geographical study of La Junta, Russell Gardinier outlined the five factors that made the La Junta region suitable for human habitation: a floodplain with soil suitable for agriculture; a river that provided irrigation; a climate capable of supporting the style of crops domesticated by Indians; biota in the surrounding region that were suitable for hunting and gathering; and a location at the center of intersecting trade routes that allowed for the bartering of locally produced goods. Because of these factors humans first settled the La Junta region in prehistoric times.¹²

Before going further, it should be noted that while there is little known about the Indians of La Junta after the arrival of Europeans, even less is known about them before this time. Charles Kelley and more recently Robert J. Malouf have led archeological digs in the La Junta and Big Bend area that managed to reveal some clues as to nature of the region’s early inhabitants. While the evidence collected on these expeditions is helpful in formulating hypotheses about the past, few conclusions about prehistoric La Junta can be drawn with certainty.¹³

A sign in Presidio, Texas, claims that the La Junta region is the oldest continually inhabited area in North America. While this cannot be definitively proven, neither can it be disproven. It is believed that humans first entered La Junta in the Paleoindian Period. This is evidenced by the discovery of Plainview and Golondrina dart points at nearby Manuel Benavides and Paso Lajitas, and Folsom and Clovis points in northern

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¹¹ Gardinier, “Physical Geography,” 45.
¹² Ibid., 48.
Chihuahua and Trans-Pecos Texas. These points indicate the arrival of nomadic bands at some point between 8000 and 6500 B.C.E. Due to lack of data not much is known of these groups, except that they subsisted primarily on game and practiced no agriculture. There is a greater amount of data available on Indian habitation in the La Junta region during the Early Archaic and Middle Archaic. As with the Paleoindian period, however, there is not enough evidence available of these periods to formulate a synopsis of the daily life of the Indians who passed through La Junta.14

A rise in the number of artifacts and habitation sites found in the La Junta region is indicative of a significant population increase during the Late Archaic. The likely reason for the rise in population was an increase in rainfall that brought bison to the Eastern Trans-Pecos. With the bison came Indians from Central Texas. During the Late Archaic period, the Indians of La Junta and the Big Bend area began to use bows as opposed to atlatls, although widespread adoption of the weapon would not occur until later. And while life in the area was still based on hunting and gathering, specializations began to occur. Mescal and sotol pits, as well as earth ovens indicate a greater diversity in labor. J. Charles Kelley named the Indians of the La Junta and Big Bend area the Chisos Focus because of these characteristics. It is also believed that during the Late Archaic, or Chisos Archaic as it is sometimes called, the Indians of the La Junta area began to practice agriculture at a very rudimentary level.15

In the Late Prehistoric Period (700-1535 A.D.), agriculture began to truly take hold, and because of this, many of the Indians of the La Junta region began to adopt

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14 Robert J. Malouf, “Comments on the Prehistory of Far Northeastern Chihuahua, the La Junta District and the Cielo Complex,” Journal of Big Bend Studies 11 (1999): 55-61. An atlatl is a weapon with a handled shaft at one end and a cup for holding a dart at the other. When swung, darts achieve a greater velocity than if they were thrown, making the weapon capable of killing big game.

more sedentary lifestyles. The bow was adopted by almost all of the Indians of the region. In La Junta proper, the population constructed villages, and further embraced an agricultural lifestyle to meet the growing demands of an increased population. Additionally, ceramics became commonplace in order to store food for the winter months. Also during this time, the complex relationship between hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists began. Apparently, La Junta’s agriculturalists were influenced by cultures to the west, with whom they traded. Interactions with the Jornado Mogollons in this period are evidenced by ceramics found in La Junta.  

Briefly, the Mogollon, Mimbres, Casas Grandes, and other predecessors of the Pueblos had begun to develop pottery and build complex, multi-storied residences in New Mexico. While these groups shared some common lineage, they were not united by a single government and had many cultural distinctions. They all were sedentary agriculturalists, built roads and irrigation ditches, and practiced polytheistic religion. By the Late Prehistoric Period these groups were trading throughout New Mexico. La Junta’s connection to these groups is uncertain. Like the people of New Mexico, La Junta’s Indians lived in adobe structures and were sedentary agriculturalists that grew corn, squash, and melons. However, the La Juntans of the time never reached the cultural complexity of their New Mexican neighbors.

There are different interpretations on the exact relationship between the New Mexico cultures and the Indians of La Junta. Kelley believed La Junta’s agriculturalists

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to be Jornada Mogollon colonists hailing from near modern El Paso. He also theorized
that La Junta provided food to many of New Mexico’s Indians because of cultural ties.
Others like Malouf believed that the Indians of La Junta were linked to the Puebloan
societies only through trade and never became fully sedentary.  

The era known as the "La Junta Phase" began sometime between 1150 and
1200 A.D. and ended between 1400 and 1500 A.D. In this era the Indians that inhabited
La Junta lived in jacale pit houses. The designs of these houses varied from place to
place and the construction methods often differed from one building to the next, but
there were some common characteristics between the structures. The houses were
adobe and often consisted of four to five interconnected rooms. Pottery of outside origin
has been found in La Junta, indicating trade with the Indians of New Mexico.
Arrowheads indicate that the Indians of La Junta also had a relationship with other more
nomadic Indian groups.

There is some disagreement as to when and why the La Junta Phase ended.
Sometime after 1400 A.D. La Junta began to lose much of its population and the level of
architecture and pottery in the area became less complex. Droughts in the early
fifteenth century likely played a part in discouraging agriculture, but historians believed
there were other reasons for the changes in La Junta’s society. Kelley attributed the
collapse of the Casas Grandes-Mogollon trading sphere as the major factor in ending
the La Junta Phase. As noted, Kelley believed La Junta was basically a colony of the
Jornada Mogollon. Its purpose was to provide the main tribe with food and to trade

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18 Malouf, “Cielo Complex,” 83-85; Steadman Upham, “Adaptive Diversity and Southwestern
19 Malouf, “Cielo Complex,” 83-85
goods with the plains Indians. With the decline of the Mogollon trade network, many of La Junta’s Indians simply abandoned the region.²⁰

Another suggestion made by Malouf was that the Indians of La Junta were descendants of Plains Indians who adopted some New Mexico customs, and when it became inconvenient to practice agriculture they simply reverted to a more nomadic way of life. He referenced the appearance of structures adjacent to La Junta that indicated the existence of a semi-nomadic group. Malouf designated this hunter-gatherer group the Cielo Complex. They were characterized by temporary housing sites and “resource-procurement” sites used for observation, hunting, and trading. Their homes were circular stacked-stone foundations with small entranceways and were occupied for only a portion of the year.²¹

When Cabeza de Vaca arrived in La Junta in 1535 he encountered two seemingly different Indian groups at La Junta. The first were sedentary agriculturalists who grew corn, beans, and squash. The others appeared to be semi-sedentary buffalo hunters. Historians and the Spanish came to know these two groups by many different names. In his work *Jumano and Patarbueye*, Kelley assigned the name Patarbueye to the sedentary Indians and Jumano to the semi-sedentary group. Because he was the first to write extensively on the subject, most historians use Kelley’s terminology.²²

The relationship of these two groups is the subject of much debate. Some historians believed that the Jumanos and the Patarbueye were culturally distinct of one another. This theory holds that the Jumanos periodically came to La Junta to trade.

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²² For a summary of Kelley’s theories on La Junta’s Indians, see Hickerson, *Jumanos*, xxi, xxii. For Kelley’s full thesis, see Kelley, *Jumano and Patarbueye*. 

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They did not live with the Patarbueyes, and instead were entirely nomadic. The other major theory postulates that the two groups were interrelated. In this theory, the buffalo-hunters lived at La Junta after the buffalo hunting season ended. The groups intermarried with one another, exchanged goods, and were both capable of doing the other’s jobs.23

In her dissertation for the University of Texas, Nancy Kenmotsu theorized that the two groups had a mutualistic relationship. They relied on one another for goods, defense, and information but should not be considered as being of the same culture. Their relationship was based on fulfilling one another’s basic needs, with food being the primary link between the two. This relationship allowed the sedentary and non-sedentary groups to better disperse their labor and to have a more complex and substantial diet. Kenmotsu’s dissertation is convincing because of the extent of her research, and for this reason her mutualism theory will be used here.24

In 1535, the sedentary Patarbueyes lived in separate pueblos that varied in size, but each were probably home to hundreds of people. Cabeza de Vaca did not give a numerical estimation of La Junta’s inhabitants, but said the region was “incredibly populous.” In 1582, Antonio de Espejo estimated a population in excess of 10,000. The inhabitants of these pueblos were likely interrelated and spoke the same language. This language remains unknown, in spite of many theories as to its origin. There does not appear to have been a cohesive political structure that governed all of the pueblos, although there was frequent information exchange and trade occurring between the

23 Hickerson, Jumanos, xxiii-xxiv. Hickerson provides a complete historiography of the “Jumano Problem” in the introduction to Jumanos.
24 For a synopsis of Kenmotsu theory, see the introduction of Kenmotsu, Mutualistic Relations.
settlements. Each pueblo had its own cacique who seems to have been picked based on merit instead of heredity.\textsuperscript{25}

The Patarbueyes lived in large buildings known as jacale pithouses that were made of adobe. To construct, a pit was dug into the ground and wooden posts were placed at each corner of the hole. Supporting wood was placed between each post, and then whole structure was coated with mud. The houses were probably occupied by an extended family, as evidenced by the presence of multiple hearths in each domicile. The Patarbueyes subsisted on corn, beans, and squash. Crops were planted on the banks of the rivers and floodwater was used for irrigation. During harvesting season, the Patarbueyes moved to small structures adjacent to their crops. They supplemented their diet with wild plants, fish, and buffalo meat obtained through trade. While they had pottery, they cooked by heating up stones then dropping them into water-filled pumpkins until the water boiled. Adult males typically wore no clothing, while females and the elderly sometimes wore breechcloths.\textsuperscript{26}

The Jumanos were a nomadic group who hunted buffalo on the Southern Plains. They were numerous throughout the early colonial period, at one point said to have a population of over 10,000. There was likely more than one band of Jumanos, as Spanish documents note the existence of more than one chief living at one time. In addition to hunting buffalo, the Jumanos fished and gathered wild fruits such as mulberries, grapes, and tunas. They were also known traders and brought all manner of

\textsuperscript{25}Cabeza de Vaca, \textit{Relacion}, in Roleno Adorno and Patricio Pautz, \textit{Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: His Account, His Life, and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez} vol. 1 (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 221. Adorno and Pautz’s study of Cabeza de Vaca is the most extensively researched history of the Spanish explorer. Hernán Gallegos and Gaspar de Luxán in Hammond and Rey, \textit{Rediscovery} 70-71, 163-165; Kelley, “Indian Pueblos,” 266.

goods to La Junta. Spanish documents place the Jumanos all over the Southwest. They were seen at La Junta, in New Mexico, and in East Texas among the Caddo. There is some confusion about the exact nature of the Jumanos, as Spaniards had a practice of calling all tattooed Indians by the name Jumano.27

La Junta was also surrounded by a variety of other Indian groups. Some were entirely nomadic, and subsisted by hunting and gathering. Others practiced some agriculture, but not to the extent of the Patarbueyes. These groups went by names such as the Conchos, Colomes, and Tobosos among many others. Because there is little information in the early Spanish documentation, there cannot be much distinction drawn between these nations. They were sometimes at war with the Indians of La Junta, while at other times they were friendly. In fact, many of these groups inhabited La Junta at one time or another during the Spanish colonial period.28

Not long before Cabeza de Vaca’s arrival in the region, another group had begun making its way south towards La Junta. This group, the Apaches, was almost entirely nomadic. Although they would later begin practicing agriculture, in 1535 they subsisted by hunting and gathering. They lived in teepees and wore little to no clothing. They were Athabaskan speakers and originally hailed from near Alaska and Western Canada. A warlike people, Apaches generally were intolerant of other peoples. After the adoption of the horse, they came to be known for their ability to raid settlements and evade retribution.29

In summary, La Junta is unique because its environment is one of extremes.

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28 There is very little written on the Indians that lived just outside of La Junta. However, Kenmotsu provides a brief synopsis of each group in *Mutualistic Relations*.
Rain is infrequent, the temperature fluctuates from scorching heat to freezing cold, and the area is home to all manner of dangerous animals and inedible plants. The surrounding desert and mountains are dry and comparatively lifeless. In the past, this rugged terrain and its unforgiving conditions made accessing La Junta difficult for anyone unfamiliar with the territory. However, at the confluence of the Rio Grande and the Rio Conchos, the soil is fertile and water is abundant, making the area capable of large-scale agriculture and therefore permanent human habitation.

While there is still much debate concerning the exact nature of the Indians of La Junta, some general consensuses have been reached. Humans appear to have reached La Junta sometime in the Paleo-Indian period. From this time forward they acquired traits and customs from both agricultural and nomadic cultures. At the time of Cabeza de Vaca’s arrival, the area was inhabited by a sedentary population that lived in single story adobe homes. This group practiced small scale agriculture and bore similarities to the Pueblo cultures of New Mexico. These sedentary Indians regularly interacted with a second group of more nomadic Indians. This group subsisted from hunting buffalo and trading. The exact relationship between these two is still unknown, although there are many theories on the topic. Some believe the two groups to be interrelated and a part of the same culture, with the buffalo-hunting Indians making their home at La Junta for part of the year. Others contend that the two groups were distinct from one another. In this theory, the buffalo-hunting Indians were more nomadic, and simply came to La Junta periodically to trade with the sedentary Indians.

Whatever the case may be, La Junta would be a unique part of the New Spain’s northern frontier because of the nature of its environment and its Indian inhabitants.
These factors challenged Spain’s traditional approaches to expansion and settlement and made the process of Hispanicizing the area and its Indians difficult and time-consuming.
CHAPTER 3

THE CONQUISTADOR

Spain developed a sense of hubris and entitlement after expelling the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. Along with their deep-seated belief in the primacy of Catholicism, the confidence gained from the Reconquista drove the Spanish to seek capital in order to expand their influence in Europe and the known world. One of the major avenues of wealth for Spain had been their overland trade with India and the Far East. However, in the mid-fifteenth century, many of their trade routes were cut off by the expansion of the Turkish Empire. This, coupled with ever-increasing competition from Portuguese traders, had Spain worried that they would lose its place in Europe’s mercantile system. Therefore, it was with the hope of finding a seaward route to the riches of India, that Spain authorized the voyage of Christopher Columbus. The Spanish Crown gave Columbus three ships and on August 3, 1492, the Genoan navigator departed Spain and sailed west.¹

Although he would not live long enough to discover his error, Columbus did not reach India. Instead, what he found was a world previously unseen by Europeans. Columbus initially landed on the isle of San Salvador, where he found people adorned in gold jewelry. This and the natives’ claims of a kingdom of gold on a neighboring island piqued Spanish interest and set about an era of conquest. During this period, the Spanish sought out precious metals and complex polities which they could quickly

¹ Charles Truxillo, By the Sword and the Cross: The Historical Evolution of the Catholic World Monarchy in Spain and the New World, 1492-1825 (Westport, Conn.; London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 55-57. For more on the life of Christopher Columbus, see Miles H. Davidson, Columbus Then and Now: A Life Reexamined (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), and Hugh Thomas, Rivers of Gold, the Rise of the Spanish Empire, from Columbus to Magellan (New York: Random House, 2003).
overthrow and position themselves as the beneficiaries of Indian labor.²

News of Columbus’s discovery quickly spread through Spain upon the explorer’s return and further voyages to the Indies were authorized. These expeditions had numerous goals. They were to establish trading posts with the Indians, set precedent for Spanish rule, and introduce Christianity to the New World. However, bringing Catholicism to the Indians of the New World was often more important to the Crown and the Catholic Church than it was to those venturing across the Atlantic. These men were, as one writer of the time put it, “the sort of men who have no intention of converting the Indians or settling and remaining in the land. They come only to get some gold or wealth in whatever form they can obtain it.” In a short time, the New World was invaded by the conquistador.³

Defining exactly who was and who was not a conquistador is a matter of debate. Typically, conquistadors were Spaniards, but as with Columbus this was not always the case. While conquistadors were usually private citizens commissioned by the Spanish government prior to undertaking their expeditions, there were exceptions. For example, if this qualifier were applied, Hernando Cortés, perhaps the person most often associated with the title, would not be a conquistador because he invaded Mexico without receiving a royal commission. A conquistador is usually thought to have been bloodthirsty and to have unrepentantly killed Indians in order to attain his goals. Cabeza de Vaca, whom many historians recognize as a conquistador, defended the rights of Indians after his expedition. Because there is no consensus definition of a conquistador,

A conquistador was a person who took part in Spain’s early expeditions in the New World. They sought wealth, usually gold, and an Indian kingdom to conquer in order exploit its citizens. Typically, they obtained this goal through violence and military might. The conquistador, Catholic in faith, maintained secondary objectives to Hispanicize and Christianize the Indians of the New World. As stated, this definition applies to the majority of the members of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition, the Espejo entrada, and the Rodríguez-Chamuscado entrada. All of these groups would pass through La Junta de los Ríos.\(^4\)

The conquistador benefited Spain with little cost to the Crown. Conquistadors usually had to supply and man their own armies and were putting their own lives at risk. If an expedition was unsuccessful, Spain lost little to nothing. However, if a conquistador did manage to find riches, they were subject to a 20-percent tax on gems and precious metals, known as the *quinto-real*. So when Columbus returned from his voyage with tales of kingdoms of gold, the Crown saw in the conquistador a risk-free way of expanding Spain’s influence and wealth.\(^5\)

Shortly after the Spanish arrived in the New World, the Caribbean Islands began to lose their appeal. The gold that Columbus had once found so abundant began to run out. Natives, whom the Spanish had been trading with and using as slaves, were dying

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\(^4\) In his book on Cabeza de Vaca’s life after the Narváez expedition, David A. Howard contends that Cabeza de Vaca was a true conquistador, albeit of a different nature than most of his contemporaries. On Cabeza de Vaca, Howard says, “this Spanish soldier and official understood the goal of conquest as did the other soldiers of his era, he differed in his beliefs about the means used to gain that goal. He sought a conquest that was just and humane, true to Spanish religion and law.” The members of the Espejo and Rodríguez-Chamuscado expeditions more closely resembled Cabeza de Vaca’s brand of conquistador than those of Cortés and Pizarro. David A. Howard, *Conquistador in Chains: Cabeza de Vaca and the Indians of the Americas* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997, xi. See Descola, *The Conquistadors*, and Thomas, *Rivers of Gold* for more on defining conquistadors.

due to disease, war, and overwork. While profit was still being made in trading some of the exotic items of the Caribbean, the Spanish desired an easier way to become wealthy. This longing led to explorations along the mainland of what was by this point known not to be India. Vasco Núñez de Balboa and Pedro Aria Avila began this era by exploring parts of modern day Colombia and Panama. Accompanied by Francisco Pizzaro, Balboa heard tales of great kingdoms lush with gold. This furthered Spain’s desire to explore inland. Initial expeditions into the mainland met with minimal financial success, but this changed when Hernándo Cortés landed in Mexico.6

Central Mexico was home to an estimated 10 million people when Cortés arrived in 1519. The dominant Native group in this area was the Aztecs. The Aztecs lived in large cities with massive stone pyramids, and had a monarchical political system that was similar to those of Europe. They also had large quantities of gold and other goods valued by the Spaniards. This would prove to be fatal to the Aztec government. After making his way to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, Cortés and his followers appraised the political situation. Then, through calculated diplomacy and military efforts, they removed the ruling class and took its place. They did this despite being drastically outnumbered and being unfamiliar with the customs of the region. The Conquest of Mexico, as it is now known, came to serve as both a blueprint for future conquests and a hope for conquistadores seeking their own empire.7

Cortés’s success had many Spaniards petitioning the crown for their own chance to conquer a kingdom. Spain, reaping the benefit of the royal fifth, was eager to oblige.

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6 Like with Columbus, the exploits of Cortés are well documented. For an abbreviated, but accurate, account of the Conquest of Mexico, see Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, eds., The Oxford History of Mexico (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chapter 2.  
7 Descola, The Conquistadors, 219
Only one of these expeditions would enjoy success comparable to that of Cortés in Mexico. This expedition, led by Francisco Pizarro, journeyed into the Andes Mountains of Peru and took control of the Incan Empire. Although this takeover would not be as quick as that of Mexico, it was still a success in Spain’s eyes. They gained land, converts, and most importantly, wealth. Other expeditions would not meet with the success of Cortés and Pizarro, and most would be considered failures.8

One such expedition was that of Pánfilo de Narváez. Narváez arrived in the Caribbean soon after Spain began to settle the region, and played a part in the conquest of Jamaica and Cuba. In 1520, he was the leader of an expedition to Mexico that attempted to arrest Cortés for disobeying the Crown. He not only failed to capture Cortés, but was himself blinded in one eye and imprisoned. Narváez’s failure in Mexico would not deter him from his desire to find his own kingdom to rule. In 1526, the Crown appointed Narváez adelantado of Florida, and after a long period of procuring supplies, he departed for the territory with thoughts of conquest on his mind.9

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca was commissioned as second-in-command and treasurer of the Narváez expedition. Cabeza de Vaca was born around 1490 in Spain to a family in the country’s aristocracy. In his teens, Cabeza de Vaca served as a member of the army in Italy. A respected veteran, the Spaniard came to the New World in early 1527. He first arrived in Cuba, where he joined Narváez. Cabeza de Vaca would go on to give the main account of the expedition in his famous Relación.10

The Narváez expedition began with major setbacks. Supply difficulties and bad

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8 Ibid., 274-275
9 Adorno and Pautz, Cabeza de Vaca, vol 3, 203-205.
10 For an overview of Cabeza de Vaca’s life prior to the Narváez expedition, see Adorno and Pautz, Cabeza de Vaca, vol. 1, 340-378.
weather delayed the expedition time and again. Finally departing from Cuba in early
1528, the Narváez expedition arrived in Florida in April of the same year. Here they
heard tales of an Indian kingdom called Apalachee to the North, which the Spaniards
hoped would turn out to be a kingdom on par with that of the Aztecs. What they found,
however, was an agriculture-based group of Indians, who, while relatively thriving, had
no gold or goods of value to the Spanish. With their expedition a failure, the men
headed to the coast of the Florida Panhandle to await their supply boats.11

The boats, however, did not come. Dying of disease, starvation, and Indian
attacks, the men of the Narváez expedition decided their best chance of survival was to
build rafts and attempt to float to Mexico. While Narváez would not survive the sea-
journey, Cabeza de Vaca’s raft made it to Galveston Island off the coast of Texas in late
1528. The starving survivors of the Narváez group were initially met by Karankawa
Indians who were friendly to the group. This attitude soon changed and most of the
expedition died of starvation. Cabeza de Vaca departed the Texas coast with plans to
walk to northern Mexico. He survived for a time by trading with the various Indian tribes
of Central Texas, until he was able to reunite with three other survivors of the Narváez
expedition. The group, however, was unable to begin their journey because they were
captured and separated by Indians. Cabeza de Vaca himself was enslaved by the
Mariames. Reunited only a few times in four years, the Spaniards planned their escape,
and after a few failed attempts they succeeded in breaking away.12

11 The journey of Cabeza de Vaca has been covered in many works, most recently in Andrés
Reséndez, A Land so Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca (Davis: University of California
12 Cabeza de Vaca, Relacion in Adorno and Pautz, Cabeza de Vaca, vol. 1, 93-154; For an
expanded treatment of Cabeza de Vaca’s time with the Indians of Texas see Nancy P. Hickekrson, “How
Cabeza de Vaca Lived with, Worked Among, and Finally Left the Indians of Texas,” Journal of
The exact path their journey took from this point is debatable. Some historians believe the four traveled straight across Texas, but most believe they went south and crossed into Mexico. Here they traveled a roughly northwestern path until reaching the Big Bend area, where they once again crossed into Texas. Along the way they encountered many different native groups, and posed as healers and gods. Shortly after reaching the Big Bend, the Spaniards arrived at La Junta de los Rios.13

Cabeza de Vaca’s group was escorted to La Junta de los Rios by a group of Indians friendly to the Spaniards, and upon entering the area they encountered a small village. Cabeza de Vaca stated, “these were the first dwellings we saw that had the semblance and appearance of houses.” The Spaniards also found the first evidence of corn cultivation since leaving Florida. The natives also grew beans and squash. This turn of luck “gladdened us more than anything else in the world, and for this we gave infinite thanks to our Lord.” The group traveled further into La Junta where residents gave Cabeza de Vaca bison hide, beans, and squash. After traveling a total of seven leagues, the group reached another settlement where the Indians threw a celebration for the Spaniard and his companions.14

Cabeza de Vaca learned many of the customs of the native Indians while in La Junta, whom he called the “people of the cow” because of the large population of buffalo near the area. In his relation of the expedition, Cabeza de Vaca remarked on the La Juntan’s clothing, cooking methods, and physical stature. He said these people had “the most well formed bodies we saw and [were] of the greatest vitality and capacity and

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13 For more on the path of Cabeza de Vaca, see Donald E. Chipman, “In Search of Cabeza de Vaca’s Route across Texas: An Historiographical Survey,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 91 (Oct., 1987,) 127-148; Cabeza de Vaca, Relacion in Adorno and Pautz, Cabeza de Vaca, vol. 1, 155-221.  
14 Cabeza de Vaca, Relacion in Adorno and Pautz, Cabeza de Vaca, vol. 1, 221-235. Quotes in Relacion, 221.
who best understood us and responded to what we asked them."\textsuperscript{15}

The Spaniards asked the La Juntans where they should travel from this point. The Indians responded with two options. They could go north, where buffalo could be found, or west where maize was more abundant. After they pondered the decision for two days, they decided to head west, along the maize road. They took some deer fat from the Indians and departed La Junta forever. After traveling into western Mexico, the group found some fellow Spaniards and made their way back to Spanish civilization.\textsuperscript{16}

Because of the personalities involved and the circumstances of the Spaniards’ presence in the region, behavior typical of the Spanish conquistador was not seen at La Junta. While it seems little can be learned from such a brief interaction between the Spanish and the La Junta Indians, some of the behavior of Cabeza de Vaca and his group may be telling of the first encounter between Europeans and the people of the region.

It must be noted that Cabeza de Vaca and his companions reached La Junta in decisively different shape than when they first landed in Florida. They were four weary and hungry men with none of the metal weapons and horses that made Spaniards powerful in other regions of the New World. Their physical appearance, their experience with other Indian groups, and their reputation as divine healers were their only advantages. If they had attempted to conquer and subjugate La Junta and its citizens, they would have been quickly overwhelmed and killed.\textsuperscript{17}

This is not to say that they would have even bothered to conquer La Junta had the entire Narváez expedition made it to the area. Although the region was the most

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. Quote in Relacion, 221.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 221-225.
\textsuperscript{17} Cabeza de Vaca, \textit{Relacion} in Adorno and Pautz, \textit{Cabeza de Vaca}, vol. 1, 221-235.
populous of any they had seen and contained people whom they perceived to be the most intelligent and strong of all the Indians they had encountered, La Junta had no pre-extracted precious metals or other goods of value to the Spanish. And while the population may have been large in comparison to surrounding areas, it was in no way comparable to that of Central Mexico or the Peruvian Andes. The La Juntans did have adequate food and shelter, but they could not support a large enough population to provide *encomiendas* for an entire expedition of Spaniards. Also, although the exact political structure of La Junta at the time can not be determined, it was not a single-headed polity that could easily be overthrown. As Coronado would do with the Pueblos of New Mexico, La Junta would likely have been ignored by any conquistadors entering the region.\(^{18}\)

At La Junta, neither Cabeza de Vaca nor his companions appeared to be concerned about finding evidence of an Indian kingdom to conquer in the future. When encountering the “Pine Nut” people of Coahuila they took notice of their copper bells and asked from where they came. They responded that they came from the North. Indians further along their path remarked that they had heard of Indians who buried copper plates and lived in permanent houses. However, there is no mention of Cabeza de Vaca asking about any Indian Kingdom while he was in La Junta. When the Chamuscado-Rodríguez *entrada* traveled to La Junta in 1581 they asked the Indians of La Junta about the source of their copper bells. The La Juntans told them it came from thirteen days upstream, indicating Pueblo origin. The expedition’s transcriber, Hernando Gallegos, even remarked that they “now had additional information of finer and very

\(^{18}\) Briefly, an *encomienda* was an official grant of Indian labor. An expanded definition and explanation of *encomiendas* follows in Chapter 3.
important things which Cabeza de Vaca did not mention.” Cabeza de Vaca and his companions may not have asked the Indians of La Junta about the Pueblos for a number of reasons. At this point they may have simply been more concerned with survival and returning home than finding an Indian kingdom for someone else to conquer. Or, they may actually have heard information on the Pueblos, but simply not put this information into their relation of the expedition’s events.19

Cabeza de Vaca provided the La Juntans with an introduction to the Spanish, but he in no way Hispanicized the region’s inhabitants. In fact, by the time he reached the area, he was more Indian in manner than Spanish. However, the Indians did learn some things about the Spanish from the bedraggled conquistador. They were introduced to the existence of bearded men with white and, in the case of one of Cabeza de Vaca’s companions, black skin. They learned that these people required food and shelter as much as they, and while they may have believed them to have god-like attributes, they were not invulnerable. Cabeza de Vaca did give the La Juntans their first lesson in Christianity. The conquistador himself only mentions telling the Indians that his God could provide them with rain, but the members of the Chamuscado-Rodríguez expedition were told that Cabeza de Vaca and his companions introduced the La Juntans to Christianity. Unlike the Indians in other parts of the New World, the La Juntans were not Hispancized by their first encounter with a conquistador.20

Cabeza de Vaca’s experiences in North America, in part, inspired Vazquez de

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20 Cabeza de Vaca, Relacion in Adorno and Pautz, Cabeza de Vaca, vol. 1, 221-235; Gallegos, “Gallegos’ Relation,” in Rediscovery, 76-77.
Coronado’s 1540-1542 expedition into New Mexico. The references that Cabeza de Vaca made to the copper producing culture in the north spurred the imaginations of would-be conquistadors. The first person to seek out this civilization was a Franciscan friar named Marcos de Niza. Friar Marcos bought the slave Esteban, one of Cabeza de Vaca’s companions in North America, and employed him as his guide. The expedition managed to reach the outskirts of Pueblo country, but was turned back. However, tales of cities of gold heard on this expedition, Coronado to imagine his own Indian kingdom. Coronado journeyed to the north and fought with various Pueblo groups, but did not find any evidence of a kingdom like those of the Aztecs or Incas. Coronado’s failure to find anything of perceived value temporarily halted large scale conquering expeditions into the Southwest. But while this would end the initial period of large-scale military efforts at conquest, many Spaniards still held out hope of finding a land of Indian riches.21

The Spanish again arrived at La Junta in June of 1581. By this time, Spain had largely shifted its frontier strategy from one of conquering the body to one of conquering the soul. The hope of finding Indian kingdoms and easily obtainable riches had not faded, but evangelism was now the preferred weapon of choice. Missionaries had been making inroads along the Rio Conchos with the Conchos Indians that inhabited the area. There was some degree of success with these efforts, but the process was slow and laborious. These missionaries, like the conquistadores before them, hoped to find a large Indian kingdom, but they wanted the large population for Catholicism. Entradas, as the smaller expeditions of the sixteenth century are sometimes called, were often led by missionaries into unknown territories. One Franciscan missionary based near Santa

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Barbara, Agustín Rodríguez, read Cabeza de Vaca’s tales of a large population of Indians to the north. He petitioned the Viceroy of Mexico for a chance to search for these Indians and was granted his request. A group of nine soldiers, nineteen Indian servants, and a large herd of livestock accompanied the friar and two of his lay-brothers.22

The small group, headed by Friar Rodríguez and an elderly soldier named Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado, departed Santa Barbara in the summer of 1581. They followed the Rio Conchos downstream, where they encountered a group of Conchos Indians, whom they held in little regard. Then on the outskirts of La Junta, the Rodríguez-Chamuscado expedition found Indians who told the entraida about Spanish slave-traders in the region and gave them information on the Pueblos to the north. Upon reaching La Junta proper, the Rodríguez expedition made comments similar to those of Cabeza de Vaca and his companions. They called the La Junta Indians “handsome,” “beautiful,” and “cheerful,” but noted that they too were apprehensive about recent slave-raids. Traveling further into La Junta, the Spaniards noted the fertility and beauty of the area and believed that the land could support grazing cattle and planting European grains.23

The entraida traveled to a large settlement that they estimated to contain 300 persons, and the Spaniards began to teach the Indians some basic Catholic practices, including the act of kissing the hands of the friars. The Indians were pleased by the Spanish, and gave the members of the entraida gifts of food and animal hides. The Spaniards took stock of the people and said:

22 Weber calls missionaries “Conquistadors of the Spirit,” and provides an overview of their role along the frontier in Spanish Frontier, 92-121. Gallegos, “Gallegos’ Relation,” in Rediscovery, 68-70.  
23 Gallegos, “Gallegos’ Relation,” in Rediscovery, 72-76.
They will be well disposed toward any good cause and will remain attached to it. I think, however, that as a naked and barbarous people they will be difficult to settle and congregate in towns, for the do not even wear clothing.24

This assessment helped encourage the entrada to bypass La Junta and continue on to New Mexico.25

While the Spaniards appeared interested in La Junta and its Indians, they were more concerned with finding the people who built the multi-storied great-houses and wore cotton shirts. When they noticed copper adornments on some of the Indians, the Spaniards asked where they could find the people that made them. The Indians indicated to the west, and told the Spaniards that it was thirteen days travel up the Rio Grande. It was at this time that the entrada discovered that Cabeza de Vaca had been to this region, as the La Juntans told the Spanish of four Christians passing through the area. This further supported the entrada members’ belief that they were on the trail of a great civilization, and with an entourage of many of La Junta’s Indians they left the area and headed toward New Mexico.26

The remains of the Rodríguez-Chamuscado entrada would pass through La Junta again a year later. This time there were no friars with the group. Two had been left in New Mexico to proselytize, and one had been killed by Indians. Chamuscado, the military leader, had taken ill on the journey, and on his second journey through La Junta he was carried on a liter. He died before reaching Santa Barbara.27

The second recorded Spanish visit to La Junta bears some resemblance to Cabeza de Vaca’s journey through the region. Like Cabeza de Vaca’s opinion of La

24 Quote in Rediscovery, 75.
26 Gallegos, “Gallegos’ Relation,” in Rediscovery, 74-77
27 Ibid., 111.
Junta, the people of the Rodríguez expedition were impressed with the land and its people. And after initial reluctance on the part of the natives, both groups were warmly welcomed and even treated like deities. Both groups also attempted to take stock of the Indians habits and customs, with the Rodríguez expedition sizing La Junta up for possible Spanish settlement and missionary efforts. Similarly, each visit was short, but for different reasons.\(^{28}\)

Like Cabeza de Vaca’s desire to return to Spanish territory, the Rodríguez entrada had a greater goal that eclipsed anything that La Junta could offer. They hoped to find a large Indian kingdom in which to Christianize and Hispanicize. While it seemed La Junta matched many of the parameters of an ideal missionary colony, the promise of more converts ahead outweighed any long term efforts to Christianize. In spite of leaving La Junta without establishing a mission, the Rodríguez expedition did follow many of the precedents of Spain’s new frontier policy. They preached a basic form of Christianity, treated the Indians as humans, and found out as much information about the area as possible. To promote Catholicism they erected crosses and taught the holiness of the friars. According to the accounts of the entrada, this was accomplished without threat of violence.\(^{29}\)

When the soldiers of the Rodríguez expedition returned to Nueva Vizcaya with no friars, and news of one of the priests having been killed in an Indian attack, the Franciscan order feared that the two remaining missionaries were dead. One Friar, Bernardino Beltrán, enlisted a fairly wealthy Spaniard named Antonio de Espejo to enter New Mexican territory and bring the friars back to Nueva Vizcaya. Espejo had become a

\(^{28}\) Gallegos, “Gallegos’ Relation,” in Rediscovery, 74-77.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
fugitive of the Spanish government after he failed to pay a fine levied against him in a murder case. He hoped that by rescuing the friars his fine would be repealed. He was also motivated, like those before him, by the prospect of finding his own Indian kingdom. With fourteen soldiers, Espejo followed the path of the Rodríguez expedition and entered La Junta de los Rios.30

The goodwill that had been earned with the passage of the Rodríguez expedition was gone before Espejo arrived in La Junta. The area had once again been raided by slavers, this time under Gaspar de Luxán, a member of Espejo's entrada and brother of Diego Pérez de Luxán the major chronicler of the expedition. Luxán’s account mentions the Indians as being in “revolt,” but dismisses any part the Spanish slavers may have had in causing this uprising. When the Spanish camped for the night in La Junta, their horses were attacked by some of La Junta's Indians. Instead of retaliating with force, the Spanish, encouraged by a friar traveling with the group, made peace with the Indians.31

After coming to terms with the hostile group, the Spaniards journeyed farther into La Junta to the large villages of San Bernadino, San Francisco, and San Juan Evangelsita. Here the expedition noted that the crosses erected by the Rodríguez expedition were still in place. In villages where no cross was found, the group erected them. As with the Spanish travelers before them, the Espejo expedition commented on the customs of La Junta's Indians. Like Cabeza de Vaca, they recognized that some of La Junta’s Indians were sedentary, while others were more nomadic. The group stayed

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31 Luxán, “Luxán’s Account” in Rediscovery, 159-160.
in La Junta while waiting on a friar to arrive, but left when they heard that the two
Franciscans who they were sent to find were still alive.32

Also similar to the two recorded Spanish encounters with La Junta before them,
the Espejo expedition remarked on the beauty of La Junta when compared with its
surroundings. But also like the prior expeditions, they left to pursue what was perceived
to be a more important goal. Espejo was not only hoping to rescue the two friars, but
was also looking for the riches of the ever-elusive next Indian kingdom.33

Like Cabeza de Vaca’s journey through the region, the Rodríguez-Chamuscado
and Espejo entradas brought Spanish ideas to La Junta. They taught the basic tenets of
Catholicism and provided many of the area’s Indians with their first exposure to
Spaniards not looking to enslave them. While these entradas did not Hispanicize any
Indians, they laid the ground work for future missionary efforts. The La Juntans’ reaction
to Spaniards they perceived to be slave-traders showed how the Indians of the area
were already reluctant to trust the Spanish. It also indicates that La Junta’s sedentary
Indians received early word of the Spanish arrival and had the ability to adopt a more
nomadic way of life, if only for a short period.

In 1598, Juan de Oñate was commissioned to colonize the Pueblo area of New
Mexico. Accompanied by missionaries and soldiers, Oñate crossed into Pueblo territory
near El Paso. Known as the last conquistador, Oñate brutally subdued the Indians of
New Mexico in Spain’s name. After this time, El Paso became the preferred route to the
Pueblos. From this point forward the Spanish would be a presence in the American

32 Ibid., 163-165.
33 Luxán, “Luxán’s Account” in Rediscovery, 165.
Southwest, but no longer would the conquistador pass through La Junta searching for the next Indian kingdom.34

In conclusion, from the point when Cabeza de Vaca first arrived in the region to the final settlement of Pueblo territory by Juan de Oñate, La Junta de los Rios was used only as a stopping point for the Spanish conquistador. The various expeditions that passed through La Junta remarked on the relative fertility of the region and the handsomeness of its people. However, the Spaniards eyed Indian kingdoms and converts far beyond anything that La Junta could offer. During this era Spain’s frontier policy was dominated by the search for Indian kingdoms, and this La Junta was not. In effect, the region was ignored because the prospect of unknown outweighed the reality of life at La Junta.

While La Junta did not become the site of a colony or a mission in the early Spanish colonial era, the Spanish did try to Christianize and Hispanicize the area’s Indians. In every recorded instance of the Spanish interacting with La Junta’s Indians, they attempted to teach the tenets of Catholicism. This is evidenced by the crosses they erected in the region and the Indians admiration for the Spanish friars.

Unlike other encounters in the New World, the conquistadors who came to La Junta did not leave a bad impression of the Spanish. They provided a friendly introduction to the Spanish way of life in the form of Cabeza de Vaca. The Rodríguez-Chamuscado and Espejo entradas also treated La Junta’s Indians well, and like Cabeza de Vaca they provided knowledge of Spanish ways. The benign nature of these entradas, however, would not be enough to give the Indians of La Junta a positive

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34 For more on Oñate’s expedition, see Marc Simmons, *The Last Conquistador: Juan de Oñate and the Settling of the Far Southwest* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).
image of the Spanish, as civilian settlers of Nueva Vizcaya had already begun to enter the region in order to enslave its inhabitants.
CHAPTER 4

THE SPANISH CIVILIAN SETTLER

While not as prominent in histories as the conquistador, the Spanish civilian played an important part in expanding and maintaining the frontier of New Spain. Spanish civilians journeyed to regions where wealth had yet to be extracted and where there was no easily conquered population of sedentary Indians. Generally, the civilian settler farmed, ranched, and mined, using Indians as their workforce. While few documents detail the activities of Spanish civilians in La Junta prior to 1700, their presence in neighboring Nueva Vizcaya greatly affected the frontier Indian community. Through their labor in the haciendas and mines of the civilian settler, La Junta’s Indians learned to both emulate and detest the Spanish.¹

Conquistadors, although themselves civilians, are distinguishable from civilian settlers in important ways. Both groups sought wealth and Indians to exploit as a source of labor. Neither was in the pay of the Crown, but conquistadors generally had to receive royal permission for their expeditions. For the purpose of this paper, a Spanish civilian settler will be defined as persons whose primary goal was to obtain wealth that required the regular application of labor. Frequently, they did not perform the work required of their endeavors themselves; instead they employed Indians for this purpose. Common Spanish civilian settler enterprises were mining, ranching, farming, and service industry professions.

In general, Spanish civilians did not want to perform manual labor themselves.

They instead sought Indians in which to exploit, and used different methods to achieve this goal. This included forced labor, draft labor, and free labor employment. However, in New Spain, particularly in frontier areas like Nueva Vizcaya, the labor system was much more complicated. The Spanish initially used outright slavery to get Indians into their employ. They followed this practice with the *encomienda* system, the *repartimiento*, and finally free labor. While each of the institutions leading up to free labor was eventually outlawed, they were all practiced in Nueva Vizcaya long after their official end. In this province, uses of the different labor systems often overlapped and were implemented based on the constantly changing dynamics of frontier life. Factors such as the discovery of new mines, smallpox epidemics, and increases in the Spanish population often determined the labor system to be used. When Indian labor was insufficient to meet Nueva Vizcaya’s demand, the Spanish journeyed into the frontier to find new workers. One such place they sought workers was La Junta de los Ríos.2

When the Spanish first arrived in the New World, they enslaved Indians based on racial assumptions and labor demands. The practice of Indian slavery was banished with the passage of the *New Laws*, but like in other areas of the frontier, the Spanish in Nueva Vizcaya continued to enslave Indians in spite of royal legislation. They did so because the Crown had little authority so far away from Mexico City. Civilian settlers justified their actions by labeling the frontier Indians as savages and claiming that Indians would be better off in civilized society. Slaves were usually acquired from war campaigns or commercial expeditions with the sole purpose of capturing Indians. These

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slave-traders journeyed into remote areas of the frontier and used force to enslave natives. They then went back to Spanish settlements and sold their captives to the highest bidder.⁴

The encomienda system, another form of labor acquisition, was employed throughout Spanish America and was a product of the Reconquista. The intent of the encomienda in the New World was to provide an Indian labor force to Spanish settlers and conquistadors. Initially, an encomienda was an officially granted Indian labor force, given for service to the Spanish Crown and as an incentive to explore and Hispanicize the New World. Indian labor could be used only for a designated period, and encomendias did not include land grants. As originally envisioned, Indians would live adjacent to Spanish settlers and would be periodically summoned to perform labor and pay tribute. For his part, the encomendero would teach Catholicism and Spanish conduct, provide some basic needs, and defend his Indian charges. However, most Spaniards exploited this system, and “in reality the encomienda, at least in the first fifty years of its existence, was looked upon by its beneficiaries as a subterfuge for slavery.” Indians were mistreated and overworked, oftentimes to the point of death.⁴

Upon hearing the complaints of missionaries like Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish Crown released the New Laws of 1542. These laws banned the use of the encomienda in its previous form in an effort to stem the mistreatment and destruction of the New World’s natives. The Crown, however, was aware that New Spain required Indian labor, so it replaced the encomienda with the repartimiento system. Within this

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³ Weber, Barbaros 37, 84; Weber, Spanish Frontier, 127.
system, Indians were compelled to provide their labor for a rotational period, and were to receive a fixed wage for their efforts. As with the *encomienda*, many Spaniards began ignoring the conditions and restrictions of the *repartimiento*. Frequently, Indian laborers were kept past their time of service. They were also often tricked into debt peonage or not paid at all. Also as with the *encomienda*, the Spanish Crown had no way of policing the use of the *repartimiento* on New Spain’s frontiers.⁵

The mistreatment and enslavement of Indians by the civilian settler and missionaries often led to open revolt against the Spanish. In Nueva Vizcaya this would be a constant occurrence during the seventeenth century. Work on haciendas and in mines was dangerous. Exposure to disease, overwork, malnourishment, and the inherent risks of the labor led to the death of many Indians. For this hazardous work, the Indians of Nueva Vizcaya received little to no compensation for their efforts, and were often forced to toil at the expense of working for the needs of their own people. For these reasons, Indians both fled and took up arms against the Spanish in an attempt to regain control of their lives. An Indian who rejected the Spanish system and either fled or fought against the Spanish was called an apostate. Especially dangerous to the Spanish were apostates who were also ladinos, or Spanish speaking Indians. At various times in the Spanish colonial period, La Junta de los Rios was used as a place where fleeing apostates and ladinos could find shelter, trade for goods and arms, and plan assaults on Spanish holdings.⁶

Spanish settlement of Northern Mexico began in 1546 when Juan de Tolosa, Baltasar Temiño de Bañuelos, Cristóbal de Oñate, and Diego de Ibarra discovered

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silver in Zacatecas. Spanish civilians hoping to find mines of their own began exploring previously unknown territory. One such person was Francisco de Ibarra. While there were expeditions to Nueva Vizcaya prior to Ibarra’s journey of 1554, none resulted in the permanent occupation of the region. Ibarra discovered numerous silver deposits in Nueva Vizcaya, and mining began almost immediately. Soon, civilians and missionaries entered the region and the capital of the province, Durango, was founded. By 1575, more than five hundred Spaniards called Nueva Vizcaya home.7

Silver mining was the lifeblood of Nueva Vizcaya during the Spanish colonial era. It offered civilian settlers the quickest way of earning capital other than taking over an Indian kingdom. Initially, many Spaniards profited from the silver mines of Nueva Vizcaya, but profits faltered due to Indian revolt, making many miners poor. Nevertheless, mining was the province’s main attraction to the civilian settler during the colonial period.8

While silver mining was Nueva Vizcaya’s greatest attraction, ranching and farming also became important to the region’s early settlers. Initially, agriculture grew in relation to mining activity. A greater population required more food. So as more people moved in to make money from Nueva Vizcaya’s silver mines, more farms and ranches were established. Like in many places in New Spain, the best pasture and farm land of Nueva Vizcaya was quickly taken from its Indian inhabitants for use by the Spanish. The long rainy season and favorable environment of Nueva Vizcaya made it capable of supporting large amounts of livestock and a wide range of crops. After a period, the output of Nueva Vizcaya’s farms and ranches exceeded the needs of the province, and

8 Ibid., 28, 231.
agriculture began to rival mining in importance and profit.\textsuperscript{9}

The move north to Zacatecas and Nueva Vizcaya saw Spaniards journeying beyond the line of relatively easy-to-control sedentary Indian villages of Central Mexico. In the north, the newly arrived Spanish and sedentary Indians settlers began to have conflicts with the region’s natives. Broadly called the Chichimecas, these Indians were nomadic and engaged in hit-and-run style tactics. Encroachments into their territory, differences in ways of life, and enslavement at the hands of the Spaniards had the Chichimecas resisting the Spanish with any means available. Historians call the period of conflict between 1550 and 1590 the Chichimeca War, and it is often credited as being North America’s longest ongoing conflict.\textsuperscript{10}

Although distant from the major area of conflict, some historians believe La Junta played a part in the Chichimeca War through trading food and arms with the nomads. Historian Jack Forbes cited a soldier writing in 1574 who stated that “a hundred leagues inland to the north [from Santa Barbara], there is a great population of natives who treat and trade with the said Chichimecas and encourage them and give them aid and assistance in order to commit said injuries [on the Spaniards].” Forbes assumed this to be La Junta. Using rough geography, the locations match. As was seen in the Rodríguez-Chamuscado expedition, the La Juntans had Spanish goods that may have come from trading with the Chichimecas. They also had been exposed to slavers sometime before 1581, and they may have resented the Spanish for their actions. However, with little information available, the extent to which Indians of La Junta armed the Chichimecas, and whether they actively fought the Spanish or were simply neutrals

There were other interactions between the Spanish civilian settlers of Nueva Vizcaya and the Indians of La Junta during the sixteenth century. As was seen by the Rodríguez-Chamuscado and Espejo entradas, slavers had raided in or near La Junta prior to 1581. It is likely that these slave-traders went to La Junta in order to capture Indians of for work in the mines and haciendas of Nueva Vizcaya. La Junta made a good target because many of its Indians were more sedentary than those of surrounding areas, and therefore easier to capture.12

The Spanish presence in Nueva Vizcaya and the constant threat of slave expeditions does not appear to have drastically changed La Junta in the sixteenth century. The people of La Junta still lived in their adobe houses and semi-nomads still came to the region periodically to trade. The staple crops of La Junta were still corn, beans, and squash, and the manner of Indian dress was still breechcloth or nothing. The number of settlements in the region appears to have remained consistent. There also does not seem to be any significant population change, indicating that there were no outbreaks of disease or warfare in the area. The natives of La Junta did gain knowledge of the Spanish, and some tenets of Christianity may have been learned from apostates fleeing Nueva Vizcaya. But, expeditions to the area indicated that La Junta was still very much Indian. In effect, the civilian settler did little to Hispanicize La Junta during the sixteenth century.13

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At the end of the sixteenth century, Spain was at the height of its power in the Americas. Spaniards had defeated the remnants of the Incan elite in Peru, had ended the Chichimeca War in Northern Mexico, and had successfully colonized New Mexico. At this time, Spanish America extended from just north of Patagonia to just south of the Rio Grande. In South America, the tenacity of the nomadic Aracanian Indians had prevented southward expansion. In North America, the lack of perceived sources of wealth and the constant threat of Indian depredations had few Spaniards venturing beyond already established settlements. For the time being, the borders of Spanish America were set.14

Spaniards continued to move into Northern New Spain in hopes of profiting from the silver mines of Nueva Vizcaya. There was no official border to Nueva Vizcaya at this time, but it roughly encompassed the area of the present day state of Chihuahua. The major cities of Nueva Vizcaya at the beginning of the seventeenth century were Santa Bárbara, San Bartolomé, Inde, Parras, Saltillo, and Durango; the latter served as the religious and governmental head of the province. In 1604, Nueva Vizcaya had a population of between 860 and 3,700 Spaniards and Hispanicized Indians, including miners, farmers, laborers, Jesuits, Franciscans, and a few African slaves. This population would grow slowly but steadily through the next century as silver strikes at places such as Parral would encourage immigration to the region.15

Spanish civilian settlers would make no attempt to colonize the La Junta region during the seventeenth century. While silver would be discovered north of La Junta in the early 1600s, the area itself contained no significant sources of the precious metal.

14 Truxillo, Sword and Cross, 78.
15 Jones, Nueva Vizcaya, xvi, 72-73, 76. Inaccurate census data is responsible for the large discrepancy in population figures.
However, this was likely only one of the reasons the Spanish would make no attempt at colonization. While La Junta had sedentary Indians and arable land capable of supporting crops and livestock, it also had a population of semi-sedentary Indians that could provide a resistance to any colonization effort. Nonetheless, the most likely reason that there was no attempt to colonize La Junta was that the movement of the Spanish frontier in Nueva Vizcaya was slowed by Indians rebelling against the Spanish presence in the Southwest.\textsuperscript{16}

There is no way of knowing how many non-Hispanicized Indians lived in the province of Nueva Vizcaya. What is known is that conflicts and minor rebellions arose between many of these groups and the newly established Spanish civilian settlers. These Indians, upset at imposed personal servitude, restriction of their religion, exploitation in mines and farms, and military expeditions into their lands, rebelled against the Spanish by raiding their towns and killing or capturing their people. The Spanish retaliated with campaigns aimed at subjugating or destroying the attacking Indians. At the beginning of the century the Xiximes and Acaxees rebelled against the Spanish, they would be followed later by the Tobosos and Conchos among others. These rebellions, however, would be minor when compared to those of the later seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{17}

Historian Gary Anderson believed that La Junta served as a center of anti-Spanish sentiment in the early seventeenth century. At La Junta, the various rebellious Indian tribes could acquire the surplus food generated by La Junta’s farms and their


\textsuperscript{17} Lope de Sierra Osoria, “Paper of Lope de Sierra Osorio” in Hackett, \textit{Historical Documents} vol. 2, 223; Jones, \textit{Nueva Vizcaya}, 97-99, 103-104.
trade with the buffalo-hunters of the plains. In his book, *The Indian Southwest*, Anderson referenced an account in the later seventeenth century that indicated that La Junta had become a home for apostates and ladinos fleeing Spanish missions and mines. Anderson’s hypothesis is supported by later Spanish accounts of expeditions to La Junta. These expeditions showed the region to be less populated than it had been during the Espejo expedition. Anderson believed that disease, introduced by apostates, was the cause of the population decline. The mannerisms and customs of La Junta’s Indians changed from the end of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century. They became more nomadic and practiced less agriculture. Anderson believed that this may have been in response to Spanish pressure on La Junta’s sedentary population. It can not be said with absolute certainty whether La Junta’s Indians were active participants in the fight against the Spanish in the early 1600s, or if they simply hoped to benefit from the conflicts. However, La Junta definitely played a part in these early rebellions as a center for Indian trade.  

In particular, La Junta and the Jumanos were instrumental in spreading the horse to tribes throughout the Southwest. Referencing the same soldier who accused La Junta of helping the Chichimecas in 1574, Jack Forbes believed the people of La Junta may have been trading horses at this early date. He noted, however, that neither the Rodríguez nor the Espejo expeditions wrote of any encounters with horses when passing through the region. While horse trading may not have occurred at La Junta in the sixteenth century, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that horses were traded in the early seventeenth century. Forbes contended that Indians in Nueva Vizcaya raided Spanish haciendas for livestock, and brought it to La Junta to trade. Additionally,

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Jumano Indians may have acquired horses from the Pueblos, as the Spanish had brought many to New Mexico after their conquest of the region. Forbes stated, “it appears that all of the east Texas tribes had horses by the 1680’s.” In effect, La Junta was instrumental in making life more difficult for Spanish civilians living on the frontier, as hostile nomadic Indians became much more mobile while on horseback.¹⁹

The Indian rebellions of the early 1600s only intensified at mid-century, making Nueva Vizcaya a veritable war zone. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 set off even more rebellions and forced the Spanish to relocate from New Mexico to El Paso. This changed the dynamic of the relationship between the Spanish and the Indians of the Southwest. The Spanish were proven to be vulnerable, and many of Northern Mexico’s Indians saw an opportunity to free themselves of the newly arrived Europeans.²⁰

While some historians, such as Gary Anderson, argued that La Junta had been a center for resistance to the Spanish from the beginning of the seventeenth century, others noted that some of the tribes of La Junta were considered friendly by the European power. One of these groups, the Conchos, is generally associated with the region upstream of La Junta, but appears to have at least partially settled in La Junta in the latter 1600s. While many Conchos and other La Juntans only had secondary knowledge of the Spanish, others worked on Spanish haciendas and even permanently moved closer to the Spanish for greater access to European goods.²¹

²⁰ Jones, Nueva Vizcaya, 103-104; Weber, Spanish Frontier, 137. Some historians have called the Indian uprising centered around Nueva Vizcaya in the late 1600s, “The Great Northern Revolt.” Jack Forbes refers to the period as “The Great Southwestern Revolt.”
One such Indian was a Concho named Taagua, who labored on a hacienda in Nueva Vizcaya. In 1684, he abandoned his work upon finding out about an incident in the Spanish city of Parral. Spain had responded to the rise in Indian rebellions in Nueva Vizcaya with violence. In Parral they hanged seventeen Indians accused of fomenting revolt. After leaving his hacienda out of anger over this incident, Taagua made his way down the Rio Conchos to La Junta. On his journey Taagua visited many Indian towns where he made claims that he could render the Spaniards weapons useless, remove their bones, and call down a hail of rocks on their cities. Taagua’s assertions earned him a large following, and he was met at La Junta by a number of tribes upset with Spanish mistreatment. These tribes included the Pusalmes, Polalmes, Conejos, Cholomes, and Conchos. The meeting had a total estimated attendance of 1,000 persons. After demanding tribute and subservience, Taagua announced a plan to destroy Parral and rid northern Mexico of the Spanish.22

Instead of a prolonged war against the Spanish, what resulted was a six-month period of raiding and pillaging based out of La Junta. After this time, many of the rebellious Indians, including Taguaa, simply returned to the haciendas from which they had fled. Historian William Griffin believed the 1684 rebellion at La Junta to be a nativistic movement and claimed that it failed to gain momentum for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the Indians of La Junta feared Spanish reprisal. They knew that the Spanish had superior weapons and would have no issue attacking and killing in an attempt to restore order. In fact, the Spanish led an expedition to La Junta for this purpose, but the results of the attack are not known. Another reason for the rebellion’s short length may have been that, unlike other Indians in Nueva Vizcaya, the quality of

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life at La Junta was simply not adversely affected enough to warrant a conflict. La Juntans may have suffered more with the increased population of combatants using their resources than they ever did at the hands of the Spanish. Finally, La Juntans may have realized that they were dependent on the Spanish and their goods. This would explain the return of many of the conflict’s participants to the haciendas from which they had fled six months prior.23

The 1684 rebellion was the only documented major rebellion that directly involved La Junta. The region’s inhabitants may have possessed anti-Spanish sentiments, and traded with and harbored rebels, but this rarely led to warfare. Its distance from Spanish settlements, the higher quality of life experienced by its inhabitants, and its status as a trading center, made most La Juntans avoid conflict. In 1692, the Spanish re-conquered New Mexico. This would help to quell most of the rebellions in Nueva Vizcaya. Although El Paso remained inhabited, a smaller Spanish population in the area put less pressure on local Indians to provide labor. The encomienda, which was still being used in places in New Mexico and Nueva Vizcaya, was abolished, and free labor began to be practiced almost universally. Finally, the arrival of warlike mounted Indians, like the Apaches, often had smaller tribes turning to the Spanish for protection.24

While some of the Indians of La Junta rebelled against the Spanish, others willingly traveled to their mines and haciendas to work. In a report written in 1686, Alonso de Posada alluded to this fact. He says, “the Indians of these nations go during seasons to work in the fields of the Real de Parral and in its mines, one hundred

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23 Ibid., 104-109, 113.
24 Weber, Spanish Frontier, 137-141, 145-146.
leagues distant from the spot.” The report also indicates that European food staples like wheat were being grown in the area.25

The practice of seasonally working in the mines and haciendas of Nueva Vizcaya appears to have continued for the next thirty years. With exposure to the Spanish came knowledge of Spanish customs and a desire for their goods. In 1715, an expedition found La Junta’s Indians adorned in European clothing and growing European crops. It was said that “in order to buy clothes, they travel more than one hundred and thirty leagues at the risk of meeting enemies to work on the farm estates of San Bartolomé Valley.” Of La Junta’s 1,405 residents, 80 were away working on haciendas in Nueva Vizcaya. A number of others planned to join this group at the time of the wheat harvest.26

La Junta’s Indians appear to have adopted many other Spanish customs by 1715. Many spoke Spanish as their primary language. They had traded their breechcloths and nakedness for “shirts of fine white linen worked in silk,… skirts of serge, silk shawls, Cordovan shoes, [and] imported Brussels silk socks.” Catholicism, at least in a bastardized form, appears to have eclipsed any native religion. They grew wheat and tobacco. And while they still lived in adobe homes and grew Indian staples like corn and squash, so did many Spaniards in the Southwest. It is likely that they picked up these Spanish traits while working in Nueva Vizcaya.27

After 1715, Apache attacks at La Junta occurred with greater frequency. In

27 Ibid. Quote in “Founding of Missions,” 256.
response, many of the region’s Hispanicized Indians fled closer to Nueva Vizcaya. They had begun moving to the province prior to this time because they wanted to be closer to their work. The Apache threat simply exacerbated their exodus. Also, much of La Juntas sedentary population had likely begun to identify more with Spaniards than with Indians; a move to Nueva Vizcaya was a move toward something more familiar. By the time a presidio was built in La Junta, most of the region’s sedentary Indian population was gone.  

In spite of the region’s fertile crop land and nearby mineral deposits, Spanish civilian settlers did not colonize La Junta until after the construction of a presidio. There is a report of one farmer who attempted to settle in the region, but he was driven out by nomadic Indians. The establishment of a presidio offered civilians some semblance of security against depredations, and La Junta soon began to be colonized soon after its construction. These civilian settlers, the presidial soldiers and their families, and establecimiento Apaches began to coexist and interrelate. After the presidio was abandoned, Spanish families stayed in the region. While they adopted some local practices, they kept many of their Spanish customs. As in other areas of New Spain, miscegenation occurred, and the line between Spaniard and Indian blurred. By the end of the colonial period, La Junta was home to a decidedly Hispanicized civilian population.

In conclusion, the Spanish civilian settler was instrumental in Hispanicizing La Junta, not through a direct effort to do so, but through employing the Indians of the region in the mines and haciendas of Nueva Vizcaya. In Nueva Vizcaya, La Juntans and Indians who would come to live at La Junta learned the Spanish language and

28 Morganthaler, La Junta de los Ríos, 91.
Spanish customs out of necessity and survival. Initially, Indians were forced to work in Nueva Vizcaya as part of the *encomienda* system or as outright slaves. However, by 1686 many willingly journeyed to the region after having developed a desire for European goods. Soon many La Juntans began to speak Spanish and wear decidedly European attire.

While the civilian settlers inadvertently Hispanicized La Junta, they also drove many of the region’s Indians to revolt against the Spanish system. Enslaved and mistreated in the mines and haciendas of Nueva Vizcaya, Indians were often left with no other choice but to run away or rebel. After the Pueblos revolted in 1680 and possibly before, La Junta was a center for anti-Spanish resistance. Indians escaping Nueva Vizcaya fled to La Junta and plotted to expel the Spanish from the Southwest. These revolts never met with long-term success, but they did keep the Spanish out of La Junta for many years.
Missionaries were a fundamental part of Spain’s effort to maintain and extend its northern frontier. In Spanish America, a missionary was expected to settle among a tribe, teach the tenets of Catholicism, Hispanicize and civilize, and then move on to another Indian group once these tasks were complete. Missionaries were agencies of both the Church and the State. As a Catholic institution, the Spanish government was dedicated to conversion. The Crown, however, also saw the benefit of having a Hispanicized native population that would generate wealth with their labor, defend Spanish territory from hostile Indians, and establish a claim to contested lands. Missionaries were seen as a cost effective way of accomplishing these goals.¹

Missionaries faced a difficult task in Hispanicizing and Christianizing the New World’s natives and many factors determined if a missionary would succeed in their endeavors. For example, the level of an Indian group’s civilization and whether they were sedentary or non-sedentary often determined a missionary’s success. With sedentary Indians, a missionary’s task was generally much easier than it was with semi-sedentary and non-sedentary tribes. Sedentary Indians were easier to control with the threat of violence due to their inability to wage the hit-and-run style of warfare employed by more nomadic Indians. Sedentary Indians also tended to have a more structured political hierarchy. This allowed the Spanish to use gifts and threats on leading tribe

members as a means of passing the Spanish message to the leader’s subjects. Finally, the lifestyle of a sedentary Indian was not as different from that of the Spaniards as was that of semi-nomadic or nomadic Indians. Therefore, less change was required in their customs.²

With semi-sedentary and non-sedentary Indians, a missionary’s task was much more difficult. Usually, missionaries attempted to force these Indians into a sedentary lifestyle. Groups like the Apaches and Comanches, who were migratory by custom, saw little reason to abandon their way of life for little benefit. Often, these groups promised missionaries that they would adopt a sedentary life in order to receive European goods. Usually, however, they would leave the mission when the next hunting season arrived, if not sooner. Additionally, because mission converts were often kept in communal building, disease was more rampant than it was in more nomadic Indian societies. Basically, the more nomadic an Indian group was, the more reason to resist mission life, and the better capability to do so.³

While it was generally true that sedentary Indians accepted the mission system and the Hispanicization process better than semi-sedentary and non-sedentary Indians, this was not always the case. In Central Texas, non-sedentary Coahuiltecs had such a poor quality of life that they willingly chose to enter missions. This gave them access to food, European goods, and some degree of protection from their enemies. They willingly traded away their way of life and exposed themselves to disease for these

³ Weber, Spanish Frontier, 115-116; Jackson, Savages to Subjects, 83-86.
advantages. This was the case in other places along the Spanish frontier like California.⁴

Sedentary Indians, for their part, were not always accepting of the mission system. In New Mexico, the Pueblos were quickly subdued by the Spanish and missions were placed in their towns. For years this relationship was maintained, until the Pueblos, deciding that they were no longer willing to accept Hispanicization, revolted and expelled the Spanish from their territories. In this instance, the Spanish returned years later and re-implemented the mission system, but it was adapted to be kinder to its subjects. In East Texas, the sedentary Caddo Indians were able to stay out of missions due to their proximity to the French in Louisiana. Because they bordered both Spanish and French territory they were able to play the European powers off one another. They had no need for the goods the Spanish missionaries brought with them because they could trade for necessities with the French, who were also willing to give the Caddos firearms and liquor that the Spanish would not.⁵

Because the Indian groups that made their home and traded at La Junta changed with time and ranged in their migratory styles, efforts to establish missions in the region would prove to be difficult for the Spanish. This, however, was not the only factor that made the missionary process at La Junta complex. The difficulty in reaching the region made it hard to supply missions, while the natives’ ability to attain European goods through trade took away one incentive to accept missionaries. Additionally,

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⁴ Weber, Spanish Frontier, 115-116; La Vere, Texas Indians, 98-99; Jackson, Savages to Subjects, 57-58.
⁵ For a concise history of the Pueblos, see Joe S. Sando, The Pueblo Indians (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1976). For an overview of the Caddo Indians, see F. Todd Smith, The Caddo Indians: Tribes at the Convergence of Empires, 1542-1854 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press).
because there was little capital to be earned at La Junta, the Spanish government was less willing to fund missionary activity in the region. True efforts to build missions in La Junta would come only when the region became strategically valuable in Spain's war on the Apaches.

It could be said that Cabeza de Vaca was the first missionary at La Junta. Although he was not ordained, his relation of the Narváez expedition and those of the later Rodríguez and Espejo expeditions indicate that the Spaniard tried to introduce the Indians of La Junta to Catholicism. Cabeza de Vaca promised the region's Indians that he would, “ask Heaven for rain” to water their crops. While this may not seem to be overly evangelical, Gallegos’s account of the Rodríguez-Chamuscado expedition, reported that the Indians of La Junta “learned the knowledge of God they possessed… from three Christians and a black man who had passed through there and stopped some days in their land.” Additionally, Gallegos noted that the Indians already knew to kiss the hands of the accompanying friars, perhaps further evidence of Cabeza de Vaca’s evangelism.6

The Espejo and Rodríguez-Chamuscado entradas also brought the ideas of Christianity to the Indians of La Junta. In fact, Rodríguez and the friars who accompanied him were the first true missionaries to reach the region. They said mass to the La Juntans and erected crosses in their villages. Espejo and the members of his expedition also spoke of Catholicism when they traveled to the region, and he too erected crosses at La Junta’s pueblos. These expeditions, however, quickly passed

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6 Cabeza de Vaca, Relacion, in Adorno and Pautz Cabeza de Vaca, 220-231; Gallegos, “Gallegos’ Relation” in Rediscovery, 77. Quote in Rediscovery, 77.
through La Junta as they were more interested in establishing missions in the kingdom of the Pueblos.\(^7\)

There is no recorded evidence of Spanish evangelism at La Junta during the first half of the seventeenth century, but there is an interesting tale involving the Jumano Indians, who were known to trade and periodically inhabit La Junta. In 1629, two Franciscan missionaries journeyed to the Southern Plains intent on bringing Christianity to the Jumanos. When they arrived, they were told by the natives that they had already been receiving religious instruction in their own tongue by a beautiful woman dressed in a nun’s blue habit. The woman had told the Jumanos that the Spanish would be arriving soon and that they should welcome them and encourage them to build missions in the area. The two missionaries were understandably surprised, and after preaching to the Indians they repeated the tale of the lady in blue to Alonso de Benavides. Benavides was another Franciscan who had been tasked with reporting the status of missionary activity in New Mexico. He did so in his *Memorial of 1630*, which also included an account of the Jumano’s elaborate assertion. Upon returning to Spain, Benavides was told of a nun that claimed that she preached to the Indians of the New World when she entered a trance-like state. The woman, called María de Jesús de Agreda, was interviewed by Benavides. Maria gave the priest elaborate details of the Jumanos, and Benavides left even more convinced of the tale’s veracity.\(^8\)

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Whether the claims of Maria de Jesus and the Jumanos were true or not, the end result remained the same—the Jumanos and the Indians of La Junta had an introductory knowledge of Christianity by 1629. This knowledge may have come from the astral projection of a nun in Spain, but more likely came from interactions with the Spanish and apostates who had left the mission system. The Jumanos were probably motivated to invent the woman in blue in order to have missions built among them. Apaches had begun encroaching on their hunting grounds by this time, and the Jumanos likely hoped that the presence of the Spanish would deter further intrusion. Whatever the case, no mission was built, despite further Jumano requests. This situation would be mirrored in 1683 when the Jumano Chief Juan Sabeata would again ask for missions, this time at La Junta.9

This was a common tactic used by many Indian groups in the history of the Spanish Southwest. When being preyed upon by militarily powerful Indians such as the Apaches and later the Comanches, weaker tribes would request a mission to be built in their territory. They did this in hopes that they would be protected by the Spanish, and perhaps the European power would wage war on their enemies. The Spanish, with its missionaries eager to convert souls, fell for this ploy time and again. The Apaches themselves successfully used this approach. Both parties usually did not get what they wanted. The Spanish did not have enough resources or manpower to build presidios and defend missions all along its frontier, and so attacks often continued unabated. The Indians for their part, would usually not comply with the missionaries’ requests, and usually wanted to be rid of the Spaniards after a short time. This would be the case with

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attempts to bring missions to La Junta.\textsuperscript{10}

The first attempt to build permanent missions in La Junta occurred in 1670. At this time two Franciscans Friars from El Paso came to the region and remained for two years before being expelled by La Junta’s natives. The missionaries’ names were Friar Juan de Sumestra and Friar Garcia de San Francisco. There is very little documentation of this initial effort to establish a permanent Spanish presence in the region, but assumptions as to what occurred during these two years can be made based on accounts of other missionaries in the Southwest.\textsuperscript{11}

At this time in La Junta, the Indians would have received few benefits from having the friars present. They forced the Indians to perform labor for the missions with little reward, did not allow the Indians to practice any form of religion besides Christianity, and punished Indians for sexual and cultural practices that did not coincide with their teachings. While there is no direct evidence of this occurring at La Junta, one of the friars who came to the area was later killed by Zunis upset at being mistreated.\textsuperscript{12}

The benefits that did come with missions were probably not substantial enough to justify a missionary presence in La Junta in 1670. While a Spanish mission was often desired for protection, if it was not accompanied by a presidio then it offered little defense to raiding Indians. And while missionaries brought European goods with them, trade with the Jumanos probably offered easier access to these products. Finally, as in other areas of the frontier, missionaries were often unsuccessful in stopping Spanish slave expeditions.

\textsuperscript{11} Fray Miguel de Menchero, “Declaration of Fray Miguel de Menchero. Santa Barbara, May 10, 1744” in \textit{Historical Documents} vol. 3, 407-408; Morganthaler, \textit{La Junta de los Ríos}, 55.
\textsuperscript{12} Menchero, “Declaration of Menchero” in \textit{Historical Documents}, 407-408; Morganthaler, \textit{La Junta de los Ríos}, 55.
Apache attacks increased at La Junta after the missionaries left the area in 1672, and Indian uprisings occurred all over Nueva Vizcaya and New Mexico. These rebellions were in response to mistreatment by the Spaniards, droughts, increased depredations at the hands of the Apaches, and forced entry into the mission system. Called the Great Southwestern Revolt, this upheaval nearly forced the Spanish to abandon Nueva Vizcaya. In New Mexico, the Pueblos of New Mexico rebelled and forced the Spaniards of the region to move to El Paso. El Paso would become the de facto Spanish base in the Southwest for the next ten years. It was there that they were approached by a Jumano Chief named Juan Sabeata, who asked for missions to be built at La Junta.\footnote{Kelley, “Juan Sabeata”; Morgenthaler, \textit{La Junta de los Ríos}, 55-56; Maria de Fatima Wade, \textit{The Native Americans of the Texas Edwards Plateau}, 1582-1799 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) 76. For a translation of the Mendoza-Lopez expedition, see Carlos E. Castañeda, \textit{Our Catholic Heritage in Texas} (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1936-58).}

Juan Sabeata arrived at El Paso in October of 1683. Sabeata was a ladino who was baptized in Parral and was familiar with Spanish customs. As a Jumano, Sabeata frequently traded all across the Southern Plains, and in recent years he had seen his access to the Tejas Indians of East Texas cut off by the Apaches. In requesting missionaries, Sabeata hoped to both garner protection for La Junta and to incite a war between the Spanish and the Apaches.\footnote{Wade, \textit{Edwards Plateau}, 76-77.}

The Spanish had come to realize that Indians often sought missions for needs other than religious purposes and were hesitant to send friars. To convince the Spanish that his desire for missionaries was genuine, Sabeata concocted a number of stories. He told the Spanish that there were thirty-six Indian nations waiting for missions. Sabeata also related a story of large wooden houses on the ocean, playing on Spanish
fears of a French colony in Texas. On a later encounter, he would go so far as to claim that a multi-colored cross appeared above La Junta.  

The Franciscans at El Paso became convinced that the Jumanos desired missions, so they told Sabeata to begin construction on churches in La Junta. Sabeata did, and three friars departed for La Junta. Once there, they began baptizing and proselytizing the region’s Indians, who already understood the basics of Christianity. They had also adopted other Spanish traits such as wearing clothes and growing wheat. After a short time, the friars were met by Juan Domínguez de Mendoza, a Spanish Captain sent to investigate Sabeata’s claims of Indian kingdoms and French ships.

Mendoza, Sabeata, and two friars soon departed La Junta and headed east into Texas. The Spanish left behind one Franciscan, Antonio de Acevedo, with the task of building more churches and continuing to baptize La Junta’s population. Throughout the expedition into Texas, Juan Sabeata attempted to incite conflict between the Spaniards and the Apaches. While the expedition failed to find a French presence or Sabeata’s Indian kingdoms, it was successful in exploring Texas, and making contact with previously unseen tribes.

The expedition returned to La Junta in June of 1684. In the brief five-month period the Spanish were away many changes had occurred at La Junta. While Friar Acevedo was successful in building seven more churches and baptizing 1,500 Indians, the population of La Junta appears to have dropped. There were only seven reported nations as opposed to the nine previously reported. The reasons for this are unknown.

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15 Wade, Edwards Plateau, 76-77.
16 Ibid.
17 For a full account and analysis of the Mendoza-Lopez Expedition, see Wade, Edwards Plateau, Chapter 4.
Some of the semi-sedentary population may have departed for hunting season, or there may have been a mistake in the documentation. However, there could have been other less benign reasons for the reported depopulation. There may have been an outbreak in illness, there may have been migration due to Apache attacks, or some of the Indians may have joined others fighting the Spanish in Nueva Vizcaya.18

Later in 1684, La Junta became the site of a planned rebellion against the Spanish. Indians, upset at being mistreated in Nueva Vizcaya's mines and haciendas, joined together and planned their revolt. The churches that were built early in the year were abandoned, and Friar Acevedo and another missionary were forced to leave La Junta. They were not injured in the uprising, and some of La Junta Indians even came to the aid of the friars. Nonetheless, mission activity was put on hold.19

There would be a third attempt at missionizing in La Junta, but like those before, it was unsuccessful. In 1687, two friars, Joachim de Hinojosa and Agustín de Colina, came to La Junta and began proselytizing. They only stayed a year, when once again there was a revolt. As before, some of La Junta's inhabitants were upset at the poor treatment they received in Nueva Vizcaya. The friars condemned the civilian's actions but left the region nonetheless. Like with the earlier revolt they were unharmed. It would be twenty-seven more years before the Spanish would attempt to establish missions in La Junta.20

At the end of the seventeenth century, the Spanish frontier in North America was in disarray. Spain perceived its missionary and defensive efforts on the northern frontier

18 Anderson attributes the apparent decline in La Junta's population to the introduction of European diseases. Anderson, Indian Southwest, 55.
19 See Griffin, “Nativist Movement,” for a summary of the uprising.
20 Morgenthaler, La Junta de los Ríos, 76-78.
of Mexico as a drain on the treasury, but the threat of other European powers and nomadic bands offered them little choice but to continue to finance faltering missions and presidios. The La Salle expedition and subsequent French activity in Louisiana saw Spain react by building missions in East Texas and San Antonio. The French presence exacerbated Spain’s Southwest dilemma. French traders, unlike Spanish missionaries, were willing to deal firearms to Indians. This caused a shift in power in the Southwest, as groups such as the Wichitas and the Comanches were able to use their newly gained weapons to expand their territory. Those in West Texas, like the Apaches, suffered attacks at the hands of these newcomers, and began to raid Spanish territory in order to find goods.21

In Spain, the Bourbons ascended the throne in 1700 and would soon implement reforms in the New World. However, changes in frontier policy would not begin to affect the Southwest until mid-century. The mission system would still be the preferred method of expanding and holding the frontier for a time.22

The Franciscan mission system in the Southwest changed in response to the 1680 and 1696 Pueblo revolts. When the Franciscans returned to New Mexico in 1692, they believed the exhausted and defeated Pueblos would accept the same level of exploitation to which they had been subjected prior to the 1680 rebellion. This belief proved to be wrong, and the Pueblos revolted once again in 1696. After this point “pragmatic Franciscans displayed less zeal in attempting to stamp out Pueblo religious practices, and colonists and officials eased (but did not cease) their demands on Pueblo laborers.” This attitude began to be displayed across the Southwest, and although

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21 Weber, Spanish Frontier, 153, 177-178.
22 Ibid., 177-178.
rebellions still occurred they would never be as extensive as those of the late 1600s.\(^{23}\)

While there is some evidence of missionary activity in La Junta between 1688 and 1715, these visits were probably not large-scale and most likely did not have the goal of permanently establishing missions in the area. There are many possible reasons for this period of disinterest. There was a more urgent need for missionary activity in both the newly retaken Pueblo territory and the contested area of East Texas. Also, wars in Europe and concern over French and English activities to the east drained away treasury resources that would have gone to missionary efforts. The depopulation of La Junta that had recently begun appears to have continued during this time, and there may not have been as much interest in proselytizing to such a small audience. Finally, as always, La Junta was deemed of little material and strategic value, and therefore not of primary interest.\(^ {24}\)

In 1715, an expedition arrived at La Junta with the intent of reestablishing missions in the area. Fray Joseph de Arranegui, a Franciscan, was the driving force behind the effort and after receiving the Viceroy’s approval, he enlisted the help of Juan Antonio Trasviña y Retes to head the expedition. Trasviña y Retes, accompanied by soldiers, Indian auxiliaries, as well as Arranegui and three other friars reached La Junta on May 31. The La Juntans greeted the Spanish with much fanfare, kissing the hands of the priests and giving gifts of meat and flour. The Spaniards found the La Juntans to be “polite” and “good-natured.” Because of this and the area’s ability to sustain agriculture, the Spanish judged La Junta to be an excellent site for a mission. They ordered the Indians of the region to repair the missions abandoned in 1688 and to build new


structures to house the friars. Three friars were left to minister to La Junta, but the Indians of the area asked for more. Their request was granted and three more friars were assigned to the locale.25

The account of the Trasviña y Retes expedition shows the degree to which La Junta had become Hispanicized. The sedentary Indians of the area, while still growing corn and squash, had adopted European staples like wheat and beef. They wore “clothes in the Spanish fashion, with shirts of fine white linen worked in silk. Some had skirts of serge silk shawls, Cordovan shoes, and imported Brussel silk socks.” They appeared to have adopted a basic form of Christianity. The Indians, even the chiefs, also seemed to be in monogamous marriages. Many also spoke Spanish.26

Shortly after Trasviña y Retes brought three missionaries to La Junta, the three additional friars arrived in the region and a total of six missions were established. The mission structures were of simple construction. They were adobe, square buildings with only one altar. The quality of craftsmanship appears to have been poor, as later expeditions to La Junta noted their rapid deterioration.27

From this point until secularization in the 1790s, there would be missions in the La Junta region. They would periodically be abandoned, but missionaries would always return in a short time. What made the Trasviña y Retes expedition successful where previous efforts had failed? Historian David Weber said that, “when Indians’ resource bases diminished or new enemies appeared on the horizon or internal power struggles pitted band against band, some of the most implacable Natives welcomed

26 Ibid. Quote in “The Founding of Missions,” 255.
missionaries." All of these factors came into place with the onset of the Apaches. Apache incursions into La Junta had only increased since the abandonment of the earlier missions. This decreased the La Junta resource base as the trade network of the Jumanos was destroyed, and Apache raids destroyed crops. La Juntans likely saw the Spanish as a deterrent to the invading Apaches, and missionaries as one of only a few ways of acquiring European goods. Additionally, it was at this time that many bands were willingly joining the Apaches. Trasviña y Retes noted that there were Apaches living just outside of La Junta in 1715, possibly indicating changing loyalty and power struggles within La Junta. It was around this time that the Jumanos began to be referred to as the Jumano Apaches.28

While the Trasviña y Retes expedition could be considered a success, there were still periods where the Franciscans fled La Junta. In 1718, an incident occurred where an argument over cattle led to a group of Indians chasing the two friars out of La Junta. They returned soon after, but another incident saw them flee once again. This time, a disagreement over irrigation was the catalyst. However, the friar’s perception of the revolt was exaggerated, and the once again they returned to La Junta.29

In March 1726, Apaches set upon one of La Junta’s missions. Spanish soldiers from a nearby presidio were ordered to attack the Apaches and restore the missionaries. The force, however, never arrived. The missionaries were able to return to

29 Menchero, “Declaration of Menchero” in Historical Documents vol. 3, 409-411; Morgenthaler, La Junta de los Rios, 92-94.
La Junta after the Apaches departed, but from this point forward they only periodically came to La Junta.  

In the middle of the seventeenth century, the Spanish Crown began examining its missionary policy. It had always encouraged missionaries to enter new areas of the frontier, turn the local Indians into loyal Spanish subjects, and then proceed to another locale. In reality, what occurred on the frontier was that missionaries would found a mission and then remain in the area after the local Indians were converted. Often, they did this out of a belief that the Indians were incapable of governing themselves and would return to their old ways once missionaries left. Friars may also simply have enjoyed being in charge. Frequently, however, they stayed because the missions made money, and therefore provided funding for other missionary efforts.

In response to this, the Bourbons began to encourage the secularization of missions. Along the frontier, secularization was a much slower process due to the difficulty in Christianizing more nomadic Indians. At La Junta, where Apaches had begun to populate the area in the mid-eighteenth century, missions stayed open much longer than in most other areas of New Spain. The mission’s main converts were the remains of La Junta’s sedentary-agricultural population. After Mescaleros were forced to settle in La Junta in the 1780s, missionaries made inroads with the Apache group. However, in the 1790s, La Junta’s missions were secularized. From this time until the late nineteenth century, the missions continued to be used as churches. The exact

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30 Menchero, “Declaration of Menchero” in _Historical Documents_ vol. 3, 409-411; Morgenthaler, _La Junta de los Ríos_, 94.
location of many of La Junta’s missions is unknown, as most collapsed due to disrepair.\textsuperscript{32}

In summary, the mission system met with mixed results along New Spain’s northern frontier, and it was no different at La Junta de los Rios. Proselytizing began with Cabeza de Vaca’s arrival in 1535, and continued intermittently for the next 135 years. In 1670, Franciscans established the first missions in La Junta, but they were soon abandoned. Later attempts to build missions met with this same outcome. In 1715, missionaries finally came to stay at La Junta. Revolts occurred after this time, but they never resulted in the long term ejection of missionaries. While most of La Junta was abandoned after the construction of a presidio, many mission Indians stayed. In the 1790s, the missions of La Junta began to be secularized.

Missionaries had little long term success in Hispanicizing La Junta’s Indians. When they came to the region in 1680, the sedentary La Juntans had already adopted many Spanish customs from their work in Nueva Vizcaya. Missionaries did little to reinforce this Hispanicization process that had begun before their arrival. In fact, they may have driven some La Juntans away from the Spanish system. Less sedentary Indians revolted against missionaries, while La Junta’s settled inhabitants appear to have only grudgingly accepted missions. In spite of these failures, missionaries did manage to introduce and reinforce Christianity. From Cabeza de Vaca’s arrival to modern times, Christianity has been a part of La Junta. In fact, there is little reference to any other religion being practiced in La Junta. Missionaries may have failed in their efforts at Hispanicization, but they succeeded in Christianizing the inhabitants of La Junta.

\textsuperscript{32} Jackson, \textit{Savages to Subjects}, 116-117.
At the beginning of the 1700s, New Spain faced a reality in which few of its civilians wished to move near the dangerous northern frontier, and its missionaries were failing to convert the nomadic and semi-nomadic Indians who preyed upon Spanish interests. A new approach to frontier defense was needed. The presidio system had enjoyed some success in controlling Indians in parts of New Spain, so the Spanish government believed an expansion of the institution would provide an answer to their problems on the northern frontier.¹

The first presidios were constructed in New Spain in 1569. They were built along the Mexico-Zacatecas road in order to protect supply trains and silver shipments during the Chichimeca War. They came to be an integral part of Spain's guerra a fuego y sangre where total war was waged on the nomadic Indians of Northern Mexico. In the 1700s, they would once again come to be used for this purpose. However, this time instead of Chichimecas, presidios were built to wage war on nomadic and semi-nomadic groups like the Comanches and Apaches.²

While some aspects of the presidio system changed with time, the basic tenets remained the same. Presidios were generally located near civilian settlements, important trade routes, or missions. The job of a presidio’s soldiers was to protect these areas from hostile Indians and prevent rebellion when it occurred. Optimally, soldiers would be armed with the latest weaponry, be well-fed and trained, and would have

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¹ Weber, Spanish Frontier, 213.
horses and facilities of the finest quality. Presidial soldiers would respond to any threats with swift justice, and in so doing would protect Spanish interests and way of life.³

In theory, if a mission were accompanied by a presidio, friars would be able to convert their charges in a safe environment. The presidio would provide protection from raiding Indians, and would serve as a fall-back point for mission converts in case of an attack. If one of the mission Indians were to commit a crime or flee, presidial soldiers could track the apostate down and return him to the custody of the friars. Finally, the presidio would serve as a deterrent against rebellion. A well armed presidio existing just outside a mission would give any Indian contemplating revolt a reason to think twice. If rebellion against missionaries did occur, a presidio would be able to quickly suppress the upheaval.⁴

The Spanish had similar lofty goals for presidios adjacent to civilian settlements and trade routes. Here, the presidial soldiers would form a symbiotic relationship with the area’s civilians. They would provide the residents with protection, and in turn they would receive food and payment from the locals. After their time of service, presidial soldiers would stay in the area, and thereby promote civilian settlement. A presidio would prevent mistreated Indians from rebelling, and indentured Indians from escaping. Presidios would also be a deterrent to raiding Indians. When raids did occur, soldiers would be able to track down the culprits, distribute justice, and return stolen property. They would serve a similar role along important trade routes, where they could provide safe passage for silver and other goods traveling from the mines and haciendas of the

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⁴ Faulk, “Presidio: Fortress or Farce,” 69.
north to the population centers of Central Mexico.\(^5\)

Unfortunately for New Spain, the presidio system was not always successful, and it sometimes exacerbated problems along the frontier. Odie B. Faulk in his article “The Presidio: Fortress or Farce” argued that the reason that the Spanish did not have much success with the presidio system was because, “(1) the philosophy of building presidios was predicated on European concepts of warfare, and (2) the soldiers garrisoning the presidios were not adequately trained, supplied, or equipped for containing the type of enemy faced in the Interior Provinces.” The presidio, as it was built in the New World, would have been a valuable tool against a European power, but against nomadic Plains Indians it was ineffective.\(^6\)

The basic construction and design of the presidio along New Spain’s northern frontier varied little during the colonial period, although they did become more elaborate with time. Presidios were usually built near missions and settlements, but not directly adjacent to them. Traditionally made of adobe in the Southwest, they were either square or rectangular in shape and had walls of up to 800 feet in length. These walls were over ten feet high and had bastions that served as watchtowers and sniper points. Inside the walls were living quarters, supply rooms, and religious facilities.\(^7\)

This design was adopted from warfare against the Moors during the *Reconquista*, and was very efficient in stopping large scale direct assaults. In fact, during the whole of the Spanish colonial period, no presidio in the Americas was taken by force. Unfortunately for the Spanish, the Indians along its frontier did not engage in European-style warfare. They preferred using stealth and hit-and-run style tactics. 

\(^7\) Ibid., 70.
Nomadic and semi-nomadic Indian groups often quickly raided nearby missions and civilian settlements and departed before the presidio could respond. With their knowledge of the terrain and their ability to evade the Spanish soldiers, there was frequently no reprisal to these depredations.\(^8\)

Seemingly, this problem could have been solved by placing a presidio directly adjacent to missions and civilians. There were, however, problems with this approach as well. Most glaring was the tendency of the presidial soldier to mistreat missionary Indians. These malfeasances included forcing the Indians to work for them, excessively using corporal punishment, and the outright raping of native women. This brought presidials at odds with missionaries who disagreed with the soldier’s treatment of the Indians. Civilians too were often at odds with the presidials and the missionaries.\(^9\)

In San Antonio, for example, civilians, soldiers, and missionaries competed for the same resources and markets. There was only a finite amount of irrigable land and each of these factions competed for what little was available, causing rifts and conflicts. These groups also competed for Indian labor. In missions, converts farmed and ranched without pay. This angered civilians who were forced to compensate their laborers. Soldiers too coveted Indian labor, and often forced the Indians to work for them at the expense of the missions. A final point of contention, civilians were angered when presidial soldiers sold their issued goods for uncompetitive markdowns.\(^10\)

The soldiers who manned the presidios of the northern frontier were traditionally of poor quality and were inadequately trained. Often having little education, soldiers

\(^8\) Faulk, “Presidio: Fortress or Farce,” 70-71.  
found that the army offered a chance to earn a wage and perhaps achieve a promotion in stature. Unfortunately, the poor quality of life on the frontier often outweighed any benefits a soldier might receive. Soldiers were supposed to be trained upon arriving at their assignments, but this was often not the case. Poor training was followed by more poor training, which created a perpetually inept frontier military. The isolation of posts did not help the situation either. An officer’s inadequate performance was more likely to go unnoticed at a remote outpost. Corporal punishment was often overused, and corruption was rampant. This sometimes led to soldiers not getting adequately paid or fed. As would be expected, there was a significant amount of desertion in the frontier army.11

Poorly trained military personnel were not solely to blame for the inadequacies of the frontier army. They were often armed with malfunctioning equipment and were not supplied with enough food. Their guns were sometimes obsolete and their horses malnourished. What equipment they did have was often not suitable for combat on the frontier. This included heavy leather armor for presidios in the sweltering heat of the Southwest. Additionally, wars in Europe and failures in bureaucracy often resulted in irregular supply shipments.12

Finally, one of the purposes of the presidio was to frighten the Indians who had rejected the Spanish system and thereby make them unwilling to challenge Spain’s dominance in their region. This often had the reverse effect. Whereas before a presidio was built in an area, a Spanish presence could have been perceived as benign, with a presidio the Indians saw a genuine military threat. The fact that presidios were usually

built on the best cropland that was frequently already occupied by Indians added to the animosity.\textsuperscript{13}

The first presidio would not be built at La Junta until 1760. Although plans for a presidio in La Junta had been proposed long before, bureaucracy and circumstance delayed construction. While an actual presidio would not be built in La Junta until the mid eighteenth century, the effects of the presidio system would be felt in the region long before this time.

The first major presidio built in Nueva Vizcaya was at Cerro Gordo, roughly halfway between the city of Durango and La Junta. The demand for labor that accompanied the silver strikes of the region led to large scale slave-trading. Indians, like those at La Junta, were rounded up and used as slaves in mines and on haciendas. This led to wide-spread rebellion and warfare in Nueva Vizcaya. The civilians of the region pleaded for soldiers and support from the government. They even offered their own money to help fund the construction of a presidio and promised to support its troops with their own crops. In 1646, the Cerro Gordo Presidio was established. Soon, however, the effectiveness of this presidio came into question. Writing the viceroy on the state of affairs in Nueva Vizcaya in 1654, Father Diego de Medrano said, “Nothing good has come of this presidio only more insolence from the Indians, who have caused more trouble than they did before the presidio was founded.” He noted that the presidio’s presence caused fear in the region’s Indians, and its soldiers and officers were self serving and its administration was poor. Father Medrano’s assessment of the Cerro Gordo presidio would come to mirror the view of the presidio all along New Spain’s

\textsuperscript{13} Naylor and Polzer, \textit{Presidio and Militia}, 420-421, 430.
northern frontier.\textsuperscript{14}

Smaller presidios were built in Nueva Vizcaya during this time, but they too were inefficient. The small presidio of Papigochic was described as having three goals, “to propagate the holy faith, protect the missionaries, and furnish protection to traffic on the road to Sonora.” According to Father Medrano, however, “not one of these goals was accomplished.” Still, the father did not believe the presidio system should be completely abandoned in Nueva Vizcaya. Instead he proposed a plan of consolidation and reorganization. In this proposal, some presidios would be moved, while others were to be abandoned and incorporated into existing presidios.\textsuperscript{15}

Although many of the Indian tribes of Nueva Vizcaya had been at war with the Spanish since the early 1600s, a large-scale rebellion did not occur until the 1680s when the Pueblos expelled the Spanish from New Mexico. This revolt gave the Indians of Nueva Vizcaya confidence that they too could rid their lands of the European power. After fleeing New Mexico, the Spanish settled in El Paso. In 1683, a presidio was built in El Paso by the Spanish refugees. Because it was primarily settled by former residents of New Mexico, El Paso was considered a part of that province. Here they came to know the difficulties involved in dealing with the semi-nomadic Apaches, and the ineffectiveness of the presidio in dealing with highly mobile bands on horseback.\textsuperscript{16}

During the Great Southwestern Revolt, the Crown feared losing Nueva Vizcaya in addition to New Mexico, and orders for the construction of more presidios were sent out. The presidios of Cuencame, Casas Grandes, El Gallo, and San Francisco de

\textsuperscript{16} Naylor and Polzer, \textit{Presidio and Militia}, 438-484.
Conchos were soon constructed. The latter was built a little more than one hundred leagues to the southwest of La Junta in response to the Concho Indian uprising at La Junta in 1684. Presidio San Francisco de Conchos was built in an area that was first settled by Franciscans hoping to convert the Concho Indians. Construction was completed on the presidio in 1685. More than fifty soldiers were initially assigned to the Presidio. The presidio was soon captained by Juan de Retana, who had led an expedition to La Junta in 1684 to suppress the Concho rebellion.\textsuperscript{17}

The Great Southwestern Revolt resulted in many changes to Spain’s Nueva Vizcaya policy. In 1693, Joseph Francisco Marín reported on the poor conditions in the province, and made suggestions as to how the presidio system could be improved. His major assertion was that presidio soldiers should operate as “flying squads,” or smaller more mobile units capable of pursuing Indians into rough terrain. He also suggested that rebellious nomadic Indians could be Hispanicized by placing them in the vicinity of a presidio, and by teaching them to be sedentary agriculturalists. Marín’s suggestions were taken into consideration by the viceroy. And while they would take some time, they would be implemented at La Junta when it became home to a presidio.\textsuperscript{18}

Improvements in the presidio system and better treatment of Nueva Vizcaya’s Indians ended the Great Southwestern Revolt; however, New Spain had a different problem. In the early eighteenth century, Apache depredations along the northern frontier began to become so frequent and devastating that they threatened Spain’s tenuous control over Nueva Vizcaya. Pushed south and west by the Comanches, the

\textsuperscript{18} The full text of Marín’s report can be found in Hackett, \textit{Historical Documents} vol. 2, 365-409.
Apaches had little option but to attack Spanish settlements. As their trading empire had been disrupted by the Comanches, the Apaches were left with little access to European goods. Spain refused to allow the trade of firearms to Indians, so in order to compete with the French-equipped Comanches they had to raid Spanish settlements. The Crown responded to these incursions with an expansion of the presidio system. Missionary activity continued, but it was no longer New Spain’s major tool in expanding its northern frontier.19

La Junta in the early 1700s was a much different place than it had been the century before. Many of the Indians who inhabited the area had become partially Hispanicized due to their contact with the Spanish in the haciendas work in the mines of Nueva Vizcaya, and exposure to missionaries. La Junta’s sedentary population wore cotton clothes, used European tools, and even spoke Spanish. Non-sedentary La Juntans, however, had not fully embraced the Spanish way of life, and often were at odds with Spaniards. Franciscans, who had built missions in La Junta in 1715, were frequently expelled from the region. Like with Spanish settlements, Apaches were a constant threat to La Junta. Here, they raided the villages of La Junta much in the same way they did Spanish holdings, stealing goods and women and children. By 1715, the trade network of the Jumanos, had collapsed at the hands of the Apaches. Suffering from constant attacks the Jumanos were soon either killed or absorbed into the Apaches. References to the Jumanos in Spanish documents cease in the early 1700s.20

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In response to the increase in Apache depredations, an inspection of New Spain’s presidios was ordered. General Pedro de Rivera was selected to lead the inspection, and on November 21, 1724, he began his tour. Rivera went as far north as Santa Fe, as far as west as Sinaloa, and as far east as Los Adaes. He found many of the presidios to be in disrepair and to be poorly managed. At the closest presidio to La Junta at the time, San Francisco de Conchos, Rivera found that “the presidio was reduced to utter wretchedness.” In his estimation, this was due to poor management by the presidio captain who was inexperienced and had been employing soldiers for his own private interests.21

When the general returned to Mexico City in 1728, he made recommendations based on his observations. Most of his ideas were implemented in the Regulations of 1729. Rivera’s proposals were mostly economic in nature and were aimed at reducing the expense of frontier defense. One cost-saving measure involved the building of a presidio at La Junta. In spite of not actually having stopped in the area on his tour, the general believed that La Junta held strategic value as an entry point into Nueva Vizcaya. Rivera also considered the number of hostile Indians in Nueva Vizcaya to be small, and because of this, he believed that some of the province’s presidios should be moved further into the frontier.22

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Rivera’s recommendation for a presidio at La Junta was accepted, and on January 13, 1729, an expedition was sent to search for suitable presidio sites at La Junta. This expedition was headed by Captain José de Berroterán who was accompanied forty-seven soldiers and six Indian auxiliaries from San Francisco de Conchos. The plan was for Berroterán to not only explore the land, but also to harass any rebellious Indians that may have been operating out of La Junta. Berroterán explored the rugged terrain leading to La Junta, but never actually reached La Junta proper. He returned citing hardship and was summarily chastised and degraded for not completing his mission. The failure of the Berroterán expedition put a halt to any plans of establishing a presidio in La Junta for the next eighteen years.23

In 1745, La Junta and its missions were attacked by Apache raiders. The governor of Nueva Vizcaya, Marqués de Torrecampo, ordered that soldiers of San Francisco de Conchos were to be deployed to aid the missionaries, unless the task was deemed impossible. Captain Berroterán, who was still stationed at the presidio, apparently either truly believed there was no chance to aid the La Junta missions or the assertions of his laziness made in 1729 were accurate, because he did nothing. In spite of this, the Apaches did not destroy La Junta, and its missionaries were not killed, although they did have to flee their missions for a time.24

After the Apache attack of 1745, Viceroy Juan Francisco de Guemes y Horcasitas sent a letter to the Governor of Coahuila, General Don Pedro de Rábago y Terán, ordering him to mount an expedition to La Junta. The letter, dated June 22, 1747, dictated that the purpose of the expedition would be to explore La Junta, reestablish any

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destroyed missions, and choose a site for a presidio. It was decided that to further
explore the country between the Spanish settlements of Nueva Vizcaya, there should
be three detachments, each using a different route to reach La Junta. One would be
headed by Rábago y Terán, one by Captain Manuel Ydoiga of the Presidio El Valle de
San Bartolomé, and a third under Captain Fermín de Vidaurre of the Presidio de
Mapimi. Each group was to bring along a small detachment of soldiers, Indians
auxiliaries, and supplies sufficient to last a few months.25

The three groups departed at separate times and from separate locations in
November 1747. In their journals they made note of the availability of water on the path
to La Junta, and the difficulty of the terrain. All three made their way to the La Junta
Indian pueblos, and remarked on the demeanor of their Indian populations. They
estimated a population of 1,124 Indians in a total of five pueblos. The constant presence
of Apaches at La Junta was also noted. Some La Juntans traded with the Apaches,
while others were at odds with the semi-nomads.26

There was a disagreement between two of the expedition’s leaders as to La
Junta’s ability to sustain a presidio. Ydoiaga, a presidio captain himself and experienced
in what was required to run a large scale military facility, believed that La Junta could
not support a presidio. He said of the Indian’s pueblos:

   In none of them may be found even the least amount of the qualities and
circumstances required by the Superior Dispatch or what is needed for the
foundation of a presidio of fifty soldiers and a large neighborhood, as the
lands are infertile, inadequate, and insecure… And neither are they judged

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151-156.
26 Daniel, “La Junta and the Despoblado,” 126-155; Joseph Ydoiaga, Expedition to La Junta de
los Ríos, 1747-1748, Captain Commander Joseph de Ydoiaga’s Report to the Viceroy of New Spain
(Special Report 33), Translated by Enrique Rede Madrid, (Austin: Office of the State Archeologist, Texas
Historical Commission, 1992), 52, 99.
Rábago y Terán disagreed with this assessment, believing a presidio at La Junta was possible. He noted the La Juntan’s ability to grow a wide range of crops, and although wood was scarce at La Junta, Rábago y Terán said that timber could be transported from a small distance away. Further, the governor believed that a presidio at La Junta would prevent the local’s trade with the Apaches, partially block the Apaches from entering Nueva Vizcaya, and protect the region’s missionaries. Rábago y Terán chose a location near the confluence of the Rio Conchos and the Rio Grande as the place most capable of supporting a presidio.\textsuperscript{28}

Ydoiga had one other reason for objecting to the building of a presidio at La Junta. Namely, he noticed that the La Juntans no longer wished to have a Spanish presence in the region. Whereas before, La Junta’s population had called for Spanish protection from the Apaches, they now objected to any military presence. This likely stemmed from knowledge of presidio life on other parts of the frontier. Presidios tended to be built on the best land, which was often already inhabited by Indians. Soldiers often mistreated Indians, and forced them to live near presidios. Also, Apaches and other raiding bands were often not deterred by presidios, as they often were ineffective in stopping these groups. The Indians of La Junta had little to gain and much to lose from the presence of the Spanish military.\textsuperscript{29}

This belief would be evident during the next attempt at establishing a presidio in La Junta. In 1749, Captain Rubín de Celís was ordered by the viceroy Conde de Revilla

\textsuperscript{27} Quote in Ydoiaga’s Report, 100.  
\textsuperscript{28} Kelley, Rábago y Terán, and Ydoiaga in Ydoiaga’s Report; xiv-xv, 82, 91-93, 100-101; Daniel, “La Junta and the Despoblado, 153.  
\textsuperscript{29} Kelley in Ydoiaga’s Report, xv; Faulk, “Presidio: Fortress or Farce,” 70-71.
Gigedo to find a suitable location for a presidio in La Junta. Celís successfully journeyed to La Junta where he found what he believed to be a location capable of supporting a large number of troops. Celís also scouted out other possible locations for presidios outside of La Junta, which he reported to the viceroy upon his return. Celís’s plan, like the presidio plans before his, was tabled after a brief respite in violence in Nueva Vizcaya in the 1750s. This peace was short lived, and in 1759 Celís once again headed to La Junta to establish a presidio.30

Construction of the first presidio in La Junta began on Christmas Day, 1759. Called Presidio de Bethlehem, the fort is believed to have been built on the Texas side of the Rio Grande about four miles downstream of the junction of the rivers. This presidio was not a large scale structure like those that were built by the Spanish after 1772. Instead, when completed on July 22, 1760 it provided housing to the soldiers stationed within its walls and not much else.31

That day, a group of Indians, including many Apaches, descended upon the presidio with the declared intent of celebrating its completion. However, their true purpose was to attack the fortification, which they did the next morning. The Indian group was repelled by the Spaniards, but fearing another attack they sent for reinforcements. A force of one hundred men arrived from Nueva Vizcaya. In response to the Spanish military presence and the constant Apache depredations, many Indians fled La Junta at this time and did not return. The sedentary and partially Hispanicized Indians appear to have been leaving the region for some time, and the construction of a presidio quickened their exodus. La Junta became relatively peaceful for the next few years.

years due to this decrease in population. While the presidio would be occupied for a short time, it would be abandoned in 1767.\footnote{Morganthaler, \textit{La Junta de los Ríos}, 122-123.}

Spanish frontier policy changed in the 1760s. Before this time, “presidios or military bases, most of them fortified, had eclipsed missions to become the dominant institution on Spain’s North American frontiers.” However, like with the mission system, the presidio was often ineffective in pacifying nomadic and semi-nomadic Indians. In Nueva Vizcaya, Apache incursions continued in spite of the presidio in La Junta. In response to the Apaches and other threats, the Crown sent the Marqués de Rubí to assess the situation on the northern frontier of New Spain. Rubí had been in the Americas only two years, but was an experienced military veteran. He began his journey to the frontier in March of 1766.\footnote{Weber, \textit{Spanish Frontier}, 212.}

Rubí’s journey took him throughout New Mexico, Sonora, Nueva Vizcaya, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Texas. All along the frontier, the Marqués saw the rampant devastation wrought on Spanish possessions by the Apaches and Comanches. At La Junta he found that the presidio had recently been abandoned on orders from the governor of Nueva Vizcaya. Rubí did not remain in La Junta for very long but noted that adjacent Indian communities had been abandoned due to Apache depredations. The Marques returned to Mexico City on February 23, 1768.\footnote{Weber, \textit{Spanish Frontier}, 212; For a complete account of Rubí’s expedition including his time at La Junta, see Sidney B. Brinckerhoff and Odie B. Faulk, \textit{Lancers for the King: A study of the Frontier Military System of Northern New Spain} (Phoenix: Arizona Historical Foundation, 1965).}

Rubí’s assessment of the situation on the frontier was grim. He noted that the Indians, particularly those of the plains, had adapted to Spanish methods of making war, had become better armed, and were mounted like never before. Presidios
developed to combat these Indians were situated without a master plan, and were poorly manned and supplied. Pedro de Rivera’s expedition to the frontier in the 1720s had seen many of the same problems Rubí encountered forty years later. However, the Regulations of 1729, written based on Rivera’s observations, were often ignored and were largely ineffective. Rubí proposed a series of changes to this previous policy.35

With regards to defense, Rubí believed that a line of presidios should be built along the 30th parallel from Altar, Sonora, to La Bahía in Texas. They were to be separated by one hundred leagues and would have flying squadrons to both patrol between and, when necessary support neighboring presidios. Of the Spanish settlements that existed outside of Rubí’s proposed line, all were to be abandoned except for Santa Fe and San Antonio. Presidios were to be built in areas where there was adequate pasture and water. They would be constructed in a square shape with towers that could provide covering fire along the presidio’s wall. The Marques also called for better training and equipment, with every presidial soldier being armed with leather armor, a lance, and a functioning firearm. These solutions were outlined in the New Regulations of 1772. But while these policies may have been effective in a European scenario, “they fell short of a prescription for containing Indian raiders who enjoyed numerical superiority and had few fixed positions to attack.”36

La Junta was chosen to be the site of one of Rubí’s new presidios. The actual task of building the presidio fell to Hugo O’Conor, an Irishman who had found employ in the Spanish army. O’Conor believed that Rubí’s plan to form a defensive line with presidios was sound, and because of this, he shut down presidios in Nueva Vizcaya

35 Kessell, Spain in the Southwest, 259; Weber, Spanish Frontier, 212-214.
that would end up inside the defensive line. O’Conor scouted the location of the La Junta presidio in May of 1773, and it was built and occupied by November of 1773.37

The presidio that was constructed is referred to by different names in different sources. O’Conor referred to it simply as Presidio de la Junta de los Ríos. Most sources, however, identify the fortification as Presidio Del Norte, an abbreviation of El Presidio de los Ríos del Norte y Conchos. Presidio Del Norte was built at the site of present-day Ojinaga. It was likely constructed in the same manner as the nearby San Vicente and San Carlos presidios. They were both four sided and had a chapel, garden, corral, and chicken coop within their walls. Rubí’s designs called for two palisades on opposite corners of the presidio for the purpose of firing along the structure’s walls. Presidio Del Norte’s soldiers were responsible for patrolling the Rio Grande from the El Príncipe Presidio to the San Carlos Presidio. Manuel Muñoz was designated captain of Del Norte with Juan Carmona and Juan Cortés serving as his officers. The Presidio was designated a budget of 18,998.6 pesos, and was intended to support 57 men and 252 horses.38

Under Rubí and O’Conor’s plans, the new line of presidios was meant not only to be defensive installations, but also a place from which offensive campaigns could be waged. Rubí supported a policy that called for peace with all Indians except the Apaches. The Marqués and many others believed that the only way to deal with the Apaches was through war. In fact, O’Conor himself engaged the Apaches in many campaigns. In 1776, Teodoro de Croix was appointed Commandant General of the

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38 O’Conor, Defenses, 76, 97.
Interior Provinces. He disagreed with O’Conor and Rubí on a number of points, including the idea of a presidial line but agreed with their Apache policy. In fact, Croix virtually called for extermination of the Apaches. This policy would never be implemented, however, because Croix overestimated New Spain’s ability to make war. 39

Croix, however, liked O’Conor’s choice to place a presidio at La Junta. In summary, he believed the presidio “was very useful in defending [Nueva Vizcaya] and its own neighboring missions, in gathering forces for campaigns against eastern Apache, and in communicating with Coahuila.” In 1779, Presidio Del Norte served in the Hispanicization process in a new, unique way. Mescalero Apaches, who were suffering from attacks by Lipans and the Spanish, petitioned the captain of Presidio del Norte for peace. They promised to settle in one of La Junta’s abandoned pueblos, and learn to farm and build houses from a group of sedentary Indians. The presidio captain, Muñoz, supported the Mescaleros using Spanish funding until their settlement was complete. While it initially appeared that the Apaches were adapting to the sedentary life at La Junta, they soon returned to their nomadic ways and came to the region only periodically. Soon after, Spain began an aggressive military campaign aimed at subjugating all Apache nations. Using a pretext that the Mescaleros had been involved in an attack on a Spaniard, the soldiers at Presidio Del Norte drove the Indians from La

Junta. While this initial attempt to settle Apaches at La Junta failed, it would not be the last.  

Bernardo Gálvez became viceroy in of New Spain in 1785. Gálvez had seen the effectiveness of French policy in Louisiana, and believed that it could be adapted for use on New Spain’s northern frontier. In his *Instructions of 1786*, Gálvez called for continuing the war on the Apaches, allying one band of Indians against another, and making Indians dependent on the Spanish. The latter was to be accomplished by supplying Indians with alcohol and faulty firearms that required Spanish craftsmanship and ammunition. The policy also called for making peace with Indians willing to give up their nomadic way of life. Similar in many ways to Captain Muñoz’s attempt to deal with the Mescaleros, Indians in this system would be expected to settle near a presidio where they would be taught how to farm and live a sedentary life by presidial soldiers. Indians were also to be given a weekly supply of rations in exchange for continuing to remain sedentary. These *establecimientos de paz*, as the settlements came to be known, were a precursor to the Indian reservations of the United States.  

The 1780s were marked by a period of bloody warfare on New Spain’s northern frontier. Desperate Apaches constantly raided Spanish settlements for livestock, firearms, and captives. The Spanish replied to these depredations with warfare on the Apaches that bordered on genocide. While the *New Instructions of 1786* called for making peace with Indians willing to live sedentary lives, some commanders in the field took liberties with the policy. One such commander was Juan de Ugalde, who would

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play a role in La Junta’s history. Ugalde and Jacobo de Ugarte, a more practical commander, were in charge of implementing Spanish policy along the frontier and staging campaigns against aggressive Apaches. They did so with efficiency and by 1790 much of the frontier was at peace.\(^42\)

La Junta was at the center of conflict during this period. Mescalero Apaches had suffered defeats as the hands of the Spanish, and were desperate for peace. La Junta was under the official jurisdiction of Ugarte from 1786-90, but a confusing power structure also gave Ugalde authority in the region. In 1787, one band arranged to meet with the Spanish in order to negotiate their surrender and resettlement. But, they were reluctant to travel to La Junta after being driven from the region years before. After consulting Ugarte, conditions of the Mescaleros surrender were dictated. These included the return of Spanish captives and the cessation of raids on Spanish possessions. In addition, the Mescaleros were to settle near Presidio Del Norte where they would farm under Spanish supervision. They would receive a weekly stipend, but would be required to join the Spaniards in campaigns against non-complaint Indians. The Mescaleros agreed to these conditions, and on March 29, 1787, three hundred families arrived in La Junta.\(^43\)

As with the first effort to settle Mescaleros at La Junta, this attempt was doomed to failure. There were many reasons for this. At La Junta, the Apaches were starving and they asked the presidio’s commander if they could go to the nearby hills to hunt and gather food. Going against establecimiento policy, the commander agreed. Juan de Ugalde had begun a campaign against Mescaleros prior to their settlement at La Junta.

\(^42\) For an account of Spain’s efforts to pacify the Mescalero Apaches, see Moorhead’s *Apache Frontier*, Chapters 9-10; Moorhead, *Presidio*, 252-253.
\(^43\) Moorhead, *Apache Frontier*, 207-212.
When he encountered one of their bands, he attacked. From them Ugalde learned of
the surrender, but in spite of their claim, and later orders from Ugarte to stop, he
continued his campaign against the Mescaleros. Ugalde seemed to be upset that the
truce was halting his extermination campaign. His attacks and refusal to release his
Indian captives drove many of the peaceful bands near La Junta away. Still other
groups that stayed at La Junta were allowed to leave for the hunting season and did not
return. There were only a few bands of Mescaleros left at Presidio Del Norte when a
new viceroy dictated that the Indians were to be moved to a presidio in Santa Rosa,
where they would be under the jurisdiction of Ugalde. Faced with the prospect of living
under the man who had killed and captured many of their relatives, the remaining
Mescaleros fled La Junta.44

The Mescaleros continued to attack and raid Spanish settlements for the next
three years, but in 1790 they once again petitioned for peace. Thankfully for them, the
sensible Ugarte had assumed power over the whole of the northern frontier. One
thousand Mescaleros arrived at Presidio Del Norte, intent on trying establecimiento life
once again. By this time, the Spanish had adapted their expectations. They knew that
the Mescaleros would not give up hunting completely, so they only required that adult
males leave their families in La Junta during the hunting season. They were also
allowed to settle outside the immediate vicinity of the presidio. While some Mescaleros
accepted establecimiento life, others did not. There were still reports of Mescalero raids
in Nueva Vizcaya in the 1790s, and in 1795 many Mescaleros fled La Junta and

44 Moorhead, Apache Frontier, Chapter 9.
returned to fighting the Spanish. Those who remained, however, eventually became acculturated to farming and adapted to sedentary life.⁴⁵

Presidio Del Norte was still standing at the end of the colonial period, although it had likely been abandoned sometime before. Still, many of the presidios soldiers and their families stayed to farm or ranch the fertile soil of La Junta. They and their children interacted and interrelated with the Indians of the area. While some of these Indians were descended from the region early sedentary agriculturalists, most were Mescalero Apaches brought to La Junta as part of Spain’s establecimiento system. Over time, however, miscegenation erased tribal and racial differences and the people of La Junta simply became Hispanic.

To conclude, the sedentary Indians of La Junta had been the target of Apache attacks long before Rubi’s expedition and the construction of a presidio. The relative wealth of the region and the presence of European goods obtained from trade and working for the Spanish, were enticing to Apache raiders. The La Juntans, who could not defend themselves as well as the Spanish, were easy targets. While sedentary La Juntans managed to survive for a period, many soon died off, moved closer to Spanish settlements, or joined other tribes. With only a small population to grow crops and trade, there were few goods to steal. Because of this, Apaches turned south towards the Spanish towns in Nueva Vizcaya. In effect, La Junta served as a buffer for the Spanish against the Apaches until the middle of the eighteenth century. With their protection gone, an alternate form of defense was needed.

Plans for building a presidio at La Junta began long before actual construction would occur. The Spanish recognized the strategically valuable location of La Junta,

and the ability of the region to sustain agriculture at a level that would support a
presidio’s soldiers and their families. But, need was not sufficient to warrant a presidio’s
cost until Apache raids became intolerable in Nueva Vizcaya. In 1760, a presidio was
finally constructed. Like with many of New Spain’s frontier presidios, it was poorly
supplied and managed, and was soon abandoned. After the Marqués de Rubí’s
inspection tour, a second presidio was constructed in La Junta. This presidio supported
a small community made up of soldiers and their families, and served as the head of an
establecimiento for Mescalero Apaches. Soon, Indians and Spaniards began to
peacefully coexist.

La Junta was largely abandoned by its Hispanicized Indians in the middle of the
eighteenth century. A presidio was the best way to repopulate the area with a Hispanic
population. It could defend against depredations and came with its own Hispanicized
residents. Without the presidio, Apaches would have likely used La Junta as a staging
ground for raids into Nueva Vizcaya, and the area may have stayed in their hands until
the arrival of Anglos. The presidio ensured that La Junta became Hispanicized and
stayed that way throughout the colonial period.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Spain began to lose control of its American empire. Wars in Europe occupied most of the Crown’s attention and sapped the Spanish treasury. In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte successfully invaded Spain and installed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. In the Americas, Creole elites used the French takeover as an opportunity to expand their power. While the Spanish Crown was soon restored, it was too late for Spain to reassert control over its colonies. Independence movements soon began across Latin America. In Mexico, rebels under Agustín de Iturbide successfully defeated federal forces and installed their own government. In 1821, the Treaty of Córdoba was signed, recognizing Mexican independence.¹

Little is known about La Junta de los Ríos from the time of Mexican Independence to after the Mexican-American War. By 1830, the region ceased to be known as La Junta de los Ríos and was instead referred to as Presidio Del Norte. Texas independence came and went with no military actions occurring in the La Junta area. In 1839, the Chihuahua Trail was established, passing through La Junta on its way from Chihuahua City to Missouri. Nomadic Apaches were still seen in La Junta, but they were soon replaced by Comanches, who were being pushed west by Anglos moving into Texas.²

The U.S-Mexico War established the Rio Grande as the official border between the United States and Mexico. While the border ran through La Junta, the residents of the area continued to cross the river with little regard to its meaning as a boundary. Ben Leaton became the first Anglo resident of La Junta when he moved to the Texas side of the Rio Grande and established a trading post. Fort Leaton, as it came to be called, served as a government seat and a de facto military base for the next fifty years. In 1849 and 1850, La Junta was the site of two Comanche raids that nearly led to the abandonment of the region. The area adjacent to the Rio Grande on its Mexican side was named Ojinaga in 1867, in honor of martyred Juarista governor Manuel Ojinaga. In 1868, Presidio, on the United States side of the Rio Grande, received its first post office, and in 1887 the first public school was opened.³

During the Mexican Revolution, Ojinaga was the site of four different battles in which revolutionary leader Francisco “Pancho” Villa fought federal forces for control of the town. In 1930, Presidio was incorporated after the arrival of the Kansas City, Mexico, and Orient Railway. From this point forward, the population of Presidio and Ojinaga grew steadily. The La Junta area became famous for its melons and onions, and agriculture continued to be the main economic focus on both sides of the river until the late 1990s. Recent border restrictions that prevent Mexican workers from crossing the Rio Grande to work in the United States have diminished the output of Presidio’s farms, but Ojinaga continues to profit from agriculture. A 2000 census of Presidio indicated a population of 4,167, while a 2005 census showed the population of the Municipality of Ojinaga to be 21,157.⁴

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The Spanish entered the New World with idealized visions. First, they sought kingdoms of gold to exploit for their own benefit. After taking control of these kingdoms, they hoped to teach the people of the Americas to be good Catholics and loyal Spanish citizens. They sought to do so because there were not enough persons of Spanish ancestry who would defend and willingly perform the labor required of a functional empire. Spain initially believed that the threat of violence and the enticement of European goods and the Spanish way of life would have Indians willing submit to Hispanicization. Early victories in the Americas confirmed this view, but idealism soon gave way to reality, and Spain was forced to adapt to the changing dynamics of the New World.

Spain employed different institutions to Hispanicize the Indians of the New World. Its methods changed with time and circumstance. First, Spain used force to subjugate Indians in the form of the conquistador. Conquistadors were effective in subduing large populations of Indians, but they did little to bring smaller groups into Spanish control. The missionary was employed for this purpose. Missionaries were sent out to live among Indians and teach the tenets of Catholicism and the Spanish way of life. Presidios were used to provide defense for missions and Spanish settlements and were meant to serve as a means of bringing hostile Indians under Spanish control. Civilian settlers supported the Hispanicization process by interacting with Indians and providing an access to European goods.

On the edge of the Spanish frontier, La Junta did not become truly Hispanicized until near the end of the colonial era. This was due to the region’s unique environment, and the presence of both sedentary and semi-sedentary Indians. These dynamics
prevented the Spanish from implementing a consistent policy for La Junta, and they made the region a unique study.

The conquistador, civilian settler, missionary, and presidial soldier all took a part in the Hispanicization process at La Junta. Other motivations prevented conquistadors from staying long at La Junta, and because of this they were successful in introducing Spanish customs to La Junta, but they did not Hispanicize or subjugate the area’s inhabitants. Civilian settlers, for their part, had the greatest amount of contact with the Indians of La Junta, and it was through them that La Junta’s early inhabitants learned to both emulate and detest the Spanish. There was extensive missionary activity at La Junta, but it did not result in the large-scale Hispanicization of La Junta’s Indians. The presence of a presidio drove many of La Junta’s Indians away, but it later served to create a community based on the Spanish way of life. While some of these groups met with greater success than others, by the end of the colonial era La Junta bore greater resemblance to a Spanish settlement than to an Indian community.

The legacy of the Spanish Colonial Period can be seen in Presidio today, in spite of it having been a part of the United States for over 150 years. In the Twenty-second Census of the United States, 94 percent of Presidio’s population listed their heritage as Hispanic or Latino. While English is used in schools and government buildings, most of the city’s population speaks Spanish as their first language. The city’s churches are mostly Catholic, and most of area’s residents still scribe to this faith. Across the Rio Grande in Ojinaga, the Spanish legacy is even more evident. Many buildings are designed in the Spanish style, and the city is still centered on the site of the Presidio Del Norte. Testaments to the region’s Indian ancestors can be found in La Junta, including a
sign that bears the proclamation “Apache People,” and several tourism billboards depicting Indian fighters. These signs, however, merely speak to a bygone era. Indian La Junta is history, while Spanish La Junta remains today.
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