

Visualizing Equestrianism's Violent Influences upon Eighteenth-century Native North America: Revisiting the Segesser Hide Paintings

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http://wn.com/MOMENTS_IN_TIME_%7C_New_Mexico's_Segesser_Hide_Paintings_%7C_KNME

Efforts to revise the temporal and spatial parameters of American history have cast asunder the field's normative beginnings. Indeed, not long ago, according to one recent assessment, "early America history looked almost nothing like it looks today. The cast of characters was small—mostly English and mostly male—and early America was nearly synonymous with the thirteen colonies. The French, Spanish, and Dutch colonial empires were there in the picture, but mainly as a hazy backdrop of hostility: they were threats to the English America that alone led the continent to its distinctive path to modernity."¹

American Indian historians have figured prominently in such revision. In the past two decades, the fields of U.S. western, American Indian, and Spanish borderlands history have increasingly embraced one another and ushered in a "continentalist" paradigm for assessing U.S. "colonial" history. Nowhere is such realignment more pronounced than in studies of the Trans-Mississippi West before Anglo-American

¹ Pekka Hämäläinen, "Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts? Place, Power, and Narrative in Early American History," (working draft in progress).

settlement. From Ramón A. Gutiérrez's detailed analyses of gender relations within colonial New Mexico to Pekka Hämäläinen's periodization of the rise and fall of Comanche equestrianism, the history of the early American West has been fundamentally rewritten. Indeed, the identification of so many new constellations of indigenous communities within the borderlands universe has not only transformed the parameters of western history but has also provided a stark rejoinder to the nearly century-long elision of such historical experiences within more Turnerian narratives of American history.²

The ascendancy of borderlands historiography has paralleled increased attention to similar historical dynamics within and across other North American colonial realms. With marked increases in studies of indigenous and imperial relations across the American South, with further investigations of indigenous captivity in eastern North America, and with heightened attention to the interlinked histories of indigenous and African peoples, current studies in seventeenth and eighteenth-century American history reveal an increasing indebtedness to borderlands historiography.³ As Alan Taylor has

² Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Power, Sexuality, and Marriage in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). For an overview of the rise of borderlands historiography and its challenges to Turnerian visions of U.S. history, see Samuel Truett and Elliot Young, "Introduction: Making Transnational History: Nations, Regions, and Borderlands," in Truett and Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1-32. See also, Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

³ For recent studies of Indian-European studies of the colonial South, see, for example, Robbie Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540-1715* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall, eds., *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); and Joseph M. Hall, Jr., *Zamumo's Gifts: Indian-European Exchange in the Colonial Southeast* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). For captivity in eastern North America, see Christina Synder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Allan Galloway, ed. *Indian Slavery in Colonial America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). For African

most famously suggested, the history of early America used to be a fairly straightforward and simple tale, one rooted in a singular geographic, documentary, and imperial tradition. The field's now vastly enlarged boundaries—its radically redrawn *borders*—testify to the impact of borderlands historians.⁴

Notwithstanding such shifting and rising tides, the consolidation of such insights remains both incomplete and also uncertain. Prominent studies of nineteenth-century U.S. history continue to exclude central lessons emanating from borderlands investigations, while American Indian and indigenous histories rarely impact twentieth-century U.S. historiography. The history of the early American West may now have vibrant, new chapters filled with an expanded cast of characters but the history of the American West after the Civil War—and of the nation more broadly—remains far less reconfigured. In fact, studies of the American nation-state appear particularly ensconced within an often impenetrable historiographic encasing, as studies of the Early Republic, Age of Jackson, U.S. Civil War, and Reconstruction and its aftermath routinely dismiss the diverse as well as influential indigenous and borderlands communities found within the expanding U.S. nation. That the two most recently admitted states to the Union maintain long-standing indigenous histories receives, for example, little mention in narratives of post-WWII America.⁵ Either due to conscious oversight or to the sheer voluminous nature of U.S. historical production, U.S. historiography has seemingly ceded the seventeenth and much

and Indian histories, see, for example, Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 2001).

⁵ Ned Blackhawk, “American Indians and the Study of U.S. History,” in *American History Now*, Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

of the eighteenth century to borderlands, indigenous, and/or imperial histories while retaining a hermetic seal around studies of the American nation-state.

A challenge for borderlands historiography lies, then, in bridging such divides, linking our fields of investigation not only with other currents in U.S. historiography but also, comparatively, with global studies of colonialism and its aftermath. Such comparisons need not remain rooted temporally or spatially within recognizable subfields of U.S. history; inter-disciplinary concepts and methods offer important linkages to scholars working in multiple geographic fields of study but contending with comparable dilemmas and inquiries. Recent “settler colonial studies,” for example, have comparatively explored the state-sponsored incorporation of indigenous children into governmental educational institutions within the United States and Australia, while interdisciplinary examinations of American expansion into the Pacific increasingly draw upon indigenous documentary traditions and linguistic archives.⁶

Historicizing the adaptations of indigenous peoples to varying cycles of colonial expansion provides methods for assessing the extent and forms of colonialism’s multiple, disruptive influences. As I have suggested elsewhere, Spanish and Euro-American colonialism violently incorporated American Indians into varying cycles of warfare, alliances, and economic dependency. Such findings underscore from a North American perspective the vital claims made by Neil Whitehead and Brian Ferguson in *War in the Tribal Zone*, who suggest that “while the importance of history and the role of violent

⁶ See, for example, Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). *Settler Colonial Studies* is a new bi-annual, peer-reviewed journal that seeks to comparatively assess the global history of settler colonialism and its enduring legacies. See, <http://ojs.lib.swin.edu.au/index.php/settlercolonialstudies/>

conflict may be readily seen; it is more difficult to know what that recognition implies: at the very least, it involves the need to revitalize our ideas about the ethnographic universe, going beyond the rejection of untenable notions of self-contained, stable local societies, and instead developing a conceptual framework for understanding conflict and change as part of the historical process underlying observed ethnographic patterns.”⁷

With such centuries-long footholds upon the North American continent, New Spain provides immeasurable opportunities for considering as well as conceptualizing such transformations. Like most borderlands investigations, such inquiry also offers critical counterpoints to static visions of American Indian peoples commonly found within U.S. historical analyses. Not only are the two oldest North American colonies—Florida and New Mexico—first chartered in the 1500s, both also bare little resemblance to many of the canonical features of Anglo-American colonial history, especially in the area of Indian affairs.

In an attempt to deepen particular moments of Spanish-Indian relations within one of these expanding colonial spheres, this essay revisits a set of commonly reproduced images originating from borderland encounters. It assesses the set’s historical context as well as its materiality, doing so in order to discern broader connections between borderlands and indigenous histories. As Matt Cohen has recently suggested, new “kinds of reading practices” must be brought “to early American media rather than the delineation of a factual, chronological history. Those practices involve the material instantiation of communication as much as its ethnohistorical context; they also involve

⁷ Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, “The Violent Edge of Empire,” in Ferguson and Whitehead, eds., *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1992), 3.

thinking transtemporally about media.”⁸ Reading each image for additional clues about the experiential nature of indigenous history across borderlands societies provides potential linkages between multiple fields of inquiry while furthering the development of an indigenous borderlands art historiography.

The set’s origins and genealogies lie not only in violent encounters upon the American continent but also in the subsequent circulation of such representations to, and more recently from, Europe. The images hail from the early eighteenth century and concern groups of largely unidentifiable combatants on the distant peripheries of colonial New Mexico. Two elkskin-hide paintings from the 1720s depicting military confrontations north of New Mexico were found after World War II in a Swiss villa owned by a Lucerne family. Roughly of equal size, each measures roughly four-and-a-half feet wide and between seventeen and nineteen feet in length. While each is referred to as a single “hide painting,” they in fact are comprised of several individual hides that are sewn together to form a larger canvas.⁹

As Gottfried Hotz first revealed, Jesuit Father Philipp von Segesser sent at least “three” hide paintings to his family from his mission in northern Mexico. He did so in 1758 and they resided thereafter in his family’s possession until Hotz initiated his decades-long inquiry. Only two known canvases survive and they each now carry the Segesser family name, known as Segesser I and II, while of “the third of the three paintings Father Philipp mentioned... nothing has survived.” Like many borderlands documentary materials each canvas remained unstudied for generations and has only

⁸ Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 20.

⁹ Gottfried Hotz, *Indian Skin Paintings from the American Southwest: Two Representations of Border Conflicts Between Mexico and the Missouri in the Early Eighteenth Century*, translated by Johannes Malthaner (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970).

recently received interrogation. Each has also returned—seemingly at least—to New Mexico, the scene of their subject matter and likely creation.¹⁰

Segesser I and II offer incomparable insight into select moments in borderlands history, while collectively they expose broader dynamics reshaping much of the eighteenth-century West. Thomas E. Chavez—who as former director of the Palace of Governors Museum in Santa Fe figured centrally in their acquisition in the 1980s—calls them “the most novel and important artifacts of Spain’s colonial history in New Mexico and the Great Plains.”¹¹ Their influence has been particularly apparent in studies of the indigenous West. First utilized in George Hyde’s *Indians of the High Plains* from 1959, many have included images of each in their work. Hyde, James F. Brooks, and John L. Kessell, for example, have each adorned the covers of their respective works with scenes from each.¹²

Hotz’s remarkable study began after World War II, was first published in German in 1960, published in translated form in 1970, and re-issued in 1991 by the Museum of New Mexico Press.¹³ This latter printing (1991) provided at its time the only detailed, color reproductions of each canvas notwithstanding a full-scale reproduction of Segesser

¹⁰ Hotz, *Indian Skin Paintings*, 11. For accounts of the hides’ return to New Mexico, see Thomas E. Chavez, “The Villasur Expedition and the Segesser Hide Paintings,” in Ralph H. Vigil, et al, eds., *Spain and the Plains: Myths and Realities of Spanish Exploration and Settlement on the Great Plains* (Niwot, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1994), 109-110.

¹¹ Chavez, “The Villasur Expedition and the Segesser Hide Paintings,” 90.

¹² George E. Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains: From the Prehistoric Period to the Coming of Europeans* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); John L. Kessell, *Spain in the Southwest: A Narrative History of Colonial New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

¹³ Gottfried Hotz, *Indianische Ledermalereien: Figurenreiche Darstellungen von Grenzkonflikten zwischen Mexiko und dem Missouri um 1720* (Berlin: Verlag Von Dietrich Reimer, 1960); Hotz, *The Segesser Hide Paintings: Masterpieces Depicting Spanish Colonial New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1991).

II in the 1976 Time-Life Books Series, the *Old West*; in 2007, thirteen years after its original release, the anthology, *Spain and the Plains*, was also re-issued with a selection of Segesser II.¹⁴ Now out of print, the 1991 Hotz re-issued work provides the only color reproductions of each canvas. Despite their prominent positions in histories of the eighteenth-century West, then, Segesser I and II have rarely been reproduced or analyzed in color.

Segesser I details an attack by unspecified equestrian raiders on an overmatched Indian community. With a substantial portion of the canvas missing due to a wide cut and without any clearly identifiable individuals, communities, or geographic features, scholars have offered contrasting assessments of this critical document, in which the identities of both sides remain unrecoverable.¹⁵

By contrast, Segesser II details the well-known defeat of New Mexico's lieutenant general, Pedro de Villasur from 1720. Ordered to travel north to monitor suspected French inroads among northern Indian communities, Villasur and his Pueblo Indian auxiliaries were routed by a joint Pawnee-French ambush near the confluence of the Platte and Loup rivers in eastern Nebraska. As Hyde relays: "Villasur fell with thirty-five of his forty-two Spaniards, of sixty Pueblos, twelve or thirteen died... It was the worst defeat Spain ever suffered in battle against Plains Indians, and in the fight fell nearly all of the best and most experienced Spanish soldiers of New Mexico." As he also notes,

¹⁴ Editors of Time-Life Books, *The Old West: the Spanish West* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1976), 72-73; Ralph H. Vigil, et al, eds., *Spain and the Plains: Myths and Realities of Spanish Exploration and Settlement on the Great Plains* (Niwot, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2007; reprint).

¹⁵ For varying interpretations of the combatants in Segesser I, see fn.#29 below.

“With the men were lost all the best firearms and other military equipment in the province.”¹⁶

As the survivors retreated back to Santa Fe, they informed Governor Antonio Valverde Cosio of the defeat. Valverde, according to Hotz, figures centrally in the origins of the canvases, as he or someone close to him eventually enlisted the survivors’ participation in making Segesser II, the structure and size of which so clearly resembles Segesser I that their jointly timed-authorship is commonly recognized.¹⁷ According to Hotz, Valverde had Segesser II crafted at some point to exonerate his administration, one that had suffered the colony’s greatest debacle since the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. The motivations behind Segesser I remain far less certain.

Leaving office in 1722, Valverde faced subsequent administrative inquiries and eventual trial. In 1727, he “was ordered to pay 50 pesos for masses for the fallen soldiers and to pay 150 pesos to the church, but was otherwise acquitted,” though such nominal tribute hardly impacted his coffers.¹⁸ Having developed near El Paso the hacienda de San Antonio de Padua—“New Mexico’s most lucrative farming, wine-producing, and stockraising property”—his estate was “valued in the tens of thousands of pesos” upon his death.¹⁹

¹⁶ Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 77. See also, David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 168-171; and Kessell, *Spain in the Southwest*, 208-214. For accounts of the Villasur campaign, see “A Portion of the Diary of the Reconnaissance Expedition or Colonel Don Pedro de Villasur Along the Platte River, 1720;” and “Confession of Valverde, Santa Fé, July 5, 1726,” in Alfred Barnaby Thomas, ed. and trans., *After Coronado: Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico, 1696-1727* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 133-137, and 230-234.

¹⁷ Hotz, *Indian Skin Paintings*, 73, 78.

¹⁸ Hotz, *Indian Skin Paintings*, 228.

¹⁹ Kessell, *Spain in the Southwest*, 209, 214.

More than any event, Villasur's defeat both clouded Valverde's governorship and shaped New Mexico in the 1720s. As scholars from Alfred Barnaby Thomas to Hämäläinen have suggested, the defeat not only contributed to the failed missionization of horticultural Apache villages on the Plains but also to the subsequent Apache diaspora, one set in motion by the newest equestrian arrivals in the region, the Comanche. Having led an expedition of nearly a thousand in 1719 aimed at crushing the Comanche and their Ute allies, Valverde had visited and camped alongside Apache villagers. He knew well of their suffering at the hands of equestrian raiders and had offered endless assurances of anticipated Spanish missionization. According to Hämäläinen, the subsequent failure to missionize *Apachería* not only foreclosed the expansion of Spanish "authority to the plains" as well as the creation of "a barrier against the Comanches" but also contributed to the transformation of the fertile watersheds of *Apachería* into the staging grounds for equestrian raiding into New Mexico. The consequences of such transformations would reverberate through the eighteenth and nineteenth-century West, indelibly shaping the context of imperial-indigenous relations thereafter.²⁰

Segesser II thus provides the earliest known visual representations of Indian-imperial conflict from the American West and does so prior to the rise both of equestrianism and of several of North America's most powerful indigenous peoples. It highlights the contingency as well as unforeseen paradoxes emanating from the Villasur defeat and does so in laboriously rendered form. In the recently rewritten history of the

²⁰ Thomas, ed. and trans., *After Coronado*, 33-39; Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 35. As Thomas A. Britten has also recently suggested, prior to their displacement by Plains equestrians, "the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a 'Golden Age' of sorts" for Apache communities in the region. See Britten, *The Lipan Apaches: People of Wind and Lightning* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 55. For Valverde's account of his 1719 campaign, see "Diary of the Campaign of Governor Valverde, 1719," in Thomas, ed. and trans., *After Coronado*, 110-133.

pre-Anglophone West, it is becoming iconic. Similar to the battle scenes from Samuel de Champlain’s narrative of Algonquian-Iroquian warfare on the banks of Lake Champlain or to John Underhill’s account of the 1637 Pequot War and Mystic River Massacre—an image of which appears on the cover of Matt Cohen’s *The Networked Wilderness*—Segesser II communicates essential borderlands truths rooted in the collision of multiple imperial and indigenous peoples.²¹

Within the scene itself, the conflict is clearly between indigenous and imperial communities. However, the heterogeneity of each side challenges such nomenclature. For example, in contrast to the relatively identifiable European and indigenous combatants in Champlain or Underhill’s seventeenth-century narratives, the composition of each opposing side in Segesser II belies ethnographic precision. With Francophone soldiers and indigenous allies from the central Plains as well as the western reaches of New France, the victorious French forces comprise a multicultural polyglot. Largely composed of “Pawnee” allies, they also hail from and resemble the bewildering constellation of *pétite nations* that characterize “the Middle Ground” and potentially include indigenous combatants who had previously served or would continue to serve in the Fox Wars in the Illinois country.²²

Fought on the central Plains, moreover, the encounter occurred far beyond the boundaries of New France. As Michael Witgen has suggested, seventeenth-century French ethnographic classifications in the western Great Lakes subsumed “an infinity of nations” into fixed and unstable political designations. French officials, traders, and

²¹ Add Champlain and Underhill citations.

²² Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

missionaries attempted to classify as singular peoples Algonquian-speaking villagers whose kinship, village, and seasonal attachments rarely resembled the stable political classifications the French aspired for as well as attached to them. Migratory Algonquian-speaking villagers, who comprised the nucleus of the French empire in the western Great Lakes, lived for months on end beyond the realms of French influence. Their kinship systems, migratory economies, and above shared social ties with neighboring villagers confounded the discourse of French ethnography. The social identities of the Indian allies fighting alongside the French in Segesser II cannot thus be fully discerned.²³

While less spectrally positioned as well as portrayed, the diversity of the New Mexican forces parallels that of their Plains Indian and French combatants. It is easy to forget that the Segesser II was composed either by the survivors themselves—some of the Pueblo Indian auxiliaries who hailed from Pueblo communities long known for their artisanal traditions—or by indigenous artisans potentially supervised by surviving Spanish soldiers.²⁴ The vibrant and lurid coloring of the Plains Indian combatants potentially communicates then recognizable forms of cultural difference circulating throughout eighteenth-century northern New Spain. The levels of detail and attention rendered to each character retain intentional if no longer decipherable meanings, and the alterity of the French and Indian forces might indeed remain not only radical but also purposeful.

If the western reaches of New France remained a world on the margins of French ethnographic classifications, New Mexico confronted to its north a social universe

²³ Michael Witgen, “The Rituals of Possession: Native Identity and the Invention of Empire in Seventeenth-century Western North America,” *Ethnohistory* 54:4 (Fall 2007), 639-668.

²⁴ “With the exception of the border, Segesser I was the work of an Indian, as was Segesser II,” Hotz, *Indian Skin Paintings*, 78.

undergoing similarly rapid and undecipherable transformations. Its northern borderlands in many ways mirrored the far western boundaries of “the Middle Ground” where Algonquian-speaking villagers pushed west by Iroquois raiders throughout the seventeenth century in turn began displacing Siouian-speaking peoples from the woodlands onto the Plains.²⁵ Villasur was sent north to monitor such changing imperial and indigenous fortunes, and his defeat came just as Plains Indian communities were beginning to harness the potential of Spanish-introduced equestrianism, a process Apache missionization had intended to curb. Notably, all of the attacking French forces and their indigenous allies are on foot. It was their superiority in numbers, their use of firearms, and their reported surprise attack that carried the field against the unsuspecting New Mexicans. The painting’s only group of horses appear in the corner where six Indian guards and three New Mexican soldiers protect the Villasur herd, while several of their compatriots vainly attempt on horseback to rescue the expedition’s outnumbered and surrounded leaders who have been cut off from their horses.

In the early 1700s, New Mexican governors confronted not only raids from northern peoples desperate to seek horses and but also only a colony still coming to terms with the aftermath of the 1694 *Reconquista*. As John Kessel has suggested, “The 1690s were prologue,” a decade when New Mexico began to shed its century-long isolation and began contending with broader imperial influences emanating from imperial spheres across the continent. The region’s escalating equestrian raids, the growing fissures between Pueblo communities, and the arrival of new indigenous communities on the

²⁵ Richard White, “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Journal of American History* 65 (Sep. 1978), 319-43.

colony's borders increasingly differentiated the eighteenth-century colony from its pre-*Reconquista* form.²⁶

Such shifting social relations as well as increased hybridity are reflected within Segesser II. The New Mexican forces include not only Villasur and resident Spanish citizen-soldiers but also include Pueblo and potentially other indigenous auxiliaries drawn from across northern New Spain. As Oakah Jones has suggested, Pueblo military service in conjunction with Spanish soldiers paradoxically increased after the Pueblo Revolt, as the crisis of equestrian raiding increasingly prompted joint Pueblo-Spanish expeditions. A generation after their re-conquest, then, Pueblo allies joined forces with Spanish officers and together moved to counter threats emanating from the overlapping zones of the Spanish and French empires in North America.²⁷

Analysis of the Villasur defeat and its representation in Segesser II thus challenge fixed ethnographic as well as political categories of analysis. At a time when Anglophone settlement in the Carolinas had only recently been secured following the Yamasee War, the center of the continent witnessed borderland conflicts between imperial and indigenous combatants whose social identities remain largely undecipherable.²⁸ Most important, such borderlands remained contested spaces not only by distant French and Spanish leaders but also by indigenous communities coping with broader cycles of colonial disruption. The site of the Villasur defeated would in fact remain unincorporated for over a century into any imperial or national polity and would become further transformed by hosts of

²⁶ Kessell, *Spain in the Southwest*, 159.

²⁷ Oakah L. Jones, Jr., *Pueblo Warriors and Spanish Conquest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966).

²⁸ James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact to the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

emergent indigenous equestrian powers in the decades ahead. Indeed, the transformation of pedestrian, horticultural homelands across the northern, central, and southern Plains into contested equestrian landscapes remains one of the defining features of the eighteenth-century West. From the bend of the Missouri in the north to the Rio Grande in the south and from the headwaters of the Arkansas in the west to the Mississippi in the east, the heart of the American continent underwent an ecological and indigenous revolution of still undetermined proportions.²⁹

While commonplace within Spanish correspondence, the seemingly inevitable and ubiquitous nature of the rise of equestrianism must not mask the violent processes that attended its spread. The equestrian revolution precipitated pandemic cycles of indigenous warfare that included the displacement of countless horticultural communities and the militarization of social and economic exchanges. Such violence moreover was inflicted upon indigenous bodies using newly acquired European technologies not just metals and occasionally guns but also horses and the violent mobility that they entailed. Born out of borderlands encounters, such indigenous histories characterize the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century North American West and challenge more canonical, Turnerian visions of American history that have framed the American West as largely a nineteenth-century field of analysis.³⁰

²⁹ Pekka Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures," *Journal of American History* 90 (Dec. 2003), 859-62. For further analysis of the ecological force prompting equestrian migration and raiding prior to the U.S. War with Mexico, see Hämäläinen, "The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Change, and Indigenous Power in the Southwest Borderlands," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67:2 (April, 2010), 173-208.

³⁰ Many borderlands historians have increasingly turned to (ironically) the works of one of Frederick Jackson Turner's most prolific students, Herbert Eugene Bolton who celebrated European colonization, but did so with a regional emphasis upon "the Spanish Borderlands," a realm larger than British North America reaching from Florida to California and with centuries-old influences upon both American coastlines. Unlike Turner's, Bolton's studies did little to

While less exact than its more familiar twin, Segesser I carries equally valuable insights, particularly when viewed in the context of equestrianism's violent spread. Many have written about the canvas and have offered similarly hesitant suggestions about the potential identities of the combatants involved.³¹ Since Segesser I is an anonymous text of an unspecified encounter, it invites interpretive and even speculative claims. Thomas Chavez's recent analysis of Segesser I, for example, provocatively suggests that the cherub-faced women and children behind the pedestrian defenders are New Mexican captives, specifically Pueblo Indians taken by Apache raiders who are in the process of being rescued by New Mexican forces. The large missing section of Segesser I, he suggests, undoubtedly includes additional members of the attacking party and likely features more clearly identifiable Spanish commanders or soldiers.³²

Given that Segesser I and II share the same authorship—or at least were crafted in close proximity or succession—there are potential limitations to such an interpretation. Leaving office in 1722 and residing in El Paso until his 1726 trial, Valverde, according to

shape the larger development of American historiography; his work, for example, on Spanish influences in colonial Georgia, let alone his mammoth studies of California mission history, barely appeared on the radar of U.S. colonial history. Turner, essentially, established an exceptionalist claim about American history, one rooted in encounters between a singular imperial and national power, not a multiplicity of European powers and resident Native Americans. Conversely, Boltonian studies examined processes of European expansion in which American Indians remained central to the course of empire. As hosts, guides, converts, laborers, subjects, adversaries, and diplomats American Indians played crucial roles in the development of Spain's flagship colony, New Spain. Studies of British North America have only recently paid comparable attention to such dynamics. See Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 335-360.

³¹ For differing assessments of the identities of those in Segesser I, see Ned Blackhawk, "The Displacement of Violence: Ute Diplomacy and the Making of New Mexico's Eighteenth-century Northern Borderlands," *Ethnohistory* 54:4 (Fall 2007), 738-739, and notes therein. In a recent public television series, New Mexico station KNME produced a six-minute "Moments in Time" interview with Thomas E. Chavez who describes the defending party as Apaches guarding Pueblo captives atop an elevated encampment. See, <http://www.knme.org/momentsintime/segesser.php>

³² KNME, "Moments in Time" interview with Thomas E. Chavez, <http://www.knme.org/momentsintime/segesser.php>

Hotz, had the paintings commissioned as administrative inquiries brewed in Mexico City. Hotz suggests that resident mission Indians in and around his hacienda at San Antonio de Padua may have worked on them and potentially incorporated recent events in their own communities' struggles with neighboring indigenous adversaries. Hotz, however, is much less familiar with the history of the Plains during Valverde's tenure than he is with the canvases themselves, and he repeatedly refers to the pedestrian defenders as "Apaches," a suggestion that Chavez and others have followed.³³ Valverde, however, largely attempted to missionize Apache communities during his tenure and treated Apache leaders, such as Jicarilla Chief Carlana, as respected diplomats and warriors. Carlana, for instance, shared with the Iberian-born governor a deep and abiding amity against the Ute and Comanche, adding dozens of his warriors to the governor's unsuccessful 1719 campaign into Colorado. If made by the same artist or artists, the canvases invariably also describe events from the same period, at a time when Apaches not only maintained close diplomatic relations with New Mexico but also anticipated "reduction... to our holy faith," as Pedro de Rivera, the visitor-general of the region's northern presidios described Apache religiosity. It was left, for example, to Valverde's successor, Carlos de Bustamante, to deliver the final verdict to these loyal allies and hopeful converts that Viceroy Marqués de Casa Fuerte had decided not to extend the mission system outside of

³³ Hotz, *Indian Skin Paintings*, 34-66. While following many of Hotz's suggestions, Chavez does break with Hotz on the identities of the women and children in Segesser I--that the Apache "defenders shown in Segesser I are not on the warpath. They have their women with them." See Hotz, *Indian Skin Paintings*, 35; and Chavez, KNME, "Moments in Time," <http://www.knme.org/momentsintime/segesser.php>. While provocative and credible, it is unclear how Chavez deduced such signs of Pueblo captivity among pedestrian Apaches at this time.

the colony, as had been Valverde and the Plains Apaches expressed and anticipated hope.³⁴

The clear and potential motivations behind Segesser II—to exonerate an embattled governor, to venerate fallen family members or kinsmen, and/or to narrate the spectacular western American chapter of the larger war of which it was apart—have left scholars searching for comparable reasons behind Segesser I. With a large piece missing and a third potentially related canvas unaccounted for, the uncertainty behind this crucial document will continue.

My primary concern in revisiting Segesser I is to encourage such engagement as well as speculation but to do with an additional suggestion: namely, to examine the intentional utilization of the distinctive coloring for the European metal technologies within the document. The attacking warriors are all equipped with Spanish weaponry, horses, and armor both for themselves and their horses. They are most likely Indian auxiliaries of the Spanish. The attackers are probably aligned, like Carlana's Apaches or the Pueblo allies of Villasur, with either Valverde or other Spanish leaders who may or may not be potentially profiled in the painting's missing section. The defenders are potentially Athabaskan-speaking Apaches or Navajos in close proximity to New Mexico or more distant non-equestrians coming into the violent, expanding orbit of Spanish colonialism in the region.³⁵

³⁴ “Rivera to Casa Fuerte, Presidio Del Paso Del Río Del Norte, September 26, 1727,” in Thomas, ed. and trans., *After Coronado*, 216. See also, *ibid.*, 39-47.

³⁵ For Navajo-Spanish relations prior to 1720, see Frank McNitt, *Navajo Wars: Military Campaigns, Slave Raids, and Reprisals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972). See also Jack D. Forbes, *Apache, Navaho and Spaniard* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

By focusing on Segesser I's materiality, critical if only general conclusions emerge. All of the attackers employ distinctly blue-colored metal weapons, e.g. swords, axes, and metal-tipped lances, while only one of the defenders possesses such weaponry. A single defender has a strip of colored metal attached to his shield. Given that the canvas has been reproduced almost exclusively in black and white, analysis of the actual coloring of Segesser I remains warranted, because like the thousands of northern Indians who came to New Mexico to trade, the anonymous artist of Segesser I instinctively recognized the distinct importance of Spanish-introduced weaponry when composing the canvas. The artist differentiated between such metals when composing these documents and understood that such distinctions mattered. As everyone in the region either understood or came to violently understand, possession of metals, horses, and guns determined the outcome of borderlands conflicts.

Such technologies of violence circulated beyond the region and deep into the recesses of the continent. Moreover, such eighteenth-century borderlands conflicts not only remained largely outside the purview of Spanish or imperial chroniclers but also occurred largely between indigenous communities. Within such a perspective, Villasur's defeat at the hands of distant French-allied Indians remains an exception within the context not only of constant Indian raids upon New Mexico but also escalating conflicts between indigenous communities. As such, Segesser I sketches a far more common and ubiquitous scene than Segesser II, one involving exclusively indigenous combatants. The defending *rancheria* stands little chance against the intruders, as the under-equipped were undoubtedly overrun and their women and children, at best, captured and transported to one of the region's growing captive markets.

While the identities of those featured in *Segesser I* may never be fully identified, their clash illustrates central themes in eighteenth-century North American history. Indigenous people equipped with superior technologies of violence incorporated distant and underequipped peoples into the disruptive folds of empire and often did so prior to their communities' encounters with European. Particularly targeting Indian women and children, one might even conclude that the primary colonial encounters occurring across vast expanses of the eighteenth-century American continent remained encounters not necessarily between Europeans and Native peoples at all, but encounters between different and increasingly militarized indigenous societies coping with the violent disruptions inherent to life on the margins of empire. The eighteenth-century history of northern New Mexico, the history of the pre-Anglophone American West, and the scene relayed in *Segesser I* all make such suggestions. The ability of some Native peoples to endure and even prosper amid such cycles of disruption must not diminish our attention to the countless moments of suffering ushered in by the arrival of new technologies and eventually economies of violence.