Pedro Pino

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Published by Utah State University Press


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The inevitable all-out war with the Navajos finally came during the 1860s. After the commander of the army in New Mexico, Colonel Thomas T. Fauntleroy, reduced the forces at Fort Defiance by nearly two-thirds in November of 1859, the Navajos perceived the weakened condition of the post. In January of 1860, nearly a thousand Navajos boldly attacked Fort Defiance. The engagement left three U.S. soldiers and nine Navajos dead and prompted the secretary of war in Washington to order a major operation against the Navajos. During the same spring, Navajo war parties stole sheep, horses, and asses from Zuni Pueblo.

Navajo raids against the settlements, and especially Zuni, increased throughout the year. The Navajos killed many and stole a great deal of property in 1860. During the winter, they raided Zuni again, prompting the tribe to send out two war expeditions and plan more. A fort was finally established in the vicinity of Zuni Pueblo, but with the Civil War approaching, it is not surprising that the Zunis were subject to more, not fewer, depredations from their old adversaries. Indeed, there are indications that building the fort at Ojo del Oso was in some ways a hindrance to the Zunis because the Navajos again viewed it as a protective buffer to hide behind and not a discouragement against raiding.

Governor Pino fought with the United States during this period, but the efforts of the army to protect the pueblo were far from adequate. In November 1860, the command of the western forces in New Mexico was moved to the post at Ojo del Oso because of reports about Navajo movements to the west of Zuni and near the Little Colorado. A depot was set up near the pueblo.
for winter use, and Navajos were detected at Jacob’s Well and Navajo Springs, but Navajo prisoners denied any knowledge of the Little Colorado. Despite the close presence of United States troops, the Zunis began to suffer more and more Navajo attacks. The agent to the pueblos, Silas F. Kendrick (not to be confused with Henry Lane Kendrick), stated in his annual report for 1860 that “for several months past, the Pueblos have suffered great and frequent losses by the depredations of the Navajos. The villages of Laguna and Zuna [sic] have been the chief sufferers. . . .”217

Pino and the other secular leaders of the various pueblos were faced with complex problems and strained to reach sophisticated decisions. The government had talked about giving presents to the Pueblo people, but a number of policies bothered the Indians. Some pueblos refused to take any farming implements as gifts because they could not be distributed equally. If everyone could not receive a tool, no one should have one—evidence of a strict cultural belief in economic equality. Silas F. Kendrick reported another worry of the Pueblos:

. . . designing Mexicans had impressed them with suspicion that, although the government proffered to give them these presents, yet that some day they would be called on to pay for them, and that the debt thus raised against them would be converted into a claim against their lands. This apprehension was more strongly impressed upon their minds, from the fact that their grants and title papers which have heretofore been placed on file in the office of the surveyor general for confirmation, have never been returned to them, nor any patent from the government issued for their possession.218

In point of fact, when in the 1950s cases finally began to go before the Indian Claims Commission, the government did use any recorded gifts made to Indians as a deduction against judgments they might receive for lands taken unconscionably.

Kendrick went on to observe the quality of the Pueblo government:

The Pueblos have governmental institutions far more ancient, and as firmly established as any other people, whatever, upon this continent. Each village, or “Pueblo,” as it is called, is a political
community of itself, has its own complete organization; its own laws; its own tribunals, has its officers for their enforcement. Probably there is no people, enlightened or otherwise, among whom the laws are enforced with greater regularity and efficiency. That these laws are adapted to their condition and in the main promotive of their happiness and prosperity, their material condition and the absence of discontent conclusively testify. It would be no boon to them to convert them into citizens, and leave them within the operations of the civil code of this Territory. On the contrary, such a policy would probably result in their destruction.219

Pino and the Zunis carried on in spite of the increasing attacks and managed, further, to protect their borders. A drought, disease, and constant Navajo attacks left the Zunis weak in numbers but not in spirit. During the latter part of 1860 and the early part of 1861, operations were carried out against the Navajos in their hiding places in the Zuni Mountains, on mesas bordering the Rio Puerco, in the Chusca Valley, and in the area between the Rio Puerco and the Hopi villages. Reconnaissance of the region around the Puerco of the West suggested that most Navajos were on the far side of the river from Zuni.

The Zunis responded to every attack by the Navajos. In late January, Navajos stole mules from Zuni and escaped into the mountains. Army patrols pursued the raiders, but when they arrived at the Navajo camp, they found that Zunis had already attacked, leaving three Navajos dead after apparently recovering a portion of the stolen stock. Despite the assiduous protection of their borders, by February 1861, the Zunis were beginning to feel the dire results of constant war and harassment. General E. S. Canby reported that “the Zuni Indians, partly from the drought of last summer but more from the interruption of their labors by the hostilities of the Navajos are now in a state of great destitution, many of them of absolute suffering from the want of food.” He went on to point out the injustice of the situation: “These people have always, I believe, been faithful and they have recently been extremely useful responding promptly to all applications that were made to them, and entering heartily into the plans for the pacification of the Navajos. They are eminently entitled to some consideration.” Seeing that the Indian
department was being lax in its obligations, Canby continued, “If the Indian Department is provided with the means of affording them any relief, I respectfully request that the attention of the proper authorities may be called to this subject. Corn and wheat for seed would be of great service to them if no other assistance can be furnished.”

Governor Pino pressed Canby for this assistance, but there is no record that he received any—a strong indictment, in itself, against the efficacy of government policy in the territory. The Zunis, who had fed the U.S. army, housed American immigrants, fought side by side with the troops, and taken every opportunity to make peace and friendship with the new occupying force in the Southwest were now starving because of what they had given. Instead of storing excess produce, they had traded it to the army. Instead of organizing more military expeditions, they had followed the army’s advice and pursued more sedentary endeavors. Now these people were starving because of that army’s inability or reluctance (because of priorities) to protect the Pueblo Indians—people who had received at least some protection from the Navajos under Spanish and Mexican rule and whom the United States had promised to protect.

After preliminary councils with Navajo leaders, yet another treaty was signed on February 18, 1861. Though more Navajo headmen signed this agreement than any previous one, the treaty was one of the worst made with the Navajos. After the treaty was signed, and it became apparent that the Civil War was about to break out, the army abandoned Fort Defiance. (With the outbreak of further Navajo hostilities, Fort Canby was founded nearby the following year). Matters worsened in 1861, when, on September 13, the command at Fort Fauntleroy massacred at least ten Navajos gathered for a horse race, including women and children. The stage was set for the final battles, but before they could take place, the Civil War interrupted.

What fighting did take place between the North and South forces in New Mexico was mainly over by 1863, though the Civil War continued to rage elsewhere. The Union forces had some Indian allies, and Pino later reported that he had fought on the North’s side during the conflict. A note from General Canby to
Governor Pino on January 15, 1861, tended to corroborate his claim. Canby wrote that “in my intercourse and acquaintance with this man, Juan [Pedro] Pino, I have found him entirely reliable and worthy of any confidence that may be confided in him.”

Quite a compliment to an Indian leader from an army general.

Frank Hamilton Cushing reported that during the early days of the Navajo wars and the subsequent War of Rebellion, he [Pino] was promised, in reward for his services to our Government in both those enterprises, by the Commanding General then stationed at Santa Fe, opportunity for visiting the reverenced home of Washington, or of our Government. Through the intercession of brother priests, however, he was induced, on account of his connection with some religious ceremonials then to take place, to renounce the opportunity.

The agreement reached in 1861 between the Navajos and the United States provided that all Navajos found either to the south or east of Zuni should be treated as robbers. It was also noted that the people of Zuni were to be strictly protected by the United States forces. But 1862 reports indicate that the Navajos regarded the army presence not as an obstacle but a buffer between them and their enemies to the south.

Although the Civil War decreased the number of written and published reports regarding the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico, it did prompt some action toward their enemies. With Navajo depredations continuing and fierce fighting occupying the eastern states, the military in New Mexico did not want to rest. With no Civil War to occupy him in the territory, Colonel James H. Carleton lost patience and decided it was time to end Apache and Navajo depredations once and for all.

There would be no more talk or treaties. The fierce and brutal roundup of Navajos under Kit Carson began in 1863. The campaign was vicious. Under military orders, Zunis joined the army as allies in the preliminary engagements, perhaps going out on expeditions headed by Albert Pfeiffer, who was leading vengeful Ute parties against the Navajos while acting as agent to the Utes. Cushing reported that the Zunis signed a treaty with Pfeiffer,
which was perhaps a reference to joint raids. In any event, Pfeiffer
did deal with Governor Pino and in October of 1863 gave him a
Mississippi rifle and twenty rounds of ammunition with which “to
defend himself and family.”

During the latter months of 1863, the Zunis joined Carson
in raids into the Navajo heartland. In August 1863, Zunis cap-
tured thirty-five head of cattle and one horse. Reports indicate
that by September of that year, the Zunis’ campaign had result-
ed in Navajo deaths as well. Twenty-three Zunis went out with
Carson in September, capturing about fifty head of sheep and
goats before returning home. In October of 1863, the Zunis cel-
èbrated a scalp dance at the pueblo, hanging Navajo scalps from
the pole.

Feelings at Zuni seemed to change as the campaign continued.
Though initially the Zunis joined Carson in his slash-and-burn ramp-
page, it soon became evident that the army did not discriminate in
its practices. There are indications that Zuni fields were burned,
and Zuni people may have been victimized. One patrol destroyed
corn within Zuni territory, and another burned forty thousand
pounds of what may have been Zuni wheat.

The Zunis had long known what the army had yet to learn:
The Navajos were made up of hundreds of small bands, and no
single leader directed all the people. Pino and the Zunis had
allowed small groups of Navajos to settle within the tribe’s bound-
daries and continued, even during the war, to trade with some
Navajos and Apaches. Now, as the United States launched its
nearly genocidal attack on the Navajo people, the army began to
hear irritating reports that their old allies, the Zunis, were har-
boring Navajo refugees.

Some of these reports indicated that Navajos were hiding near
Rito Quemado, to the south of Zuni, but expeditions to the area
verified that “scouts have already gone to that place from here and
traveled the whole length and breadth of the creek and have not
been able to find any of those Rancherías nor have they been able
to see Indians in any large numbers until they crossed the
Colorado Chiquito.” Evidently the army was finding that all of
Zuni territory was still free of intruders. But there was one place
they had not searched.
Carleton and Carson paid no attention whatever to any previous treaties—the Navajos had only two choices: be exterminated or surrender unconditionally. Groups of Navajos who had lived by the treaties or settled permanently and begun agricultural pursuits were not exempt from the army’s wrath. There is every indication that the Zunis did not approve of the army’s methods. There were reports in 1864 that Navajos attempting to avoid Bosque Redondo (the concentration camp set up for Navajos on the Pecos River) were being hidden in the Zuni Pueblo itself. When Zunis were questioned, during a short truce in the war, a United States officer reported that

there are in their town, many Navajos, mostly ricos, who are hiding there. I do not wish to take the responsibility of attacking them during the existing truce, and I am unable to dispose of them properly if I take them prisoners; yet, they are, as the Zunis say, unwilling to go to the Bosque Redondo and I have therefore thought it my duty to give Major Eaton notice of these facts, that he may be enabled to take whatever action he may deem proper in the premises.229

In July of that year, Eaton did send a message to Governor Pino, warning the Zunis not to harbor any Navajo refugees.230 Then in August, apparently unsatisfied with the results of his warning, he visited the pueblo and left Governor Pino to ponder this written order:

Visited this pueblo for the purpose of impressing upon the minds of these Indians the necessity of their not advising or aiding in any manner the Navajos or Apache Indians. Either with grain or eatables of any kind. Powder, lead, or arms nor allow them in their pueblo, but advise them to go to their reservation at the Bosque Redondo on the Pecos River. By pursuing this policy, they will retain the good will of the U.S. Government; otherwise, it will be necessary to chastise them.231

The situation eventually led to the arrest of José Maria, who had been the principal guide for the army in a number of campaigns against the Navajos and now was apparently viewed as a traitor. He was apprehended at Zuni and imprisoned at Fort Wingate.
for trading with Apaches. Governor Pino was able to obtain José Maria’s release into his custody within a month of the arrest, but it must have made an indelible impression on both men, who had spent the past two decades fighting side by side with the United States. Pino, who was seventy years old or more at the time, would see the army invade the pueblo the next month. In October more than one hundred Navajos were arrested inside the Zuni Pueblo and taken to Fort Wingate for transportation to Bosque Redondo.232

It was a time of terrible hardship for the Zunis. On top of the fact that the military engagements were destroying Zuni crops and had completely curtailed trade at the pueblo, in 1864 a devastating drought struck the area. It was so severe that in April 1865 the Zunis’ Indian agent reported that their crops had failed for the two previous years. Despite all these hardships, Pino’s correspondence shows that he and the tribe continued to feed and house exploring expeditions and other whites who came their way.233

By 1865 it is likely that all of the Navajos who were at peace with Zuni, the sedentary bands, had been gathered up and sent on the Long Walk (Hwalte in Navajo) to Bosque Redondo. The Zunis rejoined the United States forces in the fight against the remaining resistance. Several large expeditions took place. In mid-1865 the commander of Fort Wingate reported that Antonio Mejicano and two other citizens of Cubero had applied for and received permission to make a campaign against the Navajos,234 together with seventy-five to one hundred Zunis.235 Later in that same month of May, Mejicano and the expedition returned, “reporting 21 killed and 5 women prisoners.” He also stated that some of the Navajos they had killed were “nearly destitute of everything” and were surviving on pine nuts.236 The army gave Mejicano permission to continue his raids and report the results.

Later the same year, in August of 1865, a Zuni war party killed several prominent Navajos during a battle on the northwest boundary of Zuni land, the Rio Puerco of the West. Governor Pino sent war chief José Maria to Fort Wingate to report the results of that battle to the commandant. Maria stated that the Zunis had overcome a party of twenty-five to thirty Navajos and killed “Navajo
Blanco and wife, Barboncito Negro, and the son of Capitan Largo, Diego . . . from the Reservation and captured 7 horses, 2 Colt revolvers, 12 setts [sic] of Bows and arrows, many saddles and blankets, bridles, etc., about 12 pds. of gunpowder, etc. One Zuni Ind. was killed, named Weiyman . . .”237 When José Maria asked if the Zunis could again take the field against the Navajos, the post commander responded that they should and he would provide them with ammunition. During the same month, two Navajos who came near Ojo Caliente, the Zuni farming village, were killed by the Zunis.238

There were more indications of joint Ute/Zuni war parties against the Navajos in both 1865 and 1866. In May of 1865, there were reports that Zunis, Utes, and others had attacked Navajos on their way to Fort Sumner, even though they were accompanied by escorts. Old grievances against the Navajos evidently prompted their enemies to take advantage of the situation. Conditions at Fort Sumner were causing daily deaths, but the situation in the Navajo homeland was far worse. The Navajos were finally being soundly defeated.239

In 1866 Zuni’s governor presented himself at Santa Fe to ask permission to take the field against the Navajos again. He reported that twenty-five Zunis and twelve Utes had just returned from scouting the Navajos and he was ready to go out again, but he hoped to obtain some supplies first. The governor said that if the Zunis were supplied with powder, lead, caps, etc., the pueblo would always have a force in readiness.240 During the course of 1866, the Zunis captured many Navajos and killed even more during several expeditions against their hard-pressed enemies.241

The Zunis also guided cavalry expeditions during the year. One command, under Captain John S. Crouch, went from Ojo Caliente to the Little Colorado. While on the march, the command came across the tracks of three Coyotero Apache ponies. The Zuni guide indicated that the Apaches were on their way to the pueblo to trade—in the midst of the wars, the Zunis were still willing to trade with friends, despite tribal connections. But the Navajos were near the end of their road. Those who were free at this point were reportedly very poor and destitute and feared coming to Fort Wingate to surrender because they would have to
travel through either Zuni or Hopi territory. As usual, the cavalry expedition leaders in 1866 left testimonials to the ability and character of Governor Pino.242

Because of the Pueblo Indians’ alliance with the United States government and the trust earned by such leaders as Pedro Pino; because the government respected the Pueblo way of life, knew how much it was indebted to the Pueblos, militarily and economically, and recognized how important these Indians were to American colonization (or colonialization, depending on your perspective) of the Southwest, during this period of turmoil, President Abraham Lincoln presented the Indian pueblos with a symbolic gift that is remembered in every Pueblo community in New Mexico today. President Lincoln sent Zuni governor Pino and the other Pueblo governors in New Mexico silver-handled canes as symbols of the authority of their office. The king of Spain had given the Pueblo leaders similar canes years before, and, in fact, some pueblos today have not only the Lincoln canes but the Spanish ones which preceded them. They are all passed from leader to leader as a symbol of the sovereignty and power of his office.243

As more and more whites, for one reason or another, passed through Zuni territory, Pino and the Zunis cemented their reputation for hospitality, despite the ongoing Navajo conflicts. As early as 1859, a mail route through Zuni to California had been explored. By 1865 a system of mail delivery was developing in the Southwest, with one route linking Albuquerque and Prescott, Arizona. Albert Banta was one of the men who contracted to deliver the mail over that route,244 which passed through Zuni and which Pino began to use to enhance his communication with U.S. officials. Banta was snowed in at Zuni during the winter of 1866, and the Zunis housed and fed him congenially, even though he reported that during that year there was a severe epidemic and the Zunis “died off like sheep with the rot.”245

Despite the hardships the Zunis were going through, when Banta himself became ill, the people cared for him for more than two weeks and eventually adopted him into the tribe. After inadvertently disobeying a Zuni rule during a religious observance (evidently Deshkwi), Banta became very sick.246 After he had been delirious for some time, Governor Pino joined the caciques in
Banta’s room and examined him. The Zunis had a long discussion in their native tongue, and then Governor Pino turned to Banta (who reported that Pino spoke “very good Spanish”) and said, “We have been talking about you; you have been sick a long time but are going to get well now, but on condition that you become a Zuni. The Great Spirit says you ate meat thru ignorance, but by becoming a Zuni and complying with our rules and rites you will recover. Can you do this?”

“Of course,” answered Banta.

“Your Zuni name is now Too-loosh-too-loo,” Pino told him. Then Pino and the Zuni religious leaders shook Banta’s hand and filed out.

Banta reported that sometime after this some of my Apache friends—Chief Escopah and ten or twelve of his men—came along and hearing I was in the village they came to see me. I told the Chief if he and his people would help me on and off my mule I would go in to Wingate with them. But before leaving, the Zunis held a council with the Apaches at which the Apaches were told that I was a Zuni, and if any harm came to me, the Zunis would hold them responsible, and that not one of them would return home alive. The Apache Chief said in reply that I was his friend and brother and they need not fear on that account.

Though he recovered fully, Banta said he was not well for eight full months.

Banta made interesting comments on Zuni/Apache and Zuni/Navajo relations, reporting aspects of Zuni politics which Governor Pino was constantly charged with maintaining. Banta described the system of trade which was going on with the Apaches. He said the two tribes met at the southwest boundary of Zuni’s territory, the Little Colorado. “The Little Colorado,” Banta said, “has always been ‘neutral ground.’” A system of signals preceded such trading. “One time the Apaches had signaled from the summit of the Mogollons [of their] intention to meet the Zunis on the river to trade. Quite a large party of us went down there to meet them. Our party camped on the north side of the river and the Apaches on the south side. Nevertheless and notwithstanding
the ‘peace treaty,’ we were armed and ready for any emergency."²⁵⁰

Still, Zuni/Navajo relations were not good, and that troubled Governor Pino. Banta mentions several instances of Navajo conflicts during the period he was at the pueblo (mainly between 1865 and 1879). He also claimed that he was asked by the Zuni leaders to become the tribe’s war captain. “But I declined that honor; nevertheless, I went with them against the thieving Navajos on several occasions.”²⁵¹

Banta’s description of the Zunis’ hospitality merits repeating:

The Zunis were the best people in the world; they were honest and truthful, and were the most hospitable people living. No matter what house you may enter, nor how many during the day, you are politely asked to “eemoo” (take a seat), and the woman immediately sets before you something to eat with a request . . . (please to eat), and this is done to anyone entering a house. It is a religious rite with them, and you are expected to take at least a bite, if no more, after which you may say, “ellah-quah” (thank you) . . . .²⁵²

Much has been written about the final days of the Navajo wars. Many Navajos died because of the United States’ policy, a policy which no one can be proud of today. During the Civil War, Congress realized that Indian matters were being ignored and promised to turn its attention to some of these problems when war concluded. In 1867 the Indian Peace Commission was formed, and it promptly recommended that a new treaty be negotiated with the Navajos. It was admitted that the Bosque Redondo experiment was not a success despite the fact that it had helped end hostilities. With the enactment of a new treaty with the Navajos in 1868, the tribe was allowed to leave Fort Sumner and return to northwest New Mexico.

Even before the end of the war, tensions began to ease somewhat in the Zuni area, as evidenced by the number of whites like Banta who began to appear at the pueblo. An undetermined number of Navajos had been able to escape the Bosque Redondo ordeal by hiding in the mountains or canyons, but eighty-five hundred had been taken to Fort Sumner, and the experience was
enough to end much of the Navajo raiding which had been going on for centuries. Pino’s work in fighting off the raiding Navajos was not over, however. Occasional raids continued after 1867, some of them serious, and there was also a continuing threat from marauding Apache bands, which preyed on Zuni for many years to come.

Although Pino must certainly have been happy about the pacification of the Navajos, he must also have wondered about the way it was accomplished and the settlement the Navajos received. The reservation set aside for them totaled four million acres. By 1911 it would grow to twelve million acres by additional executive orders. This was far more territory than the tribe had ever controlled previous to the 1868 treaty. Pino, on the other hand, for all his efforts on behalf of the U.S. government had been ignored. Unless the government needed corn, additional soldiers, or guides, Zuni was left to fare for itself. Little effort had been made to set aside the Zunis’ land, though Pino still believed the United States’ promise that it would faithfully guarantee the tribe’s land and protect its rights. Thus far, Pino and the Zunis had been able to protect their boundaries themselves, but with the pacification of the Navajos, greater and more subtle competition for the Zunis’ land would begin to develop. Disease was still whittling away at the population of the Zunis, further reducing their defensive capabilities. Though he was now more than seventy years old, Pedro Pino’s work was far from over.