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THE DUKE INDIAN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

RICHARD N. ELLIS

IN 1967 Miss Doris Duke of New York generously granted funds to several major universities to inaugurate programs in American Indian oral history. Miss Duke recognized that Indian accounts of their own history were generally unavailable and that American Indian history was told through the eyes of white observers. She realized also that the Indian people relied heavily on an oral tradition and that their history was passed down with great accuracy by word of mouth. Her goal was to create regional archives of the oral traditions of the Indian people. The Universities of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Oklahoma, Illinois, and South Dakota received funds from 1967 to 1972 while the University of Florida has been funded for the past two years. Professor C. Gregory Crampton, director of the Doris Duke Project at the University of Utah, has provided leadership as coordinator of the various programs.

The staff of the Duke Project included faculty members and graduate students from the University of New Mexico and other institutions, some undergraduates, and individuals from several Indian tribes. Historians, anthropologists, and experts on the subject of Indian education were involved, and the interviews reflect a wide range of interests and, like most oral history materials, they vary in quality, but the overall value of the recordings is great.

Although the Duke Collection includes interviews with Indians from California, Montana, Washington, Alaska, and the Northwest Territory of Canada, the bulk of the material concerns the Navajos and the New Mexico Pueblos. There are interviews from most Pueblos, but Santo Domingo is not represented and other pueblos are the subject of only a few recordings. The Duke Projects at the Universities of Utah and Arizona have also conducted field work among the Pueblos. Utah inherited an ongoing project at Zuñi and has gathered a large amount of useful data. The Duke archive at the University of New Mexico has a substantial collection on Isleta and Laguna and smaller collections on San Juan, Santa Ana, and Taos.

It was the policy of the Duke project to seek information on a wide range of subjects, and interviews with members of the various Pueblos reflect this. Field workers understood that while certain subjects might be of special interest, a primary goal of the project was to provide an archive for the Indian people. Therefore topics that were important to the informants form a valuable part of the record of the Indian past.

Interviews with Pueblo Indians include a large number of personal and family histories which also provide insights into subjects such as economic activities, military service, off-reservation schooling at institutions such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs school at Carlisle, the development of the All Indian Pueblo Council, and the recent controversy regarding Blue Lake, a sacred area of the Taos Indians. Possibly the most important information pertains to land and water, because numerous land and water cases involving the Pueblos remain to be adjudicated. Much of the land and water testimony was collected by Dr. Florence Hawley Ellis of the Anthropology Department of the University of New Mexico in order to strengthen the legal position of the Pueblos. She has gathered descriptions of land boundaries, land ownership and usage, early irrigation and current irrigation practices.

Other interviews deal with familiar subjects such as the Pueblo Revolt, relations with the Spanish, the kidnapping of Indian children by the Spanish, buffalo hunting, and definitions of the duties of various Pueblo officials. Critical appraisals of the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act are included, along with opinions regarding hippies, the Red Power Movement, and the Indian occupation of Alcatraz. Approximately twenty tapes are devoted entirely to the recently settled Taos Blue Lake question. These interviews include governmental and tribal opinions and are supported by a collection of related documents from various agencies.

At present there are 338 tapes totaling approximately 825 hours, and 6,400 pages of transcripts on Pueblo history and life. Forty-eight recordings deal with Laguna, and of these twenty-nine resulted from interviews with Mrs. Suzie Marmon, who is now ninety-one years of age. Mrs. Marmon attended Carlisle Institute in the 1890's, became a school teacher and married into the economically powerful Anglo Marmon family living in the Laguna area. She has always been interested in the history of Laguna Pueblo, and although much of her account is autobiographical, there is a great deal of material on Marmon family economic activities and other subjects. The history of the Laguna Scouts, a militia unit that participated in the military campaigns against the Apaches in the 1870's and 1880's, is important.

Interviews on Navajo history total 412 and cover a broad range, from oral traditions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to com-

mentary on events of the 1970's. There are descriptions of relations with the Spanish and the United States governments and with other tribes, as well as accounts of warfare with the Utes and Comanches. There is considerable emphasis on the Long Walk and on tribal legends and stories. The Navajo roundup by Colonel Kit Carson in 1863-1864 and the Long Walk to Fort Sumner in the Pecos Valley, where the Navajos were confined until 1868, is a central event in Navajo history. Numerous accounts of these events have been handed down by word of mouth for generations. Many have been recorded, and provide a useful source to use in conjunction with Army and Bureau of Indian Affairs documents from the period. They provide descriptions and assessments of the activities of leading Navajos, such as Manuelito, and Jesus Arviso, a Mexican captive of the tribe who eventually became interpreter for the U.S. government, and the Navajos at Fort Sumner. Tribal animal stories account for a relatively large body of material, and occasionally we have variations of the same stories from different parts of the Reservation.

In addition, the Duke Collection houses a body of information regarding recent Navajo history and economic activity, including opinions about the stock-reduction program of the 1920's and 1930's, Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier and the Indian New Deal, and practices of traders on the Reservation. There are some recordings of chapter meetings and information regarding activities of the Office of Navajo Economic Opportunity and Community Action Programs. One collection of approximately thirty-five tapes deals entirely with the daily life of a Navajo family near Tuba City, Arizona. This study provides descriptions of seasonal and daily activities of various members of the family, agricultural methods, herding, butchering techniques, and education.

In recent years there have been several major developments in Indian education in the Southwest. The Rough Rock Demonstration School, on the Navajo Reservation, run by the Indians, has pioneered in developing new educational materials and has become a model for changes in Indian education. The Navajo Community College, established in 1969, has pioneered in higher education. These institutions have justly attracted national attention, and administrators and staff members have been interviewed for the Duke Project.

Members of the Navajo tribe have also become involved in important legal and constitutional cases, largely through the activity of the controversial DNA (Dinebeina Nahiilna Be Agaditahe), a legal aid society funded by the Federal government. Efforts of the DNA to protect the rights of Navajos have, on occasion, aroused the opposition and antagonism of members of the white community. The Duke Project, therefore, has not only interviewed staff members of DNA and obtained copies of material

from their files, but has also recorded the views of non-Indians, such as Gallup city officials.

The Duke Project also has smaller collections from more distant regions. For example, there is material on the Northern Diegueno and Desert Cahuilla, tribes from the Mission Indian group of Southern California, the Clallam and Yakima of Washington state, Alaskan Eskimos and Indians, and the Blackfeet, Flathead, Crow, and Northern Cheyennes of Montana. Anthropologist Dennis Stanford, now of the Smithsonian Institution conducted an archeological dig near Point Barrow, Alaska, during the summer of 1968 and collected forty-eight hours of taped interviews which include family histories, accounts of tribal migrations and life patterns, hunting methods, trading, and descriptions of artifacts and their use.

Joel Bernstein and Alfonso Spang of the University of Montana have utilized interested Indian students from that institution to work with the Montana tribes. Spang, a Northern Cheyenne, was director of the Indian Studies Program at the University of Montana and is currently Superintendent at the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Together with the students, Spang and Bernstein collected a large body of valuable material which includes views of important Indian leaders, such as Earl Old Person, a Blackfoot, who was formerly President of the National Congress of American Indians, and accounts of Indian-white relations in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An important portion of this collection deals with missionary activity among the Montana tribes.

Miscellaneous tapes resulted from important meetings held in the Albuquerque vicinity. The New Mexico Tribal Economic and Social Development Seminar, the annual Navajo Education conference, the Indian Community Action Program—Headstart Conference, and the National Indian Education Conference, all extremely important sources of Indian views on current issues, especially in the areas of education, government policies, and economic development. There are also some interviews with such divergent groups as Bureau of Indian Affairs officials and participants in the occupation of Alcatraz Island.

The interviews collected by the Duke Project have been transcribed, edited, corrected, and retyped. They have been numbered and filed chronologically. A guide describing each interview will be published and a subject index is being prepared. The entire collection of tapes and transcripts will be housed in the Coronado Room in Zimmerman Library at The University of New Mexico where they will be available for use by interested scholars and by the Indian people.

An extensive collection of documentary material on various aspects of Indian history will eventually be added to the collection. The documents

have been carefully selected from a variety of archival sources. Some come from government agencies such as the Southern Pueblo Agency in Albuquerque and the Forest Service, an institution involved in the Blue Lake controversy. Others come from Bureau of Indian Affairs records in the National Archives, Washington, D.C., and eight regional Federal Records Centers. Others were collected from such depositories as the Henry E. Huntington Library, the Universities of Oregon and Washington, and the Minnesota Historical Society. The Duke Collection was also fortunate in being able to obtain copies of the records of the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial and material from the files of the DNA.

The extensive collections of Indian material at The University of New Mexico and the other institutions is a tribute to the vision of Miss Duke. Nevertheless, most of the long story of the Indian past in the United States remains unrecorded. The thousands of pages of primary material in the New Mexico Duke Collection just begin to describe the history of Southwestern tribes. Similar oral history projects organized at the tribal level might well be more thorough and more successful and may revise existing accounts. American Indian history has been written almost entirely from documents written by non-Indian observers. Now more Indian sources from the oral traditions are available, and the New Mexico Duke Collection includes a selection of such material. There are 982 recordings comprising approximately 2,000 hours of taped interviews.