The People

The publication of this book was made
possible by generous support from the
S. J. and Jessie E. Quinney Foundation
Words and Photographs
by Stephen Trimble

SAR PRESS SANTA FE
SCHOOL OF AMERICAN RESEARCH
The People

Indians of the American Southwest
White Mountain Apache Gaan dancers, 1906. These impersonators of the mountain spirits are also called crown dancers. They come to girls’ puberty ceremonies, often at night, to dance with the girl, casting startling shadows beyond the circle of the bonfires. Photo by Edward Curtis. (Smithsonian Institution photo no. 76-6283)
Ojo Caliente is my home. All of my people so far as I can remember have lived there. It is my country. I have not forgotten it. I was taken away from there for no reason whatever. Loco, who was my grandfather and a chief, was moved from there for no cause. From that time until the time of his death here at Fort Sill he always asked to be sent back to Ojo Caliente. Now I am asking for that country myself.

From San Carlos they took me to Fort Apache. We had trouble at San Carlos and Fort Apache both. Both of these times we were on land belonging to other Indians. From Fort Apache I was sent to St. Augustine, Florida. At St. Augustine I was told that my way was a bad one, that my thoughts and life had been bad, to put it away from me, get away from it and go to school and learn the ways of the white people. They sent me to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. When I got back to Alabama I found lots of my people from Ojo Caliente there. In Alabama lots of them died. They brought us from Alabama to Fort Sill and there was lots of them died here. But they gave us strong words, strong thoughts. And they stayed in our hearts and are there today.

Talbot Goody, Chiricahua Apache. Fort Sill, Oklahoma, 22 August 1909

Smoke drifts along the northern shore of Stone Lake, wafting from tipis sculpted from white canvas. Red or white pennants flutter high from ridgepoles, the streamers crackling in the breeze in colors that signify the Jicarilla Apache Ollero and Llanero bands. Each family camp has an additional square canvas tent, a pickup truck or two, maybe a tent-trailer, a shade of oak boughs. Against the hillside of grass golden in early morning light and the gray-green sagebrush wet and aromatic from a dawn rain, turquoise portable toilets gleam like gemstones.

At my own camp across this lake in northernmost New Mexico, I catch snatches of singing—the higher pitch of the lead answered by the voices of the chorus. Songs to the sun and the moon, to the rain, to the clouds trailing black tendrils over the bluffs and through the Jicarilla encampment. I hear meadowlarks, ravens, ducks, an occasional exalted whoop from a singer, cars and chain saws revved. A great blue heron hunts in the shallows.

This annual three-day Jicarilla encampment brings long life and health to all participants. Tom Vigil, a Jicarilla singer, calls it “the Jicarilla New Year’s, Mardi Gras, and state fair, combined.” The high point is the 15 September relay race between Ollero and Llanero teams that ensures a beneficent harvest—and a food supply balanced
between the animals (and sun) of the white Olleros and the plants (and moon) of the red Llaneros.

So much of these three days feels like an Apache camp must have felt in the old days. People walk from tent to tent, visiting, courting, sharing food. Horse-mounted, cowboy-hatted Apaches ride through camp exultant, following a man carrying a staff flagged with the white Ollero banner decorated with four red suns. Men lead pairs of ponies down to the water. One girl practices barrel racing in a corral. Teenagers ride to a ridgetop to watch the finish of a five-mile horse race, sitting astride their animals in dusty gold light, a tipi to the left, layers of junipers behind them leading to higher ridges dense with ponderosa pines and Gambel oaks, crested by creamy cliffs.

The women preside over the cooking fires, the men parade and boast and cheer the young boys running heats to determine the lead racers. I talk with a man who doesn’t want to return to his tent for fear his wife will “capture” him and he won’t have any more fun. Leaders bless the stones marking the racecourse — stones brought from the ancestral Jicarilla homeland around Cimarron, New Mexico — and offer them to the four directions.

This scene of vitality seems far removed from any common image of Apaches, who remain romanticized and misunderstood. Apaches still find photos of their sacred Mountain Spirit dancers captioned “Apache devil dancers.” Bookshelves of Apache literature focus mostly on the Apache Wars with the U.S. Army in the late 1800s. The names of Cochise, Geronimo, Naiche, Juh, and Victorio strike chills in people who know little more of these men than that they were reputed to be fierce and bloodthirsty. Narcissus Gayton, a Chiricahua Apache at Mescalero, says: “When you go off the reservation, you say you’re an Apache, and people say it couldn’t be true.”

The late San Carlos medicine man Philip Cassadore spoke to me of “urban Indians who only know they look like an Indian.” He said: “The movie industry has really destroyed our image. Even the word ‘Apache’ means ‘enemies’ and ‘warlike Indian.’ So everybody’s scared of us.

“White people call us Apache, but we call ourselves Ndee, the People. Apaches were happy when they were by themselves, way up in the mountains. Now, when they see all these push-button things, Apaches get confused. Should I be an Apache or should I join those people? Because they think that white people have more to offer. They think the Apache has nothing.

“I grew up with nothing. But there was love. There might be no food but there was love.”

Apaches have long been seen through the narrow lens of their success in war. In 1630, Fray Alonso de Benavides called them “a people very fiery and bellicose, and
very crafty in war." But he praised their upright morals, their value of chastity, and added that "they pride themselves much in speaking the truth."

I have found that truthfulness in abundance in today's Apaches. They have a forthright bluntness that is impressive, attractive — and challenging. Ned Anderson, former chairman at San Carlos, says: "To this day, if an Apache says something, that's the way it will be." (His opponents in tribal politics, of course, might not agree!)

These Apaches, not the ones in the movies, held an enormous territory against all comers for centuries. Though vanquished, they have not vanished. Twenty thousand Apaches remain in the Southwest. Fort Apache is the nation's third most populous reservation (as of 1990), San Carlos the seventh. They have their struggles, but they continue to strive, in the words of San Carlos artist Delmar Boni, to "stand for life, family, goodness, and understanding."

The People from the North

No one knows just when the Apaches arrived in the Southwest. The Apaches, of course, don't worry about such technicalities. They know they climbed into this land from the underworld, clambering up a cane stalk behind the Red Ants, the first people. They know that Yusn, the Life-Giver, created the Universe and that Changing Woman and her sons, Child Born of Water and Killer of Enemies, then prepared the earth for Ndee, the People. The two brothers later killed the Monsters. The Apaches know, too, that Coyote stole fire, loosed darkness, and made death inevitable. Anthropologist Morris Opler said in his study of the Chiricahuas: "All that man does 'Coyote did first.'"

Any stories about the failings shared by humans and Coyote (gluttony, lying, theft, lust, adultery, incest, and the rest) insult Coyote, a risky thing to do. Apaches end such stories with diversionary tactics, a pledge to Coyote that they really have been talking about something good.

I have told stories here about Coyote. I am talking about fruit.

When the world was simpler, power was everywhere. Any Apache could possess power and become a medicine person. Some had power from the Mountain People, involving them with the Mountain Spirit dancers, the Gaan. Others had curing powers (they knew how to give "good hope," in the words of one Apache) or knew the long song cycles of the creation story, to be sung for the girl's puberty ceremony.

These beliefs underlie the Apache lifeway. The people called Apache lived in extended families organized into local groups, which, in turn, were loosely tied together in bands. Neighboring bands with shared cultural traits came to be seen as tribes, but to the Apache, the local group was always the most important unit. "Chiefs" were
elected to lead these small groups (numbering about 35 to 200 people). They maintained their influence only as long as their counsel brought success to their followers in hunting, raiding, and warfare. Philip Cassadore said: "The person that give the most, that provide food for the most, was the one they call the leader. It's not a warrior that's called a leader, it's not a warrior that's called a chief—it's the one that really care for people, not kill people."

Chiefs wielded influence in long discussions that led to group decisions; their styles varied. Chiricahua historian Donald Cole writes of the leaders of his people: "Cochise led by sheer integrity and moral example. Geronimo held his followers by enigmatic behavior and examples of raw power. Victorio was successful as long as his sister Lozen's war power sustained him [and the remarkable warrior Lozen herself rode with Geronimo until the final surrender]. Juh, inhibited by a speech impediment, let others speak for him. Ulzana led by dash and Nana by stealth."

Delmar Boni says: "Leadership that we had a long time ago took spirituality, it took understanding for the mountain, it took those real simple things, getting up in the morning and the addressing of the Sun, towards family, towards sacred places where the clans came from. It took all these things. If you remove yourself from these basic elements, Indian leadership suffers."

From the shreds of evidence remaining on the land, in dialectical differences in Apache language, and from their best hunches, anthropologists have structured a timeline for the differentiation of the Apaches after their arrival in the Southwest. By 1300, the group called Kiowa-Apache broke off to become Plains people, in historic times living in Oklahoma as allies of the Kiowa. The remaining migrating Apaches moved into the Southwest, probably about A.D. 1400.

At first, they hunted buffalo at the margins of the mountains. The Western Apache (the San Carlos, White Mountain, Cibecue, and Tonto people of central Arizona) and the Navajo seem to have moved westward early. The Lipan and Jicarilla Apache were not in contact with them after 1600, themselves dividing to set up territories in the west Texas plains and northern New Mexico mountains, respectively.

Mescalero and Chiricahua Apache people moved into southern New Mexico by the early seventeenth century. By the time Spaniards wrote of them, the prosperous Mescalero held the land east of the Rio Grande to the Pecos River and beyond, venturing out onto the plains for an annual buffalo hunt. The Chiricahua roamed west of the great river into southeastern Arizona and northern Mexico.

The Navajo became a tribe distinct from all other Apaches, picking up strong doses of Pueblo culture—though only a century has passed since outsiders called them "Navajo Apaches." All the rest of these peoples remain Apaches: Ndee.
Apacheans moved into Pueblo country late, after the Anasazi had abandoned their great cliff dwellings and moved to the Rio Grande, to Hopi, Zuni, and Acoma. Initially, Pueblo and Apache seem to have adapted to one another peacefully. When the Spaniards arrived, Apaches lived in the mountains surrounding the Pueblo villages; Apache warriors immediately began raiding the newcomers for food and horses.

The Knowledgeable People

"Nomads — always going and going. They're a very knowledgeable people; they don't get lost."

This is how White Mountain Apache museum director Edgar Perry describes his people — living in their chosen homelands, moving with the seasons. About 25 percent of the Western Apache diet came from their fields. Women did most of the gathering and the limited work in farm plots, generating the basics of life; men did most of the hunting, providing meat for the women to cook. Men led raids for food and stock and conducted war for revenge. Women set up camp, in the mountains building wickiups (gowa — also the word for family) and on the plains erecting tipis. Either sex could conduct ceremonies and curing rites, obtaining power from the earth, from dreams — though most specialists in ritual were men. Both men and women carried on the oral narrative traditions.

Apache families were structured around women; sisters and daughters lived together throughout their lives. Men entered the group by marriage. For Western Apaches, membership in one of the sixty clans further tied families together: Philip Cassadore said: "Clan is Apache way. Band is white man's description." Wesley Bonito, from Fort Apache, says: "Cousins go on and on and on — the extended family goes on forever!" These relationships formed the basis of Apache life; an Apache living alone was inconceivable.

Each year the plants gave their gifts to the people, who moved camp with the seasons and harvests. The Chiricahua named the year's divisions in accordance with these cycles of growth, from the "Many Leaves" time of late spring to "Thick with Fruit" in late summer to the "Ghost Face" of winter.

One year was "one harvest": yucca shoots, tule roots, yucca flowers, roasted mesquite, locust flowers, wild onion, ponderosa pine bark, sumac berries, juniper berries, strawberries, chokecherries, wild potatoes, mulberries, pitahaya cactus, screwbean mesquite, saguaro fruit, datil yucca fruit, prickly pear, mesquite, walnuts, piñon nuts, greens, acorns, grasses, amaranth, sunflower seeds, tule pollen, honey.
Jeannette Larzeere’s puberty ceremony, Whiteriver, Arizona, 1984. An older woman sponsors and instructs the White Mountain Apache girl as she dances through four days of ritual. Anyone attending the ceremony may bless the girl with sacred cattail pollen, and, in turn, ask her to share her power and blessing.

One conspicuous affirmation of power in the Apache universe came when a young woman reached puberty, when the entire community danced her into adulthood. During this time, the girl became Changing Woman, White Painted Woman, the progenitor of all humans; with her power the girl could cure those blessing her. As a raiding initiate, a young man became Child Born of Water—just as a pubescent girl became Changing Woman.

Today, not every Apache girl has a naí’es, a “getting her ready” ceremony. Not every modernApache girl wants one; not every family can afford the costs (as much as several thousand dollars); not every family believes it appropriate. But for the Apache girls who go through the ceremony, it is an unforgettable experience. In Philip Cassadore’s words: “During this four days is the most important part of her life.” Elbys Hugar, at Mescalero, recalled that importance when she spoke to writer Henrietta Stockel, looking back from the age of fifty-nine: “It’s still part of me and it’s going to
be that way for the rest of my life. I’ll never forget the good it did for me and how it helped me over the hardships.”

“Traveling on the medicine man’s chants,” the girl becomes Changing Woman and acquires the longevity and desirable qualities of this powerful being. The girl dances with a feather-decorated cane which absorbs the power of the ceremony; when she is an old woman she may use this same cane as a walking stick, to give her strength. An abalone shell hangs from her forehead, representing the shell in which Changing Woman survived a great flood to become the first Apache.

First, she dances alone, then she kneels, dancing as Changing Woman danced when the Sun impregnated her before the birth of Monster Slayer. An older woman, unrelated and with unquestionable reputation, sponsors and instructs the girl as she dances through the four days. The sponsor massages the girl, who is malleable like wet clay, to mold her into a strong woman. The girl runs to the four directions, and the gathered community runs behind her, running through the four stages of life, to ensure she will live through each of them.

Persons attending the Sunrise Dance may bless the girl with sacred cattail pollen, and, in turn, may ask the girl to share her power and bless them. According to anthropologist Keith Basso, the Apaches ask for everything from rain and good harvests to help for keeping out of trouble “my son in Dallas, learning to be a barber.”

The Gaan, the Mountain Spirit dancers, come to dance with the girl at night, casting huge shadows beyond the bonfires. Finally, on the last morning, the girl is painted with earth to give her the power of the earth, and the assembled people dance behind her through the ceremonial tipi, made from the four kinds of wood lightning cannot strike.

“In the Apache, there is no adolescence. They just become a woman.” This is the way Philip Cassadore summed up the significance of the ceremony he sang. In watching a puberty ceremony at Whiteriver with him, I was moved by the power and good will of the group assembled to dance the girl into womanhood. Cassadore said: “Everyone is in one accord, for the girl.” And it remains so, despite whatever other reasons people might have for attending: free food, alcohol, courting, partying.

The Apaches still have power, and each girl undergoing her nai’es still acquires the mythic power of Changing Woman. A few weeks after her ceremony, I saw Jeannette Larzelere, the girl I had photographed during those four days, in jeans and t-shirt instead of ceremonial buckskins, at the Apache Tribal Fair. Walking with her friends, she still looked transfigured.

Philip Cassadore’s power as a medicine man, a dityin, came from his knowledge of the song cycle for the girl’s puberty ceremony. He said: “My stories are Apache, from older Apaches. What they know is hundreds of years old. I ask older people if I’m
doing it right. That’s how you learn. That’s how you keep it the way it was a thousand years ago. It will be taken away if it’s not done right."

A singer like Cassadore first gained power by a sign ("power finds you"), not from a teacher ("you find power"). He told me: "You hear voices from another world if you become a medicine man. I am here, but when I look at the cloud, that’s where I’m at. I’m up there with those medicine people. When the thunder and lightning come close, they’re talking to me. When the thunder roll, it goes inside me. The closer it comes, the better I feel. I have a lightning shield — all around me."

The greatest source of power is the Sun. Edgar Perry says: "East is very important because it’s a direction that represents the Sun, the moon, the stars, the darkness, the day. The first thing that hits the Apaches in the face in the morning is the Sun. It’s like getting up with God."

Delmar Boni adds: "When the Sun sets in the evening, we can put all the things aside — obstacles, misunderstandings — put it behind. The Sun will bless us before we take our rest for the evening. And then the Sun greets us again in the morning. And the songs come out with a lot of strength and understanding."

A Cibecue Apache told Keith Basso: "You can’t talk about power like other things. You can’t hold it with words." The Apache maintain an intense intimacy with the powers of their world. Tom Vigil, at Jicarilla, says: "No one can see the world the way I see it, unless he’s experienced the world the way I have."

Edgar Perry, at Fort Apache, says: "The core of being Apache is the language. If you can’t speak Apache, you can’t think Indian." Ned Anderson explains this: "For everything you say in Apache, there is something it means absolutely — but you have to know the context to really know what it means."

At Mescalero, Evelyn Breuninger has been working on a dictionary for her people. She sat with me in front of her house and looked away at the forested horizon: "In the puberty ceremony, how do the sponsors tell the young maidens all the things you should know? In English you just can’t say some of these things." Lucille Shorten, San Carlos elder and councilwoman, says: "You need to know big words in Apache to understand big words in English. Learn English in school, put them together, and you’ll be smarter than anybody who just speaks English."

Sometimes silence matters most. Wesley Bonito, education director for Fort Apache, talked with me about how he "may speak at a meeting and no one says anything. That means approval. If they have an objection, they speak out. It could be a silent meeting, but yet it gets done. They observed." Lucille Shorten agrees: "I speak up in council only when I don’t approve."

Apaches “observing” can be unnerving to non-Apaches. The silent Apaches are neither uninterested, aloof, nor playing at being the stereotypical dignified and
impasive Indian. They are simply refraining from speaking because at times this is appropriate for an Apache. They are listening.

Delmar Boni’s advice for anyone going to a Sunrise Dance also has to do with silence and listening: “Be yourself; open up from your heart and your mind. Watch, be a part, see. Through that you can come to an understanding.” That understanding goes beyond the ritual itself to the core of what it means to be Apache.

**Apachería**

The Apaches set the northern limits to New Spain. Confrontation began early; when Apaches raided Spanish expeditions for horses, the soldiers retaliated, and by doing so brought down the brunt of Apache revenge in full-scale war expeditions.

The Spaniards, in turn, gave a name to the greater Apache homeland — Apachería — and to each Apache band they encountered. The Spaniards traded with the Apache but sold them into slavery, as well. Apaches felt they had to avenge such wrongs. Relationships among Pueblos, Apaches, and Spaniards deteriorated through the 1600s. Indeed, “Apache” may derive from a Zuni word for “enemy.”

Conflict came first in the south, in Sonora and Chihuahua. Apaches (and other lesser-known peoples evidently later absorbed by the Ndee) began raiding Spanish and Piman agricultural settlements for food and stock. By the early 1700s, the Apaches reigned north as far as Zuni. In this swath of land, the Spanish — and later the Mexicans — may have claimed sovereignty, but they had precious little to prove it. Apachería completely isolated the New Mexican settlements around Santa Fe from the Sonora-Chihuahua frontier.

Within this huge territory, the Apaches developed their culture through the eighteenth century; the roughest mountains in the Southwest became their strongholds. The Ndee treated the sedentary peoples as a crop, raiding whenever opportunity or need arose but never wiping them out — and refusing to fight in formal battles. As Edward Spicer put it, the line of Spanish presidios intended to protect the villagers “was a sieve through which the Apaches penetrated at will.”

Warfare and raiding distanced Apaches from the surrounding tribes. Each Apache group raided the larder nearest at hand. The Chiricahuas raided south into Mexico; Western Apaches raidied the Maricopa, O’odham, and Navajo; the Tonto Apache raided the Pai, Jicarilla and Mescalero raided Rio Grande Spanish and Pueblo settlements between more peaceful trading times. The Lipan plundered Texas.

Pressure from the Apaches weakened the Spaniards, contributing to the successful Pueblo Revolt of 1680. After the Spaniards reconquered New Mexico, the Camino
Real north from El Paso to Santa Fe came to be called the Jornada del Muerto, the "Journey of Death," for its risk of Mescalero Apache attack. In the early 1700s, however, the Comanches pushed south, inexorably reducing the lands of Lipan, Mescalero, and Jicarilla. These full-time raiders and hunters gained ground consistently from the Apache, who stubbornly continued to farm part of each year, making easy-to-locate targets.

After 1725, the Mescalero were forced into the mountains—and into relative poverty after their easy life as plains buffalo-hunters. Jicarilla were caught between expanding Comanche, Ute, and Navajo, and in a critical choice allied themselves with the Spaniards to stand some chance of survival. They lived close to Pueblo and Spanish villages from the 1720s on. Raids still occurred, alliances shifted, but the Spaniards were kept busy elsewhere—Christianizing the Pueblos and fighting the Chiricahua and Mescalero.

In 1786, after three generations of war, the Spanish Governor Bernardo de Galvez tried a new tack. His directions were cynical but effective (at least for some southern bands): make peace with the Apaches, persuade them to settle near presidios, feed them well, keep them drunk, give them rifles good enough for hunting but too rickety for war, stir up fighting between bands, and by any means necessary, keep them dependent.

After 1821, the struggling revolutionary government of Mexico could not afford to buy dependency as had Galvez. By 1835, the Apaches had demonstrated that the intervening years had not erased their raiding skills. Sonora and Chihuahua placed a bounty of one hundred dollars on every male Apache scalp. This desperate attempt to respond to the Apache warriors made for ineffective genocide, but it effectively aroused Apache hatred of Mexicans.

Chiricahua called those Ndee who trusted whites "the foolish people." Bloody encounters with scalp hunters ended the Apache custom of gathering in large winter encampments: such concentrations just weren't safe. Chiricahua ceased taking adult males as prisoners; instead, they generally began to turn them over to female relatives of slain Apache men for torture. War still raged when the United States took over Apachería in mid-century.

Tom Vigil, Jicarilla entrepreneur (owner/operator of the Jicarilla Inn in Dulce) spends considerable time thinking about who he is, about the history of his people. He says: "Too much of history is as we would like to remember it. We play right into the hands of the John Wayne movie. I refuse to accept the general notion that we have to be heroes."

"There is a story about some hungry Jicarillas killing some cows; all of a sudden
they were 'Jicarilla warriors.' The army ends up chasing a Jicarilla family that is just trying to avoid extermination: these were the wars. You chase me and my family around the hillside with the army, and I'll become a pretty good tactician real fast. You come into my house, and I'll become brave real fast.

"Those were the wars. That's our history."

Much of Apache life has been obscured behind the ruckus of such battles. The Apache Wars with the United States were a short, though pivotal, period in the People's long history—the only time well known, but a time as full of exaggeration and myth as any time. Apache identity actually has more to do with language and religion than warfare. As Daklugie, son of Juh and nephew of Geronimo, put it: "Religion is the one thing of which we cannot be deprived"—except perhaps by time, lost with the passing of the elders.

"A Good Day to Die"

When the United States assigned the first Indian agent to New Mexico Territory (which included modern Arizona) in 1847, there were about six to eight thousand Apaches ready to trade with the newcomers. The Americans had beaten the Apaches’ perpetual enemies, the Mexicans, so the People assumed that the Americans would be pleased to see the Apaches continue raiding their mutual enemy south of the border.

The Apaches reacted to the Americans’ vow to pacify them with surprise and disgust. Apaches could not survive without raiding, an uncomfortable fact even before Anglo settlers began to filter into the Southwest. Now that white appropriation of Indian lands began to disrupt traditional food-gathering rounds, raiding became even more crucial. As a group of Mescalero chiefs put the dilemma to an army quartermaster in 1850: "We must steal from somebody; and if you will not permit us to rob the Mexicans, we must steal from you or fight you."

The choices left to the Americans were three: exterminate the Apaches, feed them, or give them reservations and teach them to become self-sufficient. Historian C. L. Sonnichsen summed up these options from the perspective of the Apache: "Was he supposed to be a pensioner, a farmer, or a corpse?"

In the 1850s in New Mexico, the Jicarillas, the Sierra Blanca Mescaleros, and the eastern Chiricahuas (the latter known as Mimbreno, Warm Springs Apaches, and to the Ndee, as Chihene, Red Paint People) did their best to stay out of trouble. They signed treaties and were promised reservations and rations. They planted fields under the supervision of agents. But when the treaties went unratified and the government delivered neither protection nor adequate food, the Ndee were forced to raid.

Battles followed: Apaches would kill a settler’s family in a raid, soldiers would
massacre entire camps of (often innocent) Apaches in return, and Apaches would slaughter whites in retaliation. In the midst of this downward spiral, group after Apache group kept trying to pledge peace in return for food rations and payment for their lands.

In the 1860s, the turmoil of the Civil War reached the Southwest. Supply lines passed through the country of the southern Mescalero (in the Davis and Guadalupe mountains of west Texas), the eastern Chiricahua (the Mimbreno, led by Mangas Coloradas), and the central Chiricahuaas (the Chokonen, led by Cochise). When General James Carleton occupied New Mexico with Union forces in 1862, his aim was to keep the supply lines open; his method was to exterminate the Apaches.

By the spring of 1863, Carleton had forced the starving Mescaleros to leave their informal reservation in the Sierra Blanca and move to newly built Fort Sumner, at Bosque Redondo on the Pecos River. More than eight thousand Navajos joined the four hundred Mescaleros, and with each new wave of prisoners, the situation at Bosque Redondo grew worse.

The little grove of cottonwoods made a decent camp for a family but was no place for ten thousand people. Alkaline water, disease, crop failure, and inedible rations made Bosque Redondo a place of heartbreak and death.

On the night of 3 November 1865, the Mescaleros decided that they had had enough. All but nine ill or crippled Apaches escaped from Fort Sumner, scattered, and vanished into the mountains—for seven years. Big Mouth, who was at Bosque Redondo when he was a child, spoke to historian Eve Ball of returning to “our country and our freedom,” where “there was pure, cold water and plenty of wood and no worms, no bad smells, no Navajos, and no soldiers.”

On the western edge of Apachería, the Prescott gold strike of 1863 led the Tonto Apaches into the same tragic cycle of raid, murder, and massacre. By 1865, the army had built a string of forts across Apache country. They were no more effective than the Spanish presidios at preventing raids—and little better at protecting settlers. The forts did house plenty of troops ready for battle, however.

Tragic stupidities by individuals contributed immensely to the sad story. Miners at what became Silver City, New Mexico, bullwhipped Mangas Coloradas in 1860, turning him to war; Mangas was tricked into capture and murdered in 1862. An inexperienced Lieutenant George Bascom alienated Cochise, an immensely respected leader who otherwise might have kept the peace. Chiricahua Donald Cole calls the Bascom attack on Cochise and the murder of Mangas his people’s “Pearl Harbor.”

Through the 1860s, the Apaches held the field—particularly the Chiricahuas. By one estimate, the U.S. Army spent $38 million from 1862 to 1871 to kill one hundred
Chiricahua Apache camp, San Carlos River, circa 1885. After disastrous government efforts to concentrate all 5,000 Western and Chiricahua Apaches at San Carlos, many White Mountain people moved to Fort Apache. All Chiricahua bands, both peaceful and rebellious, were sent into exile. Photo by Ben Wittick. (Courtesy Museum of New Mexico, neg. no. 15873)

Apaches (including old men, women, and children). The Apaches themselves killed over one thousand American troops and civilians during the same period.

One particularly brutal massacre of San Carlos Apache women and children near Camp Grant in Arizona’s Arivaipa Valley in 1871 finally pushed President Grant to formulate the Peace Policy. The administration planned to concentrate tribes on reservations and “promote peace and civilization among them.” Success would require stellar leadership on both sides.

In New Mexico, the Mescaleros living on Sierra Blanca under their peace-making leaders Santana and Cadete were acknowledged with a reservation in 1873 — though with little support for their efforts to maintain themselves. The Jicarillas continued to promise to stay at peace, but the government provided insufficient rations, allowed their lands to be usurped, and made no move to establish a reservation. The Jicarillas remained in limbo throughout the 1870s, raiding for stock in desperation at times, but not really at war.

The Peace Policy had better luck in Arizona, at least for a few years. Vincent Colyer, Peace Commissioner, proclaimed reservations; General George Crook set out to confine the Indians on them. Crook’s campaign against the Tonto in 1873 brought
them permanently under military control. The Camp Verde, San Carlos, and Fort Apache reservations — together home for the modern Western Apache — all date from this time.

Guided by the trader Thomas Jeffords, a longtime friend of Cochise, another peace emissary sent by President Grant met with the Chiricahua leader deep in the Dragoon Mountains. Years of war and disease had whittled away at the Chiricahua: women and children outnumbered men by two to three times. Cochise promised peace; the Great Father in Washington promised a reservation in the Chokonen homeland surrounding Apache Pass; Jeffords reluctantly agreed to sign on as agent. Within two months, six hundred southern Chiricahua (Nednai) led by Juh and others joined Cochise’s 450-member band, and a presidential order sanctioned the new reservation.

Jeffords strove to deliver rations in the face of an uncooperative bureaucracy. Cochise strove to limit raids but could not control the Nednai (whose numbers included a dijin for war named Geronimo). By the time Cochise died in 1874, he could no longer control even his own Chokonen. A frustrated Jeffords had already submitted his resignation once, and the Indian Bureau was trying to move the Chiricahuas eastward to New Mexico. The Apaches said, simply, that “they would rather die here than live there.”

Cochise created a new definition of Apache leadership. He started as war chief and the favored son-in-law of Mangas Coloradas. By force of personality, integrity, and his unusual friendship with Jeffords, he claimed leadership over other Chiricahua bands as well as his own. When he died, he ordered the same allegiance to his son Taza. The subchiefs agreed and elected the young man chief, but Taza lacked his father’s wisdom and experience and never wielded the same authority.

Young Apache men had only one route to manhood and leadership: raiding (literally, in Western Apache, “to search out enemy property” — in contrast to warfare, “to take death from an enemy”). Their initiatory raids were the equivalent of the girl’s puberty ceremony, the “equivalent of a Bar Mitzvah,” as Donald Cole puts it.

Generally, only an accomplished warrior won the favor of his chosen woman. Only a successful raider could provide for his wife’s family — indeed, a major goal of Apache life was “having a lot of relatives.” Only a raider’s surplus could accommodate the huge feasts and gifts necessary for his daughters during their puberty ceremonies. Only by demonstrating power and wisdom in war could a man earn the votes required for leadership.

Chiricahua men continued to slip away to Mexico to earn their successes, growing bolder as Jeffords’ ability to deliver supplies decreased. Their reservation fell apart in 1876, with skirmishes between Apache factions, raids on settlers, and army reprisals.
Chaos filled the next ten years. Bands moved on and off reservations, fleeing to Mexico, returning peacefully, drifting away into the mountains once more. Warriors shifted allegiance between the primary dissident leaders: Taza, Geronimo, Juh, and Victorio. At one point, Agent John Clum succeeded in concentrating at San Carlos all five thousand Western and Chiricahua Apaches, most of whom had never associated with each other on such intimate terms. Juh’s son, Daklugie, described San Carlos as “a terrible place, the worst in all our vast territory.”

Concentration and forced marches continued. Geronimo and a few others were held in chains, awaiting civil trial. Clum took Taza to Washington, D.C., to show him off, and Taza died of pneumonia on the trip. Cochine’s youngest son, Naiche, succeeded him as chief. While thousands of Apaches lived in peace on reservations, Victorio, Geronimo, Juh, and their few dozen followers made their last stand for the warrior’s path. Daklugie put it this way: “All of us knew that we were doomed, but some preferred death to slavery and imprisonment.” The warrior Chihuahua’s son, Eugene, said they “were fighting for their freedom, their families, and their homeland. And their self-respect.”

While the dissidents fought for their last, short interval of freedom, the concentration of the other Apaches began to ease. The first five hundred White Mountain people left for Fort Apache in 1879. Corrupt agents and voracious settlers continued to whittle away at reservation boundaries at both San Carlos and Fort Apache, lopping off the more desirable areas for mines and farms, appropriating upstream water, and in New Mexico stealing horses from the impoverished Mescaleros.

After years of being shuffled between his home at Ojo Caliente, the hated San Carlos, and Mescalero, Victorio took his final stand. He and his Mimbres people had lost their holy lands; what was there now to live for?

The leader fled with his warriors; their women and children were taken to San Carlos. Victorio’s attitude must have been much the same as Philip Cassadore’s: “I’m a human being, not a ‘peaceful tribe.’” For a year, Victorio and his men (as many as 300) battled thousands of American and Mexican troops — usually winning and sometimes losing to the most canny of the army officers — who had the skilled help of Apache scouts recruited from bands at peace, including some Chiricahuas.

The army eliminated Victorio’s sanctuary in the Sierra Blanca by disarming (and humiliating) the reservation Mescaleros in April 1880. Victorio, chased hard, retreated to Mexico, where he was surrounded and his band annihilated by Mexican troops in October 1880. Apache tradition says that Victorio took his own life with his knife when he realized that without ammunition his people were doomed to death or capture.

The surviving Mimbreno leader, Nana, escaped into the Sonoran mountains. In
July 1881, Nana led a raid across southern New Mexico with about forty Chiricahua and Mescalero warriors unencumbered by their families. Lieutenant Gatewood described old, lame Nana, seventy-three, as "palsied, aged and decrepit." Nana, however, could call on the power of Goose — for speed and endurance. He covered more than a thousand miles in six weeks, some days riding seventy miles, and won more battles than he lost, leaving the countryside in an uproar. If Apache warriors had always traveled without their families, the long wars would have been even longer.

During Victorio's campaign, Geronimo and Juh stayed at peace. But in 1881, Juh, Geronimo, Naiche, Nana, Loco (tricked into joining the fighters by Geronimo), Chatto, and Chihuahua led some seven hundred of their people into a Sierra Madre stronghold. The army took them seriously: in September 1882, General George Crook returned to Arizona.

Crook clearly stated his intentions toward the Apaches: "First, to make them no promises that could not be fulfilled. Second, to tell them the exact truth at all times. Third, to keep them at labor and to find remuneration for that labor. Fourth, to be patient, to be just, and to fear not." The general reorganized San Carlos, brought the Apache scouts to full strength, put his pack trains in order, and headed for Mexico.

In May 1883, the Apaches surrendered — now led in battle for the first time by Geronimo, after the death of Juh in an accident. It took until the following spring to force all of the bands to return, and the last was Geronimo's. Once again, all the Apaches tried living together on the reservations. Crook allowed nine hundred more White Mountain people to move back to Fort Apache country.

Too many competing factions existed — both Apache and white — for San Carlos and Fort Apache to settle down. One hundred and thirty-four Chiricahuas bolted a last time. More pursuit, more raids. More death. Ten months later, in March 1886, deep in the Mexican Sierra Madre, Chihuahua, Naiche, Nana, and Geronimo surrendered to Crook. On the ride north, bootleg mescal liquor roused the leaders again; Geronimo and Naiche escaped with thirty-five others. Of the seventeen warriors among them, all but Naiche were related to Geronimo by blood or marriage.

Jasper Kanseh reminded Eve Ball of Geronimo's burdens — so different from the needs of the professional army soldiers who traveled without their families: "Geronimo had to obtain food for his men, and for their women and children. When they were hungry, Geronimo got food. When they were cold, he provided blankets and clothing. When they were afoot, he stole horses. When they had no bullets, he got ammunition. He was a good man."

The last chase was a sad one. General Nelson Miles replaced Crook; he commanded five thousand troops — one-fourth of the U.S. Army. To intimidate the thirty-seven free Apaches, Miles deported to Florida not only the surrendered group led by