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# Política

Phillip B. Gonzales

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# Política



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*Nuevomexicanos and  
American Political  
Incorporation, 1821–1910*

PHILLIP B. GONZALES

*University of Nebraska Press • Lincoln & London*

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*Dedicado a la memoria de mi padre,  
el hijo de Nuevo México,  
Benerito Domingo Gonzales*



The history of New Mexico is,  
perhaps, to an uncommon degree  
the history of her politicians.

—MARALYN BUDKE





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## Preface

The tiny El Rito Campus of the Northern New Mexico College bristled with *Historias de Nuevo México*/Histories of New Mexico conference activities. In the crisp air of the El Rito autumn of 2013, participants spoke to, represented, and performed portions of the Nuevomexicano, indigenous tribal, and Euroamerican (white) contributions to New Mexico culture. For the Native American and Nuevomexicano representations particularly, the focal resolve involved the preservation of tradition.

In the perspective of the Nuevomexicanos (Mexican American natives of New Mexico), the declared attachment was to *herencia* and the active devotion to *querencia*. *Herencia*, literally “heritage,” harks back to an agrarian base with origins in the Spanish colonization of the region, a base that evolved through a Mexican period and survived as the United States took possession of what became the American Southwest. *Querencia* figures as the beloved culture of the homeland, linked here to a distinct bioregional place identity. However, for proponents today, *querencia* leaves wistful nostalgia and romantic memory behind, acting instead to defend Nuevomexicano material culture and village tradition, maintaining community survival as a matter of collective well-being against the ravages of externally driven modernity (including a debilitating heroin problem among village dwellers) and overriding colonial structures.

Such themes as the communal land grants, the wisdom of everyday life in rural aridity, a unique folk spiritualism, and the *acequia* system of horticulture form the stuff of reverential *querencia* in the outlands of northern New Mexico. In this light an arresting juxtaposition appeared in the conference setting. It was that *Historias de Nuevo México* held its sessions in a venue named Jaramillo Hall and convened its plenary in Cutting Hall.

Nuevomexicanos have been engaged in conventional Western-

style politics for a very long time, yet that heritage is generally not counted among the elements of *querencia*. For one thing, politicians have appeared in the region whose commitment to herencia has gone lacking, and in the politics of *querencia* this is seen as a reprehensible cultural betrayal. Moreover, “politics” has a way of appearing contaminated on its own; the effect, perhaps, of compromise, horse-trading, and the ambitious player. How, then, to reconcile the original portraits of both Jaramillo and Cutting hanging on the central spaces of honor in a deep site of northern New Mexico herencia?

A native of El Rito, Venceslao Jaramillo was born in 1875 on a *ranch* off the El Rito village. He attended Notre Dame elementary school in Indiana, followed by a Jesuit boarding school in Denver. Even as he embarked on a political career as an adult, he became a successful rancher and stock-raiser, straight in the tradition of his father, and an El Rito merchant. He served in both chambers of the territorial assembly before New Mexico became a state, as chair of the Territorial Republican Central Committee as New Mexico was becoming a state, followed by a stint as Río Arriba County collector and treasurer. Working his connections with the territorial legislator from his district, Jaramillo succeeded in brokering the territorial government for the creation of the Spanish American Normal School at El Rito in 1909, an institution that in its initial phase trained teachers to serve in isolated Nuevomexicano schools, later evolving to its present extension of the Northern New Mexico College in the nearby town of Española.

Bronson Cutting was a New York Brahmin who moved to Santa Fe in 1910. Cutting rapidly rose as a celebrity in New Mexico’s bourgeois society, but his first love was politics. A dyed-in-the-wool Progressive, he engaged with whatever conservative politics he encountered in the state, supporting candidates whom he considered progressive in their leanings, purchasing the daily Santa Fe *New Mexican* to further the causes of the late Progressive Era. He proved effective in bolstering his favorites and sinking his enemies. In 1928, New Mexico U.S. Senator Andrieus Jones passed away, and in acknowledgment of the New Yorker’s personal power, Governor A. W. Hockenull appointed Cutting to fill the vacancy left by Jones.

In this whole trajectory Cutting endeared himself to the Nuevomexicanos in particular, and it was they who formed his base of power. Their undying allegiance from both urban and rural areas of the state

garnered for him a level of representative power he did not seek as a personal ambition. All the while, he became a significant support for their right to political and civic inclusion. Cutting's ghost haunts El Rito for the visitations the senator paid to that and many of the other northern New Mexico villages, in which he earned the undying affection of the common folk, much as John F. Kennedy would later in the century. Moreover, at his death, the Cutting will bequeathed \$150,000 to the El Rito campus when it was the Spanish-American Normal School.

The lesson, of course, is that good things can come out of politics. Indeed, New Mexico localities commonly take pride in a prodigal person's fruitful public career, regarding it as their own accomplishment. For those communities that have been marginalized compared to the well-endowed American mainstream, the politician's presence in the field of politics can carry value, more so if a voice is raised on behalf of the disadvantaged.

The honoring of Jaramillo and Cutting on the campus at El Rito reflects a kind of public service *querencia*. And it is more than a still-life scene. The memories are active. Current community residents go before the advisory board of the Northern New Mexico College and the Rio Arriba County Commission proposing that the El Rito facility be renamed for Jaramillo.

The political rise of Cutting and Jaramillo occurred at a time when "politics" really meant something to Nuevomexicanos. Politics saturated their communities. Nuevomexicano coalescence as a political force manifested itself not only within particular communities but across the entire state. Nuevomexicanos voted with a clear ethnic voice, considered vital by the political parties. Not that the group formed a single bloc: the American system of political competition generally does not permit holistic unity for major social or ethnic segments. What did arise was a certain Nuevomexicano-identified enthusiasm for the frays of the popular election, for government generally, and for public administration. It was a distinct political culture, and the people relished it.

An underlying intent of the present work is to reveal the obscured roots of the Nuevomexicano political herencia, and by the time the account ends, to suggest how a political history deserves a place in the temple of Nuevomexicano *querencia*. A strong political patrimony



rightfully belongs to a substantial readership that cares deeply about New Mexico and its storied past. Many among the Nuevomexicanos today hold close the images, personages, and events of the ancestral homeland, considering these their heritage particularly. My hope is that the honoring of their political ancestors will emerge as a viable product of the chapters to follow. It applies as well to a substantial portion of the non-Nuevomexicano readership, those who hold abiding affection for New Mexico's rich ethno-cultural legacy, in which their ancestors may have participated.

The book's purpose will thus have fallen short if it fails to respond to the "disciplinary" requisites of public readerships, and to bundle in stories that reflect "their" history, even as their relationships to the past are capable of changing. Many will not agree with particular views, interpretations, or descriptions expressed herein, and a balk or two may arise at what may appear as the public washing of some in-house laundry. But as I have come to realize through many years in the study of New Mexico, the open contentions over the interpretations of the past, capable of exploding onto the public stage at a moment's notice, are themselves integral patches of New Mexico's historical quilt. They are also forceful motivators, if sometimes negative inspirations, for keeping our shared sense of New Mexico's rich chronicle alive.

From the academic perch, my dive into the stormy political waters of New Mexico's territorial period was taken from the platform of a prior interest I had developed in New Mexico's politics during the couple of decades after it became a state in 1912. In that work, in which both Cutting and Jaramillo figured, I labored to comprehend the roles that the Nuevomexicanos played in the political development of their consolidating state. What stood out as I began to perceive this complex was the heavy stamp of the established political parties. The dynamics of party organization and mobilization molded Nuevomexicanos into fierce partisan loyalists. The very cultural identity of Nuevomexicanos intertwined with their commitment or opposition to the Democratic and Republican parties and/or the factions within those organizations. The more clearly that political connection emerged from the primary sources, the stronger grew the compulsion to know of the origins of the link between the Nuevomexicanos as a group and the American tradition of party organization, membership, leadership, and militancy.

Working backward from 1912, my first forays bore frustration. Unfortunately, no authoritative or sufficiently precise research had even documented the establishment of the American political parties in New Mexico, let alone in specific relation to the Nuevomexicanos. In the daunting prospect, I came to realize that the initial Nuevomexicano-American party associations lay deep in New Mexico's territorial waters. To examine these associations, it emerged as necessary to navigate the channels of archival collections, micro-reeled newspapers, government reports, administrative records, and shelves of published materials. Wading through the sources generated a rising tide of fragmentary references to Nuevomexicanos and political party activity.

I succeeded, finally, in identifying certain critical events that led to the formation of the Democratic and Republican parties during New Mexico's territorial period. As I did, it was gratifying to realize that the parties would not have germinated in New Mexico, and could not have developed to their twentieth-century incarnations, without the involvement and contributions of the very Nuevomexicanos who had animated my whole inquiry to begin with.

The enmeshing of Nuevomexicanos and the American political parties could have served as the core of a regional chronicle, and indeed that story threads through the narrative in emotion-filled electoral campaigns; the machinations of factional formation and confrontation; the rise and fall of charismatic, tough-minded, proven, and blundering politicians; a parade of intrigues descending from Washington DC and other points east; and various protest outbreaks and minor collective movements.

In bringing strategic events and vivid characters to life, some grist for New Mexico's historical mills is provided. One challenge is leveled at facile generalizations that have been made regarding the life of the political parties in New Mexico, including erroneous conclusions about Nuevomexicano political participation. Another is offered to researchers' claims about which elements within the Nuevomexicano populace were the real beneficiaries of the American political system in the nineteenth century. Also up for reconsideration is Manifest Destiny and its impact on the Nuevomexicanos. How New Mexico related to a succession of national political eras forms an area of review, to include successive presidential regimes, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. In this regard I have sought to inspire a clearer understanding of

how these historical dynamics figured into the partisanship of territorial New Mexico for the first couple of decades of its existence and how New Mexico's internal politics helped shape national contours.

Descending in search of the story of when and how the American political parties took hold in New Mexico, I arrived at the very moment in which New Mexico became a part of the United States. At this point a greater set of questions emerged, principally involving the imperial conquest and national incorporation of the *Nuevomexicanos* by the United States. It became necessary to ask how the appearance and development of the party system fit into that whole situational mystery.

The discipline of sociology has an eminently rightful claim on the events and sociopolitical patterns associated with New Mexico's transfer from an extension of the Mexican Republic to the periphery of the United States. In the need to make choices for framing the interpretation of findings, sociologists have amassed an impressive body of research and publications on the subject of regions that have been impacted by invading national forces. In matching the historical materials coming before me with the themes, theories, and concepts of the discipline, the more general problematic and possibilities of a case study emerged.

Particular themes from the sociological corpus guide the chronology. The application to political parties and other aspects of republican government exposes core processes of *Nuevomexicano* incorporation, integration and exclusion, inter- and intra-ethnic relations and social change, colonialism, and liberalism—and all of it in relation to the political development of a U.S. territory. All political dances occur against a backdrop of significant social change. Both the dominant “colonizing” sector and the conquered subalterns make their moves in the contextual waltz. It could have been no different in New Mexico. The United States had to contend with different manifestations of agency by its new denizens. At stake for the *Nuevomexicanos* were the exigencies of their relationship to the central government as well as their evolving sense of themselves as natives in their conquered homeland. *Nuevomexicano* identity had much to do with waves of Euroamerican settlers, short-term residents, and administrative agents as well as the U.S. states themselves, each bringing or injecting evolving policies, decisions, and conflicts into the arena.

In working to track down facts, individuals, patterns, and especially key relationships, the narrative ground expanded, as a proper survey of New Mexican territorial politics called for the context of the American political system itself, especially as it related to the federal territory. Without the conceptions of political scientists, the result would have been a rather more ragged rendering of territorial administration and institutional development. Certainly a political science perspective on the modern “political party” appeared necessary, together with a consideration of party formation and change in the United States. Essays by political scientists also helped deal with such matters as the U.S. approach to international treaty making, the congressional formation of territories, the theory of the conventional politician’s career, the factors typically influencing voting among the American electorate, and especially the process of territories becoming states prior to the 1920s.

Yet the social sciences, formally speaking, are not the only bounded fields I have needed in order to satisfy the interpretive demands of the excavated materials. Viewpoints from the history of American politics and from accounts of the development of republican institutions in the United States are also applied. I found it necessary as well to draw on the likes of cultural and literary studies, textual analysis, and a biblical scholar or two. The trick for a narrative presentation was to sketch in the academic eddies without disrupting the flow of the chronological stream. Hopefully nonspecialists can sail on to a revealed portrait of New Mexico’s territorial politics, Nuevomexicanos within them, and ethno-racial dynamics in American history.



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