Is it possible to reconstruct the Navajo impression of the Anglo-Americans in the nineteenth century? What did they think of the intruders who entered Navajo land as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century? As the white people impinged on their lives, how did they react? And how did they see the older aliens in the Southwest—the nomadic bands who lived outside the river valley and the Pueblo Indians and the Hispanics who lived a sedentary existence inside the Rio Grande valley? Did they make a place for all of these different peoples in their basic ideology and incorporate them into their political and social views? Is it fair to ask such questions and expect a reasonable, informed, and academic answer?

Navajo views of aliens are difficult to examine, since they were rarely recorded. It is hard enough to examine the obverse, alien views of Navajos. Anglo-American contacts with the Navajos were intermittent throughout most of the nineteenth century. It was not until the 1880s that the Anglo scholars first undertook a systematic study of the Navajo and other Native Americans. On the other side, interpreting the Navajo conception of the beligaana (white person) is more difficult because of the paucity of authentic Navajo statements regarding their white neighbors. Most Navajos of the nineteenth century did not know English, and Navajo was not then a written language; in fact, no Navajo wrote down a remembrance on any subject that can be examined by the investigator of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Navajos must have had an impression of the Anglo-Americans even before they saw them. Word undoubtedly filtered in from the Rio Grande villages, where the first Americans met the Pueblo Indians and Hispanics in the very early 1800s. American mountain men wandered in by the 1820s, but only James Ohio Pattie (inaccurately) described the Navajo. (Most of the other American commentators, such as Zebulon Montgomery Pike or Josiah Gregg, imbibed the views of Pueblo Indians and Hispanics.) A much more palpable contact began in 1846, when the U.S. Army and Indian agents penetrated Navajo country. The number of commentaries up to the 1860s, although imperfect, is im-
pressive. Contacts suffered a hiatus in the late 1860s, the 1870s, and the early 1880s but grew more frequent in the late 1880s and the 1890s.¹

How can we identify Navajo attitudes toward the aliens (particularly the Anglo-Americans) in the nineteenth century, limited and undefined though they may be? First of all, we can look at Navajo mythical and religious concepts about other Indians, Hispanics, and Anglos; second, we can look at historical events in which the Navajos initiated actions or expressed attitudes toward other races and ethnic groups; and, third, within that framework of historical events, we can analyze concepts of Navajo spokespersons toward other peoples, filtered through the eyes of the Anglo recorder.

**NAVAJO RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL VIEWS OF ALIENS**

The Navajos call themselves Dine'—"the People"—which implies that other humans are "not-people" or are enemy people (anaii dine'e). Dine' has a broad meaning; it means not just earth people, but holy people—diyin dine'e—with whom the Navajos are closely associated, thus giving them a sense of their divinity, or connectedness to the gods. In this, of course, they are not unique. All ethnic groups imagine themselves as chosen. James Axtell has written that the Indians of Canada and New England believed that they were superior to the French and English. They thought their way of life the best, and when runaway Indian schoolboys returned to their tenacious cultures, they quickly relapsed into the old way. The prideful eastern Natives, whose conceit the Christian divines condemned as sinful, simply did not believe in the superiority of "civilization."²

The same may be said for the Navajo. The proscriptions laid on the true people by the Holy Beings did not apply to the non-Navajo. For instance, at one time (and still perhaps today), Navajos relied on Anglos to bury corpses as a way to avoid contamination by the dead. Flora Bailey was asked to examine a corral of dead, blackened sheep that had been struck by lightning. If Navajos observed the lightning-struck sheep, they would become ill; if Bailey looked at them, she would not get sick because she was a white person, a non-Navajo. In the early part of this century, Little Gambler asked William T. Williams to bury his brother, who was killed by lightning. Williams also shot a horse over his grave as Little Gambler requested. Little Gambler, however, would not attend the burial, and Williams did not tell him that before he got the corpse in the ground a coyote had fed on his brother's body. The proscriptions of the Holy Beings did not apply to the whites, so that Williams would not contaminate himself as the Navajo ran the risk of doing.³ Navajo religion—its beauties, its curing, and indeed its taboos—extended its advantages and restrictions only to the Navajos.

The Origin Legend is the best known part of the Navajo myth. As the Mist
People navigated the four lower worlds, finally to emerge into the Fifth World to become Earth Surface People in the present world, the Navajos held priority over all the various Indian tribes of the Southwest, over the Mexicans, and over the whites. By transforming from the Mist People or Insect People into the Navajo Earth Surface People, they completed their personhood. They furthered their identity by creating their first clans, as Paul Zolbrod says, and then they incorporated other tribal peoples into their social system by allowing them to form additional clans— the Mohaves, Jemez, Utes, Apaches, Zunis, and others. Although Navajo clans are not totemic, that is, ranked according to hierarchy, the original clans, created out of the epidermis of Changing Woman, held precedence over the later clans, some of which were created to absorb alien peoples who were captured by the Navajos or who had fled from their parental societies. Still, the rule of exogamy encourages intermarriage into the “lesser” clans, and the superiority of the original clans is not rigid.4

Navajo religion, then, places the Navajo ahead of everybody else. Some Indian groups, such as the Paiutes and Utes, had an ignoble beginning. Monster Slayer, one of the Hero Twins, killed all the children of a monster except for an ugly and filthy being who was banished to Navajo Mountain, where he became the progenitor of the Paiutes, a repulsive, starved, ragged, and unwashed people who lived on vermin in the desert.5 The origin of the Utes is a little more ambiguous. The trickster Coyote foisted his sister-wife off on a stranger, who abandoned her offspring after she learned of Coyote’s deception. Owl raised one of the youths, who crafted arrows to kill other children. The Navajos vainly attempted to waylay the youth. The arrows were transformed into dangerous Arrow People, which is the Navajo name for Utes.6

This precedence before other peoples, sometimes casting them in an inferior light, is also illustrated in the Navajo story of the creation of the Mexicans. A gambler in Chaco Canyon had won so much wealth from the Kisani, or Pueblos, that he owned nearly everything of theirs, including their women. This distressed the Sun, who especially hankered after two of his great shells, which were part of the gambler’s spoils. With the help of the Holy Beings, a young Navajo entirely reversed the gambler’s luck and even enslaved him. The young Navajo, who was actually a Mist Person, shot the gambler up into the sky with his bow of darkness to the abode of Begochidi, a mischief maker who was also called One Who Grabs the Breasts of Women, and who, despite his vexatious nature, took pity on unfortunate beings. Begochidi equipped the unfortunate gambler with sheep, horses, birds, bayeta, cotton, and wool and created for him new people, who came back down to naakaii bikeyah, or Old Mexico. These were the Mexicans, who prospered and later moved north into the Rio Grande valley.7

Thus, the naakhaii, or Mexicans, were inferior to the Dine’, and yet the Mexicans introduced livestock and cloth to the Navajo, certainly a very great advan-
tage to them. The Navajos denigrated the Mexicans, but they also recognized their contributions. Navajos included the Mexicans (and, very tentatively, as we shall see, the whites) in their clan structure.

A Hopi legend also explained ethnic difference between the Navajo and the Pueblo. In the 1850s, Dr. P. G. S. Ten Broeck, the agent, heard the tale of two jars, one beautiful and one made of plain brown earthenware. The two peoples were asked to select a jar. The Navajos chose the plain earthenware and the Hopis, the beautiful one. For the Navajos this choice symbolized their nomadic, destitute life, greedy for the wealth of others but with their flocks of intrinsic value. For the Pueblos the choice signified living in houses and having an abundant life. Ten Broeck thought this gave the Navajos a rationale for their relative poverty, but perhaps we can see it as evidence of ethnic difference among Native peoples.

The Navajos' somewhat ambiguous attitude toward the Pueblos—a love-hate relationship—is illustrated in the story of the adoption of corn. After the emergence from the Fourth World, the Kisani built their camp close to the Navajos. They had brought with them into the Fifth World an ear of corn, and a band of young Navajo roughnecks—still Mist People—demanded this ear. The Kisani broke the ear of corn in half and offered the Navajos whichever half they wanted. While they examined the two halves, Coyote, the trickster, grabbed the tip end and dashed away. This is why the Pueblo Indians, who had gotten the better half, grow better corn than the Navajos, who were left with the meager end.

Hostility was enshrined in this myth. The selection of the poor end of corn antagonized the Navajos, and the two peoples lived apart. Wind, or Nilch'i, advised the Navajo that the Pueblos were unfriendly, and when a Navajo rescued some ceremonial eagles from perceived Pueblo mistreatment, the Pueblos responded in anger. In another story, the yei, a Navajo deity, instructed the Stricken Twins, one blind and the other crippled, to devastate four times the Moki (or Hopi) cornfields with the aid of supernatural agencies. Navajos informed the Moki that they must give the Twins jewels and sacred objects to pacify the yei. Reluctantly, the nonplussed Moki called off the devastation, to the Navajos' delight.

The Pueblos retaliated in their myth and expressed contempt for the Navajo. The scalp ceremony at Zuni began with a foray into Navajo land in order to forcibly take a trophy. Twelve days of ritual demeaned and humiliated the Navajo scalp, which presumably revived Zuni fortunes. In a ceremony on Hopi First Mesa, clowns caricatured Navajo men, ridiculing their slouchy appearance, laughing at their antics, and slapping grass pulp on their naked rumps and groins.

Ethnicity is thus evident in Navajo and Pueblo myth. This is partly due to a need to identify the group, to distinguish it from others, to establish an ethos.
that defines the People in relation to other societal units. It is also partly due to conflict among peoples over the appropriation of the economic and physical resources that people need to survive.

Did the Navajos have enough time to incorporate the Anglo-Americans in their mythology before it stabilized, and did they place them in a lower order? None of the pristine written sources we have today mention the Beligaana. Those earliest written accounts are recorded by Washington Matthews and Father Berard Haile, on whom all of the current scholarship on the Origin Legend relies. The white people are not in their accounts.

But observers of the 1850s caught a trace of the whites that somehow did not survive into the scholarly stories of Matthews and Haile of a later day, and the whites come in second. The Navajos told William H. H. Davis in 1855 that mankind came forth from a Place of Origin in southwestern Colorado, where a beaver dug a hole in the earth, out of which came seven Navajos and five white people. Hence, there are more Navajos in this world than whites. Lt. Col. J. H. Eaton was told a similar story: After the first emergence, whenever a death occurred, twelve more Navajos came forth from the Fourth World and went off toward the rising sun, from whence their descendants, the whites, later returned from the east. Dr. P. G. S. Ten Broeck was informed that Navajos, Pueblos, Coyoteros, and Americans had lived in the lower worlds, under the San Francisco Peaks. There, assisted by various animals, these people poked through to this world. The Navajos came through first and the Americans last. These last people went east toward the rising sun, where they prospered and now, in the 1850s, were finally returning to their old homeland. Since the Navajos believed that the Americans were of the same stock as themselves, they all should therefore live in peace. Lewis H. Eddy heard that various peoples emerged out of the side of a mountain; the Navajos, who had come out first, claimed the country nearest to the mountain and to the south, the Pueblos settled to the north, the Coyoteros went west, and the white people journeyed to the east.12 None of these legendary accounts of the secondary but ethnically related Americans survived into the twentieth century.

Navajo social organization differentiated class by economic, hereditary, and intellectual attributes – separating the rich and the poor, being born in the mother’s clan and for the father’s clan, learning an immense amount of ritual language to perform the chant. They both dissolved and created new classes: the war chiefs disappeared in the 1850s and 1860s, and the weavers and silversmiths emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And yet the Navajos’ social stratifications were far from absolute and not very gender specific on division of labor or very ethnically specific on absorbing aliens within their social fabric. Until about 1800, they were constantly on a frontier, where egalitarian attitudes prevailed.

But they did distinguish socioethnic characteristics that contrasted them-

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selves with other peoples. They compared their way of life by assuming a common descent, a similarity of occupation and mode of life, and a common set of ideas, feelings, attitudes, and forms of behavior. They regarded themselves as belonging to a peculiar group and possessed an esprit de corps. In a sense they betrayed a sense of class struggle, in their essentially precapitalist and pre-Marxian society, as the deprived pobres attacked the upper classes of the Pueblo and Hispanic villages.13

Navajo myth and belief is rich with symbolism. The Dine' have raised the legends to actuality. Navajo aboriginal history is the enshrinement of myth as reality in a distant or not-too-distant past. Their symbols transcend actual experience and go beyond the actual meaning in experience: Coyote has a plethora of supernatural powers, dies and is resurrected, appears in many forms, disguises himself, foils other holy beings, and is humiliated in turn. He is the symbol of uncertainty in life, of the lack of control over ordinary events. He is the trickster, the troublemaker, and perhaps he illustrates to the Navajo the lack of any comity with the Pueblo and Hispanic neighbors. The Hero Twins, born of the deific Changing Woman and Sun, slay some but not all of the alien monsters and evil beings who threaten Navajo existence. Dinétah, the sacred Navajo homeland, is reserved for the Navajos alone, and the alien monsters and the sacred geography signify the separateness of the Navajo from surrounding peoples. The Navajos are so concerned for their own health and harmony in their symbolic rituals that they have left little room for interaction with others.14

Most peoples presuppose the primacy of their group. The Navajos are no exception in their ethnocentrism. They did not carry their basic views to the idea of supremacy or Chosen People, yet they viewed other ethnic and racial groups as mildly inferior. There was indeed ambiguity in their imagination. They recognized the contributions made by the Pueblos and Mexicans to Navajo life, realized that their relationships were often one of conflict, but they possessed societal mechanisms to incorporate these others into their own way of life. Known for their historic adaptability to social and cultural change, the Navajos found a place for the Anglo-American in their canon but apparently lost them in the wake of overwhelming historical events of the later nineteenth century.15

THE NAVAJOS VIEW THE AMERICANS FROM 1846 TO 1868

In the first period of close encounters with the Americans, the Navajos showed a great deal of self-confidence, which some American observers interpreted as boastful, even impudent. The Indians did not fear the Americans, at least before 1860, and expressed contempt for things American. However, they reserved their most severe strictures for the Mexicans, and many Americans be-
lieved the Navajos did not destroy the Rio Grande villages only to save their source of supply for raiding. However, many white people believed the Navajos comported themselves well and responsibly, and while the Navajos did assert their superiority over the other Indians of the area – the Havasupai by driving them into the canyon farther to the west, the Hopis by destroying their village of Oraibi, the Pueblos by raiding their larders, the Gila Apaches by joining an alliance against them – the whites respected the leadership qualities of the wealthier ricos (rich Navajos with large herds) in contrast to the destitute ladrones (thieves or poor Navajos without sheep).

Although the Navajos had no formal unified political structure, they did have the trappings of a nation-state; for instance, they had diplomatic and military roles to play, and they understood that they operated in an environment in which other peoples employed similar diplomatic and military tools. Undoubtedly, the Navajos understood that they faced retaliation when they raided the Rio Grande villages.

Zarcillos Largos set the tone for early Navajo attitudes toward the Americans. Col. Alexander Doniphan led an American expedition westward to confront the Navajos in 1846 at Ojo del Oso (present-day Fort Wingate). He warned the Navajos to stop the attacks on the New Mexican villages lest the Americans retaliate. Zarcillos responded in outrage:

Americans! you have a strange cause of war against the Navajos. We have waged war against the New Mexicans for several years. We have plundered their villages and killed many of their people, and made many prisoners. We had just cause for all this. You have lately commenced a war against the same people. You are powerful. You have great guns and many brave soldiers. You have therefore conquered them, the very thing we have been attempting to do for so many years. You now turn upon us for attempting to do what you have done yourselves. We cannot see why you have cause of quarrel with us for fighting the New Mexicans on the west while you do the same thing on the east. Look how matters stand. This is our war. We have more right to complain of you for interfering in our war, than you have to quarrel with us for continuing a war we have begun long before you got here. If you will act justly, you will allow us to settle our own differences.16

Doniphan replied to Zarcillos very somberly and straightforwardly. Yet even Doniphan must have smiled at the Navajo leader’s unconscious use of irony and certainly must have admired his boldness. After signing a treaty with the Navajo leaders, Doniphan, accompanied by three chiefs, rode the several miles into Zuni. There a fierce argument erupted between the Navajo and Zuni, and the harangue of one of the Navajo chiefs illustrated the distrust and conflict

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between the two but also the pride of the Navajo: "You [Zunis] kill, and drive off our flocks and herds, and subsist your people upon them, and use them for your own advantage. . . . We have plundered your villages, taken your women and children captives, and made slaves of them. Lately you have been unsuccessful. We have outstolen you." The Zunis wanted to take the three Navajos hostage, but Doniphan's force protected them from the clutches of the hostile Pueblo.17

Manuelito in the 1850s and 1860s perhaps best expressed Navajo haughtiness. In 1856 he declared to the friendly Indian agent, Henry Linn Dodge, and to Capt. Henry Lane Kendrick that the Navajos had always robbed the Mexicans and would continue to do so. All attempts of the Americans to restrain the Navajos had failed, and he impressed upon Dodge "very plainly that the Navajoes were superior to any force which we [the Americans] can bring against them. In this he speaks the opinion now entertained by a majority of his people." He told Kendrick that:

Mexicans they had always killed and robbed when they pleased and the Americans could not prevent it. [He insisted] That they had made several attempts to do so but had always failed. The Americans were [too] fond of sleeping eating drinking and had white eyes and could not see how to catch them when they chose to keep out of their way.

Manuelito and his colleagues still celebrated the annihilation of the Mexicans in 1835 at Washington Pass (now Narbona Pass). Manuelito defiantly rejected the recently negotiated Treaty of Laguna Negra. The only article of that treaty he proposed to observe was the one granting subsidies to the Indians.18

Manuelito's defiance translated to some degree of boastfulness. He expressed contempt for all non-Navajos and satisfaction with Navajo aggression. Perhaps Navajos had enough to brag about in their dominance over their neighbors, but they did have one legitimate grievance. The capture of children by the New Mexicans compromised their sense of superiority. Said Chief Armijo at the Council of Jemez Springs in 1852:

I have been a Captain ever since I was a young man. I have come to tell my Great Father that my people wish to live in peace & quiet. . . . I have lost my grandfather and two other members of my family who were all killed by Mexicans. I have never sought revenge – My hair is beginning to get gray – I wish to live in peace with every one – I want to see my cattle and horses to be well grazed and my sheep to be safely herded – and to get fat – which can never be done while my people are at war. . . . My people are all crying in the same way – three of our chiefs now sitting before you mourn for their children who have been taken from their homes by the
Mexicans – More than 200 of our children have been carried off and we know not where they are – The Mexicans have lost but few children in comparison with what they have stolen from us. Three years ago they took from my people nearly all their *cavallados* [horse herds]. Two years ago my brother lost 700 animals. How shall we get them again. . . . From the time of Col. [Edward] Newby [1848] we have been trying to get our children back again – Eleven times we have given up our captives – only once have they given us ours – My people are yet crying for the children they have lost. Is it American justice that we must give up every thing and receive nothing?²¹

Despite this grievance, the Americans had the impression that the Navajos, as the *Santa Fe Gazette* noted in 1857, believed that they were the greatest people living. The editor in 1853 had expounded on the Navajo sense of dignity and wealth.²⁰ Their review of Navajo history under the Spanish and Mexicans registered a notable record. They had forced the Havasupai into the gorge bearing their name today, warred on the Hopi and Zuni, sacked the Jemez, campaigned against the Mogollon Apaches, forced the Spaniards to give up Cebolleta, and drove out the padres at the missions at Encinal and Cebolleta because they could not “stay in one place because they had been raised like deer.”²²

To the New Mexican and American alike, the Navajos were a formidable people. The Pueblo Indians of San Ildefonso described them as “impudent, troublesome, and dangerous – and that they were in every nook and corner of the country.”²² The Apache agent E. A. Graves reported to the commissioner of Indian Affairs that “the Navajos are a fierce, intelligent and warlike tribe of Indians. They possess more wealth than all the tribes in New Mexico combined.” They raised horses, mules, asses, goats, and sheep, they cultivated grain, and they wove blankets and coarse woolens. Their centers of power were on the San Juan River and in Canyon de Chelly. “These Indians have long been the terror of the New Mexicans, carrying on robberies on an extensive scale, and often carrying away many captives, and committing murders; occasionally extending their predatory excursions in the States of Chihuahua and Durango.”²³

Whether the Americans expressed like or dislike for the Navajos, these Indians still came out as self-confident. According to the various views of them, they were crafty, saucy, impertinent, merry, generous, and hardworking (unlike the Apaches and Utes). One agent, Samuel Yost, even declared that they were humble.²⁴ Navajos had no fear of the Americans and did not hesitate to raid the army’s herds. Supt. James L. Collins described a haughty people who held the American government in contempt, preferring their own way to any other. Maj. Electus Backus urged a Navajo to live in an Anglo-type house, but this did not suit the Indian. Where, then, asked Backus, did he sleep?. Candidly and nonperjoratively, he replied, “Just like a dog – on grass and chips.”²⁵
Americans readily admitted the Navajo warrior's superiority to the soldier. Wrote Agent John Greiner in 1852:

Our troops are of no earthly account. They cannot catch a single Indian. A dragoon mounted will weigh 225 pounds. Their horses are all as poor as carrion. The Indians have nothing but their bows and arrows and their ponies are as fleet as deer. Cipher it up. Heavy dragoons on poor horses, who know nothing of the country, sent after Indians who are at home anywhere and who always have some hours start, how long will it take to catch them? So far . . . not a single Indian has been caught.26

If the troops dared lighten their load, they might regret their decision. During the Kit Carson campaign, soldiers threw off their greatcoats to pursue some Navajos more easily, but another group of warriors stole the coats while the soldiers were afield. They probably did not find this amusing. The soldiers also were convinced that the Navajo warrior held the upper hand. Major Backus admitted that the Navajos redressed all wrongs committed against them.27

More than a few Americans believed that the Navajos restrained their raids on the New Mexicans to preserve their supply of sheep, although the Navajos had it in their power to annihilate the Hispanic and Pueblo of the New Mexican villages. Lt. W. H. Emory, the first official American observer in New Mexico, commented that, although the Navajos boldly attacked the settlements, "they are prudent in their depredations, never taking so much from one man as to ruin him." (Emory further believed that Gov. Manuel Armijo not only prohibited Mexican retaliation upon the Navajos but also initiated Navajo attacks upon his political enemies, using the Navajos for his own political purposes.) Pvt. Marcellus Edwards, reflecting perhaps a general view among the military, maintained that the Navajos, Utes, and Apaches tolerated the cowardly Mexicans in their midst because they possessed the herds to replenish the Indian stocks. The Natives brazenly raided, without subterfuge. Mexican campaigns always failed. The Navajos told Col. George McCall that they did not exterminate the New Mexicans so that they could keep them as their shepherds. McCall noted that the Apaches raided from want; they plundered or starved. This was not true of the Navajos, who had permanently enriched themselves at the expense of the cowardly Mexicans.28

The Navajos took captives, either by raid or trade, and subjected these aliens to servitude, reflecting perhaps their distinctiveness from other peoples. These captives were sometimes little more than slaves and might not have dominion over their life. Two Mexicans lost their lives because of their presumed inferior status. In 1854 an army private was killed by an arrow at the haying field north of Fort Defiance. The commander threatened Navajo leaders with war unless the culprit were rendered up. The chiefs turned over a "Navajo," who resisted
mightily his punishment, and the Americans hung him until he was "dead, dead, dead," as Agent Henry Linn Dodge described the incident. Four years later the Americans realized the person hung was innocent and was a Mexican captive of the Navajos.29

In that same year (1858), a Navajo had gotten into an argument with his wife and, according to Navajo custom, reasserted his manliness by killing an alien, in this case a Negro slave belonging to an officer at Fort Defiance. To avoid military retaliation, the Navajos finally brought in a recently killed corpse, which the Americans immediately perceived to be that of a Mexican boy. The outraged Americans conducted a number of retaliatory sorties into Navajo country, without, however, apprehending the murderer.30

The Navajos also demanded respect from the Americans, as illustrated in the George A. Smith affair. Jacob Hamblin had led Mormon missionaries into Navajo country from Utah in 1860. Navajos murdered Smith, a member of Hamblin's party, and told Hamblin that this was partial retaliation for the white murders of three Navajos committed elsewhere in Navajo land. The Smith assassination was one requital, they announced; the Navajos had two more to go.31 So demonstrated the Navajo a sense of sovereignty, a sense of separateness from other ethnic groups.

Even while at Fort Sumner, where Navajos were relocated for acculturation, they maintained their self-respect. Maj. Henry D. Wallen, the commandant, characterized the Navajos as brave in battle, advanced in manufactures and agriculture, and superior to the Comanches and Apaches. They were acquisitive and industrious, with only a few faults. Later, when they realized the futility of planting in the irrigated fields at Fort Sumner, they refused to work any longer.32 Even their great nemesis, Gen. James Henry Carleton, lauded their heroism. "They have fought us gallantly for years." Even one of his complaints was a tribute to them: "Shall the Indians always get the best of Ft. Wingate troops?"33

Until the Navajos were defeated in the Kit Carson campaign of 1863-64, they enjoyed a high reputation, or a bad reputation, among the Americans. They had an informal political system to deal with relations with the external world. It is true that their internal political organization declined in the 1850s; the nah'sit, or council, where all Navajos met became outmoded as the population grew to such large numbers. But Navajos had a diplomacy with which they dealt with other peoples. They had leader-diplomats who negotiated with other "nations." They had a military organization with a strategy, which demonstrated its effectiveness time after time. They accepted an intertribal etiquette, if you will, that required retaliation for attack, demanded offense for respect, and riposted against an enemy to uphold their own honor. When they were attacked, they knew that their enemy sought vengeance for some past
incursion, and, when they attacked, they knew their enemy would retaliate against them.  

To illustrate the situation or milieu in which the contending factors played out in the Southwest, we can turn to an event at the beginning of the 1860s. Manuelito attacked Fort Defiance in 1860. Inflamed by several incidents between soldier and warrior, he assaulted an American position located intrusively in the midst of Navajo territory. Manuelito, a leader-diplomat, adopted a war strategy. He attacked with his military forces to assert his power and dominion. He knew the consequences if he failed. He was unable to take the fort and drive the Americans out, and Gen. E. R. S. Canby prepared a counteroffensive, which, though interrupted by the withdrawal of regular troops to the Civil War theaters in the east and the invasion of New Mexico by the Texans, was the plan implemented by General Carleton and Kit Carson. Was Manuelito surprised? Did he expect the Americans – or the Hispanics or Pueblos – to respond in any other way? Surely not.

THE NAVAJOS VIEW THE AMERICANS FROM 1868 TO 1900

The Bosque Redondo experience was a tragic interlude for the Navajos. Yet, to many Americans the Navajos were an impressive people, even in the trauma of defeat. In 1865, the American surgeon George Swyther described the Navajos as flexible, imitative, and physically attractive. An American quartermaster declared that he would rather hire Navajos than the soldiers to perform various jobs. Bishop Juan Baptiste Lamy testified before the Doolittle Commission that the Navajos were superior and would become model pueblos – this when it was still hoped that the experiment at the Bosque Redondo would work. Others noted their relaxed, joyful, industrious, “ductible, malleable” mood and compared them favorably to the Mescalero Apaches, who also were incarcerated at the Bosque. Some of the captives at the Bosque had begun life as Mexicans but were now thoroughly Navajo-ized and professed a desire to return not to a Hispanic household but to Dinétah. Americans complimented the Navajos for their high regard for women and for their bravery when the Comanches attacked.

Even in their demeaning condition, the Navajos refused some commands. They labored diligently in the fields when it suited their purposes to do so, but they rejected an order to gather corn in 1866 (which was mostly destroyed by the army worm, as it turned out). They resisted pueblo-style housing, raided some in eastern New Mexico in order to feed themselves, and kept Roman Catholicism at bay and their traditional religion intact, even adding a new chant, the Chiricahua Windway, to their religious pantheon. They killed five American soldiers in a dispute over horses, for which there was never any punishment.26
Doubtless, the Navajo leadership of Ganado Mucho, Manuelito, and Barboncito at the Bosque did much to influence this outcome. But the persistence of cultural traits was strong. The American military was unable to change the basic cultural constructs of Navajo culture, partly because the Bosque Redondo Reservation was too large to be adequately policed. It might be argued that the Navajos left the Bosque Redondo Reservation psychologically undefeated, their culture and their sense of superiority intact.37

Consequently, the Navajos in the post-Bosque period did not play the role of victims. They assumed an active role in determining their own destiny, and they were vigorously involved in the defense and expansion of their frontiers. This time, however, their resistance and their influence on federal policy stopped short of war. The Navajos adapted their strategies to the conditions of their opponents.38 Until the 1890s, this twin strategy was shaped by a self-image of ethnocentrism and a sense of limited power vis-à-vis the Americans.

Very soon after the return, the reservation boundary became an issue. Navajos ignored the survey line and grazed their sheep pretty much wherever they liked. Navajos believed that they had traditional rights to the land, while the Anglos and Hispanics believed that they had public domain rights and pushed their settlements toward Navajo country. Hispanics founded San Mateo north of Mount Taylor in 1869 and resettled Cabezon in 1870, from which the Navajos had driven them in 1774. Farmington was established north of the San Juan River in 1876, and non-Navajos began moving into the area east and north of that new town in 1877. Some effort was made to move the Indians onto the reservation, but according to the Treaty of 1868 they clearly had hunting rights off the reservation, and this was a Navajo wedge into nonreservation areas. Navajo leaders, such as Manuelito, continually urged expansion of the reservation. In 1880 the president extended the boundary eastward. The military was called in to vacate intruders, and, when the president even restored an irrigable portion of the 1880 extension back to the public domain, the Navajos simply refused to move. Agents and Indian officials sided with the Navajos, and then the troops evacuated the whites. One white family watched as the military burned their house down.

Navajo leadership defended its position forcefully but at the same time avoided American retaliation. In a card game in 1876, Jose Perea's mayordomo (a Mexican range boss of a large herd) provoked a quarrel with a Navajo and killed him. Navajo survivors forced Perea’s shepherders to flee and confiscated 450 sheep for the death of the card player and then 900 more from Perea's herd for two earlier deaths. In Farmington in 1881, a drunk cowboy killed a Navajo. Twenty-five to thirty Navajos rode into town and demanded satisfaction. A medical doctor led the Navajos to a cornfield, where the cowboy was hiding. They set fire to the cornfield and killed the cowboy. Americans did not retaliate.39
Navajos also exhibited self-esteem by their treatment of the agents at Fort Defiance. Navajo leaders, such as Manuelito, Ganado Mucho, Narbona, and Delgadito, gave strong advice not only to the agents but to the military at Fort Wingate. They bent the ear of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman and refused his suggestion that they move to Oklahoma. When their recommendations were not heeded, they sometimes took matters into their own hands. They dubbed William F. M. Arny as “Tarantula” and ran him off. Later, Galen Eastman also antagonized them; they labeled him “Tarantula” and called the agency physician “Tarantula number 2.” These government officials were forced off the reservation amidst grave threats of war. The Navajos satirized S. S. Patterson, who had thrown Manuelito into jail for accusing the agent of dishonesty and lying. They ridiculed him an “old woman,” because he moved around so slowly, and also as the “man who smells his mustache.”

Perhaps Navajos viewed Americans with a certain amount of disdain or skepticism. James Brown, who led a party of Mormons into northern Arizona in 1876, encountered a militant Chief Coma, who accused the Mormons of stealing Navajo cattle. He evidently sought double indemnity, because the Mormons had already reimbursed the Navajos. In 1893, Navajos feared a section of the Army Topographical Survey, which identified and conserved water resources, because it was rumored that the Americans intended to take children away from parents and put them in school at Fort Defiance. Eliza Thackera gave her Navajo stonecutters, who were erecting a hospital, a half dollar for the Thanksgiving festivities, and they then forced her to admit that on Christmas they would deserve even a greater gift! Never was Navajo skepticism more aptly expressed than by S. M. McCowan, the superintendent of the Phoenix Indian School, in Arizona governor Nathan O. Murphy’s report: “They laugh at the white man’s laws and scorn his customs and want to be left alone.”

Many conclusions about Navajo perceptions are indirect testimony of Americans. Only once did Navajos gather in council to express direct views on current affairs, but even here we must remember that the white man is doing the recording.

Manuelito testified at some length in the council of 1886. By then he had replaced his old defiance with accommodation. The Treaty of 1868 had established American and Navajo friendship. The Americans were like spirits, he said, as if they were some kind of superior being and the Navajos were richer for taking their advice. The Navajos must give up stealing and become farmers. Perhaps more to his heart, he expressed concern about white encroachment on Navajo lands and spoke eloquently for reservation expansion. He reviewed the history of Navajo-American contact and admitted that the Americans had beaten them at war. Ganado Mucho, the other head chief, seconded Manu-
elito's position and spoke for additional lands, as did other Navajo participants, who appealed for inclusion of the area along the San Juan River. The Navajos seemed to be saying that if the Americans wanted them to settle down and farm the San Juan lands should be added to the reservation.

Most Navajos were not intimately acquainted with Americans and had no idea what the outside world – or "civilization," as the Americans would put it – was like. This thought evidently occurred to the agent, Lt. E. H. Plummer, who scraped some money together from the Indian Rights Association to finance a trip of fourteen Navajo leaders to the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. Plummer believed that the sight of the many farms along the railroad, the large buildings in the cities, the industry and the accomplishments of the Americans, and the fact that the population far outnumbered that of Navajo, had a significant impression on the minds of the Indians. Now, after the journey to civilization, the Navajos accepted schooling for their children and improved farming techniques. With their newfound image of the Americans, Plummer recommended an end to annuities and the creation of an industrial school.  

One of the chiefs who visited the World's Fair told the pupils of the Navajo Boarding School about his realization:

I have told the people that after we travelled a night and a day the white people were taking care of the earth all the way. Look at our country. We ought to be ashamed of it. Look at the difference. The white people are like ants, industrious, working all the time. They are thick coming and going all the time. Before we thought the agent told lie when he told us about how many white people there were. All believe now because so many of us saw. So many headmen saw. Now the people come and want to hear all about it. Formerly they paid no attention.

Hasteen Nez used to say anything told was a lie. When he got to Chicago he liked to had ten fits.

The headmen see that it is the head and the hands that do the work, mostly the head.

We see the progress of the white man like the corn growing from the seed, fast in one season. Old things are like the seed. From the old the new is like from the carita [a light one-horse carriage or cart?] to the Studebaker wagon.

Perhaps indeed the Navajos entered a new era of awareness of the white people. They did not simply react to events as they transpired but began to absorb events in the world around them. In the fields of religion, education, economics, politics, and government, they must have noticed greater activity by the Americans. The outside world was beginning to creep in. Gov. Miguel Otero of New Mexico observed in his annual report of 1901 that Navajos no longer con-
cerned themselves only with reservation affairs. At a council meeting that had
occurred around this time they asked about national current events, the pros-
ppect for crops, whether the Anglos had more rain than Navajos, and the results
of the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection. The Navajo
image of the Americans and Hispanics was more deeply limned after the turn
of the century.

Thus, until the 1890s, many Navajos undoubtedly had little knowledge of the
Beligaana, isolated as the Indians were in a remote part of the North American
continent. Their Native culture persisted, as reflected in the fact that no English
words invaded the Navajo lexicon. Navajo religion placed the Navajo people
ahead of other peoples, not surprisingly, designating themselves as Dine', "the
People," a concept that had high religious and mythical meaning. Yet there was
an ambiguity in their attitudes toward the Pueblo and Hispanic, who the Nava-
jos admitted had supplied them with many cultural artifacts (corn and ani-
mals, for instance). They placed the American in a somewhat inferior origin,
emerging from the underworld with the Navajos to go east and then returning
in the nineteenth century. During the 1840s and 1850s, the Navajos showed an
aggressiveness and rambunctiousness suggesting great self-pride. Not even de-
feat at the hands of Kit Carson and incarceration for about half of the tribe at
Fort Sumner or the Bosque Redondo psychologically disturbed their self-
pride. When the Americans began to contact the Navajos again in the 1880s, the
Dine' urged reservation expansion until the Americans obliged them, and they
developed new sources of water. The Navajos still lived in their self-satisfying
isolation, oblivious to the outside world, until a number of them attended the
Chicago World's Fair in 1893, where they realized that the Navajos inhabited a
world that was full of other people, some of them very industrious. This con-
tact with other people may have been a turning point in the Navajo historical
imagination.

In the eighteenth century, the Navajos had adopted and then selectively re-
excluded large amounts of Pueblo culture. Until the twentieth century dawned,
they held the Hispanic and American cultures at bay. By 1900 they faced the
 crisis of adapting and reacting to an alien Anglo culture, which had begun to
creep into the Navajo imagination.

NOTES

1. See William H. Lyon, "The Navajos in the American Historical Imagination, 1807-
1870," Ethnohistory 43 (1996): 188-233; and William H. Lyon, "The Navajos in the Ameri-

2. Gary Witherspoon, Language and Art in the Navajo Universe (Ann Arbor: Univer-
sity of Michigan Press, 1977), 96-97; James Axtell, The Invasion Within: The Contest of


4. Paul G. Zolbrod, Dine bahane': The Navajo Creation Story (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 289-314, 408 n.1, 413 n. 13; Leland C. Wyman, Blessingway (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970), 32-34, 388-93, 400-403, 633-34; Washington Matthews, Navaho Legends (New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1897), 144-47, 154-59, 249 n. 245; Ethelou Yazzie, ed., Navajo History (Rough Rock az: Navajo Curriculum Center, 1971), 78-83. Signifying inferior status, the Zuni clan began when they were starving and sought relief by incorporation in the Navajos' society. The Utes were not permitted to join the Navajos until they had learned to conduct themselves acceptably (Zolbrod, Dine' bahane, 306, 309).


7. Dr. P. G. S. Ten Broeck was the first American to hear this story, which he relayed in “Manners and Customs of the Moqui and Navajo Tribes of New Mexico,” in Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States, pt. 4, ed. Henry R. Schoolcraft (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1854), 72-91; Washington Matthews, “Noqoi'ip, the Gambler: A Navajo Myth,” Journal of American Folk-Lore 2 (April-June, 1889): 89-94; Zolbrod, Dine' bahane, 100; Locke, Book of the Navajo, 80-85. In the section on Navajo legend, Locke copies from Matthews, particularly from his Navajo Legends. After the Mexican people were created, the Mexican clan was reputedly started by a Mexican slave woman (Zolbrod, Dine bahane, 309).


9. Matthews, Navajo Legends, 68-78.


18. *twme*, 2:42, 44.


28. *twme*, 1:203; Marcellus Ball Edwards, "Journal of Marcellus Ball Edwards, 1846-1847," in *Marching with the Army of the West, 1846-1848*, ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale ca: Arthur H. Clark, 1974), 176; McCall, *New Mexico in 1850*, 90-91. It was a common view that the Navajos were wealthy, as McCall indicated. But Agent George W. Manypenny wrote the commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1854 that the Navajos must either steal or
starve, or be colonized by the government and taught agriculture. Kelleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico*, 76-77.


40. Moore, Chiefs, Agents, and Soldiers, xv–xix, 1-30, 43, 55-73, 82-108, 115-59, 161-74, 185-252; Lawrence R. Murphy, Frontier Crusader, William F. Arny (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), 234-37; Reeve, “Government and the Navaho, 1883-1888,” 19-20, 50; Locke, Book of the Navajo, 398. (Locke is the only provenance for the epithet “Taran-tula,” used by Moore and by me in this article, and, since Locke does not cite any sources and I do not find this in the biography by Murphy or in Reeve, two basic sources, I am beginning to doubt its authenticity.)


42. Presidential Message [Benjamin Harrison], “Report on the Condition of Navajo Indian Country,” 52d Cong., 2d sess., 14 February 1893, S. Executive Doc. 68, serial 3056. In that same report, Manuelito expressed doubt that the Topographical Survey would have much influence on the Navajos to save water, since they were not accustomed to conservation.

43. “Miss Thacker’s Hospital for the Navajos,” Indian's Friend 10 (March 1898): 7-8.


47. “A Chief’s Impression of the Chicago Fair,” Indian’s Friend 7 (1894): 5.

