Elle Meets the President: Weaving Navajo Culture and Commerce in the Southwestern Tourist Industry

During the spring of 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt included a two-hour stop in Albuquerque while on a speaking tour through the western territories. The Commercial Club of Albuquerque chose a Navajo woman, called Elle of Ganado, to weave a gift for the president—a textile rendition of his honorary Commercial Club membership card. Club members provided the design, which Elle wove quickly in hand-spun red, white, and blue yarn. During his tour of Albuquerque, Roosevelt visited the Commercial Club, where he received Elle’s blanket, and he stopped by the Alvarado Hotel’s Indian Building, where he met the weaver herself. An Albuquerque newspaper reported that upon meeting the weaver, the “president gave her a hearty shake and told her how much he appreciated her work. The little speech was interpreted and pleased the Indian woman beyond expression.”

Although her own thoughts were apparently “beyond expression,” Elle’s image spoke volumes to turn-of-the-century Americans, showing New Mexico as not only conquered but commercialized, safe for investment and safe for statehood. Indeed, Commercial Club members orchestrated this performance as part of a statehood campaign, a drive for integration into the social, economic, and political life of the United States, an effort that would not pay off for nearly ten more years. Elle and the president’s meeting suggests ways in which race and gender, regional and national politics, culture and commerce interacted and were inextricably linked as the twentieth century began. The pivotal role that Elle played in Roosevelt’s visit reveals that while we tend to think of women like Elle as marginalized historical figures, they were far from peripheral to the unfolding of twentieth-century American history. Not only can we better understand such women by placing them within the larger economic, cultural, and political context

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of their times, but we can better understand that context by putting a woman like Elle at its center.

Elle of Ganado, also called Asdzaa Lichii’ (Red Woman) in Navajo, was born to the Black Sheep Clan and lived in the southern part of the Navajo Reservation near the Hubbell Trading Post in Ganado, Arizona. She might have been about fifty years old at the time she met Roosevelt, and she lived until 1924. At the suggestion of trader John Lorenzo Hubbell, she and her husband Tom began spending substantial periods of time in Albuquerque beginning in 1903 after the Fred Harvey Company opened its Indian Building as part of the Alvarado Hotel complex at the Santa Fe Railroad depot. Together with other Navajo and Pueblo families, they worked as arts and crafts demonstrators within the burgeoning southwestern tourist industry.²

Most scholarly literature on southwestern tourism examines the ironies and complexities of images of Indians portrayed as purely nonindustrial producers of “traditional” handcrafts, “outside history, outside industrial capitalism” that had begun to emerge at the turn of the century.³ Elle’s Commercial Club blanket, however, unabashedly declared the link between Indian art and turn-of-the-century capitalism. It is a reminder that those who worked as demonstrators were, like all Americans at the time, entering new kinds of economic relationships that would affect their work and their communities in profound ways. Beyond their ideological implications, then, these tourists sites were workplaces to which a number of Native Americans agreed to travel for extended periods of time. The sites were also cultural crossroads at which negotiations took place between employers and employees, between young corporate and rural America, between white men and Indian families, between metropolitan and peripheral economies. This essay explores the contours of these crossroads, the compromises demanded and the benefits promised various participants.⁴

The Fred Harvey Company, it has been said, “invented” the Southwest as “America’s Orient.” Fred Harvey was an English immigrant who opened his first restaurant along the Santa Fe Railroad line in 1876 in Topeka, Kansas. From there the company grew into the first chain of restaurants and of railroad hotels. Harvey built his company’s reputation on the notion of civilizing rail travel to the West by selling good food served by respectable young, white, single women called “Harvey girls.” Combining hot meals, Harvey girls, and Indian images in their advertising, the company presented the West as an exotic but accessible tourist paradise. By the time of Harvey’s death in 1901, his empire consisted of twenty-six restaurants, sixteen hotels, and twenty dining cars.⁵

The Harvey Company went into the Indian art business at the instigation of Harvey’s daughter, Minnie Harvey Huckel, an avid Indian art collector. In
1902 she suggested that a display of Indian art be included in Albuquerque's new Harvey hotel, the Alvarado. Her husband, J. F. Huckel, a New Yorker who had been in the publishing business and was now a Fred Harvey vice president, began to commute from Harvey headquarters in Kansas City to Albuquerque, where he created the Fred Harvey Indian Department. The Huckels' collaboration with Harvey employee Herman Schweizer ensured the success of this venture. Schweizer, a German immigrant, had found his way to the Southwest in the 1880s, had jobbed silver and turquoise to Navajo silversmiths, and while working at the Harvey restaurant in Coolidge, New Mexico, had begun buying and selling Navajo arts and crafts—a successful sideline that caught Minnie Huckel's attention. Schweizer spent the rest of his life managing the Fred Harvey Indian Department. He had an eye and a taste for the Indian art business and soon built the Harvey Indian collection into a premiere showcase. This success was further facilitated by the architect Mary Colter who helped to design the Indian Building at the Alvarado and subsequently went to work full time for the company. Colter was an important force in developing a regional architectural style inspired by local, native design—spaces for the "staged authenticity" that became fundamental to southwestern tourism, and spaces designed for commercial transactions that also offered a seemingly behind-the-scenes view of Indian homelife.

The development of southwestern tourism thus depended on diverse players who illustrate the various and complex forces at work at the turn of the century: Minnie Huckel, a wealthy woman and art patron; Mary Colter, a professional woman finding a career in the Southwest; J. F. Huckel, an elite eastern businessman; Herman Schweizer, a young, ambitious, Jewish immigrant; and a number of Native American artists, including Elle, worked together to invent the modern Southwest and to find a place for themselves within it. Each brought her or his own goals, background, and economic and cultural logic to their meeting. They did not always act out of positions of equality, but each were crucial players in the story. Most analyses of the Harvey Company and southwestern tourism in general tell the story from the Anglo participants’ point of view, even when critiquing their use of Indians and Indian imagery. Although the individual, private thoughts and reactions of Indian workers such as Elle may never be known, careful reading of sources left mostly by those Anglo participants can help us examine their roles and experiences within the larger context of turn-of-the-century Navajo and American history.

Much recent scholarship has explored the elevation of Indian imagery in this period, even as Native Americans remained culturally, politically, and economically marginalized. Indian artisans were central figures in the invention of the Southwest. Traveling in the comfort of a berth on the Santa Fe railroad, white
Americans could see exotic pockets of the nation where the industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization of the era had not yet, it seemed, taken hold. Yet in this period, as industrial capitalism spread and the Southwest was incorporated into the nation and the national market economy, it became, as Leah Dilworth explains, “increasingly clear that the development of the American West would depend on the metropolis for capital and cheap immigrant labor.” Ironically, she continues, “The spectacle of Indian artisanal labor resurrected an ideology that declared precisely the opposite: that the rural artisan and the farmer were the backbone of the nation’s economy.” The presence of hardworking, artistic Indians provided tourists with a heavily mediated—indeed artificially constructed—arena in which to feel they had safely encountered the real West through a glimpse of Indian homelife. Barbara Babcock, Marta Weigle, and others have shown that the prominent place of female Indian artisans and their children in locales like the Fred Harvey Indian Building was crucial to the domestication of the image of the “wild” West. They call such sites “ethnic sets for exotic performances” or “human showcases” where “the companies staged authenticity by controlling the architectural setting, ‘live’ demonstrations and other expressive performances, museum and sales displays, publications, and virtually all associated exegesis.”

Tourists viewed Indians purportedly practicing their naturally artistic, premodern everyday lives, but the artists, too, were travelers who had moved from their rural homes to these tourist spaces in order to incorporate income from such work into their families’ economic strategies. The idealized domestic tableaux offered at a Harvey House obscured a gender organization and economic system that differed markedly from that of Euro-Americans. It also ignored the cultural meanings that the Diné, or Navajos, themselves found in their textiles. Weaving was, and is, a highly respected activity that reflects and reinforces Navajo women’s economic, cultural, and social centrality. Navajo textiles had long been both market objects and unique cultural expressions embodying hózhó, the central Navajo philosophical concept that connotes harmony, balance, goodness, and beauty. Weaving also reflects the power of thought and the combination of autonomy and cooperation that is so important to the Diné. Husbands build looms for their wives, and weavers sometimes work side by side at the same loom. At the same time, the design of a rug, as one weaver explains, “just has to be you,” and, to quote weaver Mary Lee Begay, “takes a lot of hard thinking.” Weavers do not generally sketch out designs but rather conceive and then hold them in their minds as they work. A leading scholar of contemporary Navajo textiles, Ann Lane Hedlund, explains that weaving “represents a proper way to make a living or, putting it more exactly, to live”; weavers practice their art
while “caring for their families, homes, and herds . . . and remembering the sacred stories, prayers, and songs that ‘go with the weaving.’”

Those “families, homes, and herds” are organized around the principle of motherhood, a term that refers not just to biological mothers, but to the women of one’s clan, the family’s sheep herd, and the family’s land. The Diné are matrilineal, tracing descent from the female side of the family, and matrilocal, with daughters living with their husbands and children near their mother. The primary familial bond is between a mother and child (not between a husband and wife); Navajos belong or are “born to” their mother’s clan; and other clan members are their closest relatives. Individual women, men, and children own livestock and other property but share the care of herds and fields. Women generally control range land, and land use is typically inherited from mothers. Weaving, too, has always been dominated by women (though men can, and some do, weave), and weaving knowledge passes from generation to generation through kinship bonds.

At the turn of the twentieth century, livestock products were the primary source of subsistence and of income, supplemented by farming and by trading other items, most importantly textiles, at the local trading post. Living in an often harsh and unpredictable environment, the Diné pooled resources along kinship lines. Economic specialization was not practical, but varied economic strategies and adaptability to changing environmental and historical forces were. Even while becoming more dependent on the national market economy, the Diné did not abandon their diversified subsistence economy or reciprocal economic expectations revolving around matrilineal kinship ties.

Long before trading posts or Harvey houses, weaving had been one of many activities through which women contributed to the household economy. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the Diné had increasingly oriented their economy and culture around sheep herds while developing much of what is now considered traditional Navajo culture. Navajo women used their sheep’s wool to weave blankets and clothing for family use and for inter- and intratribal trade. By the early nineteenth century, Navajo blankets were prized within a wide regional market for their quality—so tightly woven they were waterproof—and their beauty.

In 1865 U.S. troops that had wrested control of the region from Mexico two decades earlier implemented a scorched-earth policy, massacring herds and burning crops, in order to impoverish and defeat the Diné. Elle probably joined the approximately eight thousand Navajos who were moved to a tiny reservation near Fort Sumner in southeastern New Mexico called Bosque Redondo, or Hweeldi
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in Navajo. There they faced disease, death, and emotional and economic turmoil. Even though they were short on wool and given manufactured blankets and clothing, Navajo women nevertheless "set up looms and created blankets of strength and beauty."¹⁵

To the army officers at Bosque Redondo, Navajo women's commitment to their looms appeared not as evidence of resilience but proof of conquest. Long accustomed to the association of femininity, domesticity, and textile production, Anglo observers thought weaving augured well for Navajos' ability to adopt "civilized" gender roles. When American officials offered Navajos Anglo-style looms and spinning wheels, however, the Navajo women refused to use them or to work with the white women hired to instruct them, insisting on continuing with "their old plan of spinning and making blankets."¹⁶ Weavers readily adopted some newly available materials, including commercial dyes and yarns, but insisted on controlling the means of production. Nor did they adopt Euro-American gender roles, but continued to ground their social organization and identity in matrilineal kinship relations. Despite cultural misreadings of the Navajo, weaving became a critical point of contact, valued by both groups but for different reasons.

After four years, American officials decided that relocating the Diné to Bosque Redondo had been a costly mistake, making a once self-sufficient tribe an unnecessary economic burden on the federal government. In 1868, eager to return home, a group of Navajo headmen signed a treaty establishing a reservation carved out of their traditional homeland. As soon as they returned, they set about resurrecting a pastoral economy using sheep and goats provided by the federal Office of Indian Affairs and taking advantage of a national boom in the wool market. White traders appeared in Navajo country to broker the sale of wool from Navajo herds to eastern markets. Trading posts sprouted along the new railroad lines and deeper within Navajo country. The Diné traded wool, sheep, textiles and other products for flour, coffee, sugar and other items they could not produce at home. Traders thus helped introduce the national market economy to the Diné while becoming cultural brokers as well. During the 1890s drought and a severe national depression lowered wool prices and ended the Diné's economic recovery, but they continued to center their lives around their sheep herds, grafting elements of the national market economy onto their subsistence economy.¹⁷

Weavers left traces of these historical changes and continuities in their textiles. They adopted designs from manufactured Pendleton blankets from Oregon that they bought at trading posts, experimented with serrate style designs inspired by Hispanic weaving, and increasingly used commercial yarns and dyes. The Indian Office provided finely spun yarn manufactured in Germantown,
Pennsylvania, that allowed weavers to develop ever more intricate and complex designs. Some weavers began to include figurative elements such as trains in their textiles in a new “pictorial” style. When wool prices dropped in the 1890s, women apparently turned increasingly to weaving as a way to increase the value of their wool. New designs reflected changing concerns of the weavers and the changing market. Traders encouraged weaving styles they thought would sell well and regional styles named after neighboring posts emerged. For the most part, Navajos stopped weaving clothing and instead created what would come to be called rugs, meant not to be worn, but to be souvenirs of the West. Military personnel were among the first Anglo collectors, followed by growing numbers of explorers, scientists, government personnel, and finally tourists arriving with the new railroads.\(^1^8\)

Railroads altered the economic, cultural, and social contours of the region. By the turn of the century, the Santa Fe dominated Albuquerque's economy and had practically built a whole new town around its depot. Railroads also shifted the region's perspective from a local economy oriented along a north-south axis facing Mexico to an east-west trajectory incorporated into the U.S. national economy. One of the byproducts of this process was the introduction of wage work and migrant labor to Native American communities. Many Navajo and other Indian men added income from railroad work to the contributions they made to their household economy. Meanwhile, as the Navajo economy became increasingly incorporated into the modern industrial economy of the United States, the inter- and intratribal blanket trade evaporated as southwestern Indians adopted white-style clothing and factory-made blankets. Navajo weavers adopted their art to a new and changing market that, though it did not generally pay producers well, yet could be crucial to the household economy. Navajo textiles had become a key commodity in southwestern economic development and were central to the income of traders and the growing tourist economy.\(^1^9\) One of the most famous and successful trading posts, for example, was John Lorenzo Hubbell's in Ganado, Arizona, in the southern part of Navajo country near the New Mexico border. The Hubbell family eventually opened several other posts and became the main suppliers for the Harvey Company. They also became employment brokers, recruiting Navajos and Hopis, including Elle and Tom of Ganado, who were willing to work at Harvey houses as arts and crafts demonstrators.\(^2^0\) Within the growing trading post economy, Navajo weavers found new and different customers, and they experimented with new materials and designs while maintaining traditional production techniques and continuing to create uniquely Navajo textiles.
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While the railroad introduced industrial capitalism to the rural Southwest, it also introduced the Southwest, or a particular image of the Southwest, to the world. Ironically, while some Indian men learned to participate in industrial wage work, the Santa Fe’s tourist business perfected the image of Indians as naturally artistic preindustrial craftspeople. Upon disembarking at Albuquerque, train travelers passed through the Harvey Indian Building on the way to the Alvarado lobby. The first thing they saw were weavers, potters, silversmiths, and basket makers, and Fred Harvey sales increased appreciably as a result of this encounter.

The Indian workers’ primary job was to be on display for the tourists. In making arrangements for the demonstrators, Harvey Indian Department manager Herman Schweizer explained to the trader John Lorenzo Hubbell that “the principal thing [is] for them to be at work when trains are in. They should be working from 7:30 a. m. to noon. They can work as much or as little as they want to in the afternoon but must come back after supper for about one hour for evening trains.” In exchange the Harvey Company provided room and board and on at least one occasion Schweizer promised “double of what they are getting for their stuff on the reservation.” This was a good enough deal, apparently, to entice a number of artists and their families away from their homes, farms, sheep, corn, and kin for two or three months at a time, long enough for good weavers to complete a large weaving project “if they bring blankets already started.”

Schweizer and Huckel always preferred a mix of women, men, and children to provide scenes of domestic, familial, artistic comradery. The ideal Navajo couple would include a weaver and a silversmith. Navajo women would weave, care for the children, cook, and perform janitorial duties, though accomplishing the latter out of the view of tourists. Navajo silver work was still a somewhat new craft, and silversmiths were harder to find than weavers. Back in Navajo country, economic specialization in weaving or silversmithing would be unusual. Instead, arts and crafts work was integrated into diversified economic strategies. Even the Harvey men did not rely on their demonstrators for quality silver work. More important to them was to have a man who knew enough to act like a silversmith while being “a good man,” that is, reliable, honest, and hardworking. His tasks would include cleaning and upkeep on the buildings and usually translating.

Many Indian artists worked at some point for the Fred Harvey Company. The San Ildefonso Pueblo potter Maria Martinez and her husband Julian worked as Harvey demonstrators early in their careers, before developing the black pottery style that brought so much fame. The Hopi-Tewa potter Nampeyo also worked for the Harvey Company on a few occasions, demonstrating her Sikyatki revival style. Nampeyo had already begun to make a name for herself, which the
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Harvey Company cashed in on when they hired her. Elle, in contrast, was not well-known until her work for the Harvey Company made her one of the only other Indian artists with name recognition in the early twentieth century. Elle's willingness to stay away from home for long periods of time and to be photographed over and over again made her one of the Harvey Company's favorite employees. She and her husband were local celebrities in Albuquerque, their activities documented regularly in the town's newspapers. They met and were photographed with numerous national celebrities, too, from the Chicago Cubs to "America's sweetheart," Mary Pickford. Encouraged by their success in Albuquerque, the Harvey Company began employing demonstrators for other sites as well. Elle and other artists traveled around the country representing the company at expositions in San Francisco, Chicago, and elsewhere. They also worked in other Harvey houses, most notably at the Grand Canyon, where living exhibits of Indian "homelife" were built into the tourist spaces.

Architect Mary Colter based the architecture of the Grand Canyon's Hopi House on that at Oraibi, one of the oldest inhabited villages in the United States. Hopi demonstrators lived upstairs, Navajos camped nearby, and downstairs salesrooms also invoked Indian "homelife." By emphasizing art, and deemphasizing other economic activities carried out in actual Hopi villages, the Hopi House helped to define Native American culture narrowly by its marketable, artistic products. While Harvey publications extolled the Hopi House as a "reproduction of the homes of this tribe as they are found on their reservation," it was not a reproduction but an interpretation of Indian life in which certain characteristics stood in for Indian culture. The inaccuracy of this "staged authenticity" is highlighted by the number of Navajos who enacted their artistic domestic life at the Hopi House, where Navajo weaving and silver were especially important commodities.

Authenticity was itself historically constructed, and it changed over time. At the Grand Canyon, Huckel insisted that Navajo women "have and use some of their homemade pots to cook." At the same time, Schweizer and Huckel solicited Hubbell's help in securing an "old Navaho forge. . . perhaps a piece of steel rail or whatever there may be that is homemade" for silversmiths working at the Hopi House. Authenticity, then, did not require the complete rejection of technology or industrialization; Navajo silver work, in fact, was not a traditional craft and relied on modern technology, in this case steel. What seemed to be most important in indicating authenticity was the word "homemade," which suggested self-sufficiency: that a Navajo man could build a forge out of a piece of steel rail; that a Navajo woman could feed her family out of homemade pots; that for these
Indians art and labor were integrated into everyday life. Such items as Navajo pottery might merely serve as decoration in modern white American homes in which the art of self-sufficiency had been lost, but for Indians they must still be used. Harvey images of Indian artisans played off concerns emerging from the arts and crafts movement about the alienation of art from labor in the modern industrial world, the growing dichotomy between the traditional and the modern, and a nostalgia for a mythological past.29 Still, the art itself did not (yet) have to be so pure: “Modern” designs were especially popular, and weavers could use manufactured yarns and dyes as long as they wove them by hand.

As for the Diné, their identity was less tenuously tied to material objects such as stoves or pots than was the Anglo definition of an “authentic” Indian. On one occasion Tom and Elle asked a Harvey manager to provide buckskin and other materials so that Tom could make moccasins for Elle.30 This story suggests an impressive level of self-sufficiency that might reinforce Anglo understandings of Indian authenticity: Even if they did not hunt the buck and cure the hide themselves, they also did not buy the manufactured product. But the cost of a pair of shoes may have been less of an issue for the couple than a deeper cultural undercurrent. As a Navajo woman interviewed in the 1990s explained, moccasins “were first worn by the holy people and reflect our culture and our identity as Diné. . . . It is by a Navajo’s moccasin the Holy People recognize that a person is a Diné and who that person is.” Indeed, establishing this identity may have been especially important to demonstrators like Elle who had journeyed so far from home. Moreover, the construction of the moccasins is critical because the sole “represents mother earth” and the top, which is “dyed red to represent the rainbow . . . is father sky.” The sinew that ties together the sole and the top represents lightning and thus the “union of mother earth and father sky [which] brings forth all life.” As when a Navajo weaves, the process of making moccasins expresses hozho, harmony between nature and the supernatural, and the power of thought: “We think about how we are going to make the moccasins, we plan out how best to make the moccasins, we use our thinking and planning put into action when we make the moccasins, and when we are done we have moccasins to protect our feet and give us comfort.”31 In other words, the material, the color, and the process of constructing the moccasins would have been more important to Elle and Tom than that the finished product was “homemade.”

Diné identity depended on relationships to land, kin, and livestock, relationships that income from weaving could help maintain. In contrast to Elle and Tom, most weavers were unwilling to stay away from home for long periods of time. For that reason, most of the rugs sold in Harvey houses were woven not by
demonstrators, who could not in any case have produced the necessary volume, but by women back in Navajo country who combined weaving with their other daily activities. Often these weavers bought packaged dyes at their trading post. Sometimes they spun and carded wool from their own sheep, but often they received wool from a trader as an advance on their rug, or perhaps they paid another woman to process wool for them. Weaving was thus part of both a local and national economy, combining traditional means of production with materials and marketing strategies made available by industrial capitalism.

Presenting “authentic,” “traditional,” “ancient” Indian culture to the tourist market was crucial to the economic development of the Southwest, yet in both practical and ideological ways it could clash with official federal Indian policy. In day-to-day business practice, for example, the Harvey people took Navajo polygamy—the bane of Christian missionaries—in stride. In fact, polygamy might have made Harvey managers’ job easier by providing more adults, especially weavers, per family to take care of various chores. Similarly, the disjuncture between educating Indian children in the Protestant, individualistic, capitalist work ethic that lay at the heart of assimilationist policy ran counter to Huckel and Schweizer’s desire for demonstrators to bring along their children who were “one of the chief attractions to the traveling public.” The Harvey men had to obtain Indian agents’ permission for the children to accompany their families. The agents were employees of the federal Indian Office whose policy was to wean Indian children away from traditional culture, the very culture that was being preserved, commodified, and marketed at the Grand Canyon.

Meanwhile, Harvey managers also found some elements of traditional culture trying, and they worried frequently about “spoiled” Indians having a bad influence on other demonstrators. While Indians were asked to demonstrate the appearance of self-sufficiency, attitudes of independence could get them sent home. Demonstrators were to be viewed by, but not interact with, tourists, except within prescribed limits. Most importantly, the Harvey employers wanted demonstrators to act as passive producers rather than active participants in the Indian art market. As anthropologist John Hudson explained to his wife Grace Hudson about the Pomo demonstrators he helped the Harvey Company hire, what “the Harvey’s [sic] want is the attraction to visitors and monopoly of all work done.”

Demonstrators who tried to take business into their own hands, as did a silversmith called Taos, threatened this monopoly. “He is making silver for other Indians and they are selling it,” Huckel complained to Hubbell. “He is going over town and selling it and also selling it to our guests on the quiet. Taos has
been spoiled by his experience at St. Louis” during the world’s fair and, though a “silversmith is quite an attraction,” he was becoming uncontrollable. In the end, they sent him home with his wife even before she had completed the blanket she was weaving, which they bought for twenty dollars. Taos received thirty-one dollars, although he asked for $36.50. Harvey manager Snively refused him the additional five-fifty “as I thought he was trying to skin me.” He also refused “to pay him $12.50 for putting Pins in 50 buttons for Hat Pins which was about two days’ work” but “compromised with him at 12 1/2 cents each.”

The dispute with Taos was not the only time that these tourist spaces, primarily dedicated to the commodification of women’s work, became arenas for conflicts among men. Shortly before sending Taos home, another Navajo, called Long Man, who in Schweizer’s opinion had not been working out well anyway, was “getting troublesome and stubborn. . . . He is pretty much of a mischief maker.”

“I’ve had a lot of trouble with the Indians lately in little petty ways,” Schweizer wrote Hubbell late in May of 1905 from the Grand Canyon. “The Longman sort of queered the whole bunch, he seems to be a sort of evil spirit reads the stars and all that sort of thing.”

This last complaint indicates that although demonstrators willingly traveled into these white tourist sites, they maintained ways of looking at the world that did not always mesh well with their employers’ assumptions about market forces and employee responsibilities. Elle and Tom may have been the Harvey Company’s favorite employees, but they were not particularly acculturated. Although willing to stay for several months each year, they would go home for reasons that mystified the Harvey people, for example, when Schweizer wrote Hubbell that, “Elle has rheumatism and Tom says Long mans saw the sign and she’d die if she didn’t get medicine.” In this case, Tom, Long Man, and Elle did not mean western medicine to be found in pills or at hospitals, but the Navajo medicine around which their religious beliefs were organized. Indeed, because the Navajo worldview centers on maintaining well-being through hozho, cultures could clash most irrevocably around the issue of health.

At Harvey houses different worldviews grounded in different economic and gender systems collided. Within this context, it should come as no surprise that even a woman’s body could become the site of conflict, as happened to one of the favorite demonstrator families headed by Maria Antonio and Miguelito during the summer of 1905. In May the family began planning to return to the reservation in anticipation of another of Miguelito’s wives, Agippa, giving birth. Huckel and Schweizer were not happy with their decision to leave. In a letter to Hubbell, Huckel wrote: “It seems to me he would be much better off if he stays where he
is. He is earning a pretty fair salary,” and the family was “doing well.” Their young daughter, Tonsi-pah, also a weaver, had been ill, but was “quite recovered. Of course, if he is set on going home, I presume it is not advisable for us to object or persuade him not to.” The timing was not good for the Harvey Company, as other demonstrators were also “restless,” “lonesome,” and “homesick,” and Elle and Tom were also away. During June, Schweizer and Huckel, with Hubbell’s help, tried to make arrangements for replacements while waiting eagerly for Elle and Tom’s return.

Then in mid-June Agippa gave birth, probably prematurely. The Harvey people called in a Dr. Pearce who had attended demonstrators before with success. This time he predicted that the baby would not live a month. Huckel told Hubbell, “Agippa was not very ill in Dr. Pearce’s opinion, but he would be obliged to attend to her and take her to the hospital.” Later Huckel explained, “We have had so much hospital and other work connected with Migelito’s family that I think he believes thoroughly in the ‘white man’s’ doctor.” They did not anticipate any problems. Still, Huckel suggested that the family return to the reservation once Agippa was well enough: “I feel if this baby should die at Albuquerque or Agippa should get very ill there the Indians might think it was on account of their living there.” He apparently had some understanding of Navajos’ need to avoid places associated with death and realized that a death at a Harvey House could be disastrous for the demonstrator program. But Agippa never recovered sufficiently to return home, and, as she got sicker, the limits on this family’s acceptance of white ways were severely tested. Schweizer informed Hubbell, “Migelito took his wife out of the hospital and he has her down by the river in a grove of cottonwoods where he built a temporary shelter for her and says he is going to cure her.”

Though angry at Miguelito and reprimanded by his boss, Schweizer apparently did not know how to stop this retreat to traditional medicine. In fact, the Harvey men knew that Miguelito was a singer, that is, a Navajo doctor and religious leader. Just the previous fall he had performed a healing ceremony for Tom when doctors at Albuquerque’s St. Joseph’s Hospital failed to cure his pneumonia. On that occasion Miguelito and Tom’s traditional ways brought Fred Harvey good publicity as the Albuquerque paper followed Tom’s progress. Born during the Navajos’ confinement at Bosque Redondo in the 1860s, Miguelito must have been about forty in 1905. During the 1930s, he and his family would act as important informants for the anthropological work then undertaken with increasing frequency in Navajo country. In her classic studies from that period, anthropologist Gladys Reichard would celebrate Miguelito’s knowledge of Navajo
religion and Maria Antonio’s knowledge of weaving. In the summer of 1905, Miguelito knew what he was doing in that cottonwood grove on the banks of the Rio Grande, although a full-scale sing back home surrounded by a crowd of relatives and friends would surely have been more effective.

When Agippa died, Schweizer, furious, wrote Hubbell, “You can tell Miguelito when he returns that there is no one to blame for her dying but himself.” Schweizer insisted that the doctors had told them that she “was bound to die unless she was operated on immediately.” In fact, Schweizer finally got her to the hospital, but “It was too late. . . . Dr. Pearce told me that there was no excuse whatever for her dying.” He insisted that from then on, they would have a stricter policy in which demonstrators “will have to take [their] physician[s] orders or go back to the reservation on the first train.”

Miguelito, Maria Antonio, and Tonsi-pah hurried home after Agippa’s death, “too nervous” even “to finish their blankets.” But they soon returned. As demonstrators, they moved between their rural homes and Harvey houses and occasionally on longer trips to expositions, integrating demonstration work into their diversified economy. Their movement provides yet another example of the back and forth between “farm and factory” that marked the daily lives of so many Americans in the early twentieth century. But Harvey houses were unusual factories. Rather than wholesale celebrations of technological progress, they were meant to be oases from the modern world. More than mere workplaces, they presumed to display the artistic homelife of what the Harvey Company termed “America’s First Families.” But for the Indian demonstrators, home was not the Hopi House.

Because the Harvey Company’s business was tourism, the demonstrator program was, in a sense, far more important to them than to their Native American employees. Schweizer liked “to see my factory in full blast,” but he constantly struggled to keep enough demonstrators on hand: “Everybody going to the Hopi House is asking where the Hopi Indians are,” he moaned to Hubbell on one occasion, ignoring the fact that many of his favorite Hopi House demonstrators were Navajo. With Miguelito’s family gone after Agippa’s death, only Tom and Elle remained at the Grand Canyon, making “the Indian proposition . . . really a farce.” He pleaded with Hubbell to persuade Miguelito to return or to make some other, really “any arrangement,” just, “get some Indians to the Canyon at once.”

“It was up to the family when they wanted to quit and go home,” remembered one woman who as a child had accompanied her mother to Albuquerque for two months.

And so they did, for dramatic reasons such as Agippa’s death or in response to more quotidian or seasonal necessities—to plant their corn, check in with
family and friends, attend ceremonies, take care of business, because they just wanted to, or, in the case of one man called the “Old Silversmith,” because “people are bothering too much trying to take his picture.” Demonstrator work provided some welcome income as well as travel and adventure. It may even have appealed to a few demonstrators as a way to practice and preserve traditional crafts. Most demonstrators, however, were likely less concerned with facilitating cross-cultural exchange than in the satisfaction of earning decent money for work that was of both economic and cultural value to them and their communities. For some, such as Agippa, this decision could lead to tragedy. For others, such as Elle, it may also have entailed sacrifice that was deemed worthwhile. In any case, in the early twentieth century such craftwork was integrated into Navajos’ diversified subsistence economy even when practiced in the “staged authenticity” of Albuquerque’s Indian Building or the Grand Canyon’s Hopi House.

While the Diné brought economic assumptions based on that diversified subsistence economy and reciprocal economic obligations to Harvey houses, their employers maintained faith in market forces and economic specialization. Part of the justification for the marketing of tradition was, according to the Harvey people, that it would benefit all concerned: “The railroad company is very much interested in the success of this project,” Huckel wrote Hubbell, “and the tourists are as much so, and I think it will help eventually the . . . Indians by creating a market for their goods.”

Through their art, it seemed, Indians could be incorporated into the national market economy and could find a future in modern America, as long as there was a market for their goods. “Staged authenticity” thus suggested an alternative to assimilation: Indian cultures had unique contributions to make, and perhaps they were worth preserving, at least in part. It also served to define Indians as “naturally artistic,” a positive but ultimately constraining view.

The conquest of Indian America included not only military force and boarding schools but also the ideological reduction of native cultures to their marketable artistic products—an example, perhaps, of what Barbara A. Babcock calls “modern power,” replacing “violence and force with the ‘gentler’ constraint of uninterrupted visibility, ‘the gaze.’” A woman like Elle would not languish in prison like Geronimo, but she was captured many times—on film.

Yet, while in the tourist literature Indians were presented as silent, “beyond expression,” a woman like Elle was hardly mute, even if she did not speak English. Remembered decades later as “the boss of the weaving outfit in Albuquerque” she, like her husband Tom and Miguelito and Maria Antonio, found a role in the modern world and a way to support herself by embodying the traditional
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Indian artisan yearned for by modern Americans. She took on that employment and even met the president without abandoning her ties to her rural home, her kin, her language, her Navajo name, or her religion. In his speech in Albuquerque the day they met, Roosevelt praised those with “adventurous temper and . . . iron resolution . . . who first tempted the shaggy wilderness and turned it into habitations for man.” His meeting with Elle is a reminder that the West had been inhabited by “man”—men and women—long before the Anglo conquest, and that diverse groups would continue struggling to make a home there in the twentieth century, a task that might take an even stronger resolution and more adventurous spirit than those manly pioneers Roosevelt had in mind. Historically and historiographically, we have tended to examine more closely the perspective that Roosevelt brought to his meeting with Elle, but just because we do not know what Asdzaa Lichii’ said about this encounter does not mean that she said nothing. Despite the lack of written sources from her perspective, we can shift our frame of reference to make the central actor in the story the weaver instead of the president. In doing so, we can deepen our understanding of the ways in which diverse Americans entered the twentieth century and forged our common history.

Much rural women’s history has analyzed how women adopted products of domestic labor to the early twentieth century’s expanding national industrial economy. The Navajo rug trade fits neatly into this larger historiographical context, but it is worth remembering that Navajo textiles had always been commodities as well as cultural expressions. As Navajo weavers became symbols of the modern Southwest, Navajo women who wove found new markets for their craft. Such marketplaces were sites of compromise and confusion, exploitation and resistance. But, as Diné, weavers continued to expect both financial remuneration and cultural respect for their work. One professional weaver, following in Elle’s footsteps, explained in 1986: “Your mind and prayers are connected” to weaving; a rug “just has to be you. . . . I want the Navajo weaver to get lots of money for their weaving. I go several places to teach that.” Weaving remains a good way to help face difficult economic circumstances, despite the low return per hour of labor. Younger women, she predicted, will continue to take up weaving because if “there are no jobs for them . . . . they think about weaving.” Echoing the words of many Navajo weavers over the centuries, she explained, “I raised my children” with weaving, and “with my weaving I get what I want.”

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Notes

I first told the story of Elle meeting the president at the Fifth Annual Conference on Rural and Farm Women in Historical Perspective held in 1995 in Chevy Chase, Maryland. I would like to thank Lu Ann Jones and Anne Effland for making my participation there possible. Since then the paper has been through many permutations. My thanks go to Jacquelyn Hall, Nancy Hewitt, John Kasson, Marla Miller, and Molly Rozum for their help on the dissertation chapter from which this article is drawn. Participants in the Duke-UNC Feminist History Group and Nancy Shoemaker, as panel commentator, at the 1999 Western History Association meeting provided useful suggestions and lively discussions of earlier versions. Finally, I am grateful to Kathleen Howard, Joan Jensen, Marla Miller, Kathleen Tabaha, and an anonymous outside reader for their thoughtful comments on drafts of the present article and to John Moore and Roberto Mosheim for crucial aid in its completion.


2. For what little biographical information is available on Elle of Ganado see Howard, “Weaving a Legend,” 127–53.

4. Scholars have usually viewed the impact of the tourist industry, and the larger market economy of which it was part, on Native American artists and their communities as highly detrimental. See, for example, Edwin L. Wade, “Straddling the Cultural Fence: The Conflict for Ethnic Artists Within Pueblo Societies,” in The Arts of the North American Indian: Native Traditions in Evolution, ed. Edwin L. Wade (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986), 243–54; Tessie Naranjo, “Cultural Changes: The Effect of Foreign Systems at Santa Clara Pueblo,” in Weigle and Babcock, The Great Southwest, 187–96; and Kathy M’Closkey, “Marketing Multiple Myths: The Hidden History of Navajo Weaving,” Journal of the Southwest 36:3 (1994): 185–220. Such analyses parallel and sometimes intersect with scholarship on rural women that views Native Americans as losing out as they adopt items of domestic production to an expanding national market economy, and with analyses in Native American women’s history that argue that the European and Euro-American economic system disrupted indigenous gender roles to the detriment of women. For an article that combines these themes, see Terry R. Reynolds, “Women, Pottery, and Economics at Acoma Pueblo,” in New Mexico Women: Intercultural Perspectives, ed. Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986). In other words, the market economy has long been a villain in Native American studies. Recently, however, historians of Native American women have noted the depth and resilience of cultural systems, evidenced in particular by the fundamental maintenance of gender roles, even as Native Americans adapted to significant historical and material pressures. Other Native American historians have also examined the variety of Native responses to changing economic circumstances and the ways in which Indians brought their own economic rationales to interactions with Euro-Americans, adapting and adopting aspects of a complex, historically constructed market economy. For an example, see Theda Perdue, Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); and Arthur J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660–1870 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974).


6. Howard and Pardue, Inventing the Southwest, 9–15, 103. See also Kathleen L. Howard, “A Most Remarkable Success: Herman Schweizer and the Fred Harvey Indian Department,” in Weigle and Babcock, The Great Southwest, 87–101; Matilda McQuaid


8. Weigle and Babcock, The Great Southwest, 12.


10. Interview no. 27, Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site Oral History Collection (hereafter HTPOHC), Ganado, Arizona; and Ann Lane Hedlund, Reflections of the Weavers’ World: The Gloria F. Ross Collection of Contemporary Navajo Weaving (Denver, Colo.: Denver Art Museum, 1992), 30. When the interviews were conducted for HTPOHC in the late 1960s and early 1970s, consent forms were not obtained for the interviews to be used in subsequent research. Kathleen Tabaha, the assistant curator at the Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site, is in the process of contacting interviewees’ family members in order to obtain such permission. In the meantime, she has asked that I not use interviewees’ names.


13. Garrick Bailey and Roberta Glenn Bailey, in *A History of the Navajos: The Reservation Years* (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1986), argue that even in the twentieth century, as “Navajos diversified into commercial stock raising and wage labor” they did not totally commercialize their herds but “successfully maintained high subsistence value while raising the market value of their livestock. . . . In large part rug weaving enabled them to achieve this balance” because it “gave a dimension to their herding economy that Anglo-American and Spanish-American ranchers lacked” (179–80). David Aberle contends in “Navajo Exogamic Rules and Preferred Marriages” (in *The Versatility of Kinship Essays Presented to Harry W. Basehart*, ed. Linda S. Cordell and Stephen Beckerman [New York: Academic Press, 1980]) that “traditional kinship organization is maintained because of, rather than despite, changes in the Navajo economy—that traditional kinship organization, oriented to the multiple, fluctuating resources of the traditional economy, preserves the same orientation now that the Navajos are marginal participants in the larger United States economy. Relying on multiple, fluctuating resources, which include flocks, farms, crafts, wage work, and welfare, most families have no single source of livelihood sufficient in quantity or reliability to induce them to give up the others. . . . By and large, the nuclear family provides insufficient labor power for all these activities” (123–24). On the maintenance of matrifocal kinship institutions in the midst of a dramatically changing political economy, see also Klara B. Kelley, “Navajo Political Economy before Fort Sumner,” in Cordell and Beckerman, *The Versatility of Kinship*, 315, 317–318, 329. On change and persistence of Navajo women’s roles and status, see Laila Shukry Hamamsy, “The Role of Women in a Changing Navaho Society,” *American Anthropologist* 59:1 (1957): 101–111; Mary Shepardson, “The Status of Navajo Women”; and Christine Conte, “Ladies, Livestock, Land, and Lucre: Women’s Networks and Social Status on the Western Navajo Reservation,” *American Indian Quarterly* 6:1/2 (1982): 105–124; and Louise Lamphere, “Historical and Regional Variability in Navajo Women’s Roles,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45: 4 (1989): 431–56.


15. Hedlund, “‘More of a Survival Than an Art,’” 54.


20. The Hubbell Trading Post in Ganado is still in operation today, owned by the National Park Service as a National Historic Site. Weavers still visit the trading post’s rug room to bargain with the trader in Navajo, while others demonstrate their art for tourists in the visitor’s center. These weavers carry on in Elle’s tradition, but
much has also changed, and tourists are instructed not to photograph demonstra-
tors without their permission.

21. Herman Schweizer to John Lorenzo Hubbell, March 13, 1903, April 29, 1903, and
March 6, 1903, Fred Harvey File (hereafter FHF), Incoming Correspondence, box
36, Harvey Trading Post Collection (hereafter HTPC), Special Collections, Univer-
sity of Arizona.

22. Juana Sangre of Isleta Pueblo, interviewed in 1994, remembered constantly cleaning
the pots and the floors between trains. She said, “And when they tell us a train is
about to be here we used to quit so they wouldn’t find us [cleaning]” (quoted in
Howard and Pardue, Inventing the Southwest, 24).

23. See, for example, Huckel to Hubbell, June 9, June 26, July 1, and July 20, 1905,
FHF, HTPC. Unlike weaving, silver work continued to be an important trade item
among the Diné. The heavy silver jewelry that Navajos used was inappropriate for
the tourist market, so the Harvey Company encouraged some silversmiths to de-
velop a lighter, cheaper style that they could sell in their stores. See John Adair, The

24. Howard and Pardue, Inventing the Southwest, 74, 76, 105–110.

25. Elle and Tom had no children together, which might have lessened their responsi-
bilities back home. Still, they often brought some of Tom’s grandchildren with them
to Albuquerque, and Elle was frequently photographed surrounded by children. She
was an ideal demonstrator because she could afford to stay away from home while
still providing a matronly image (Howard, “Weaving a Legend,” 132, 128).

26. Howard and Pardue, Inventing the Southwest, 64, 66, 68.

27. The Great Southwest Along the Santa Fe (Kansas City, Missouri: Fred Harvey, 1914),
n.p., quoted in Marta Weigle with Kathleen L. Howard, “‘To Experience the Real
Grand Canyon’: Santa Fe/Harvey Panopticism, 1901–1935,” in Weigle and Babcock,
The Great Southwest, 21.

28. Huckel to Hubbell, March 4, 1905; and Schweizer to Hubbell, November 17, 1904,
FHF, HTPC.

29. I am touching here only lightly on the relationship between “antimodernism,” the
arts and crafts movement, and Indian art, a relationship that I discuss in more depth
in “The Navajo Rug Trade: Gender, Art, Work, and Modernity in the American
Southwest, 1870s–1930s,” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel
Hill, 1999). Besides those already cited, related works include T. J. Jackson Lears,
No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–
1920 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Eileen Boris, Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris,
and the Craftsman Ideal in America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986);
J. J. Brody, Indian Painters and White Patrons (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico
Press, 1971); W. Jackson Rushing, Native American Art and the New York Avant-
Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995);
Wendy Kaplan, ed., “Art That is Life:” The Arts and Crafts Movement in America,
1875–1920 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company for Museum of Fine Arts, 1987);

30. Switzer per Snively to Hubbell, July 9, 1903, FHF, HTPC.
32. Huckel to Hubbell, October 24, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
33. See, for example, Huckel to Hubbell, April 26, 1905, and April 21, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
34. Letter from John Hudson to Grace Hudson, February 6, 1903, quoted in Howard and Pardue, *Inventing the Southwest*, 59.
35. Huckel to Hubbell, April 21 and 26, 1905; and J. Snively to Hubbell, May 6, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
36. Schweizer to Hubbell, April 29, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
37. Schweizer to Hubbell, May 31, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
38. Schweizer to Hubbell, April 6, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
39. Huckel to Hubbell, June 9, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
40. Huckel to Hubbell, June 26, 1905, and May 31, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
41. They got to the Canyon on June 25.
42. Huckel to Hubbell, July 1, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
43. Huckel to Hubbell, July 20, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
44. Schweizer to Hubbell, July 19, 1905, FHF, HTPC.
46. Interview with Marie Curley, Doris Duke Number 678, the American Indian History Project, Western History Center, University of Utah, September 10, 1970, copy in the HTPOHHC, Ganado. Curley says that her father, Miguelito, was four, and her mother, Maria Antonio, was two, when they left Fort Sumner.
47. Gladys Reichard, *Navajo Shepherd and Weaver* (1936; reprint, Enumclaw, Wash.: MacRae Publications, 1977), *Spider Woman: A Story of Navajo Weavers and Chanters*
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48. Schweizer to Hubbell, July 24, 1905, FHF, HTPC.

49. Schweizer to Hubbell, July 27, 1905, FHF, HTPC.

50. In the 1920s the Fred Harvey Company issued a series of lavishly illustrated publications edited by J. Huckel titled "American Indians: First Families of the Southwest."

51. Schweizer to Hubbell, March 15, 1903; Huckel to Hubbell, May 23, 1905; and Schweizer to Hubbell, September 13, 1905, FHF, HTPC.

52. Interview no. 40, n.d., HTPOHC.

53. Schweizer to Hubbell, May 31, 1905, FHF, HTPC.

54. Huckel to Hubbell, March 23, 1905, FHF, HTPC.


56. Interview no. 7, November 15, 1971, HTPOHC.


58. Interview no. 1, January 20, 1986, Ganado oral history rug study interviews, HTPC.