

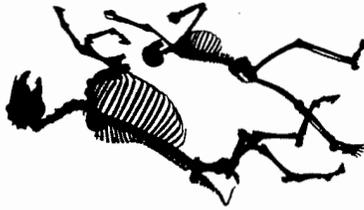
A Study of Slave-taking and the Traffic in Indian Captives

Indian Slave Trade in the Southwest

by
L. R. Bailey

WESTERNLORE PRESS . . . 1973 . . . LOS ANGELES 90041

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"Juan Padilla of Atrisco was speaker for the party [numbering fifty-four] and his headman . . . He could produce no license to trade with any Indians whatever and said his intentions was to trade with the Zunians only. The lie was given him by several of his party, who insisted upon his giving a true statement. This he refused to do. The statement of his party is that Juan Padilla said he had a license to trade with the Apaches and Navajos, and they had obtained licenses from him for the same purpose at the rate of \$2 per man.

"A considerable amount of powder, lead was found in their packs of goods . . ." Buford to L. McLaws, June 19, 1850; National Archives, Records of United States Army Commands, Record Group 98, Department of New Mexico, Letters Received. Hereafter cited as Department of New Mexico, LR.

19. Departmental Order No. 29 (dated September 19, 1851); in *ibid.*
20. John Greiner to W. C. Lane (n.d.); Superintendent Papers, LR.
21. W. C. Lane to Donaciaro Vigil, May 9, 1853; *ibid.*
22. Annie H. Abel (ed.), "Indian Affairs Under the Administration of William Carr Lane," *New Mexico Historical Review* (Vol. XVI, July 1941), P. 341.
23. Kendrick to S. D. Sturgis, June 11, 1853; Department of New Mexico, LR.
24. John Ward to Samuel M. Yost, April 9, 1858; Superintendent Records, LR.
25. Miles to J. D. Wilkins, November 23, 1858; Department of New Mexico, LR.
26. Pheiffer to Collins, December 18, 1859, and Juan Valdez to Pheiffer, December 29, 1859; all in Superintendent Records, Letters Received from Agencies.
27. "An act Amendatory to the Militia Law of the Territory of New Mexico," (dated January 28, 1859); in Territorial Papers.
28. Santa Fe *Weekly Gazette*, July 18, 1860.
29. Collins to A. B. Greenwood, July 27, 1860; Superintendent Papers, LR.
30. Canby to A.A.G., March 11, 1861; Department of New Mexico, LR. Also National Archives, Records of the Office of Adjutant General, Record Group 94, Fort Defiance Post Returns, April 1861. Hereafter cited as Fort Defiance Post Returns.
31. Canby to A.A.G., February 27, March 11 and 18, 1861; Department of New Mexico, LR.
32. Canby to Fauntleroy, February 27, 1861; *ibid.*

III

WITH ERUPTION of the Civil War conditions in New Mexico grew worse. The Comanches and Kiowas on the east, Apaches to the south and west, and Navajos in the north ran riot as posts were abandoned and officers and troops defected to the South. To this was added another menace: Texas Confederates under Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley were marching up the Rio Grande late in 1861, driving Union forces before them. During their brief occupation of the territory, the Texans came face-to-face with the Navajos, and their cousins — the Apaches — who made no distinction between soldiers in blue or gray. Sibley had been in the territory but a short time before he formulated a plan to end the Indian problem — legal enslavement of all hostile tribes.¹ The Confederates, however, were never to realize their plans for conquest of the desert southwest, nor the enslavement of its Indians. From out of the west marched a column of California Volunteers under command of Colonel James H. Carleton, and from the north came Colorado Volunteers led by Colonel John B. Slough, to crush the Texans at Glorieta Pass in February 1862. The Civil War had come and gone in New Mexico, but there the slavery issue was never to be settled by the victory of Northern principles over those of the South.

The Navajos and Mescalero Apaches realized that attentions of the army had been diverted to repelling the Confederate invasion, and they stepped up their depredations. But the threat

from Texas soon passed, and Colonel James H. Carleton, veteran Indian fighter, and organizer of the "California Column," was able to launch his plans for pacification of the Indians. The First and Second Regiments of New Mexico Volunteers, organized to repel the southern invasion, were put under command of one of the territory's leading citizens — Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson, who ruthlessly applied sword and torch to Indian country. The roundup of the Mescaleros began in January 1863, and the "Long Walk" of the Navajos, followed six months later. Both terminated at a disease ridden reservation upon the banks of the Pecos River in east-central New Mexico — the infamous Bosque Redondo.²

Certain unscrupulous individuals, realizing that the roundup of Navajos would end forever their slave trading activities, took this last opportunity to obtain a few more menials — with the blessings of the military — for Carleton had given his approval to organization of volunteer groups, many having considerable experience fighting Indians. During the Carleton campaign Navajo country was alive with New Mexicans seeking women and children, who were in many cases, snatched from groups of Indians making their way to Forts Wingate and Canby to surrender.³ Companies of irregulars from the slave dealing centers of Cubero, Cebolleta and Abiquiu made frequent raids upon Navajos. One such company of volunteers, recruited by Ramón A. Baca of Cebolleta, was highly successful in their forays, for "they took hundreds of prisoners, who, as was the custom . . . were sold as domestics all over the territory, sometimes at very high prices."⁴

This was also a time when the implacable enemies of the Diné from across the Rio San Juan also struck. Kit Carson reported large concentrations of Ute warriors ranging the red rock country between the Carrizo Mountains and the east entrance of Cañon de Chelly in search of captives. Carson sought to capi-

talize upon animosities which existed between the two tribes, and employed Utes as scouts and guides. These Indians, from the mountains north of the Rio San Juan, proved so expert at ferreting out their enemies that they soon earned the acclaim of their commander. In true mountain man fashion, Carson wanted to reward his Ute allies for "their continued zeal and activity" in the Navajo campaign, by permitting them to retain women and children. The "Rope Thrower," as the Indians called Kit, was firmly convinced that captives disposed of in this manner would be better off than at Bosque Redondo, as the Utes would sell them to Mexican families who would care for them — thus they "would cease to require any further attention on the part of the government." He also advocated distributing captive Navajos as servants to New Mexican families in order to break up "that collectiveness of interest as a tribe which they will retain if kept together" at Bosque Redondo.⁵

Never in the history of Anglo-American Indian affairs had a military campaign been carried to such proportions. For over eighteen months the general populace of New Mexico, Pueblo Indians, Utes and Apaches were armed to carry war into Navajo-land. Parties of Navajos coming into Forts Wingate and Canby to surrender were attacked by New Mexicans, who drove off their sheep, seized whatever silver ornaments and blankets they could, and carried off their women and children.⁶

Even Indians who trustingly put their faith in the army, and chose captivity at Bosque Redondo to freedom in their beloved red rock country, were not spared by slave procurers. Many a party of Navajos being transported — under military guard — to Fort Sumner were viciously attacked. Particularly those Indians, who for reasons of illness and exhaustion lagged behind their party, were victims of ever-preying slave raiders. In early May 1864, Lieutenant D. W. Brocheim, an officer in charge of escort-

ing Navajos to Bosque Redondo, reported upon the consequences befalling Indians who were left behind without adequate military guard:

I received information this morning [May 2, 1864] that a party of friendly Navajo Indians who had been with Captain McCabe en route to Fort Sumner having fallen sick and unable to travel were left behind by him in Tejas Cañon, east of [Albuquerque] . . . Yesterday about noon while traveling along the road in front of San Antonio, six Mexicans came out from the town and took thirteen prisoners (eight women and five children) and took them back into the town.⁷

By late spring Navajos were surrendering in such numbers that both General Carleton and Colonel Carson suspended active military operations against the tribe for fear of injury to parties of friendly Indians making their way into Forts Canby and Wingate. Relaxation by the military, however, did not deter activities of itinerant militia companies, who roamed Navajoland. In fact, so extensive were the forays by these independent parties, that they threatened the very success of the Navajo campaign, and raised the ire of military personnel. Incensed by the wanton acts of New Mexicans from Cebolleta, Cubero, Abiquiu, as well as from towns in southern Colorado, Colonel Christopher Carson, in mid-April 1864, suggested that measures be adopted to curtail "independent campaigns."

"Since active hostilities have ceased against the Navajos," wrote the old scout, "various parties of citizens have come into their country for the purpose of robbing from the Navajos, and some of them have the audacity to steal from them under my protection at this post [Fort Canby]."

"To counteract and put a stop to this state of affairs, which if continued would prevent the chiefs and others of their tribe from coming in with their stock, and complying with the instructions

of the Department Commander, I would by leave respectfully suggest that Lieutenant Charles M. Hubbell, First Cavalry New Mexico Volunteers, with a party of enlisted men now on detached service at Los Piños be ordered forthwith, together with fifty (50) good serviceable horses, to join the regiment at Headquarters, to pursue and capture whatever bands of citizen marauders may come here for the purpose of thwarting the laudable actions of the government . . ."⁸

Apparently even members of the regiments of New Mexico Volunteers — the very units commanded by Carson — were not above abducting and selling Indian children now and then. On February 19, 1864, General Carleton's aide-de-camp, Cyrus H. DeForrest, wrote to the commandant of Fort Craig, that out of a party of twenty-two Navajos brought in by New Mexico Volunteers, there was missing a girl of seventeen years of age, named Guadalupe, who it was alleged, was sold to one Gregorio Sedallio, of Paraje.⁹

As the army was virtually powerless to stop this cruel and malicious practice, General Carleton sought aid from Governor Henry Connelly. In council, the two leaders discussed this insidious commerce, which had reached disgraceful proportions under their very guidance and sanction. Both men agreed to an immediate cessation of war against the Navajos, and the publication of a proclamation aimed at halting all forays by independent companies of civilians:

Whereas a suspension of arms, in the prosecution of the war against the Navajo tribe of Indians, exists, as the more hostile part of that tribe is now reduced to and located upon the reservation at the Bosque Redondo, and the remainder of the tribe coming in and surrendering themselves to the military authorities; and

Whereas any hostile demonstrations upon the part of our citizens towards the said Indians during this suspension of

hostilities would frustrate the intentions and efforts of the government in the peaceable removal of the remainder of this tribe, now collecting around Forts Canby and Wingate, to whom has been granted safety to life and property while there and *in transitu* to the reservation: Therefore,

I, Henry Connelly, governor of New Mexico, do issue this my proclamation, and ordain:

First. That hostilities on the part of the citizens with the remainder of the Navajo tribe of Indians, who have or have not presented themselves at the military posts for removal to the reservation, shall cease.

Second. That all forays by our citizens of a hostile character into the country heretofore or now occupied by any part of the said Navajo tribe of Indians, are hereby positively prohibited under the severest penalties.

Third. That any parties of armed men, with hostile intentions, hereafter found in the Navajo country, will be immediately arrested by the United States troops and sent to the headquarters of the department of New Mexico, here to be dealt with according to law.

Fourth. It is proper in this connexion to warn the people against further traffic in captive Indians. The laws of the country as well as those of justice and humanity positively forbid such a traffic. Measures are now being taken by the Department of the Interior to have all Indians surrendered who have been sold into slavery, and the people therefore have this timely warning to refrain at once from any such traffic in Indian captives as has heretofore been practiced among them.

Done at Santa Fe, this 4th day of May, 1864.

(Signed) HENRY CONNELLY,
Governor and Commander-in-
chief of the Militia.¹⁰

The publication of Governor Connelly's proclamation fell upon deaf ears. Now was the chance New Mexicans had waited for. The populace of the territory had groaned for generations

under lightning-fast incursions of Navajos and Apaches. Live-stock losses had been unbearably heavy, and settlements had been of necessity confined to the river valleys of New Mexico — the Rio Grande and Rio Puerco. At last the Navajos, as a tribe, had been hit hard by Kit Carson and his scorched earth policy. No proclamation — no matter how stringent — would halt New Mexicans from striking their mortal enemies. And no "laws of the country, as well as those of justice and humanity" would halt the traffic in Navajo captives.

Throughout spring and summer of 1865, the general populace of New Mexico, the Pueblo Indians, and Utes, prepared for war. The military commandants at Fort Wingate, Los Piños and Albuquerque were constantly approached for permission to raid the Navajos. From those villages, always notorious for their participation in illegal trade, came the itinerant militia captains, begging arms, ammunition, and assent to raid — the only recompense being retention of all booty taken from Indians.

Regardless of all proclamations prohibiting campaigns by militia, and the threats of immediate arrest of those who disregarded Governor Connelly's words, many United States military commanders shut their eyes to these itinerant groups. On May 13 Antonio Mejicano, "a citizen of Cubero," and two other Mexicans (names not specified) with 75 to 100 Zuñi Indians, applied for and received permission from Lieutenant Colonel Julius C. Shaw, commanding Fort Wingate, to campaign against Navajos.¹¹ One month later fifty volunteers, raised at Abiquiu, penetrated Indian country as far as the San Francisco Peaks, near present-day Flagstaff, Arizona.¹² Even Indian agents were doling out powder, lead and percussion caps to the Utes, so that this mountain tribe could successfully raid Navajos south of the Rio San Juan.¹³ So the insidious activities of slave procurers continued, bringing death,

destruction, and captivity to those of the Diné who had not surrendered and been transported to Bosque Redondo.

Although these raiders — even when officially sanctioned — were technically required to turn over all prisoners to the regular army, for transferral to the Navajo reservation, few if any did so — as verified by military correspondence. In a letter (dated May 25, 1865) Lieutenant Colonel Shaw admitted giving permission to Antonio Mejicano to retain five Navajo women, whose fate was readily apparent.¹⁴ Testimony of Navajos fortunate enough to have either escaped or to have been released from captivity, seems to bear this out. A niece of the prominent chief, Herrero, recounted before a military court of enquiry, the circumstances of her abduction:

Question: Where were you taken prisoner?

Answer: At Casa Blanca near Moqui.

Question: Who took you prisoner?

Answer: An armed party of Mexicans from Cebolleta, who attacked our camp at day break, killed seven men and took twelve women and children prisoners.

Question: Where are the others who were taken the same time with yourself?

Answer: My two sisters were taken and sold at the Ranchos of Atrisco, and I heard that the others have been sold near Isleta or below the river.¹⁵

The vicious attacks by New Mexicans and their Pueblo and Ute allies continued throughout the remaining months of 1865 and into the following year. Navajos, however, were becoming more and more wary. In the rugged and extremely dissected country around Navajo Mountain they sought sanctuary from their enemies. Conserving their few remaining sheep and horses, the Indians grubbed a pitiful livelihood on wild potatoes and berries, and remained ever vigilant. Ute war parties and militia companies found fewer Navajo rancherías occupied; and those

Indians unlucky enough to be surprised, resisted vigorously. A great number of irregular companies returned unsuccessful from their enterprises; and not a few turned to other sources readily at hand for accomplishment of their goals. Such an expedition entered Navajoland in December 1866.

Eighty New Mexicans, without authority either from civil or military authorities, organized a predatory band to campaign against hostile Navajos. However, after penetrating far into the interior of Indian country, and having been totally unsuccessful in their search for captives and livestock, these raiders pushed on to the Hopi village of Oraibi, where supplies could be easily obtained. Their wants satisfied, the company must have decided among themselves to attack the Pueblos, for without provocation, they assaulted the Hopis; killed three, wounded four, drove off 558 head of livestock, and carried into captivity five girls and six boys.

Once out of hostile Indian country, the New Mexicans offered their booty for sale, and profitably disposed of their captives by passing them off as Navajos. This wanton attack had come so sudden that the populace of Oraibi had been unable to resist; and as is the nature of Hopi Indians, they made no attempt to follow the New Mexicans in vengeance. Instead, they sent a delegation to Santa Fe, there to complain to the "Grand Yata," as they called the Superintendent of Indian Affairs — and "see that justice was done them."

After consulting with the Hopi delegation, the superintendent deemed the crime serious enough to warrant further attention; and Special Agent John Ward was sent out in mid-January 1867 "to investigate the matter and make a report, and if possible get possession of the captives and stock."¹⁶ By February 10 Agent Ward had uncovered enough details of the raid to give him an idea of what lay ahead, for he wrote to Superintendent A. B.

Norton, that the "task before me now is rather hard and a very disagreeable one. The captives . . . are scattered in many directions, one at Tierra Amarilla, others at Ojo Caliente, El Rito, Arroyo Seco, Taos, and some even at Los Conejos, Colorado Territory . . ."¹⁷

As difficult and irksome as was this task, John Ward apparently accomplished it with dispatch and efficiency. By March the Special Agent had hunted down sixty of the raiders, freed the captives, and returned fifty head of livestock. With names and facts of the case fully exposed, Superintendent Norton and his trouble-shooting agent endeavored to bring the New Mexicans to justice, by having them indicted by the grand jury during the March Session of the District Court — but their efforts failed. "The clannish nature of the Mexicans," complained Norton, "prevented their indictment. I understand that the pretext of the grand jury was that the crime (if any) was committed in the Territory of Arizona, and that they should be tried there, and not here."¹⁸

Although the Territory of Arizona failed to indict these slave raiders, their foray would be one of the last to penetrate Indian country. Throughout the southwest, civil and military personnel were beginning to wake up to their responsibilities. With conclusion of the Civil War national attention could once again be focused on matters other than of a military nature. Causes of turmoil between red and white men were being delved into, and a few answers uncovered as to the source of Indian hostilities — not the least of which were the nefarious practices of Indian slavery.

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1. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of Official Records of the Union & Confederate Armies* (Washington: 1883, Series I, Vol. IX), p. 512. Cited as *Official Records*.

2. The establishment of the Bosque Redondo Reservation was recommended by the Office of Indian Affairs on January 14, 1864, and laid before the President and approved by him on January 16, 1864. For details relative to Bosque Redondo see L. R. Bailey, *The Long Walk: A History of the Navajo Wars, 1816-68* (Los Angeles: Westminster Press, 1964).

3. Joint Special Committee on Indian Affairs, *Condition of Tribes* (Washington: 1867), p. 336.

4. Nathan Bibb, "Reminiscences of Early Days in New Mexico," *Albuquerque Evening Herald*, June 11, 1922.

5. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXVI, pp. 233-234.

6. On February 2, 1864, the commandant of Fort Wingate reported that the Navajo chief, Delgadito, had surrendered. According to official records, this Indian told "of having been attacked by a party of Mexicans, who killed some of his men, took some women and children prisoners, and drove off some of their stock . . ." Maj. E. W. Eaton To Capt. B. C. Cutler, February 2, 1864; Department of New Mexico, LR.

7. D. W. Brocheim to A.A.G., May 2, 1864; *ibid*.

8. Carson to A.A.G., April 13, 1864; *ibid*.

9. DeForrest to Edwin A. Rigg, February 19, 1864; *ibid*.

10. *Condition of Tribes*, p. 333.

11. Shaw to Cutler, May 16, 1865; Department of New Mexico, LR.

12. Shaw to Cutler, July 24, 1865; *ibid*.

13. On November 18, 1866 the U.S. Special Agent at Abiquiu agency wrote to the superintendent of Indian Affairs: "The Utes are coming here most everyday to get their powder, lead and caps; I am making the issues in small quantities as you directed me." Jesus M. Sena Baca to A. B. Norton, November 18, 1866; Superintendency Records, Letters Received from Agencies, 1866.

14. Shaw to Cutler, May 25, 1865; Department of New Mexico, LR.

15. Report of Captain Francis McCabe, July 9, 1865; *ibid*.

16. N. W. Davis to Lewis Bogy, January 18, 1867; Superintendency Papers, LR.

17. Ward to Norton, February 10, 1867; *ibid*.

18. Norton to N. G. Taylor, August 1, 1867; *ibid*.