



**The Zuni:
then and now**



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Because of its relative isolation, Zuni, unlike other Pueblos, evidenced few signs of direct contact from the Spanish colonists along the Rio Grande. However, some indirect effects were felt: dramatic population decreases due to introduced diseases; new economic products such as sheep, cattle, and peaches and some missionary activity. Because these indirect influences were limited, Zuni in 1880 was probably closer to its pre-Hispanic and prehistoric roots than most other cultures in the Southwest, with the possible exception of the Hopi. Many anthropologists like Frank Hamilton Cushing, Matilda Coxe Stevenson and Cosmos and Victor Mindeleff studied the Zuni in the late 1800s recording detailed descriptions of Zuni economy, social and political organization and ceremonial life.

During the twentieth century, however, the Zuni have not been immune to change. Comparison of the Zuni of 1880 with the Pueblo in 1980 shows alterations in Zuni life on many levels. During the past 100 years, the Zuni have been exposed to new material goods and ideas, and they have selected from the new contact cultures those items which best fit their way of life. The result is a gradual shift from previous values to new ones borrowed from their new neighbors. Examination of the work of early ethnologists provide a "then" picture of Zuni society which can be sharply contrasted with the "now" Zuni of today.

PREHISTORY

The archaeological history of Zuni begins around A.D. 700 or 800. Small pithouse villages first appear at this time and persisted until A.D. 1000 when the people shifted to above-ground masonry homes. The pithouse was retained as a meeting room located with each cluster of dwellings. By A.D. 1200, the pueblos in this area were multistoried. The former pithouse was transformed into the kiva, an underground or semi-underground ceremonial chamber. In addition, some sites contained "Great Kivas", which were communal ceremonial and meeting rooms. By this time, the Zuni area apparently had strong ties with the Chaco Canyon peoples.

By the thirteenth century, villages had moved into defensive positions on mesa tops, and by A.D. 1400 to 1500, only six to ten large towns remained in the Zuni area. After the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the Zuni consolidated into one large village, but established small, seasonal villages throughout the area to continue the exploitation of traditional lands.

CHANGES

Contrasting the Zuni of 1880 with the Zuni of 1980 highlights differences in many areas but especially social organization, economics, political organization and the ceremonial organization of the Pueblo.

Traditionally, every Zuni belonged to a matrilineal, extended family group, that is, many relatives lived near the oldest woman in the family. Each Zuni belonged to a clan based on lines traced through the women, and marriages involved members of different clans. These unions were arranged informally, and the dissolution of the union was easy. In the 1980s, the Zuni still determine descent through the female line and marriages are preferred outside of an individual's own clan. Marriages are formal arrangements, legally contracted, and divorce is less simple. New families live on their own, rather than in extended groups. The larger family group still cooperates, however, by pooling resources, tending livestock, and generally assisting each other in rough times.

In the 1880s, each Zuni family owned specific farm plots and the basic subsistence strategy was based on agriculture and livestock, supplemented by hunting and gathering. Today, the Zuni have become integrated into the American cash economy. Wage work both on and off the Reservation is the primary source of cash, followed by craft production. Sheep herding and cattle raising continue to be important.

Western Europeans reorganized Native American societies into their own political image, and created the posts of Governor, Lt. Governor, and others. In the 1880s these politicians operated as figureheads, since the political structure of the Pueblo was a theocracy. In fact, officials were selected by the highest priests and they regulated only the affairs pertaining to the outside world. The Bow Priests acted to keep order within the tribe. During the twentieth century, there has been a gradual transition to a democracy within the Pueblo, although the council members are still installed by the priests after being elected to office. In addition, a local school district has been established with its own elected governing body, insuring local control of education.

Traditionally, the Priesthoods at Zuni held all religious, ceremonial and political power. The *bekwinne* or Sun Priest was the most important man at Zuni, embodying the highest religious power. The religious organization included the *u'wanami* (Rain Priests), Kachina groups, Kachina priests, War Gods, and Cult of the Beast Gods. Today, the Priesthoods retain religious and ceremonial power, but exercise dwindling political power. The *bekwinne* office has been vacant since 1944. Religion is still practiced to bring rain, fertility, and good things for the Zuni and other neighbors in the world.

CONTINUITY

While changes have taken place in the last hundred years at Zuni, the religious cycle of the Pueblo has remained constant. Most Zuni ceremonies are requests for the support of the ancestors, "the keepers of the road", and the cycle begins with the winter solstice, "the middle." The rituals of the winter are dedicated to medicine, positive blessing, peace and harmony, long life for the human race and fecundity. This contrasts with the ceremony of the summer solstice, which is directed towards the production of rain and crops. Not all aspects of any ceremony are performed by any one group. Rather, the Zuni believe that the successful performance of a ritual requires different groups to perform different aspects of the ritual, all done for the maximum blessing. Thus, all the differing groups must cooperate for the welfare of the Pueblo.

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