The controversy over Pueblo Indian land grants and citizenship was building in 1868. The commissioner of Indian affairs reported optimistically that most of the grants to the pueblos had been confirmed and the rest should be verified soon. On the other hand, the Santa Fe Ring controlled New Mexico. None of the land grants bought and illegally enlarged by the ring were near Zuni, but another method the group was initiating to wrestle land from the pueblos affected Zuni relations. The ring was trying to establish the Pueblo Indians as citizens. On the surface, this sounded like an honorable idea to many people (except most of the Indians), but the real objective was to remove Pueblo Indian land from its trust status. Then it could be alienated through legal channels which the Indians did not understand (only the ring’s attorneys understood the “legal channels” in New Mexico in those days). The end result was Pueblo land falling into the hands of land-speculating Anglos. In 1868 the special agent for the Pueblos reported that Stephen Benton Elkins was interested in the movement to grant the Indians citizenship. “Smooth Steve” Elkins was one of the principals in the Santa Fe Ring.

With land grants a topic of special interest in New Mexico in 1868, renewing pressure on Pueblo lands, the Zunis traveled to Fort Wingate and applied for protection for Nutria Springs. No action was taken, but the movement to allow alienation of Pueblo land resulted in the Slough decision in 1869. Chief Justice Slough of the New Mexico Territory put the Pueblos on “equal” footing as
citizens with his decision (they were not allowed to vote, however). The agent to the Pueblos complained that the Indians did not want this status and should be treated specially by Congress.²⁵⁸

Pino sensed more and more pressure on the Zuni people. The agent had made a few telling comments the previous year: “These Indians, as you can readily imagine, are fully aware that every year something is done by the government towards relieving the wants of other Indians while at the same time they see that nothing is done for them towards relieving their wants, not even so far as to comply with some of the many promises which from time to time have been made to them.”²⁵⁹ He elaborated in his 1869 report: “As the department is doubtless aware, no appropriation has been made for these Indians since 1856; and until within the last few days they have received no presents of agricultural implements & etc. since 1857.”²⁶⁰

A small insight into the equal-minded philosophy of Pueblo culture can be gained from the agent’s report for the following year. “Last spring,” he wrote,

I received a few agricultural implements for the Pueblos, which I proceeded to distribute to the different villages, according to the population. The amount was not near enough to supply all, and, as a consequence, when the proportions alluded to were offered to the Pueblos of Tersuque [sic], Pojuaque, Nambi, San Ildefonso, and San Juan, they refused to receive them, saying that if every person could not receive something, they would take none at all. . . .²⁶¹

In 1869 Pino led two delegations on pilgrimages. In July the Zunis heard of the approaching eclipse of the sun and traveled to Fort Wingate to learn details. Undoubtedly the bekwinne, or sun priest, was much interested in the event, which was predicted to take place on August 7. The group visited the fort on July 26 and asked for information. A. W. Evans, commander at Wingate, reported,

. . . Pedro Pino, or Laia-à-et-tsalòu—a leading man of Zuni, formerly Governor, now Ayudanté de los Caciques de Zuni, has visited this post to enquire about the eclipse of the sun of August 7, 1869, of which he has heard. He is, like all the people of Zuni,
a good man—friendly, peace-able [sic], and always to be trusted. He is recommended to the good treatment of all Americans who may meet him.

His companions on his visit here are: Ouatchiuufuino, principal Cacique; Manuel Ouacamañix, second Cacique; Patricio Pino, Son of Pedro Pino [Ba:lawadiwa] Juan José; Lucero; and Jose L´nicio.262

Albert Banta, who was at the pueblo during this period, recalled the eclipse, though he may have embellished his memory slightly:

I remember one time on returning from Santa Fe, where I had gone to purchase a few goods for trade, I had no sooner returned to the village when suddenly a “wailing” started all over the village. Asking the cause of the monotonous wailing I was answered by the question, “Is it true the sun is going to die?” I replied, “Of course not, what gave you such a notion?” They said an American had been there while I was gone and said that on a certain day the sun would die, and if it did all would die as the sun is the Father of all life. It struck me the American had reference [sic] to an eclipse; looking at an old almanac I saw that an eclipse of the sun was due in August, a few days hence, I explained the matter to them by illustration of just how it would be and the result; that if cloudy, it would hardly be noticed at all. Immediately one of the men rushed out and reaching the top of the highest house announced to the people what I had said, the wailing as suddenly ceased as it had begun . . . .263

The second pilgrimage that Pino took was the result of continued Navajo depredations on the pueblo. On November 11, 1869, the *Weekly New Mexican* reported that on the fourth of November,

. . . a delegation of sixty-five Indians from the Pueblo of Zuni arrived in the city [of Santa Fe] and proceeded in a body to [the] United States Indian Superintendency, halted and grouped in front of which and . . . they presented an interesting appearance. Last night they encamped in the city near the state house, and will today or tomorrow . . . seek and obtain a formal interview with Major Clinton, the Superintendent. The delegation has come accompanied by the governor of the Pueblo; and
we learn the object of the visit is in connection with alleged recent depredations committed on life and property at Zuni by the Navajos, and in connection the relations of threatened hostility subsisting between the Zunis and Navajos.264

The government did nothing, and in the following year, Pedro Pino, who must have been nearing eighty years of age, went out with a war party against the Navajos. On April 17, 1870, an officer at Fort Wingate reported that Pedro Pino “has been at this post for 2 days resting after a scout after a party of Navajos who had stolen stock from his people.”265

W. F. M. Arny, a special agent, visited Zuni and talked to the leaders in 1870. Pino articulated the grievances of the Zunis. “They complained,” Arny noted, “that ‘no agent had visited them for ten years.’ That ‘last October they went to Santa Fe, and did not get enough to pay them for going.’ ‘They begin to think that because they do not steal, the Government does not give them anything.’ They begin to think that ‘if they steal like the Navajos, they would get something,’” Evidently the topic of a title for the Zunis’ land came up during the conversations with Pino because Arny commented, “These Indians have no title to their land. A law of Congress establishing a reservation where they are, and to give them a title to a sufficient amount of land for their subsistence [should be enacted] . . . There are no citizens living near them and none within forty miles.”266

Arny left a testimonial with Governor Pino before leaving the pueblo, concurring with Major William Redwood Price’s assessment of Pino and the Zunis. “He represents a flourishing industrious agricultural people who should be treated with justly by all parties passing through the country they occupy.”267 Pino was attempting to document the Zunis’ goodwill and keep a record of the United States/Zuni contact by requesting and collecting these testimonials. He was successful in doing this, and as a result we can verify the observations of men like Banta, as well as document the veracity of Pino’s statements, particularly his description of Zuni boundaries and the history of Zuni’s political turmoil over them.268

Testimonials about Governor Pino and the Zunis came from two other people during 1869. On July 12, C. E. Cooley and Henry Dodd visited the pueblo from new Fort Wingate. They
intended to go on an expedition to locate a lost gold mine they had heard was beyond Zuni territory. Cooley and Dodd served as guides and scouts for the army and are credited with naming Showlow, Arizona. On leaving the Zuni villages, the two left a note with Pedro Pino. “I take great pleasure,” they wrote, “in testifying to the good qualities, kindness & hospitality of the Govonor [sic] & the Indians of Zuni in general—they received us like brothers & treated us with the utmost kindness giving us everything their town could afford [sic]—may they ever be prosperous & happy is the sincere wish of their friends.”

Others who left testimonials with Governor Pino during 1870 included John S. A. Clark and John H. Farrand, who said they were received and “treated with the utmost kindness & hospitality” by the Zuni statesman. They recommended him to all those who might pass through the Zuni villages.

With the Navajos’ new reservation including land that they had never previously controlled—land which had once belonged to Zunis, Hopis, Southern Utes, and Southern Paiutes—some in the government understood that an injustice was taking place. The Board of Indian Commissioners, which was formed in 1869, was aware of the “apparent inconsistency of expending government funds on the warlike and largely ignoring the peaceful groups” but claimed that the expenditures were necessary to keep those tribes peaceful and secure their continued existence.

Arny suggested that a reservation be set aside for the Zunis, recommending that it should consist of “a tract of land thirty miles square,” with the central village at the heart. He also recommended that the Zunis’ proposed reservation be surveyed at government expense so that the Indians could tell what land was actually theirs. In reality Arny was taking a great deal of land away from Zuni. If the Zunis had been limited to an area thirty miles square, they would have lost the majority of their territory. But Arny’s recommendation was not acted upon.

Navajo/Zuni hostilities forced Arny to visit Zuni again in the spring of 1871. Navajos had killed two Zunis, and the Zunis in retaliation had killed two Navajos. Arny reported that there “were various cases of murder and robbery between these two tribes” but made the claim “[I] succeeded, I trust, in making a lasting peace
between them.” All property was reportedly restored to its original owners.

In the meantime, the military was seemingly taking a position of letting the Navajos and Zunis fight it out. In 1870 General John Pope, commander of the Department of the Missouri, made these revealing comments: “I do not believe that Fort Wingate is necessary . . . . The Navajos are peaceable, and likely, I think to remain so. Any evil acts they do are simple robberies of sheep or mules, and once in a long time the killing of a herder.” He concluded that it was too expensive to keep the fort in operation.

In fact, the army did not take seriously any depredations against the Zunis by the Navajos. If there were no depredations against the white settlements, the army was satisfied. Banta reported that “at this time—May, 1870—there was not a settlement or single soul to be met with from the time I left Zuni until I reached Bob Postle’s ranch in Chino Valley—twenty-five miles east of Prescott.” The Zunis had been severely reduced in numbers and, indeed, needed the protection of the army. The government, however, was not in the business of providing the same kind of protection for Indian tribes as it offered to white businessmen.

Pino’s problems in 1871 were not limited to Navajo depredations. In Arny’s report for that year, he discussed the case of a trader, Sol Barth, who had been convicted of improper activities. His goods had been entrusted to Pino, but the Zuni governor had had enough dealings with the government to know that if he kept the goods, he might, at some future date, be charged with stealing them. As the government did not seem to have a very good memory, he turned the goods over to the military authorities to be safe. The agent, who declared that Zuni was “a good place for traders who sell whiskey and gunpowder to the Southern Apache Indians,” decided that henceforth no traders would be allowed at Zuni. This was a severe restriction on the Zunis and a complete departure from the policy followed ever since Backus had ordered corn from Zuni while building Fort Defiance. Zuni had been a trade center for hundreds of years. The tribe’s land was in jeopardy, their trade was now being restricted, and to make matters even worse, the military was beginning to cultivate its own corn on what had once been Indian land.
Navajo hostilities culminated in a conflict with Zuni in 1873. The Zunis battled the Navajos on the border of their land, the Rio Puerco of the West. The fight claimed at least thirty Navajos and fifteen Zunis. This was the last major violent conflict between the two tribes.  The Zunis had apparently repelled the Navajos’ every attempt to breach their borders. But what the Navajos could not do, the U.S. federal government would accomplish during the next six years.

Timothy O’Sullivan, the famous early western photographer, happened to document a war dance during 1873. This remarkable photograph shows spears, muskets, and rifles in the hands of Zuni men evidently dancing in anticipation of this battle with the Navajos.

O’Sullivan was leading one of the surveying parties in the Wheeler expedition. Lieutenant George M. Wheeler’s geographical expedition provided the first detailed maps of the area surrounding the pueblo of Zuni. Using the best guides, including Albert Banta and a Zuni named Swzano, the party crisscrossed the area to make the survey. Pino understood it was a surveying and mapping expedition and went to great pains to explain Zuni boundaries to the men, as well as assist the project in any way he could.

Francis Klett was in charge of another of Wheeler’s parties, which arrived at Zuni Pueblo on July 22, 1873, and was met by Governor Pino. Klett reported the conversations that followed: “The executive authority of the Zuni is vested in an officer styled governor—one Pedro Pino—who, however is but the mouth-piece of the spiritual ruler, the cacique.” Klett is correct about the final authority of the caciques (there were more than one), but as mentioned earlier, Pino’s authority would not be interfered with except in extreme cases. “The orders of the latter,” Klett continued, “are the laws governing the tribe, their execution simply resting with the governor.”

Klett described Pino as being “of commanding presence and affable manners; his hair is snow-white. He told us he had been governor of the Zuni people for many years, and that the tribe had always been friendly to the whites (Americans), from whom he had many testimonials to the latter effect.” Klett provides the reader with a detailed description of the way Governor Pino
worked: how he met new representatives of the United States, explained his impression of these representatives, immediately reassured them about the Zunis’ alliance with the federal government, and then later discussed policy, emphasizing approaches to problems with each group. To demonstrate his continuing friendship with the U.S. government, Pedro Pino ordered his son Patricio to “bring him certain papers. He produced letters from officers of our army and private citizens, which referred to the governor in the highest terms and also spoke of his uniform kindness in their treatment of his people.”

“The Americans,” continued Governor Pino, treat us well, but the Mexicans very badly; the latter have always maltreated us, and we want them neither to go through our country nor to reside among us. The heavens punish us by long drought for allowing them to remain on the Colorado Chiquito. My cacique, who prays for rain, and who is the spiritual and temporal ruler of this people, watches the sun daily, and is much distressed because no rain falls. 

Pino went on to say that his tribe had always owned its land and now he wanted from the United States government a “perpetual title to the Zuni country, which had been handed down to us by our forefathers, through all time. We are peaceable and do not make war; if we have a title to our lands from the Great Father, we can show the document, and even the Mexican will respect it. The cacique who was present nodded in assent. . . .” The presence of the cacique underlines the reliability and importance of what Pino had to say. The old governor again described the boundaries of Zuni land: “the country between the Neutrias [Nutria Springs] and Colorado Chiquito [Little Colorado], some sixty miles, and Agua Fria [spring in the Zuni Mountains] and the Moquis [Hopi] settlements, about one hundred miles apart.”

The Zunis had suffered through literally centuries of religious persecution at the hands of the Catholic Spanish and Mexican governments. That persecution resulted in a strong prejudice against Hispanos (Mexicans) by Pino and the Zunis, a prejudice hard to erase even today. Though Pino had his political reasons for allying with the United States, his commitment to U.S. policy
and hostility toward former Spanish practices may have been somewhat misplaced. Nevertheless, he was dealing with a nearly all-powerful entity in the United States of 1872, and he made his points with strength.

Pino said that his caciques especially resented the presence of the Mexicans who were now encroaching upon Zuni land. Then he allowed Klett to view a dance and said, “No Mexican shall ever look upon the performance of this holy and sacred rite. The Americans have ever been our friends, and are good and excellent people.” If O’Sullivan’s photograph pictures this dance, then Pino’s description of it as a rain dance may be further evidence of his diplomacy.

The governor continued that there was a Mexican at Ojo de Benado (south of Zuni) and another on the Little Colorado. “The Cacique of my nation is very sorry on this account and the rain will not fall while these wicked men inhabit our territory. I will deem it a special favor if you will intercede with the Great Father for a title for us to our country: this will satisfy us. You men are good, have seen the sacred dance . . . and we shall have rain.” Following the rain dance, Klett reported, “It may be a fact of importance to the superstitious to know that it did rain that evening, and most heavily, the storm lasting several hours!”

Klett added his note to the papers kept fastidiously by Pino: “The people were very kind and considerate,” he wrote, “and have done all in their power to make our state as pleasant and agreeable as possible, they have given us an opportunity to witness the religious ceremony of the cachina, and given us every chance to observe their peculiar customs and the ways of their every day life.”

The following month, on August 6, 1873, Wheeler himself arrived at Zuni Pueblo. He reported that he had “careful conversation” with the governor, with one important topic again being Zuni land. “The grant from the Spaniards, or rather the Mexicans as asserted by Pedro Pino,” Wheeler wrote, “covers the following area: bounded on the north by the dividing ridge between Zuni River and the Puerco, on the east by the summit of the Zuni Mountains, on the south by an east west line through the Salt Lake, and on the West by the Little Colorado.” Wheeler also mentioned some of the Zuni ruins throughout the area which he had
visited or knew of: “Three other pueblos found to be, one at Ojo
Benado, a second a short distance to the south and east, a third at
Tule Spring, now in ruins, were once inhabited.”

Wheeler also left a testimonial with Pino, written on
September 1, 1973, praising the old man but with a final conde-
scending qualification so typical of the period. “This is to certify,”
Wheeler wrote, “that Pedro Pino, Governor of the Zuni Indians
has been very kind and accommodating to all the parties, con-
nected with the expedition of 1873: has cheerfully furnished any
desired information, and is evidently a man of more than ordinary
intelligence for one of his race.”

It is important that both Wheeler and Klett reported a descrip-
tion of the area which the Zunis inhabited and claimed, and it is
also a testimony to Pino’s efforts at explaining Zuni rights. It seems
incongruous, however, that Wheeler later commented that all the
Pueblo Indians’ titles vested their lands to them permanently
“except, perhaps, for the Moquis and Zuni.”

This statement
becomes clearer when we learn that Wheeler took advice from
Smooth Steve Elkins of the Santa Fe Ring on New Mexican land.

The Zunis had now been allied with the United States for almost
three decades under Pino. They had supplied feed corn, supplies,
and housing for all Americans who came through their land. They
had guided exploring parties. Finally in 1873, following Wheeler’s
departure, Pino was appointed United States forage agent for the
area, supposedly guaranteeing the payment for feed which Pino sup-
plied to official parties passing through Zuni territory.