Chapter Sixteen

Accomplished Ladies and Coyotes

Marriage, Power, and Straying from the Flock in
Territorial New Mexico, 1880–1920

Pablo Mitchell

On June 24, 1919, while under observation in a Colorado Springs hospital room, Grover Harrison calmly announced to officers that he was almost finished getting dressed. He would be ready for his appointment with the sanity commission in a moment, he told them. The Harvard graduate, former minister, and thirty-two-year-old New Mexico native then proceeded to climb atop a chair in his room and hang himself with his underwear from a pipe running along the ceiling. The officers, according to newspaper reports, “heard a gurgling sound and [attempted] to get into the room by the use of a ladder and an ax.”1 But by the time they cut him down, Grover Harrison was dead. In a brief suicide note, Harrison proclaimed his weariness after “nearly ten years of an ugly litigation suit” and expressed his desire to “go home,” where he would once again be reunited with the mother he had lost as a child. The note ended with an appropriately Dickensian literary flourish: “the rest that I go to is far, far better than I have ever known. No wonder then that I greet the unseen with a cheer.”2 Grover was referring to a suit he had brought against his father, the Albuquerque physician George Harrison, over the young man’s inheritance from his mother, Guadalupe Perea. Five years earlier, in 1914, Grover had won the case and been awarded more than one hundred thousand dollars. In a bitter and pained last testament, Grover gave kindly to friends and institutions, and offered a total of one dollar to his father, stepmother, and their children.3

Grover Harrison’s death was only one of many bizarre twists in an inheritance battle stretching over half a century. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Grover’s stepgrandfather, and as it turned out the first husband of his mother, José Leandro Perea, was easily one of New Mexico’s richest and most powerful men.4 Perea was born in 1822 to an elite Hispano family, and in 1842 married into a similarly influential family with his wedding to Dolores Chávez (see fig. 16.1). Making their home in the village of Bernalillo in central New Mexico, the Pereas had nearly a dozen children before Dolores died in 1877 at the age of fifty-one. In 1878 José Leandro Perea married Guadalupe Perea, the eventual mother of the ill-fated Grover Harrison. When José Leandro Perea died in 1883, he divided his estate
among his wife, Guadalupe Perea, and his numerous children. Two years later, Guadalupe Perea married George Harrison, an Anglo physician from Missouri and the father of Grover Harrison. When Guadalupe died in 1889, she bequeathed a large portion of her estate, formerly the estate of José Leandro Perea, to her son Grover. Guadalupe's widowed husband, George Harrison, subsequently remarried soon afterward, to none other than Margarita Otero, a granddaughter of the aforementioned José Leandro Perea and Dolores Chávez. In a further crucial intermarriage, another granddaughter of José Leandro Perea, Dolores Otero, in 1905 became the wife of John Burg, a skillful and, as we shall see, fortunate lawyer. Thus, when Grover Harrison killed himself in a Colorado Springs hospital room in 1919, he left behind a deeply tangled estate, what would turn out to be more than two dozen heirs, and a complex family lineage stretching back some half a century.

The death of Grover Harrison ultimately illustrates far more, however, than a colorful family squabble over heirlooms. Indeed, the four decades between the marriage of José Leandro Perea and Guadalupe Perea in 1878, and the death of Grover Harrison in 1919, coincide with a remarkable period in the region's history. The transcontinental railroad entered New Mexico in 1880, carrying with it a host of dramatic transformations. Prior to 1880, according to one historian, "the framework of Hispanic culture was kept intact and continued to serve as the principal point of reference by which the people viewed their present and measured the future." Although Anglo trappers, traders, Civil War soldiers, and merchants had settled in New Mexico throughout the nineteenth century, the structure of power in the territory continued to be based on centuries-old Spanish and Mexican patterns of dominance, including control of property and water rights through royal and governmental decrees, and the violent subjugation of New Mexico's Native populations. Even well into the nineteenth century, Pueblos, Navajos, Apaches, and Utes continued to be excluded from significant power, and many were held in quasi-slavery. Lower-class Hispanics suffered as well, often struggling mightily to make a living as subsistence farmers, artisans, and peons. Those in power, New Mexico's elites, relied on informal and wide a combination of local custom a centers of successive Spanish, Mex bers of leading families such as t level of control reminiscent of Eu trones. As we shall see, gender an marriage and intermarriage, were gime.

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As this essay will demonstrate, torial courts and legislature. Altho from using the legal system to acq the reliance on law and the courts, professionals from outside the terr As had occurred before 1880, An tions with each other, often in an e cans and poor Hispanics and white measure, then, lawyers and judges once held by merchants and ranch century after the arrival of the railr itously between two worlds: the pr tion and the modern domain of leg tized cultural and cross-cultural inte

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elites, relied on informal and widely understood traditions, often governing through a combination of local custom and military might. Far from the administrative centers of successive Spanish, Mexican, and then American rulers, such elites, members of leading families such as the Armijos, Perales, and Oteros, could exercise a level of control reminiscent of European feudal lordships and Latin American patrones. As we shall see, gender and sexuality, especially the crucial use of strategic marriage and intermarriage, were indispensable aspects of this long-standing regime.

In 1880 a new era dawned in New Mexico with the arrival of the transcontinental railroad. Richard White has noted that by 1900 the American West “depended on outside markets, outside capital, and most often skills and technologies imported from the outside,” and New Mexico was no exception. The arrival of the railroad carried in its wake significant changes, including increased integration into national markets and an unprecedented flow of mostly Anglo immigrants to the territory from throughout the United States and Europe. While older leading families scrambled to maintain their status, new elites rose to prominence in the growing towns of New Albuquerque, Las Vegas, and Santa Fe. These emergent elites, mostly Anglo but with a sprinkling of Hispanics, utilized new techniques and strategies in the consolidation of power. Increasingly, the informal, mostly Hispano-Native traditions governing interpersonal relationships, land use, and the transfer of property gave way to more formal, rationalized methods of interaction and control.

This transition, actually the emergence of a modern New Mexico, appeared in countless guises, from the meticulous surveying and distribution of the land to the explicit regulation of personal behavior.

As this essay will demonstrate, elites and aspiring elites also turned to the territorial courts and legislature. Although previous elites had certainly not shied away from using the legal system to acquire and consolidate their power, the extent of the reliance on law and the courts, including the use of newly educated lawyers and professionals from outside the territory, reached an unprecedented level after 1880.

As had occurred before 1880, Anglo and Hispano elites frequently formed coalitions with each other, often in an effort to continue the exclusion of Native Americans and poor Hispanics and whites from significant power in the region. In large measure, then, lawyers and judges in New Mexico came to occupy the positions once held by merchants and ranchers at the highest levels of society. In the half century after the arrival of the railroad in 1880, New Mexico thus balanced precipitously between two worlds: the premodern land of custom, informality, and tradition and the modern domain of legal codes, explicit property rights, and systematized cultural and cross-cultural interaction.

Nevertheless, amidst these momentous changes in New Mexico, certain aspects of the region remained much the same. Strategic marriages and the careful policing of elite boundaries had for centuries served well the interests of Spanish and then Mexican ruling elites. Marriage and sexuality, as Ramón Gutiérrez has demonstrated, were central features in the creation and sustenance of elite control in New Mexico prior to American conquest. Gutiérrez uses Pueblo and Spanish sources from colonial New Mexico to demonstrate, as he argues, that in New Mexico “marriage historically has structured inequality.” Even after the imposition of
American rule in 1848, the politics of gender and sexuality continued to play a critical role in the governing of the territory. Deena González has noted that in Santa Fe, intermarriages between Anglo men and Spanish-Mexican women were a crucial aspect in the transition from Mexican to American government and rule. “Spanish-Mexican women,” González notes, “brought Euro-American men into their communities, their homes and their lives.” On a more individual level, several of midcentury New Mexico’s most prominent Anglo leaders, such as Kit Carson, Governor Charles (Carlos) Bent, and Governor Henry (Enrique) Connelly, had married wealthy Hispanics of influential New Mexican families. Furthermore, scores of marriages between Latino families, despite their fair share of love and affection, undoubtedly also served strategic ends.

The outlines of this deeply embedded sexual system endured well after 1880 in New Mexico, and, indeed, as a glance at the genealogies of contemporary elites will reveal, the pattern seems even to stretch into the present. Emergent elites post-1880, though anxious to wrap themselves in the formal and systematized garb of modernism, were hardly so uptight as to turn up their noses at the successful strategies of their predecessors. Equipped with new and improved techniques of rule, elites and striving elites also turned with striking frequency to the marriage altar as a strategic location in the consolidation of power. Increasingly well versed in the formal elements of law and the control of territorial courts, Anglo and Latino elites alike nevertheless followed the grand New Mexican tradition of strategic marriage. It is thus my contention that sex across racial boundaries helped bridge the considerable gap separating the New Mexico territory of *patronos*, slaves, and *serfs* and the New Mexico state of lawyers, judges, and wage laborers. This enduring significance of intermarriage and inter racial sexuality is especially evident in the history of the Perea-Otero-Harrison family and the particular life stories of Guadalupe Perea and her son Grover Harrison.

To illustrate my argument, I will follow one of the more prominent narrative threads holding together this story of intermarriage and intrigue in New Mexico: the money, specifically the vast estate left by José Leandro Perea after his death in 1883. Of a much larger original estate, some one hundred thousand dollars passed from Perea to his wife, Guadalupe, and subsequently to her son Grover, over the four decades between José Leandro’s death and the suicide of his stepgrandson. This sum was hardly an undisputed legacy, as other, more prominent members of the Perea family fought in court for generations to obtain the inheritance. As quasi-illegitimate members of New Mexico’s elite, Grover and Guadalupe nonetheless fought back. Though a Native American woman of servant status, Guadalupe passed on her portion of the estate not to other members of the Perea family but to Grover, her son by a second marriage. For his part, Grover, a “mestizo” likewise excluded from New Mexico high society, struggled first to recover and then to distribute after his death his share of his mother’s fortune. Both Guadalupe and Grover utilized the courts, and implicitly challenged the legitimacy of the emergent Anglo-Hispanic elite. It is this tension, lasting nearly forty years and pitting one proper, respectable Anglo-Hispanic section of a family against another less respectable, Native-Hispanic-Anglo side that drives this narrative. The story begins in 1878 with the marriage of Guadalupe Perea. José Leandro, a wealthy thirty-year-old Guadalupan, married the thirty-year-old Guadalupan Francisco De Anda, the wife of the late Francisco De Anda. The life of José Leandro Perea in the nineteenth century, he married Bernalillo and much of central New Mexico, in the hundreds of thousands of doloholds. In 1860 he was one of the few to afford domestic servants, of which he sold seventeen thousand sheep in or out of New Mexico. According to the historian L. F. Symmes, ‘the way south along the Rio Grande, the river and begin the west,' is the likely choice, with Albuquerque much of the land the railroad would have to sell. Subsequently, the railroad moved to the coast, the transcontinental hands of historians like Simmons, naive, holdover from a bygone era, and notes of progress.”

In certain ways, the life of Don José Leandro Perea, a young village, indeed probably throughout, was quite a different story. The seven thousand servants he owned were listed with five servants. Dom Elite status in nineteenth-century New Mexico was served as witnesses and godparents. In 1846 José Leandro and his wife, Doa José Leandro and the engagement of the marriage years later, José and Dolores were Sydney Hubbell and Mathias Ygnacio’s role as a New Mexico *patron* and *quiche* servants. Between 1850 and 1860, the family. Without exception, each of young or old, “Indian” or mestizo sign as any that Don José Leandro of upper-class New Mexico society was prominent New Mexican family, the elder Mexican elite. Their marriage also, and sexuality in the pre-1880 cons-
The story begins in 1878 with the marriage of José Leandro Perea and Bibiana Guadalupe Perea. José Leandro, a widower of barely a year, was fifty-six when he married the thirty-year-old Guadalupe. He was already the father of nearly a dozen children by his first wife, Dolores Chávez, six of whom were older than his new wife. The life of José Leandro Perea is the stuff of New Mexico legend. For decades in the nineteenth century, he dominated the politics and economy of the village of Bernalillo and much of central New Mexico. When he died, his estate was estimated in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, including extensive property and livestock holdings. In 1860 he was one of only a handful of families in Bernalillo to be able to afford domestic servants, of which he had seven. In 1877 he is reputed to have sold seventeen thousand sheep in one sale. Another story of his life is likely apocryphal. According to the historian Marc Simmons, when the railroad was winding its way south along the Rio Grande, A.T. & S.F. engineers searched for a site to cross the river and begin the westward path to the coast. Bernalillo at the time was the likely choice, with Albuquerque a distant second. Don José Leandro owned much of the land the railroad would need to set up its thoroughfare, yet the old patron refused to sell at the rock-bottom prices the railroad demanded. Consequently, the railroad moved to a cheaper land south in Albuquerque, and, but for a lone depot, the transcontinental railroad effectively bypassed Bernalillo. In the hands of historians like Simmons, José Leandro Perea is fashioned a romantic, if naive, holdover from a bygone era, a feudal lord about to be eclipsed by “the clarion notes of progress.”

In certain ways, the life of Don José does indeed seem that of the archetypal pre-railroad New Mexican elite. As mentioned, Perea was one of the few men in his village, indeed probably throughout the Middle Rio Grande Valley, to be able to afford domestic servants. The seven servants listed in his household in 1860 had been preceded by three servants a decade earlier in 1850. In 1870 Guadalupe Perea and two other domestic servants appeared in the census, and in 1880 the family was listed with five servants. Domestic servants were not the only factor defining elite status in nineteenth-century New Mexico. Upper-class New Mexicans also served as witnesses and godparents in marriages and baptisms. In the winter of 1846 José Leandro and his wife, Dolores, were listed as padrinos, or godparents, to one of the betrothed in the marriage of Juan Montoya and Maria Petra Perea. Ten years later, José and Dolores were again padrinos, this time in the marriage of Sydney Hubbell and Maria Ygnacia Perea. A final indication of José Leandro’s role as a New Mexico patron and quasi-feudal lord rests in the names of his domestic servants. Between 1850 and 1880 some fifteen servants lived with the Perea family. Without exception, each of the family’s servants, whether male or female, young or old, “Indian” or “mestizo,” was listed with the surname Perea, as sure a sign as any that Don José Leandro took quite seriously his role as standard-bearer of upper-class New Mexico society in the nineteenth century.

José Leandro’s marriage to Dolores Chávez, a member of an even more prominent New Mexican family, further highlights Perea’s position as a traditional New Mexican elite. Their marriage also, of course, points to the significance of gender and sexuality in the pre-1880 consolidation of elite control. Dolores Chávez’s fa-
ther, Francisco Xavier Chávez, was, like José Leandro, a wealthy rancher and businessman in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. Unlike Perea, however, Chávez had achieved high political office. In fact, he had been the last governor of New Mexico under Spanish rule, and reportedly had at one time owned 300,000 head of sheep. According to one historian, after his death at the age of ninety, his wealth was divided evenly among his eleven sons and daughters. Thus it is quite likely that a fair portion of the wealth accumulated by the Perea family entered the family through either the dowry or the inheritance of Dolores Chávez, yet another indication of the snug relations between the institution of marriage and elite status and power in nineteenth-century New Mexico. Other examples of the strategic use of marriage and intermarriage in the Perea family are close at hand. One of José Leandro Perea’s sisters, Dolores Lauvinia Perea, married Henry Connelly, the governor of the territory of New Mexico. One of José Leandro’s daughters, Cesarí, married Sydney Hubbell, a district judge, while another married W. W. Lewis, an Anglo merchant. A son of Dolores and José Leandro, Mariano, married another member of the Hubbell family, Nina. Other daughters married prominent Hispanics such as Mariano Otero and Jacobo Yrisarri. In their vast wealth, social status as community leaders, and strategic marriages, José Leandro Perea and Dolores Chávez lived exemplary lives as representative New Mexican elites of the nineteenth century.

The Pereas’ grasp on power, however, began to unravel, if only in the slightest of ways, with the death of Dolores in 1877 and José Leandro’s marriage to Guadalupe Perea a year later. Unlike Dolores Chávez, who entered the Perea family with elite status and likely with a substantial dowry, Guadalupe Perea entered the home as a domestic worker and a Native woman. Although the last census enumeration before her marriage placed Guadalupe Perea among the servants of the Perea family, little evidence remains of her early life. According to the census, she was born, like her parents, in New Mexico in the auspicious year of 1848. Her first name quite likely alluded to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed that same year between the United States and Mexico ending the Mexican War and resulting in the U.S. annexation of much of the greater Southwest. At the same time, the name Guadalupe may have referred to the Virgen de Guadalupe, the Spanish and Mexican religious icon and symbol of the commingling of Native and Christian religious beliefs.

More important is the question of how and when Guadalupe Perea entered the Perea household. Her last name suggests that she may have been baptized by the family; baptisms, however, did not necessarily have to occur at a young age. Indeed, Guadalupe did not appear in either the 1850 or 1860 censuses, when she would have been two and twelve years old, respectively. During that same period, as mentioned, the Perea household included several servants, suggesting that Guadalupe may have become a member of the household and been subsequently baptized with the name Perea when she was in her teens. A further clue to Guadalupe’s entrance into the Perea household is the fact that in 1870 she was listed as an “Indian” domestic servant. New Mexico had a long and inglorious tradition of Native servitude and slavery, stretching as far back as the entrance of the Spanish into the Southwest. Countless Native w Pueblos, Navajos, Apaches, an direct slaving raids or as the b ment had ostensibly ended af continued to rely on Native do itary and Native Americans centuty, offering the wealthy servants. Thus Guadalupe Perea and 1870 could quite easily ha documented New Mexican lega

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Southwest. Countless Native women, men, and children of various tribes, including Pueblos, Navajos, Apaches, and Utes, entered Spanish homes, often as the result of direct slaving raids or as the booty of war. While the practice of Native enslavement had ostensibly ended after the Civil War, wealthy Hispanics and Anglos alike continued to rely on Native domestic servants. Warfare between the American military and Native Americans continued in New Mexico throughout the nineteenth century, offering the wealthy ample opportunity to procure the services of Native servants. Thus Guadalupe Perea’s entrance into the Perea household between 1860 and 1870 could quite easily have been the result of an enduring though still poorly documented New Mexican legacy.

Once within the Perea household, Guadalupe occupied a vastly different social and sexual position than her immediate predecessor, Dolores Chávez. Indeed, Guadalupe’s life was fraught with dangers virtually unknown to the Señora Chávez de Perea. As a Native servant in New Mexico, Guadalupe had little status in the Perea household. There is no evidence of personal wealth in the census schedules, and she is listed as being unable to read or write. Furthermore, as Ramón Gutiérrez and others have noted, sexual predation was far from unknown in such domestic situations. Although there is little evidence that Guadalupe was raped or that she had been pregnant prior to her marriage to José Leandro, it is clear that Guadalupe Perea had few legal recourse in resisting the sexual advances of males in the Perea household. Unlike Dolores Chávez, she came into the Perea family not with a handsome dowry or the backing of a prestigious family, but as a servant and quasi-slave.

In a startling transformation, however, Guadalupe would exit the home as a señora. The transformation began when she married José Leandro Perea in 1878. Two years later, the 1880 census enumeration suddenly listed her not as “Indian” but as “white.” Although the household included one “mestizo” and two “Indian” servants, Guadalupe appears “white,” as do José Leandro and his children from the first marriage. Furthermore, nine-month-old José Leandro, Jr., presumably the son of Guadalupe and José, also becomes whitened, his racial category listed as “white,” not as “mestizo” or of mixed heritage. José Leandro was evidently not at all shy about recognizing publicly his marriage to Guadalupe. He not only bestowed his first name on their child, but quite openly named Guadalupe his legitimate wife in his will. She and their child figured prominently in the wealthy New Mexican’s estate, receiving a considerable bequeathment. After the death of José Leandro, upon her remarriage to George Harrison, a newspaper duly noted that Guadalupe Perea was a “wealthy and accomplished lady.” Clearly, much had changed in the decade between 1870 and 1880, as an illiterate Native American servant became a wealthy Hispana señora.

At the same time, for all her wealth and apparent status, Guadalupe Perea could not so easily enter New Mexico’s ruling elite. New Mexican elites had for centuries defined themselves as not “Indian,” and there is little to suggest that the Perea family was much different. The widowed Guadalupe, though the recipient after José Leandro’s death in 1883 of a significant portion of the estate of one of New Mexico’s wealthiest men, was also in several senses a marked woman. One threat may have come from the townspeople of Bernalillo and the Middle Rio Grande Valley,