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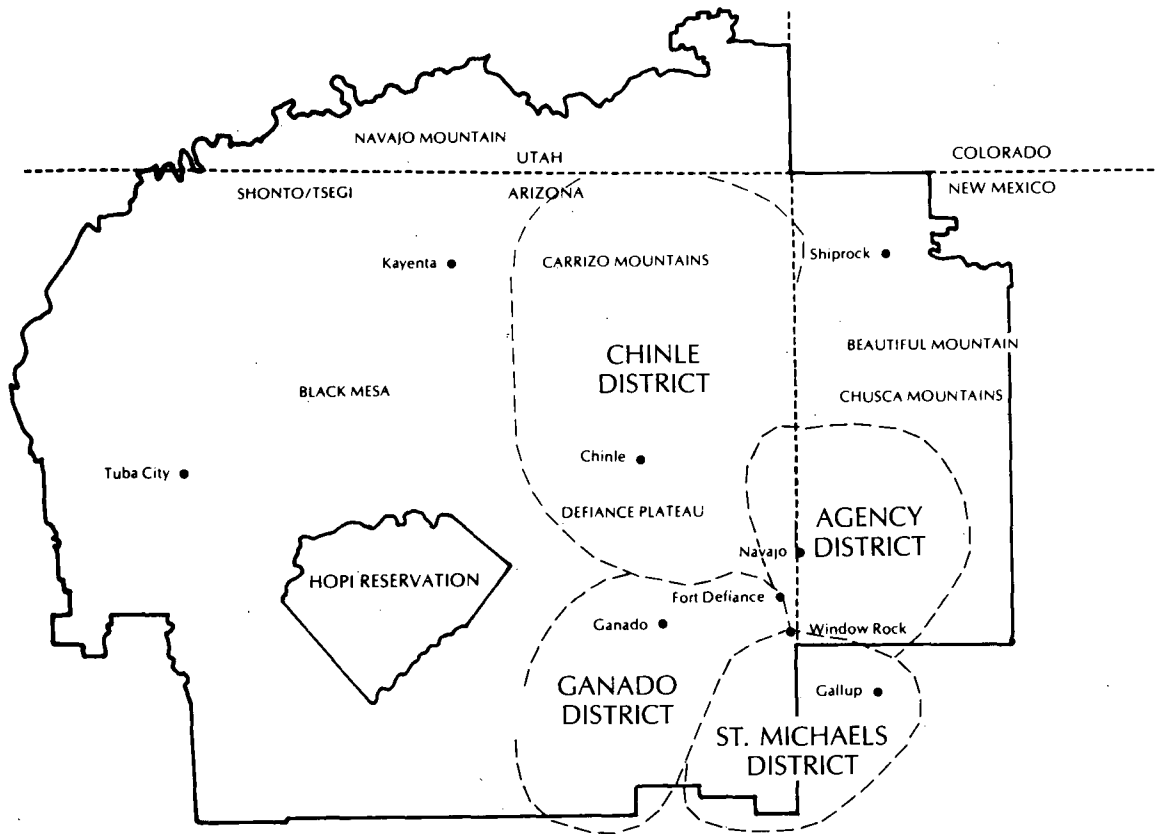
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*RICOS AND POBRES: WEALTH DISTRIBUTION  
ON THE NAVAJO RESERVATION IN 1915*

ROBERT S. McPHERSON

THE HOLIDAY SEASON of 1915 was a time of rejoicing for at least one man on the Navajo reservation—Peter Paquette, superintendent of the agency headquartered at Fort Defiance, Arizona. For on 26 December, Paquette mailed to the Bureau of Indian Affairs the 1915 census, the first such document to be compiled since the Navajo had returned from Bosque Redondo in 1868.<sup>1</sup> It had taken five men four months to collect and edit the information, and so it was not with just a little pride that in the letter of transmittal the superintendent tweaked the nose of his Washington supervisor in pointing out that estimated costs had proved to be very accurate (approximately \$2,000), that the 398-page manuscript “was done entirely by the Agency Office force in addition to their other duties,” and that the census was the “first of its kind ever.”<sup>2</sup> Paquette had accomplished an important task that would be cited in years to come as growing population and increasing livestock became mounting concerns in the management of Navajo lands.

The 1915 census is filled with information about the most densely populated portion of the reservation. Although information on the San Juan, Leupp, and Western agencies were compiled separately by their respective superintendents, the major portion of the tribe was enumerated in Paquette’s work. To undertake this job he selected four men who were either Navajo or who had married Navajo women and who were intimately familiar with the language and lifestyle they would encounter in their survey. The reservation was divided into districts (see map) and the men sent out with numerous questions about cultural, demographic, and economic concerns. The information reported in the census and its accompanying letter



District boundaries for the 1915 census on the Navajo reservation.

Map adapted from Philip Reno, *Navajo Resources and Economic Development*, University of New Mexico Press, 1981.

includes sections on Navajo placenames and clan relationships, identification of influential men, frequency of polygamous and miscegenetic marriages, distribution of houses and hogans, number of school children, problems in health and education, type and amount of livestock, and trading posts with freighting distances listed. Other sections include translation of names, value of personal and tribal wealth, and the composition, age, and relationship of family members. Thus, Paquette's detailed account presents a timely picture of Navajo life at the beginning of the century and provides insights into the reasons for livestock reduction, the growth of tribal government, and the issues of grazing and water rights.

This study will focus on one aspect of Paquette's survey—wealth—and view it quantitatively to determine if past assumptions maintain their validity. Before doing so, however, it should be mentioned that although the figures used to derive this information came from the census, they do not correspond with totals Paquette listed. In some instances the two sets of numbers differ widely. Although the superintendent was conscientious in his approach to gathering and recording information, he had difficulty correctly adding long columns of numbers. For example, in his addition of page totals, he was incorrect by as much as three thousand sheep in one case; so many of his calculations have been refigured. Consequently, later authors who used his statistics vary from those used in this paper.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the importance of these findings, the beliefs associated with Navajo property must be briefly reviewed. Basically, wealth was divided into two types: hard goods to include silver and turquoise jewelry, saddles, wagons, and other durable materials; and soft goods such as woven blankets, expensive clothes, tanned buckskins, wedding baskets, and ceremonial knowledge. However, the basis of all wealth was livestock, which served to meet subsistence needs and to provide a visible display of status. As one scholar, Gary Witherspoon, notes, "sheep are not only wealth in an objective sense but serve as a measure of family well-being on a more abstract level of discourse. One is quickly impressed with the identification between 'the family' and 'the sheep.'"<sup>4</sup>

The importance of sheep in a pastoral lifestyle (regardless of how much capital is derived from this source) is seen in the emphasis

an owner placed upon his herd. Total family involvement was required during certain times of the year (shearing, dipping, and herding), and though ownership was maintained on an individual basis, personal acquisition was a source of group responsibility and family pride. Thus, livestock operations were the "most important cooperative enterprise of the 'outfit' [defined as one or more extended families that work together]; the animals were normally herded together, though owned individually, and children were started in the whole process at about the age of five."<sup>5</sup>

Social prominence was derived from the ownership of sheep, so a person with a large herd was often respected as wise in management and supernaturally blessed. Also, since the Navajo lived in a matrilineal society, wives often owned more livestock than husbands, while members of the extended kin group or even nonrelated groups combined efforts in maintaining their animals with those of their relatives or associates. By 1915, cattle, horses, mules, and goats served as another basis for wealth. Although herds of these animals were numerous, sheep continued to be the pillar of the economy. Anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, paraphrasing a leader in a tribal council session, records the speaker as saying:

Give us sheep, give us our mutton, let us have herds as our fathers and our grandfathers had. If you take away our sheep, you take away our food, and we have nothing. What then will become of our children? What will we say to our young men who have gone to war? . . . They are fighting now for our homes and our land, and these things will be useless if you take away our sheep. This is not right. You must let us keep our sheep or we die.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most complete study of Navajo attitudes toward wealth is found in *Navajo Acquisitive Values* by Richard Hobson, who argues that the Navajo possess a strong desire to accumulate wealth and to "make a good living." This motivation is interpreted by some *Diné*, Hobson notes, to mean "The Navajo way is just to want enough to have enough to eat for your family and nice things to wear sometimes."<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, those who acquire excessive wealth and break the injunction of not being "too rich" are the first to be accused of antisocial behavior. Thus, Hobson sees

wealth accumulation as a primary preoccupation controlled through social means: "A high valuation is placed upon the possession of land, livestock, houses, clothes, and jewelry. . . . Sheer accumulation of wealth is of less importance than its display or its generous distribution."<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to Anglo society, Navajo culture has often been viewed as trying to keep interpersonal rivalry and friction at a minimum. To achieve this goal, a number of leveling mechanisms evolved that prevented one person or family from becoming too rich or too dominant in social relations. Accusations of witchcraft, gossip and ridicule concerning stinginess, and the belief that a prosperous man should pay a higher price for a ceremony than a poor man were means of maintaining this control. James F. Downs, a specialist on Navajo practices in animal husbandry and its associated beliefs, explained that

Navajo economic life has always been one in which men expended efforts in order to secure the necessities rather than amass capital. Many Navajo attitudes about sharing and accumulation of wealth tend to restrict unrestrained accumulation by individuals. Pressures to share one's good fortune with relatives and a fear of being accused of acquiring wealth by means of witchcraft both restrain the acquisitive impulse, although they most certainly do not suppress it altogether.<sup>9</sup>

From these quotations one gets the impression that an informal egalitarianism existed throughout Navajo country as the Indians struggled to keep themselves above the grinding poverty associated with life on the reservation. While sharing and cooperation seemed to be the hallmark of Navajo life, statistics sometimes tell other stories.

When the Navajo returned to their homelands after a four-year exile at Bosque Redondo, they spread throughout the reservation (and in some instances off the reservation) and returned to previous residences. Since land ownership was based on usufruct rights and since the Navajo received 30,000 sheep and 4,000 goats shortly after their arrival, they began to expand their herds and acquire the necessary grazing lands. By 1915 that part of the reservation surveyed in the census had 382,044 sheep and 119,228 goats. In

monetary terms of those days (a sheep cost \$3.25 and a goat \$.75), the value of these two largest groups of livestock amounted to \$1,331,064. This figure does not include horses, cattle, mules, and burros, which Paquette estimated would total an additional \$1,101,487.

While these figures are impressive, they raise two important questions: first, what was the distribution of this wealth-on-the-hoof? Second, what impact did this type of livestock production have on land holdings? If one follows what others have written about the communal spirit of the Navajos, one would expect that ownership of animals would be relatively equal, but this is not the case. As Tables 1 and 3 show, when livestock owners are divided into ten equal increments and placed in ascending order based on wealth, a high percentage of animals are concentrated in the wealthiest decile. Figures such as 59.7% and 59.1%, for example, are surprising for a supposed egalitarian society that stresses leveling processes. If this imbalance were true of only one district, then it could be viewed as an anomaly, but all four districts illustrate the same pattern. A similar inequality exists in the ownership of goats. Although two of the percentages in this area of ownership are not as high as in the other two districts, they still show a concentration of wealth at the top of the scale.

One effective way to analyze these highly skewed percentages is to use the Gini Coefficient, which measures the amount of equality or inequality by expressing how close to zero (total equality) or how close to one (total inequality) a series of figures may be. As seen in Tables 2 and 4, the Gini Coefficients express high inequality of ownership of sheep and goats in every instance. In terms of actual animals, the figures are equally impressive. For example, Table 2 shows the range of livestock for each district, with a high of 4,000 sheep owned by one man. When all of the sheep in the top decile of the four districts are added together, one finds that 197,507 animals were owned by a relatively small group of people. For less fortunate families, the average number of sheep is much smaller while the median is even lower. Thus, in every respect an inequality in the division of this wealth appears to exist.

Another question concerning land distribution is of equal importance and provides equally surprising answers. The census mentions two types of lands—fenced and cultivated. Obviously, fenced

TABLE 1. Ownership of sheep in ascending order.

Decile	Agency District		Chinle District		St. Michaels District		Canado District	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	52	0.1
2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	991	0.6
3	0	0.0	311	0.3	89	0.2	2393	1.9
4	0	0.0	1093	1.0	430	1.0	4047	3.2
5	757	0.7	2223	2.1	776	1.8	5900	4.7
6	2557	2.3	3709	3.5	1227	2.9	8191	6.5
7	5683	5.2	6702	6.4	2486	5.9	11800	9.4
8	13789	12.7	12754	12.1	4400	10.4	16651	13.2
9	21065	19.4	22598	21.5	7873	18.6	23990	19.1
10	65005	59.7	55657	53.0	24965	59.1	51880	41.2
Total	108856		105047		42246		125895	

TABLE 2. Distribution of wealth in sheep.

	Range of ownership		Average number owned including		Median	Percent and number owned by top 1% of population		Gini coefficient
	Low	High	Those			Number	Percent	
			without sheep	with sheep				
Agency District	0	4000	165	280	10	7	19.0	.7541
Chinle District	0	2000	155	202	30	7	10.8	.7061
St. Michaels	0	1700	96	128	20	5	14.2	.7299
Canado District	0	2000	212	231	100	6	7.7	.5773



TABLE 3. Ownership of goats in ascending order.

Decile	Agency District		Chinle District		St. Michaels District		Canado District	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	355	1.1
3	0	0.0	105	0.3	90	0.6	678	2.0
4	0	0.0	540	1.4	365	2.5	1178	3.5
5	344	1.1	845	2.1	440	3.0	1575	4.7
6	1086	3.5	1557	3.9	733	5.0	2697	8.1
7	2085	6.6	2392	6.0	1051	7.2	3621	10.8
8	3269	10.4	4089	10.3	1902	12.9	5202	15.6
9	5914	18.8	7687	19.3	3710	25.2	5969	17.9
10	18663	59.5	22584	56.7	6407	43.6	12095	36.2
Total	31361		39799		14698		33370	

TABLE 4. Distribution of wealth in goats.

	Range of ownership		Average number owned including		Median	Percent and number owned by top 1% of population		Gini coefficient
	Low	High	Those without goats	Those with goats		Number	Percent	
	Agency District	0	950	48	85	10	7	15.1
Chinle District	0	900	59	78	20	7	14.0	.7110
St. Michaels	0	800	34	44	10	4	12.2	.6464
Canado District	0	900	57	64	30	6	8.4	.6293

land would be of greater concern to the livestock owner. In addition, aridity, poor quality of soil (in general), and an emphasis on pastoralism would lead one to expect to find small amounts of land under cultivation, which is the case. Ownership of both fenced and cultivated land, however, is highly skewed, the latter being not quite as unbalanced as the former (see Tables 5 and 7). The amount of fenced land ranges from zero to a high of 8,500 acres, while median figures vary from zero to 4.5 acres (Table 6). Cultivated land, ranging from zero to 160 acres with the highest median of three acres, shows a similar type of distribution but on a smaller scale (Table 8). Part of this problem may be attributed to the location of arable land and water, but the statistical pattern in land and livestock categories is too distinct to be attributed solely to water or other resources.

The logical conclusion about the large livestock/landholders is that these two groups were one and the same—the more pasturage, the more animals—but this carryover was not necessarily true. For example, Table 9 lists twenty-five of the larger livestock owners on the reservation, who, with only a few exceptions, owned a small proportion of the fenced acres. Of the ten large landowners identified in the above list, only three had large herds, none of which were comparable in size to the flocks of the largest livestock holders. Thus, large landholdings did not mean the owner had a large herd and large herds did not mean that the owner would have a great deal of land.

Before providing possible explanations for this inequality, a few considerations should be made. The first lies in the ownership of sheep. The census attributes livestock to one man and his family, when, in reality, all members of the group—plus the extended kin—may have had part ownership in the herd. Second, Paquette mentions that Gallup, New Mexico, was the central railroad shipping point for much of the reservation and that year-round transportation was available. It is conceivable that some herds of sheep were sold just before the census-taker arrived, thus indicating a low figure for sheep while the large number of fenced acres remained constant. Finally, those people who had large herds and little or no land probably ranged their animals on unfenced or general-use territory as opposed to renting pasturage from their

TABLE 5. Ownership of fenced acreage in ascending order.

Decile	Agency District		Chinle District		St. Michaels District		Canado District	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	0.0
2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	47	0.6
3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	79	1.0
4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	106	1.4
5	157	0.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	155	2.0
6	484	1.0	74	1.6	0	0.0	203	2.7
7	669	1.4	157	3.4	56	1.5	282	3.7
8	722	1.4	243	5.2	143	3.9	377	4.9
9	7565	15.3	342	7.4	273	7.5	542	7.1
10	39956	80.6	3829	82.4	3169	87.0	5844	76.5
Total	49533		4645		3641		7641	

TABLE 6. Distribution of fenced acreage.

	Range of ownership		Average number owned including		Median	Percent and number owned by top 1% of population		Gini coefficient
	Low	High	Those	Those		Number	Percent	
			without acreage	with acreage				
Agency District	0	8500	75	131	4.5	27400	55.3	.8444
Chinle District	0	640	7	15	0.5	3040	65.4	.8312
St. Michaels	0	300	6	16	0.0	1100	30.2	.8605
Canado District	0	64	18	20	4.0	2186	28.6	.7621

TABLE 7. Ownership of cultivated acreage in ascending order.

Decile	Agency District		Chinle District		St. Michaels District		Ganado District	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	0.6
2	0	0.0	6	0.2	0	0.0	42	2.5
3	0	0.0	99	3.5	0	0.0	67	4.0
4	0	0.0	136	4.8	0	0.0	84	5.0
5	75	3.7	166	5.8	0	0.0	107	6.4
6	156	7.6	216	7.6	0	0.0	128	7.7
7	252	12.3	268	9.4	59	4.9	174	10.5
8	296	14.5	335	11.7	135	11.3	220	13.2
9	483	23.6	418	14.6	249	20.9	296	17.8
10	784	38.6	1211	42.4	749	62.8	534	32.1
Total	2046		2855		1192		1662	

TABLE 8. Distribution of cultivated acreage.

	Range of ownership		Average number owned including		Median	Percent and number owned by top 1% of population		Gini coefficient
	Low	High	Those	Those		Number	Percent	
			without acreage	with acreage				
Agency District	0	40	3.3	5.5	2	149	7.3	.6232
Chinle District	0	160	4.2	5.2	3	561	19.6	.5390
St. Michaels	0	40	1.9	4.7	0	173	14.5	.7837
Ganado District	0	80	4.0	4.2	2	137	8.2	.4564

## 9. Comparison of livestock and landholdings.

Census #	Sheep	Goats	Fenced land (acres)	Cultivated land (acres)
29	1400	100	260	200
148	3800	30	160	2
150	900	300	0	0
151	1000	950	140	4
158	2500	60	0	0
180	1861	39	1000	4
268	3800	260	10	4
285	2000	150	0	0
434	3000	90	18	10
3198	900	100	3	3
3221	2000	50	25	9
3227	1200	300	6	6
3333	1386	0	1	1.5
3393	1400	400	0	0
3445	1500	200	2	2
3588	1900	150	0	8
6135	1000	200	2	2
6173	1400	20	1	1
6257	2000	200	30	30
6354	1500	100	10	10
8045	2500	90	160	1
8070	1350	70	4	3
8125	2000	70	5	5
8324	1200	50	0	0
8451	1700	60	3	3
(those with large landholdings)				
50	10	6	8500	0
51	20	0	8500	10
59	120	120	900	0.5
69	40	20	640	0
153	*	*	4000	4
180	1861	39	1000	4
465	600	400	2000	6
550	365	112	2500	6
3047	40	36	640	3
3448	0	0	640	640

\*No entry

neighbors. Moreover, some wealthy Navajos were known to have hired poorer Navajos to herd part of a flock for a percentage of the lamb crop. Logically, these sheep could be grazed on the poorer Navajo's land. In addition, since herding centered around a winter and a summer camp that needed to be near water and within distance of a corral, many of the sites had to remain close to the herder's homes.

Yet these qualifying remarks do not explain why land and animals, the two basic resources of the Navajo, were unequally distributed in 1915. As flocks grew at an increasingly faster rate, the land base seemed to shrink, and though there had been thirteen territorial additions made to the reservation by 1915 (with more to be made in the future), the carrying capacity of the land was deteriorating. Father Anselm Weber of Saint Michael's Mission in 1914 said, "The Navajo Reservation is stocked heavier and its range is more overgrazed and run down than the range in any other part of these states [New Mexico and Arizona]." <sup>10</sup> Indeed, by 1928, the problem of overgrazing was the first issue to be addressed in the November meeting of the Navajo Tribal Council, which resulted in a Grazing Committee that legislated a fifteen-cent tax on each sheep or goat owner having more than 1,000 head. This resolution, though passed, was never enforced. <sup>11</sup>

Of ever greater interest is the second item on the agenda in 1928—"The Question of eventually Limiting the Number of Sheep, Horses, Goats, and Cattle for Any One Indian so that Benefits of the Range May be more Equitably Distributed Among the Navajos." <sup>12</sup> Describing the "haves" and the "have-nots" as "ricos" and "pobres," the council attacked the problem with reticence. <sup>13</sup> The responsibilities associated with clan, family, and social ties entered into the consideration of reducing the number of livestock, creating a maze of considerations difficult to resolve. Wealth was counted in sheep, ownership was an individual right, and land use was based on usufruct rights, not legal contracts, yet the dwindling natural resources needed to be saved.

During the meeting, District Superintendent Chester E. Faris made an interesting observation that bore directly on the issue of ricos and pobres. Speaking of the distribution of wealth, he said:

Some families have three, four, and even 5,000 sheep and goats. These men are leaders in thought, application, and influence. Five years ago your chairman (Desha Clah Chischilly) had no sheep; today he has nearly 1,000. Maybe in another year or two he will have more than 1,000—maybe 2,000. Such leaders are found among every people. There are industrial chiefs among white people—the Fords, the Morgans, the Rothchilds. These men have much and they give much.<sup>14</sup>

Faris made a point that many anthropologists and historians overlook when they write about the Navajo. The economic, social, and political power of the reservation was influenced by the wealthy, not solely by the tribe's desire for egalitarianism. This assertion is not to deny the existence of the leveling forces already mentioned, but only to underscore that wealth and prominence played an important role in determining influence. Anthropologist Ruth Underhill points out that during the nineteenth century a number of affluent Navajo men surrounded themselves with poor families who wanted to be associated with a prosperous person. By the early twentieth century, many of these families who had gained their wealth in earlier years when raiding and the settling of choice lands was possible, now continued to enjoy high standards of living when others in the tribe suffered.<sup>15</sup> One scholar also cites a report written in the 1880s indicating that at least two-thirds of the families had less than one hundred sheep and that 24 percent of the population had no sheep.<sup>16</sup> A report of commissioners in 1897 also states that one-third of the adult population owned no property but that the customary sharing and reciprocity among Navajos was carried out, if necessary, "even to the last meal in the house."<sup>17</sup>

Although further research needs to determine how much sharing occurred, one may assume that (1) those who were wealthy often farmed out part of their herds to poorer Navajos who would care for the livestock for a part of the herd's increase; (2) that individual and not family or group ownership was involved; and (3) that the social pressures discussed earlier did not seem to reduce the desire or ability to accumulate extensive flocks. Clearly, extreme wealth for a few fortunates prevailed.

Who, then, were some of these ricos? Contrary to what Clyde

Kluckhohn suggested—that these “rich men often exert great power through economic pressure but they often work mostly behind the scenes and are seldom invested with the authority of formal leadership”—four of six men whom Paquette designated as “principle men” were fairly well-to-do by the standards of the times<sup>18</sup> (see Table 9). Other influential men are listed in the census, but their names and identity are not sufficiently clear, and thus an accurate, larger sampling cannot be determined. A study of the financial background of some of these tribal leaders would probably reveal considerable economic status. For instance, Chee Dodge, one of the identified leaders, was noted in Paquette’s letter as owning a Dodge car, a stone house valued at \$5,000 and, one suspects, the person referred to when the superintendent wrote, “In addition one of the above parties has a bank account of something like \$80,000 being the largest individual depositor in McKinley County, New Mexico, outside of the coal companies.” His wealth, accrued through trading posts, money lending, and ranching, was illustrated in a number of cars “equipped with white sidewall tires and with spares mounted on the front fenders inside chrome covers,” an array of household servants, and a retinue of poorer Navajos he aided financially.<sup>19</sup>

While Chee Dodge was the most successful of the ricos, he was not necessarily the exception. Although little quantitative research has been done concerning wealthy Navajos, they were apparently scattered throughout the reservation and were leaders in their communities. For instance, Dagha da Sikaad was one of the first Navajos to move into the Kaibeto area, evading exile during the Fort Sumner period. His power and prestige grew as rapidly as his flocks so that by the early 1900s he was able to bequeath to his descendants herds that each exceeded 1,500 head.<sup>20</sup> One might argue that Navajo reciprocity and sharing would dilute these herds and spread the wealth throughout the society following the owner’s death, but this dispersion did not occur. In the case of Dagha da Sikaad, a study conducted in 1982 showed that status and property had been perpetuated along family lines.

The four ricos in the sample (those with over 1,000 sheep units of livestock) deserve additional comment. Three were descendants



or married descendants of Dagha da Sikaad. The fourth was the wealthiest livestock owner of the southern Coppermine area and the son-in-law of the headman who first migrated to that area after Fort Sumner. All four were wealthy because they or their wives had inherited large numbers of livestock and exercised rights to use large tracts of relatively good grazing land.<sup>21</sup>

The transmittal of wealth through family members appears to be the norm in Navajo culture. Many families have a "resource controller" who oversees grazing lands and who may provide counsel in the distribution of flocks in the event of the death of a close relative. When the controller dies, this responsibility remains in the family and is passed on (1) to the oldest living son available; (2) to the current living spouse; or, finally, (3) to the husband of the eldest available daughter. If no one assumes the responsibility for control of grazing lands, then the right is lost—a traumatic event to large sheep owners.<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, then, one study reveals as many as 73 percent of those people interviewed (142 families) inherited their wealth from parents or grandparents and that 50 percent of the households owned only 10 percent of the sheep and goats.<sup>23</sup> This same report shows a Gini Coefficient of .5713, illustrating again the tendency of wealth to be skewed, even though today poverty and prosperity are far more dependent on the wage market than on livestock.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, then, a group of ricos gained property and status, both of which were transferred to succeeding generations. But one must also look at the influence these ricos exerted in affairs outside their locales. There are two schools of thought on this subject, the first one represented by anthropologists Hobson, Kluckhohn, and Leighton. They argue that political leaders were not chosen from the rich but from those who worked well with other people. The wealthy were hated, distrusted, avoided, feared, and envied and were rarely given any influential leadership positions. To quote one of Hobson's informants, "Bunch of Whiskers wasn't a headman but everybody knew him and feared him. He was the richest Navaho on the reservation."<sup>25</sup>

The second group of scholars, including, for example, Witherpoon, Wood, and Underhill, recognizes that leaders were created

not only because of their ability to work with others but also because of their financial success. The conspicuous status of these ricos in sheep and goats proved their resourcefulness and wise management of affairs. Witherspoon believes this connection between wealth and leadership was particularly true before stock reduction, when ownership of animals was at the height of the status-producing scale. He states: "Community members judge the character and qualities of those within the residence group on the basis of size and appearance of their sheep herd. No one will be respected in the community or elected to positions of leadership if his family's herd gives the appearance of improper care and attention."<sup>26</sup> Thus, status, wealth, and politics were intertwined then as now in the affairs of the Navajo.

Returning to 1915 and the period preceding stock reduction, one can see the importance of understanding the internal mechanics of Navajo society. While there has been scanty research in this area, partly because of the lack of documentation, partly because of the diversity of Navajo communities, and partly because few ethnohistorians have yet been willing to delve into cultural as well as into written sources, still some tentative findings concerning the influence of ricos on political events are evident. It was large stockholders holding positions on the Tribal Council who tried to block the passage of the fifteen-cent sheep tax mentioned earlier. Interestingly enough, Chee Dodge did not at first oppose this tax, remaining more circumspect at the outset of the reduction period.<sup>27</sup> As the large stockholders continued to fight losses in wealth and status, they finally settled on an across-the-board 10 percent reduction for all Navajos, an act that would reduce the number of animals but that would maintain the social position of the ricos. Others have suggested that some ricos tried to persuade their followers to frighten away or kill government officials sent to carry out stock reduction.<sup>28</sup>

The reduction program was carried out, but the results were mixed. Some ricos maintained their status and a proportionate amount of wealth, while others were reduced to poverty. These diverse results can be explained by looking at each district's implementation of reduction policies, the number of sheep needing to be eliminated, and the willingness of a community to accept the

government plan. In general, however, the loss of stock was traumatic and impoverishing. A study of the Black Mesa area explains how some of the ricos were affected.

The testimony of four owners illustrates the magnitude of the reduction. Crooked Fingers owned more than 1,000 sheep before the reduction. The records of his family herd show that after reduction the herd numbered only 25 animals. Tall John owned 1,350 sheep and goats, more than 100 head of cattle and 58 horses. After the reduction his permit allowed him to graze less than 100 sheep and goats, no cattle, and a "few horses." Al Katties' father owned 2,000 head of sheep, a herd that was reduced to about 100 after the reduction program. Tom Clayton owned 1,550 sheep and goats and 13 horses. After the reduction, his herd consisted of 15 sheep and goats and 7 horses.<sup>29</sup>

Small wonder then that the difficulties of this era have been equated with the trauma of the Long Walk in its impact upon Navajo culture. Abject poverty was forced upon both the poor and the rich among the Dine.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these findings. First, one should only partially accept statements about the Navajo that claim "their religion discourages accumulation of wealth; they share their material wealth extensively with their families and neighbors and friends; their 'familistic individualism' discourages aggressiveness in economic affairs. . . ." <sup>30</sup> The census of 1915, government documents, and anthropological studies indicate that this conclusion was not necessarily true and that wealth was concentrated among a few. Second, political positions, though not based solely on wealth, were often given to those men who showed knowledge in obtaining and maintaining physical possessions that enhanced their social status. Rich and politically active Navajo, along with medicine men (controllers of spiritual power), were the first ones to come under attack or accusation for wrongdoing, but these men still commanded respect and exerted influence. Finally, a far greater amount of attention needs to be focused on internal political and economic activities on the reservation to better understand the Navajo's view

of their history from the early to mid-twentieth century. Failure to do so perpetuates a one-sided reporting of events as well as a misunderstanding of Navajo culture.

#### NOTES

1. Census of the Navajo Reservation—1915 with letter by Peter Paquette, Film #579,683, Microfilm Division, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
2. A partial census was taken in 1885 and again in 1900, but neither was from this part of the reservation, nor were they as complete or as carefully done as the 1915 census.
3. For examples, see Robert W. Young, *The Navajo Yearbook* (Window Rock, Ariz.: Navajo Agency, 1958), 375; and David F. Aberle, *The Peyote Religion Among the Navaho*, 2d. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 32.
4. Gary Witherspoon, *Navajo Kinship and Marriage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 87.
5. Witherspoon, *Kinship*, p. 72.
6. Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton, *The Navaho* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 83.
7. Richard Hobson, *Navaho Acquisitive Values*, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology 42 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1954), 7.
8. Hobson, *Values*, p. 26.
9. James F. Downs, *The Navajo* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), 114.
10. Peter Iverson, *The Navajo Nation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 17.
11. Aberle, *Peyote*, p. 53.
12. Young, *The Role of the Navajo in the Southwestern Drama* (Gallup, N. Mex.: The Gallup Independent and Robert W. Young, 1968), 66.
13. Young, *Drama*, p. 66.
14. Young, *Drama*, p. 67.
15. Ruth Underhill, *The Navajos* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 81, 231; see also Aberle's *The Peyote Religion Among the Navajo*; Frank McNitt, *The Navajo Wars: Military Campaigns, Slave Raids and Reprisals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), and Katherine Luomala, *Navajo Life of Yesterday and Today* (Berkeley, Calif.: National Park Service, 1938).
16. Louise Lamphere, "Traditional Pastoral Economy," in *Economic Development in American Indian Reservations*, ed. Roxanne Ortiz (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, forthcoming), 79.
17. Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment and*

*Social Change Among the Choctaws, Pawnees and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 24.

18. Kluckhohn, *Navajo*, p. 118.

19. Donald L. Parman, *The Navajos and the New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 18.

20. John J. Wood, Walter M. Vannette, and Michael J. Andrews, *A Sociocultural Assessment of the Livestock Reduction Program in the Navajo Joint-Use Area* (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University, 1979), appendix 3, p. 5.

21. Eric Henderson, "Kaibeto Plateau Ceremonialists: 1860-1980," in *Navajo Religion and Culture: Selected Views* edited by David M. Brugge and Charlotte Frisbie (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1982), 169.

22. Terry R. Reynolds, Louise Lamphere, and Cecil E. Cook, "Time, Resources, and Authority in a Navaho Community," *American Anthropologist* 69 (April 1967): 192.

23. Wood et al., *Assessment*, pp. 78-79.

24. Wood et al., *Assessment*, p. 82.

25. Hobson, *Values*, p. 18.

26. Gary Witherspoon, "Sheep in Navajo Culture and Social Organization," *American Anthropologist* 75 (Fall 1973): 1443.

27. Parman, *New Deal*, p. 113.

28. Parman, *New Deal*, p. 163.

29. Downs, *Animal*, p. 20.

30. Kent Gilbreath, "Review of *Red Capitalism*," *Journal of Arizona History* 14 (Autumn 1973): 260.