



A Bad Peace and a Good War: Spain and the Mescalero Apache Uprising of 1795–1799 by Mark Santiago.

Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2018. Pp. xii, 248. ISBN 978-0-8061-6155-6.

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Unlike most historians of the Spanish borderland in 1795–99, Mark Santiago (New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum) argues that, while Apaches, Comanches, and other groups were living peacefully along the Mexican border with the United States, the lands of the Mescalero Apaches in Texas and New Mexico were aflame with violence. Chafing against Spanish control and seeing economic opportunities in raiding, the Mescalero launched a series of uncoordinated attacks against Spanish settlements. Commandant General Pedro de Nava, in charge of security for the “Internal Provinces” in the Greater Southwest, relished the mission of eliminating Apache aggression and preventing future conflicts. In *A Bad Peace and a Good War*, Santiago examines the checkered history of the Spanish military against their will-o’-the-wisp enemies.

The author is deeply familiar with the era and particulars of his subject¹ and solidly grounded in the pertinent primary sources. Furthermore, his detailed study of military operations in his period of interest has present-day implications. His goal is

to include as many individuals as possible within this story and to bring forth the ideas and environments that impacted the course of their actions.... I have also attempted to flesh out the personalities and actions of the Spanish participants in these events. The latter has proven a much easier task, in that many of the officers and not a few of the common soldiers left service records that provide personal details. Both the detailed records of the Spaniards and the correspondingly sparse references to the Mescaleros have ... been a vehicle through which the terrible face of war, even one so little understood and so long forgotten as this, could be distilled to a recognizable, if elemental, humanity. This ... makes the story of the Mescalero war and the recollection of its participants worth telling. (9)

Before reaching the “bad peace,” there had to be a “good war,” good being a relative term. Santiago’s account of how Nava defeated his foes will ring true to students of Anglo-American military campaigns against Native Americans on the Plains and in the Southwest over the nineteenth century. For instance, the Spanish did what they could to sow discord among the Mescaleros, while using scouts and fighters from other Apache bands or Oyata auxiliaries to ferret out relatively small groups of 20–150 men, women, and children. The Comanches, like the Opatas, were traditional enemies who knew just how to hurt the Mescaleros: that is, drive them off the Plains in the summer and fall, disrupting the traditional buffalo hunts they conducted to secure food for the winter.

Long Spanish expeditions multiplied the Apaches’ misery and forced them to stay ever vigilant and on the move, especially in the winter, when the Indians suffered from reduced mobility, the destruction of their food supplies and shelters, limited access to seasonal food sources and pro-

1. His earlier work includes *The Jar of Severed Hands: Spanish Deportations of Apache Prisoners of War, 1770–1810* (Norman: U Okla Pr, 2011).

tected sites, and the need to defend large numbers of noncombatants. (The Spanish made little distinction between warriors and women and children.)

Nava was also blessed with aggressive commanders happy to pursue the enemy and whittle away their ranks in endless small-unit skirmishes. Many Indians surrendered and moved to Spanish-controlled settlements for both food and shelter—both often in short supply. Captives were marched to Mexico City, moved to the coast, and shipped to Cuba and or elsewhere in the Caribbean to live out short, brutish lives of slave labor before succumbing to the foreign environment and harsh treatment.

On a wider front, the Spaniards had their own problems in maintaining a bad peace. Once Apache groups surrendered and resettled in peace communities on the outskirts of Spanish towns, they had the choice of existing on the scanty dole of their neighbors or leaving the reservation and joining relatives and friends living free but perilous lives beyond military protection.

A growing concern for the Spanish was their wars with England and other European countries that started on the far side of the globe but often spread to the Americas. Spain had to reallocate resources to wage war closer to home, living in fear of invasion and the closing of shipping lanes. And, too, the fledgling United States was actively seeking control of New Orleans and the Mississippi River, as well as lands within New Spain's internal provinces. The relocation of men and materiel away from the frontier weakened Spanish defenses against encroaching overland forces. This bad peace was fraught with intractable problems: keeping the Mescalero settled, guarding a vast area against invasion, and dealing with other upstart Native American groups. Santiago tallies the results of the myriad skirmishes, raids, and ambushes over this period:

The Mescaleros' constant losses from Spanish raids into regions beyond the frontier, and the terrible certainty of deportation, ensured that a substantial number of Indians remained attached to the peace establishments. By the end of the year 1800, approximately three hundred men, women, and children remained officially registered outside five presidios in Nueva Vizcaya, but exactly what percentage these Mescalero de paz [peace] represented of the entire tribe is difficult to calculate. But the actual numbers did not reflect accurately the impact the Spaniards exerted on these people. For every individual registered in the peace establishments, there were probably an equal or greater number that remained in the hinterland. Yet these "free" Mescaleros were continuously subjected to overwhelming pressure from Spanish bases.... The lesson ... had been driven home by the dreadful four years of war they had recently endured—accept the terms of the bad peace rather than risk the terrors of the good war. (193)

Mark Santiago's engaging and valuable new study holds lessons for students and historians of the Spanish borderlands and small-unit military operations, but also for anyone interested in twenty-first-century irregular and guerrilla warfare.