Nuestra Platforma: **Hispanics Protest Anglo Encroachment in New Mexico (1890)**

*The White Caps*

*With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which concluded the U.S. war with Mexico, Hispanics who were living in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas suddenly found themselves foreigners in their native land: the Mexican North became the American Southwest by right of U.S. conquest. Not surprisingly, the process of political incorporation, which took decades to complete, created racial tensions as well as class and economic conflicts. One such conflict erupted in San Miguel County in the territory of New Mexico when Anglo interests in the 1880s tried to enclose the communal lands of Hispanic villagers. Taking matters into their own hands, angry local residents, known as Las Gorras Blancas, or "the White Caps,” resisted these encroachments by cutting the Anglos’ newly strung barbed wire and committing other acts of destruction. The White Caps also put their grievances in writing and on the night of March 11, 1890, posted copies of “Our Platform” throughout the town of Las Vegas.*

Source: From Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans, ed. David J. Weber (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1973), 234-236. Copyright © 1973 by The University of New Mexico Press. Reprinted by permission of The University of New Mexico Press.

NUESTRA PLATFORMA —Our purpose is to protect the rights and interests of the people in general and especially those of the helpless classes.

We want the Las Vegas Grant settled to the benefit of all concerned, and this we hold is the entire community within the Grant.

We want no “land grabbers" or obstructionists of any sort to interfere. We will watch them.

We are not down on lawyers as a class, but the usual knavery and unfair treatment of the people must be stopped.

Our judiciary hereafter must understand that we will sustain it only when “Justice” is its watchword.

We are down on race issues, and will watch race agitators.

We favor irrigation enterprises, but will fight any scheme that tends to monopolize the supply of water sources to the detriment of residents living on lands watered by the same streams.

The people are suffering from the effects of partisan "bossism” and these bosses had better quietly hold their peace. The people have been persecuted and hauled about in every which way to satisfy their caprices.

We must have a free ballot and fair court and the will of the Majority shall be respected.

We have no grudge against any person in particular, but we are the enemies of bulldozers and tyrants.

If the old system should continue, death would be a relief to our suffering. And for our rights our lives are the least we can pledge.

If the fact that we are law-abiding citizens is questioned, come out to our houses and see the hunger and desolation we are suffering; and “this” is the result of the deceitful and corrupt methods of “bossism.”

The White Caps 1,500 Strong and Gaining Daily

**Questions**

1. If you were to reduce this platform to one or two slogans, what would they be? Do the White Caps’ demands seem reasonable?
2. What connections can be made between the experiences of the White Caps and Native Americans in the new “American” West?

**A Century of Dishonor** (1881)

*Helen Hunt Jackson*

*Born in Amherst, Massachusetts, Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885) was raised in the New England moral climate that nurtured the abolitionist and woman suffrage movements of the mid-nineteenth century. However, this childhood friend of Emily Dickinson showed no interest in reform causes until her second marriage and her move to Colorado in 1875. Ironically, it was during a trip to Boston in 1879 that Jackson heard the Ponca chief Standing Bear speak on the plight of the Plains Indians.*

*The incident served as a conversion experience, and Jackson began making herself an expert on the history of relations between the government and Native Americans. Within two years she published* A Century of Dishonor. *Not all readers were pleased with Jackson’s condemnation of the government for its mistreatment of Native Americans. Because the book was “written in good English” by an author “intensely in earnest,” Theodore Roosevelt feared that it was “capable of doing great harm.”*

Source: Excerpt from Helen Hunt Jackson, A Century of Dishonor, (1881), 338-342.

In 1869 President Grant appointed a commission of nine men, representing the influence and philanthropy of six leading States, to visit the different Indian reservations, and to “examine all matters appertaining to Indian affairs.”

In the report of this commission are such paragraphs as the following: “To assert that 'the Indian will not work' is as true as it would be to say that the white man will not work.

“Why should the Indian be expected to plant corn, fence lands, build houses, or do anything but get food from day to day, when experience has taught him that the product of his labor will be seized by the white man to-morrow? The most industrious white man would become a drone under similar circumstances. Nevertheless, many of the Indians” (the commissioners might more forcibly have said 130,000 of the Indians) “are already at work, and furnish ample refutation of the assertion that 'the Indian will not work.' There is no escape from the inexorable logic of facts.

“The history of the Government connections with the Indians is a shameful record of broken treaties and unfulfilled promises. The history of the border white man’s connection with the Indians is a sickening record of murder, outrage, robbery, and wrongs committed by the former, as the rule, and occasional savage outbreaks and unspeakably barbarous deeds of retaliation by the latter, as the exception.

“Taught by the Government that they had rights entitled to respect, when those rights have been assailed by the rapacity of the white man, the arm which should have been raised to protect them has ever been ready to sustain the aggressor.

“The testimony of some of the highest military officers of the United States is on record to the effect that, in our Indian wars, almost without exception, the first aggressions have been made by the white man; and the assertion is supported by every civilian of reputation who has studied the subject. In addition to the class of robbers and outlaws who find impunity in their nefarious pursuits on the frontiers, there is a large class of professedly reputable men who use every means in their power to bring on Indian wars for the sake of the profit to be realized from the presence of troops and the expenditure of Government funds in their midst. They proclaim death to the Indians at all times in words and publications, making no distinction between the innocent and the guilty. They irate the lowest class of men to the perpetration of the darkest deeds against their victims, and as judges and jurymen shield them from the justice due to their crimes. Every crime committed by a white man against an Indian is concealed or palliated. Every offence committed by an Indian against a white man is borne on the wings of the post or the telegraph to the remotest corner of the land, clothed with all the horrors which the reality or imagination can throw around it. Against such influences as these the people of the United States need to be warned.”

To assume that it would be easy, or by any one sudden stroke of legislative policy possible, to undo the mischief and hurt of the long past, set the Indian policy of the country right for the future, and make the Indians at once safe and happy, is the blunder of a hasty and uninformed judgment. The notion which seems to be growing more prevalent, that simply to make all Indians at once citizens of the United States would be a sovereign and instantaneous panacea for all their ills and all the Government’s perplexities, is a very inconsiderate one. To administer complete citizenship of a sudden, all round, to all Indians, barbarous and civilized alike, would be as grotesque a blunder as to dose them all round with any one medicine, irrespective of the symptoms and needs of their diseases. It would kill more than it would cure. Nevertheless, it is true, as was well stated by one of the superintendents of Indian Affairs in 1857, that, “so long as they are not citizens of the United States, their rights of property must remain insecure against invasion. The doors of the federal tribunals being barred against them while wards and dependents, they can only partially exercise the rights of free government, or give to those who make, execute, and construe the few laws they are allowed to enact, dignity sufficient to make them respectable. While they continue individually to gather the crumbs that fall from the table of the United States, idleness, improvidence, and indebtedness will be the rule, and industry, thrift, and freedom from debt the exception. The utter absence of individual title to particular lands deprives every one among them of the chief incentive to labor and exertion—the very mainspring on which the prosperity of a people depends.”

All judicious plans and measures for their safety and salvation must embody provisions for their becoming citizens as fast as they are fit, and must protect them till then in every right and particular in which our laws protect other “persons” who are not citizens.

There is a disposition in a certain class of minds to be impatient with any protestation against wrong which is unaccompanied or unprepared with a quick and exact scheme of remedy. This is illogical. When pioneers in a new country find a tract of poisonous and swampy wilderness to be reclaimed, they do not withhold their hands from fire and axe till they see clearly which way roads should run, where good water will spring, and what crops will best grow on the redeemed land. They first clear the swamp. So with this poisonous and baffling part of the domain of our national affairs-let us first “clear the swamp."

However great perplexity and difficulty there may be in the details of any and every plan possible for doing at this late day anything like justice to the Indian, however hard it may be for good statesmen and good men to agree upon the things that ought to be done, there certainly is, or ought to be, no perplexity whatever, no difficulty whatever, in agreeing upon certain things that ought not to be done, and which must cease to be done before the first steps can be taken toward righting the wrongs, curing the ills, and wiping out the disgrace to us of the present condition of our Indians.

Cheating, robbing, breaking promises—these three are clearly things which must cease to be done. One more thing, also, and that is the refusal of the protection of the law to the Indian’s rights of property, “of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

When these four things have ceased to be done, time, statesmanship, philanthropy, and Christianity can slowly and surely do the rest. Till these four things have ceased to be done, statesmanship and philanthropy alike must work in vain, and even Christianity can reap but small harvest.

***Questions***

1. Why didn’t official reports that were critical of U.S. government policy toward Native Americans have a greater effect on the American public?
2. What was the importance of granting citizenship to Native Americans? What problems with granting citizenship does Jackson see?
3. What was Jackson’s prescription for improved relations with Native Americans?