

4-1-1991

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### Recommended Citation

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# L. Bradford Prince: The Education of a Gilded Age Politician

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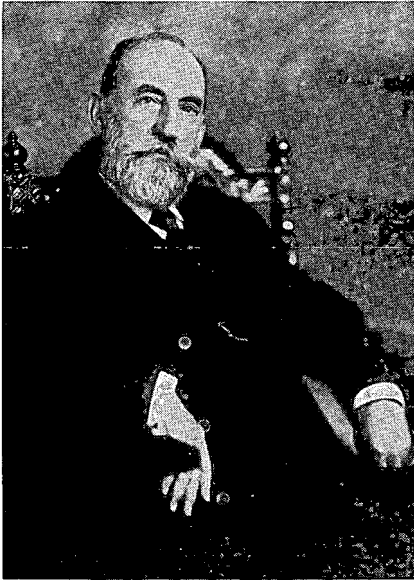
MARÍA E. MONTOYA

In 1879, when L. Bradford Prince crossed the “Great American Desert” on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad to Santa Fe, he must have thought that his journey from New York covered a distance vast in more than just miles. For Prince, the newly appointed chief justice of New Mexico Territory, the *cultural* distance between New Mexico and the Long Island of his sophisticated legal practice was immense. Unfortunately, Prince’s first impression of New Mexico’s inhabitants came from racist, yet romantic sources such as W. W. H. Davis’ *El Gringo*. As Prince’s train glided across the empty, rolling landscape he read that, “While Mexicans lack the courage and enterprise of our own people, they neither possess the turbulent and uneasy spirit. They are a peaceful and quiet race of people, and in their general disposition are rather mild and amicable.”<sup>1</sup> Drawing on his previous travels to New

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1. William Watts Hart Davis, *El Gringo: or New Mexico & Her People* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857), 88. Davis was one of the first U.S. government officials to visit New Mexico and report on its people, government, and customs. Harvey Fergusson in an introduction to a later edition said of this Victorian American, “his naive and beautiful smugness never keeps him from recording the fact or the details with precision.” See also Diary entry, February 4, 1879, Diaries and Notebooks Folder, Prince Papers, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as Prince Papers).



L. Bradford Prince. Photo courtesy of Museum of New Mexico.

Mexico, Davis painted a picture of a naive and pre-industrial people who were easily controlled if handled properly. Former U.S. Attorney Davis' account of life in Santa Fe fascinated and appealed to Prince because in many respects Prince's journey to New Mexico was a flight from the rough-and-tumble democracy of the newly urbanized and Gilded Age America. No doubt, as he sat on the train reading, Prince looked forward to his arrival in pastoral New Mexico and the beginning of his new career as chief justice of the territorial Supreme Court.

Prince thought that his life had finally fallen into place. Not only had he received his prestigious appointment from President Rutherford B. Hayes, but Hattie Childs had just agreed to marry him the following summer. Most important, however, he had overcome his earlier clash with Roscoe Conkling's New York political machine, and he was back into politics, even if 2,000 miles from New York. Santa Fe, New Mexico, seemed like an appropriate location for a prospering new career in a romantic new setting.<sup>2</sup>

An enigmatic and extremely private figure, LeBaron Bradford Prince has eluded historians of New Mexico. Although historical sources do not reveal that Prince played a more prominent role than did other

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2. Diary entry, February 5, 6, 1879, Prince Papers.

New Mexicans in the campaign for statehood, he somehow acquired the title of the "Father of Statehood."<sup>3</sup> Prince did wax most eloquently about the legal as well as the philosophical reasons for New Mexicans deserving to become citizens of the United States, but his relatively minor contribution is hardly his most significant political act. Unfortunately, historians have ignored Prince's larger importance as a transition figure between the machine politics of the Gilded Age and the more populist reformers associated with Progressivism. Because of this confusion and misinterpretation of Prince's role in New Mexico history, a reexamination of the territorial governor's life is essential to understand the political and cultural development of territorial New Mexico.

Born in Flushing, New York, in 1840, L. Bradford Prince came from the long-standing Prince family of Long Island, who for three generations had been prominent horticulturists and successful nurserymen. He also prided himself on being able to trace back his patrician background from his mother, Charlotte Goodwin Collins, to Governor William Bradford of Mayflower fame.

On the other hand, Bradford's father, William Prince, was somewhat eccentric and often ensnared in scandal. In 1835, William Prince and his brother took over the nursery from their father. At William's insistence the nursery invested in mulberry bushes and silk worms, but the project was a failure, from which the family business never financially recovered. Then in 1849, when Bradford was only seven years old, William Prince caught gold fever and left for California, staying away from his family and business for four years. He returned penniless, with but a few experimental plants he had gathered in his travels through the American Southwest and northern Mexico. Since experiments with these plants proved unsuccessful in the Long Island climate, William spent the remainder of his life, until 1869, tied to his

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3. The only monographic treatment of the Territorial Governor is Walter J. Donlon, "LeBaron Bradford Prince, Chief Justice and Governor of New Mexico Territory, 1879-1893" (doctoral dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1967). Other short treatments of Prince can be found in Cynthia Secor-Welsh, "Governor Miguel A. Otero, 1897-1906: Agent for Change," (master's thesis, University of New Mexico, 1982); Robert Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest: "The Sacred Right of Self-Preservation"* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 109-30; Robert W. Larson, *New Mexico Populism: A Study of Radical Protest in a Western Territory* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1974), 70-149; Larson, *New Mexico's Quest for Statehood 1846-1912* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 143-90; Howard Roberts Lamar, *The Far Southwest 1846-1912 A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 147-98; Lamar, "Edmund G. Ross as Governor of New Mexico Territory, A Reappraisal," *New Mexico Historical Review* 36 (July 1961), 177-209.

failing business and deeply involved in spiritualism.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this mismatched combination of patrician mother and adventurous father explains how L. Bradford Prince acquired his often puzzling approach to life.

Nominally involved in his father's nursery, Bradford Prince decided instead to pursue a career in public life. After graduating from Columbia Law School with honors in 1866, he immediately embarked on a career in state politics. Although a Republican in a strongly Democratic district, his progressive and "anti-Boss" politics won him great popularity and respect. He served in the New York State Assembly from 1871 to 1875 and then from 1876 to 1877 in the State Senate. One of Prince's most noted political achievements occurred in 1876. While serving on the State Senate Judiciary Committee, Prince instigated impeachment proceedings against three corrupt New York State judges: George B. Barnard, Albert Cordozo, and George McKunn, all of whom were accused of "impropriety in office." Prince led the fact-finding stage of the inquiry and then spearheaded the prosecution of the judges. Within six months he and his colleagues had succeeded in removing the judges from office, proclaiming, somewhat prematurely, that "judicial reform in the state of New York [was] complete."<sup>5</sup>

Prince's conflicts with government corruption and New York bossism changed dramatically when he and New York Republican party leader Roscoe Conkling began quarrelling openly about Prince's reform activities. This break eventually led to Prince's premature departure from New York politics. During the mid-1870s, through the use of official New York Customs House monies, Conkling ran a lucrative governmental patronage syndicate that Prince opposed. To show his dissatisfaction with the Conkling machine, Prince, as a delegate to the Republican National Convention, supported reformer Rutherford B. Hayes in the 1876 presidential election, opposing Conkling's choices of either a third term for President U. S. Grant or the nomination of James G. Blaine, the notoriously corrupt Maine politician. The Republican convention, reacting to the criticism of Grant's corruption-ridden second term, chose the reformer Hayes over Blaine. Finally, in the controversial election of 1876, Hayes was elected president over Democrat Samuel J. Tilden. One of Hayes' primary goals was to clean up the corruption at the New York Customs House, which he inaugurated

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4. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (20 vols., New York: Scribner's Sons, 1935), 15: 229-30.

5. "Biography, Political Issues," expandable file 1, Prince Papers; *Flushing Evening Journal*, June 6, 1905, p. 2.

by appointing the reform-minded Carl A. Schurz to head the Department of the Interior.<sup>6</sup>

Schurz' first action was to remove Conkling's man, Chester A. Arthur, from head of the Customs House post, replacing Arthur and his cronies with the elder Theodore Roosevelt and L. Bradford Prince. These two new appointees, however, had to win confirmation by the Senate Committee of Commerce, which Roscoe Conkling chaired. Conkling, seizing the opportunity to keep Arthur in office and to get even with Prince, successfully blocked both appointments.<sup>7</sup> Although Hayes and Schurz eventually succeeded in removing Arthur and replacing him with Silas Burt, Prince's New York political career was in ruin because of Conkling's strong opposition. After his defeat, Prince retreated from politics and settled into a New York law practice.

Prince illustrates the late nineteenth-century, good government reformer who placed the eradication of machine patronage and graft at the center of their political agendas. Typically blue-blooded and well-educated professionals, these civil-service reformers espoused a government run by patrician elites motivated by noblesse oblige and free from precinct captains, ward bosses, or bribes. Prince exemplifies the precarious position of such reformers: lacking the populist zeal of a later William Jennings Bryan or the enthusiasm of a Teddy Roosevelt, these "gentleman-reformers" faced extraordinary obstacles in trying to wield political clout against political bosses with strong ethnic constituencies. Instead, many civil-service reformers went the way of Henry Adams and retreated into a dignified world of scholarship and criticism of government, away from the arena of electoral politics that had no place for them. Prince took a different route, however, and in leadership of the territorial system he found his niche as a political appointee. In the western empire of the United States he believed he had located a region free from the messy ethnic democracy of political bosses and the raucous popularity of progressives. Prince regarded the western frontier as a place where he could live out his patrician dream.

Immediately after the Conkling affair, President Hayes, in recognition of Prince's support, asked him if he would accept appointment as governor of Idaho Territory. Prince thought about the position, and, so the story goes, decided to visit the Idaho territorial delegate to Congress. According to Frank W. Clancey, Prince "conceived a prejudice against Idaho, after calling upon the delegate from the territory,

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6. Donald B. Chidsey, *The Gentleman from New York: A Life of Roscoe Conkling* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 240.

7. *Ibid.*, 250-51.

and finding him without shoes and with his wool-clad feet obtrusively elevated to a highly unornamental position, and he [Prince] declined the appointment."<sup>8</sup> Clearly, Prince possessed a refined eastern and somewhat aristocratic propriety that often made him wary of frontier homespun manners.

Two years later, however, Hayes offered Prince another post as chief justice of the Supreme Court of the Territory of New Mexico and Prince accepted. Why Prince believed New Mexico was more "civilized" and why he was more willing to travel to the Southwest remains unclear. He probably preferred, however, the prestige of the court over the tainted world of governmental politics. In any event, Prince's close friend, Episcopal minister Joseph Beers, sent Prince off to the territory with best wishes and a charge to "promote the best interests of the Church of Christ in that needy region." Prince, remembering the charge by Beers, continued an active member of the Episcopal church and is still revered by many New Mexico Episcopalians as the founder of the church in this state. In typical late-nineteenth-century ignorance, however, Beers also warned Prince to "take care of your scalp, don't let the Injuns take it away, it would despoil your beauty and mar your visage, besides inflicting temporary discomfort upon you."<sup>9</sup>

Prince rode the train for seven days from New York City to Trinidad, Colorado, where the line ended. At Trinidad he boarded a stagecoach bound for Santa Fe. In Bradford Prince's typically laconic manner, he described his first reaction to the Territory: "Left Trinidad on coach. Jammed in. Very Rough. Over Raton Pass. Splendid view. Cold. Much snow on ground." On the following day he reported, "At night caught in drift. Had to get out and beat a track." Although Prince's first impression of New Mexico was less than inviting, he would pursue his new position with the same efficiency and aggressiveness that characterized his earlier career in New York. On the very day he arrived in Santa Fe, he opened court. Prince's journal of 1879 shows that he often held court from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m., with only one-hour breaks for lunch and dinner. Within six months Prince had cleared the large backlog of cases, earning a reputation as one of the most efficient and fairest judges in the territory.<sup>10</sup>

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8. Frank W. Clancey, *In Memory of L. Bradford Prince* (Santa Fe: Historical Society of New Mexico, 1923), 5.

9. Joseph Beers to Prince, January 29, 1879, Prince Family Papers, reel 14, Special Collections, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

10. Diary entry, February 6, 7, 1879, Prince Papers; Arie William Poldervaart, *Black-Robed Justice* (Santa Fe: Historical Society of New Mexico, 1948), 111-13.

At the end of his first year in office, Prince returned to New York to marry Hattie Anna Estelle Childs, the daughter of a prominent New York medical doctor who by all accounts was "bright and charming." On Prince's wedding day, he wrote, "Office in a.m. Succeeded in getting to Brooklyn by 3, by carriage—belongings on boat. Married at Grace Church, Brooklyn to Hattie Anna Estelle Childs. Nice Lunch at Col. Tucker's[.] Left on Aft. Boat for Phili. No valise." One notes that the most memorable event of Prince's wedding day was that the couple had lost their suitcase in the course of their travels.<sup>11</sup>

After a brief honeymoon in Philadelphia and Washington D.C., the couple returned to New Mexico. Unfortunately, Hattie "caught cold" on December 28, and on the next day Prince wrote, "Hattie sick—neuralgia—doctor tomorrow."<sup>12</sup> Hattie, however, never recovered from her illness. The cold and rough trip to New Mexico had been injurious to her health, and tragically she died three months later in Santa Fe. After 1879, Prince stopped keeping a diary, so there are no clues about his feelings or their relationship. But less than two years later he returned to New York and married an old family friend, Mary Catherine Bruckle Beardsley. She proved more sturdy than the first Mrs. Prince and served her husband well as an astute political colleague. Mary Catherine Prince was an aggressive woman, perhaps more so than her husband, who pushed Bradford's political career forward by using her own New York political clout, as well as by creating a "Santa Fe society" that would appreciate her husband.

The Princes remained in New Mexico for another year until Prince ran into political trouble with factions of the Santa Fe Ring, led by Stephen Dorsey. Apparently, the ring tried to remove Prince because he would not help in their attempts to gain political and economic control over New Mexico. After President James A. Garfield's inauguration, an investigation was launched under Attorney General Benjamin Harris Brewster to answer the charges of misconduct against Prince. Although nothing was ever proven, Prince reluctantly resigned from office and was replaced, suspiciously, with Samuel B. Axtell, former territorial governor and noted ring member.

Corrupt "spoils politics" continued to trouble Prince even in the West. Dorsey and the Santa Fe Ring, however, differed in crucial respects from Conkling's machine. Where Conkling had a large constit-

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11. Devens to Prince, March 6, 1880, Governor's Papers, L. Bradford Prince, Territorial Archives of New Mexico, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe; Diary entry, December 1, 1879, Prince Papers.

12. Diary entries, December 19, 28, 1879, Prince Papers.





Will Prince in his father's study. Photo courtesy of Museum of New Mexico.

uency of petty henchmen and local loyalties to support him, the ring had only a handful of well-placed government officials, businessmen, and lawyers. Prince's best ally against Conkling had been the federal government: President Hayes and Carl Schurz had thrown out Prince's enemies from the New York Customs House. In New Mexico, however, the federal government proved to be Prince's enemy and the ring's ally: the detachment of the federal government from local corruption that destroyed Conkling simultaneously kept the federal government ignorant of the fabricated charges against Prince. Indeed, the Santa Fe Ring represented a new western form of boss politics—a federal boss system in which a distant, central government became a tool for local bosses to reap spoils without an elaborate local political machine. This “federal boss system” would dog Prince in New Mexico just as Conkling's local machine had dogged him in New York.

Despite these political defeats, the Princes decided to stay in New Mexico and settled in Santa Fe. In both 1882 and 1884 Prince returned to the world of electoral politics and ran unsuccessfully for territorial delegate to Congress on the Republican ticket. Finally, in 1889, after six months of lobbying in Washington, D.C., Prince was appointed

governor of the Territory of New Mexico by President Benjamin Harrison.

Prince's appointment was greeted with acclaim. A reporter for the *Social Independent Advocate* wrote of Prince that he was "a man of ability; thoroughly honest, industrious and enterprising. No man is more thoroughly acquainted with the wants and desires of the people of New Mexico, and we feel assured that he will make an excellent governor."<sup>13</sup> During Prince's campaigning for the governorship, no one mentioned the Brewster investigation; perhaps people attributed the incident to partisan, political machinations.

During his term as governor, Prince wanted more than anything else to attain statehood for New Mexico. That task, however, was much easier said than done. Although a vocal group, mostly Republicans, supported the move, New Mexico had not petitioned Congress for statehood in fifteen years. Above all, extreme racial prejudice against the territory's residents by the rest of the United States had halted earlier statehood moves. The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, said of New Mexicans: they were "not American, but 'Greaser' persons ignorant of our laws, manners, customs, language, and institutions," and "grossly illiterate and superstitious."<sup>14</sup> These prejudices surfaced politically when opponents of statehood pointed out that New Mexico had no public school system, that the territory was embroiled in numerous land tenure disputes, and that its leaders were not sufficiently organized to write a constitution.

Partisan national politics also played a crucial part in the controversy over New Mexico's entrance into the Union. In 1888 it had become clear that the Dakotas, Washington, and Montana would be admitted to the Union, probably as Republican states. But the Democrats, who had lost control of the House in the 1888 election, were anxious to take a gamble by admitting a Democratic New Mexico. After a year of political maneuvers and counterattacks, however, statehood for New Mexico was dropped from the Omnibus bill at the insistence of the Republicans and the territory once again denied its rights guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>15</sup>

Prince quickly mobilized a new effort after the Congressional defeat of New Mexico statehood, calling for the election of delegates to

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13. *Social Independent Advocate*, April 6, 1889, Prince folder, Marian Dargan Papers, Special Collections, University of New Mexico.

14. *Chicago Tribune*, January 10, 1889, as quoted in Larson, *New Mexico's Quest for Statehood*, 148.

15. Larson, *New Mexico's Quest for Statehood*, 155.

a Constitutional Convention that would meet in November 1889. Unfortunately, the Democrats and Republicans vehemently disagreed over the apportionment of the districts, each, of course, wanting to gerrymander a winning majority. When no satisfactory agreement was reached, Democrats encouraged people not to vote, and then most Democrats elected refused to participate in the framing of the Constitution. Only fifty-one of the seventy-three delegates appeared at the convention. Distressed by Democratic opposition and conscious that Washington was watching, Prince wrote to C. H. Gildersleeve, Democratic party whip, asking him to return to New Mexico because "your people are acting as badly as possible, and unless you come and put some sense into them, we will be criticized all over the country." Although a strong advocate of statehood, Gildersleeve chose not to dissuade his party from undermining the Constitution of 1889.<sup>16</sup>

At Prince's bidding, Republicans continued the process and produced an extremely controversial Constitution with a much amended Public School bill, as well as a 1 percent property tax. This low rate of taxation protected the extensive holdings of the influential Santa Fe Ring. One paper even labeled these efforts the "Tom-Cat Constitution" after one ring leader, Thomas B. Catron.<sup>17</sup> When the Constitution was taken to the people for ratification, it was soundly defeated: 16,000 to 7,493. Once again, statehood was postponed. Once again New Mexicans were relegated to what Prince termed "second-class citizenship."

Prince's annual report to the secretary of the interior in 1890 carefully explained the reasons for the defeat of the Constitution. He argued that the voting did not suggest that New Mexicans wanted to remain out of the Union. Instead, Prince turned the tables on the federal government, placing blame not on New Mexicans but on the U.S. Congress, which had failed to admit New Mexico in 1888. "This refusal to admit," he wrote, "has forced us to recognize that there is a prejudice in the older states against New Mexico, which, although based solely on ignorance of our condition yet is none the less powerful and injurious."<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, L. Bradford Prince had matured in his understanding of New Mexico and her people since that day, ten years ago, when he sat on the train reading *El Gringo*. Contrary to Davis' observation that

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16. Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 188; Prince to C. H. Gildersleeve, July 13, 1889, Contemporary Issues folder 6, Prince Papers.

17. Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 189.

18. "Report to the Secretary of the Interior, 1890-1891," frames 297, 336, reel 121, Governor's Papers, L. Bradford Prince, Territorial Archives of New Mexico.

the natives "should be [shown] compassion rather than shunned because of their degraded condition,"<sup>19</sup> Prince found that New Mexicans were neither naive nor pitiful. He argued that they, like other U.S. citizens, deserved the benefits derived from statehood.

Prince wanted statehood because he believed that act would help end the inherent corruption of the territorial system. In his dealings with Stephen Dorsey, Thomas B. Catron, Stephen B. Elkins, and the rest of the Santa Fe Ring, Prince encountered first hand the iron fist of the ring's power in New Mexico. Once he recognized the ring's control, he planned to fight it in the same way he had fought against Conkling's dominion. By allowing the territory's residents to choose their own political leaders, Prince hoped he could undercut the Santa Fe Ring's power, which was based on federal appointments and land speculation. Unfortunately, for Prince, neither his personal charisma nor his organizational skills were a match for his dualistic goals for democracy; like other "goo-goos" or "good government" men, Prince was unable to master the democratic process that he endorsed.

In defending New Mexico's right to statehood, Prince was defending *his* vision of democracy—a democracy free of factions, self-interest, or party rancor. Here, Prince patently distorted reality. For instance, in his report of 1890 to the secretary of interior, Prince blamed New Mexico's territorial status on Congressional inaction and claimed that the territory had been "proceeding in a dignified manner to perfect every preliminary that could possibly be required as a prerequisite to admission." Prince thought that New Mexicans had gone beyond what was necessary. Now, he stated further, not New Mexicans but Congress had to acknowledge "the responsibility of their deprivation of the right of self-government."<sup>20</sup> His claims obviously ignored the earlier undignified party squabbles that surrounded the Constitutional Convention and the doubtful legitimacy of that process in which 30 percent of the elected delegates refused to participate. Nevertheless, Prince was convinced that the territory was willing and prepared to embrace the right of self-government; New Mexicans deserved finally to exercise their long-overdue rights.

Prince was likewise quick to expound on the cultural harmony and unity that he believed characterized New Mexico. By painting a picture for Washington D.C. of subdued Indians and capable, "Americanized" Hispanics, Prince wanted to rebut nativist stereotypes of New

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19. Davis, *El Gringo*, introduction.

20. "Report to the Secretary of the Interior," 1889, frame 293, 1890, frame 313, reel 121, Territorial Archives of New Mexico.

Mexicans as lazy, superstitious, and "un-American." Instead, he created another more benign but still false picture of New Mexico—a New Mexico free of racial or ethnic tensions, in which different cultures, without strife or resentment, labored side by side for the common good. For example, in 1889 Prince reported that "the pueblos are the same industrious moral and orderly people that they were when first seen by Cabeza de Baca, three and a half centuries ago."<sup>21</sup> By invoking prequest mythology, Prince tried to paper over the reality that many Native Americans and Hispanic New Mexicans, with justification, regarded themselves as a conquered people in an occupied territory.

This is not to suggest that Prince was insincere in his desire to alleviate ethnic resentment. In fact, early in his tenure as governor, Prince wrote a letter to President Benjamin Harrison requesting that more native New Mexicans be appointed to territorial offices. "I beg to ask your careful consideration of this matter," he wrote in July of 1889, "feeling assured that both justice and policy require some such recognition."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, when the first public school system was established in 1891, Prince, in the spirit of his request, appointed a Catholic Hispanic, Amado Chávez, to the post of territorial superintendent of schools. This appointment helped alleviate the fears of the territory's Catholics that the government would usurp all authority over education. Chávez proved a successful bureaucrat and was reappointed by Governors William T. Thornton and Miguel A. Otero.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, Prince wanted outsiders to believe that all intra-territorial squabbles were settled and that a united, multicultural people were asking for statehood. In reality, however, this was not the case.

Even while Prince wrote and spoke eloquently about the supposed peace and unity of New Mexico territory, two serious altercations marred his tenure as governor. The most problematic one, although not directly aimed at Prince or his government, came from *Las Gorras Blancas* (the White Caps), who terrorized the eastern counties of New Mexico by cutting fences and vandalizing Anglo homesteads. At first, Prince tried to ignore the distant situation, but by late 1890 the complaints to the Department of the Interior were so numerous that Prince was asked to launch an investigation into the violence.<sup>24</sup>

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21. *Ibid.*, 303.

22. Prince to President Harrison, July 10, 1889, Current Issues, folder 3, Prince Papers.

23. Thomas C. Donnelly, *The Government of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1947), 185.

24. Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance*, 109.

Las Gorras Blancas was a grassroots organization led by Juan José Herrera, a native from San Miguel County, where most of the violence occurred. "Building on a sense of ethnic and class identification that grew stronger in the face of racial slurs and economic threats," historian Robert Rosenbaum wrote, "Herrera forged a movement out of traditional materials of hispanic culture."<sup>25</sup> Las Gorras Blancas agitated for a return to the traditional use of land (e.g., subsistence farming and sheep grazing) and dignified wage labor, the latter demand illustrating the group's affiliation with the Knights of Labor. Their agitations were somewhat effective: Prince was unable to mobilize a popular movement against them or to convict any member. When the violence eventually subsided, Las Gorras Blancas turned to political agitation by forming El Partido del Pueblo Unido, an influential Hispanic political force in the territory.

Prince's inability to control the general populace in the countryside matched his frustration in his struggle to control his own party's personnel. Indeed, Republican infighting and disunity constantly hampered Prince's proposals for reforms. Sensing the hostility of his enemies, particularly that of people associated with the Santa Fe Ring, Prince declared that "it is the curse of this country that political prejudices run so high."<sup>26</sup> As the power of the Santa Fe Ring waned to its nadir, political squabbles within the syndicate began to take their toll on the Republican party. Especially hostile towards and fearful of Thomas B. Catron, Prince anxiously sought to keep him out of power. In 1892, when Catron ran for territorial delegate to Congress, Prince published a brief attacking Catron, "The Enemy of Progress," in which Prince portrayed his opponent as a self-serving man who had neither loyalty to the people nor concern for the development of New Mexico. "His will has been to crush out all enterprise in which he was given no share" wrote Prince. "If he had never seen New Mexico we should today have much more population, more farms, more factories, more improvements of all kinds and our laws would have been modernized long ago." Although Prince's fulmination attracted few followers, the document reveals the same hatred for corruption that he exhibited when attacking Conkling and recalls his intense paranoia of and hostility towards machine politics in general, and Catron in particular. Prince concluded, "To increase his [Catron's] power is a blow to prog-

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25. *Ibid.*, 124.

26. As quoted in Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 192.

ress."<sup>27</sup> Despite Prince's appeals, however, Catron won his election handily.

In an earlier letter to Gildersleeve, Prince voiced another of his deep concerns: that without statehood "every chance of a Land Grant Bill will be destroyed, and values of real estate will be reduced to nothing."<sup>28</sup> Prince believed that the land grant issue and the settlement of private land claims were integral to the attainment of statehood and the profitable development of New Mexico. In all of his official reports to the secretary of the interior, Prince's first item of concern was always the problem of fraudulent land titles, an issue closely associated with late-nineteenth-century New Mexico.

Prince lobbied Congress for, and they eventually established, a "Court of Private Land Claims," which was charged with deciphering land titles and the extent of legal acreage. He had blamed Congress and the president for New Mexico's land tenure problems because of their inability to establish a clear and consistent policy for resolving land grant disputes and regulating the public domain. Prince charged, "If the matter had been left to be settled in the local courts, as similar questions would be adjusted in the older states, no great difficulty would have ensued and titles would have been determined a quarter century ago, but the U.S. chose to claim, that all titles were invalid. . . ."<sup>29</sup> Prince believed that the U.S. territorial system stripped all power from local courts to adjudicate land claims and placed land grant matters in the hands of corrupt and interested federal officials, particularly the surveyor general who was more often than not a tool of the Santa Fe Ring. The government, through the bidding of the ring and contrary to the stipulations of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, had deprived New Mexicans of both their right to defend their land titles, as well as of their right to self-government. Prince thought that statehood would solve land grant problems and make New Mexicans into good American citizens.

What remains unclear is why Prince was convinced that local control of the government would deter the Santa Fe Ring. If this sophisticated group of men were able to manipulate federal policy, would not manipulation of local authority be much easier? Prince, however, probably believed that "gentlemen-reformers" like himself could wrest

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27. "Enemy of Progress," Catron File 1, Prince Papers.

28. Prince to C. H. Gildersleeve, July 13, 1889, Contemporary Issues, folder 6, Prince Papers.

29. "Governor's Report to the Secretary of the Interior, 1890," folder 6, Prince Papers.

control from the likes of the ring and bring order as well as progress to the state.

Governor L. Bradford Prince was a complex and manipulative character who could eloquently portray a territory blessed with unity, prosperity, and preparation for statehood, but who could not admit that the area's residents lived amidst contradiction, political confusion, and poverty. Prince was also a stoic who masked his personal grief yet who was a passionate political maneuverer. An easterner in a frontier environment, Prince sought to mold New Mexican politics to fit his patrician ideals of American political, cultural, and social life. These contradictions in his character were at the foundation of his major political feud with Miguel A. Otero.

Prince served only one term as governor and was then replaced by William T. Thornton, who was appointed by the Democratic President Grover Cleveland. After two unsuccessful campaign bids for the office of territorial delegate to Congress in the 1890s, Prince turned his energies to electing a Republican president so he could lobby for a second term as governor. Ironically, although William A. McKinley was elected, he did not appoint Prince as territorial governor of New Mexico. That honor went, surprisingly, to Miguel A. Otero, a young, relatively inexperienced New Mexican who had earlier met and impressed the president.<sup>30</sup> Prince felt slighted and opposed Otero's nomination, believing that his inexperience would make him prey for the many political factions in Santa Fe. Both historians and contemporaries of Prince have suggested that his opposition to Otero was ethnically based.<sup>31</sup> But Prince's previous appointments, coupled with his support of Pedro Perea, a loyal Republican and a compromise candidate, complicate such one-dimensional interpretations. Although critics of Prince labeled him a racist, he was in actuality a Republican party man.

In March 1897, just prior to McKinley's inauguration, Prince wrote Otero a friendly and informative letter discussing political maneuverings in Washington. The letter implied that Otero supported Prince for the governorship, or at the very least, that Prince had a chance of attaining Otero's support. "I am very sorry that you and your friends felt any hesitation as to signing the paper which you had," wrote Prince, "as it had been arranged expressly by General Bartlett for sig-

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30. For Otero's account of his appointment, see Miguel A. Otero, *My Nine Years as Governor of the Territory of New Mexico 1897-1906* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940), 1-27.

31. For example, Victor Westphall, *Thomas Benton Catron and His Era* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1973), 271-75.



nature by those who might be committed in other directions as to the governorship."<sup>32</sup> One of the few extant letters between Prince and Otero, it contains no hint of aggression or fighting.

McKinley's appointment of the territorial governor in 1897 was a long-awaited and long-planned-for decision. To support his candidacy, Prince published and distributed to Congressional members and lobbyists "Extracts from Documents on file in the Department of the Interior Favoring the Reappointment of L. Bradford Prince." The pamphlet excerpted flattering quotations from nearly all of the 109 letters on file that advocated his reappointment. The authors varied from old New York cronies to New Mexican politicians and Episcopal church officials.<sup>33</sup> Both Prince and his wife Catherine were serious and unrelenting in his quest for a second term as governor. Even his letter to Otero, a possible political foe, suggests the extent that they were willing to go to achieve their goal. Furthermore, on the same day that Prince wrote to Otero, he also solicited support from an unnamed Republican:

I know him [Mr. Bliss, secretary of the interior] very slightly myself and the object of this note is to ask if you will kindly write to him asking his friendly aid with the President, in securing my reappointment, and saying that it will gratify many old friends among New York Republicans. This I am sure would have much influence with him, and will greatly oblige.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly, then, Prince consciously pulled every last string and called in each political debt to assure his appointment by McKinley. But all his efforts were in vain.

When the animosity between Prince and Otero broke out is unclear, but four years later there was obviously mutual hatred. In 1901 Prince wrote of Otero,

A striking illustration of this unfortunate territorial condition is seen, right now, in New Mexico, where the people are suffering under an improper man as Governor. His name is Otero, the son

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32. Prince to Otero, March 8, 1897 (on Republican Central Committee of New Mexico stationary), Political Issues, file 1, expandable file 1, Prince Papers.

33. "Extracts from Documents on File in the Department of the Interior Favoring the Reappointment of L. Bradford Prince," Political Issues, folder 1, expandable file 1, Prince Papers.

34. Prince to \_\_\_\_\_, March 8, 1897 (on Republican Central Committee of New Mexico stationary), Political Issues, file 1, expandable file 1, Prince Papers.

of a Mexican father and American mother, and possessed, as those thus born are apt to be, of the worse qualities of both races.<sup>35</sup>

Prince's swipes at Otero and his administration reveal that Prince had abandoned his high standards of political propriety and grace and had allowed himself to be guilty of character assassination. Prince handled the Otero situation opposite from how he had dealt with Roscoe Conkling in New York. With Conkling, he let the facts speak for themselves, but with Otero, he resorted to mud-slinging.

The extremes to which Prince went to attain the governorship and his disappointment and frustration at seeing the young Otero appointed over an old political war-horse like himself are understandable but unacceptable. Furthermore, after McKinley's assassination and the rise of Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency and when Otero came up for re-appointment, the Princes tried to block Otero's renomination with the same vigorous opposition they exhibited in 1897. Prince again used character attacks, which, although in part truthful, were usually blown out of proportion.

One such example was Prince's publication, "One of Otero's Appointees," a provocative account of George Prichard, the district attorney, who had supposedly seduced and impregnated Genoveva Casados of Mora County. The brief stated that although Prichard was holding court in Mora County, he boarded at the house of Manuel Casados, whose daughter was the victim of this "handsome, experienced, glib talker without principle." The article further claimed that even though Genoveva "had 120 letters, full of affection and promises," Prichard left her, married in California, and brought his new wife back to live in Mora County, breaking the young Genoveva's heart and disgracing her family. As corroboration, Prince cited that "these facts are known to everyone in Mora County and can be substantiated by the least inquiry there."<sup>36</sup> The real issue, however, was not the immorality of Otero's appointees, but that earlier, after Otero's appointment of Prichard to the Supreme Court had been denied, Otero had created a new district and appointed Prichard as the district attorney. It was this patronage, reminiscent of Conkling's antics, which disturbed Prince. Now, however, unlike his earlier actions, Prince willingly compromised his standards to make political attacks of the lowest

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35. "Cogent Reasons for Statehood. The Evils of Territorial Government. An Appeal to the Senate," and "Attempts to Block Otero's Reappointment," folder 8, Prince Papers.

36. "One of Otero's Appointees," "Attempts to Block Otero's Reappointment," folder 8, Prince Papers.

sort. Perhaps this was Prince's lame attempt to descend from his lofty "gentleman-reformer" ideal and to launch a populist attack against corruption. If so, his attacks failed.

The more personal problem between the two men, however, centered on ethnicity. Historian Cynthia Secor-Welsh, in her preface to Otero's *My Life on the Frontier*, notes the "ethnic distancing" in which he engaged and attributes these actions to Otero's bicultural background and his grappling with his own ethnic identity.<sup>37</sup> Otero frequently used "them" or "this class of our people" when referring to Hispanics (usually of the lower classes). On one occasion Antonio Lucero of Las Vegas complained to Prince, "New Mexico has not had in its history a more unfriendly governor [sic]," and he wondered why "the so called leaders of our people who belong to the Republican party take so much from the little coyote."<sup>38</sup> Possibly, Otero had doubts about his own ethnic loyalties and how they coincided with his political and social alliances. Therefore, Prince, who viewed himself as an understanding, wise patrician, liked to believe Hispanic New Mexicans trusted him more than they did Otero.

As part of his argument, Prince complained that Otero locked himself in the Palace of the Governors away from the people and (unlike Prince's tenure in office) "never had a single public reception of any kind. There have been private dinners enough, but not one in the seven years when the doors were open to the public at large."<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Prince carefully endeared himself to New Mexicans, consciously used the inclusive "we," and utilized this aristocratic benevolence to court Hispanics and to turn them against their native-born leader.

The most serious altercation between the two men, however, came in 1902 after Otero's reappointment, against which Prince had launched a devastating campaign. Three days after his inauguration, Otero removed Prince from the presidency of the Board of Regents at the Agricultural College in Las Cruces. Otero wrote Prince, "For reasons satisfactory to myself, and of which you are well aware, I have this day removed you from the position of Regent . . . , and have appointed your successor."<sup>40</sup> Otero justifiably punished Prince for his aggressive

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37. Secor-Welsh, "Introduction" in Miguel Antonio Otero, *My Life on the Frontier 1864-1882* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), xxxiii.

38. Lucero to Prince, February 24, 1905, file 1, folder 9, Prince Papers.

39. A piece of scrap paper, Political Issues, folder 5, Prince Papers.

40. "The Agricultural College Case," January 1903, Appointment to Regent of New Mexico Agricultural College, folder 6, Prince Papers.

oppositon to Otero's reappointment. Incensed by that censure, Prince contended that Governor Otero had no constitutional authority to remove an appointed official. Prince replied to Otero's letter *in Spanish*,

I had supposed that everyone understood the law that in a Territory the governor has no power to remove a duly appointed and confirmed territorial official during his term of office. . . . After due deliberation, therefore, and casting aside personal inclination, I have concluded that it is a matter of duty to remain in the office of Regent of the College.<sup>41</sup>

By writing in Spanish, Prince pointed to his proficiency in the language and suggested that Otero was disloyal to his Hispanic heritage. Furthermore, Prince made the more theoretical argument that a territorial governor had no constitutional power to remove territorial officials, thereby calling Otero's authority into question. So Prince would uphold the Constitution and graciously maintain his seat as a trustee.

Prince wanted to sue Otero and the territorial government, but the governor's crony, E. L. Bartlett, an earlier supporter of Prince and the solicitor general of New Mexico, refused to hear the case. Bartlett's response prompted Prince to attack not only Otero and his "Boss" politics but also larger problems inherent in the territorial system. Because Bartlett had made a personal decision, it was final by territorial law; Prince had no appeal. That Bartlett was a pawn of Otero did not matter or influence the situation. Instead, Prince and other New Mexicans were again at the mercy of territorial officials, just as they were in problems with the surveyor general's office. In the end, Prince lost the battle, but he ingeniously used the incident for advocating statehood when he contended that this case was only one more example of the flawed territorial system that blocked people's right to self-government.

By 1903 the feud had reached such ridiculous proportions that even the politicians' wives became involved. Mmes. Otero and Prince started an argument of their own that rivaled their husbands' backstabbing. In May 1905, immediately after President Theodore Roosevelt visited the Otero residence, Mrs. Otero beckoned Mrs. Sparks, the Santa Fe mayor's wife, and said to her,

You know that old Mrs. Prince. Well, you ought to have heard Mr. Loeb [Roosevelt's secretary] make fun of her last night. He told us that she persecuted the President so much by her persistent

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41. *Ibid.*

calls, that he had to direct Mr. Cortelyou to write her to keep away from the White House. Mr. Loeb entertained us for an hour, telling us all about it, and how she was turned out of the White House. We had great fun over it.<sup>42</sup>

Shocked, Mrs. Sparks turned on her heel and left the governor's palace without saying a word to Mrs. Otero, while many, according to Mrs. Prince, cheered her good manners. Mrs. Sparks immediately walked across town to Mrs. Prince and relayed the story to her. Catherine Prince was so upset that anyone would think, much less say, that she had "pestered" the president that she waged an all-out letter campaign to reinstate her reputation. Not only did she write President Roosevelt's secretaries, Loeb and Cortelyou; she also wrote Roosevelt himself, asking him to clear her good name and keep her from social ruin.

Mrs. Prince apparently wanted to sue Mrs. Otero for character defamation and dictated a long statement in which she delineated all the events leading up to the Palace incident. Mrs. Prince believed that during the president's visit to New Mexico, the Princes and other members of the Republican Old Guard had been slighted and omitted from official functions by the Oteros, which Mrs. Prince thought "a positive affront to the President." She added that the parade route took the "tin can route" through the back streets to avoid both the Prince and Catron homes, and, to make matters worse, the Princes were excluded as platform guests. Catherine Prince claimed that "the President's cordial greeting of me . . . so enraged Mrs. Otero that immediately after his departure, she repeated that old story."<sup>43</sup>

What Mrs. Prince failed to mention, however, was that earlier, when her husband was challenging Otero's reappointment, she kept a salon in Washington D.C., that was the center of anti-Otero activities. Also, due to extenuating circumstances, when the Senate held confirmation hearings on Otero's reappointment, Mrs. Prince was one of but two available people to testify against Otero.<sup>44</sup> Mrs. Otero had reason to be especially hostile towards Mrs. Prince and her meddlesome political maneuverings.

After the bitter controversies of 1903, Prince seems to have resigned himself to Otero's governorship and to his own political demise. He, therefore, turned his energies to more positive, nonpolitical endeavors. In addition to his position as president of the New Mexico

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42. "Statement," Political Issues, folder 2, expandable file 1, Prince Papers.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Otero, *My Life As Governor*, 180.

Historical Society, he was a leader of the American Apple Congress; and his own orchard in Española, New Mexico, to which he and Catherine retired, won him considerable fame as a fruit grower. He was also the president and founder of the New Mexico Horticultural Society.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, little is known about this part of Prince's life since few personal papers exist.<sup>46</sup>

Until 1922, Prince continued to be an outspoken advocate for tourism, comparing New Mexico favorably with other western states.<sup>47</sup> Through personal letters and old political connections, he continued to advocate statehood and finally saw his long-awaited dream realized in 1912. The following year he commemorated the event by writing *New Mexico's Struggle for Statehood*, which was used as a grade school text for many years.<sup>48</sup> After 1903, however, Prince never again successfully ran for political office. His prolific writings from this period suggest that he was content with being a retired statesman and country gentleman on his Española valley farm.

To some, Prince's retirement from politics marks a break in his life and career. Perhaps this is why historians treat Prince either as a political figure, as a founder of public education, or as a "man of letters" interested in cultural advancement. Yet these scholars fail to see how Prince's retirement from American politics to become a gentleman farmer illustrates his political personality. Genuinely disliking undignified politics, Prince was an aristocratic "gentleman-reformer" who modelled himself, consciously or unconsciously, after an aloof Henry Adams. Prince fled from the boisterous democracy of the Gilded Age to New Mexico because he thought the territory would offer a haven from factious machine politics. For greenhorn Prince, New Mexico was a frontier filled with innocent, docile peasants where a gentleman-reformer, ruling above party as an appointed governor or judge, could implement enlightened measures.

Prince's fantasy was shattered by territorial machine politics of the kind that he thought he had left behind in New York. Obviously,

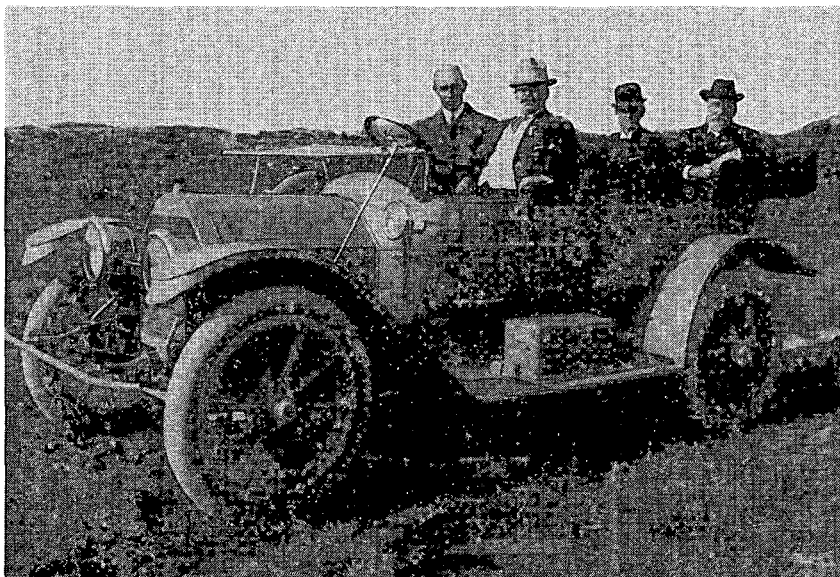
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45. Malone, *Dictionary of American Biography*, 230.

46. After the research was completed for this paper, a new cache of Prince's personal papers were found among his official correspondence in the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe. Perhaps some curious reader will peruse this voluminous correspondence between Catherine and Bradford Prince.

47. For example, Prince, *Spanish Mission Churches of New Mexico* (Glorieta, New Mexico: Rio Grande Press, 1977); Prince, *Stone Lions of Cochiti* (Santa Fe: Historical Society of New Mexico, 1903), *Extracts from Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Americanists*, Washington, D.C., 1915, Special Collections, University of New Mexico.

48. Prince, *New Mexico's Struggle for Statehood*.



A "carload of governors" (c. 1912). Left to right: Herbert Hagerman, driver Miguel A. Otero, William T. Thornton, L. Bradford Prince. Photo courtesy of Museum of New Mexico.

rough-and-tumble democracy did not end at the Mississippi River. Contentious ethnic groups and classes like Las Gorras Blancas demanded redistribution of economic power, and Prince lacked the populist acumen to win their support. As a result, he lost all four elections for territorial delegate. At the same time, Prince was deficient in the organizational skills that gave Catron and the Santa Fe Ring a strong party. Without populist appeal or party, Prince could not survive in American territorial politics, eastern or western. So, like Henry Adams, Prince retired to his estate to play the part of the patrician country squire, scholar, and patron of the arts. He sought in private life what he could not achieve in politics—the tranquility of reasoned and high-minded living.

What had Prince learned since his train ride to Santa Fe in 1879? Unlike W. W. H. Davis, Prince realized that New Mexicans, in their politics and in their cultural activities, were neither naive nor simple. After being embroiled in political controversies involving the Santa Fe Ring and Governor Miguel A. Otero, Prince discovered through his confrontations that New Mexico, like New York, possessed corrupt politicians not easily controlled. Granted, Prince was caught up in

several complex personal and political controversies and probably never attained the lofty patrician goals of his youth. Nevertheless, his significance is much more than the misleading "The Father of Statehood" label suggests. Prince was one of the first Anglos to understand and appreciate the cultural, political, and historical richness of New Mexico, and he spent his life trying to educate others with the same lessons he had learned. Unfortunately, because of his ellusiveness, his complexities have been misrepresented, if not entirely forgotten. Historians have overlooked the variety and quality of the impressive contributions of this statesman, writer, and patron of New Mexico.