

4-1-2014

Native Americans from the 1930s to the 1940s

Sarah Calnan

Loyola Marymount University, scalnan@lion.lmu.edu

Repository Citation

Calnan, Sarah, "Native Americans from the 1930s to the 1940s" (2014). *American Cultures Studies Student Works*. 1.
http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/acs_students/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the American Cultures Studies at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Cultures Studies Student Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Native Americans from the 1930s to the 1940s

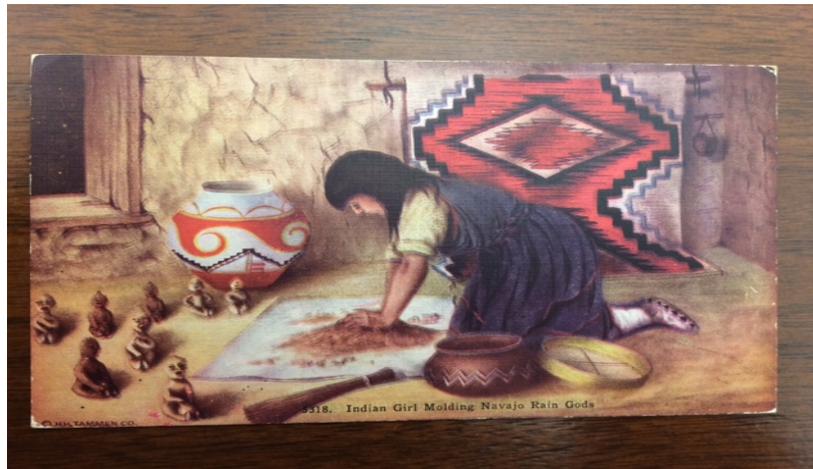
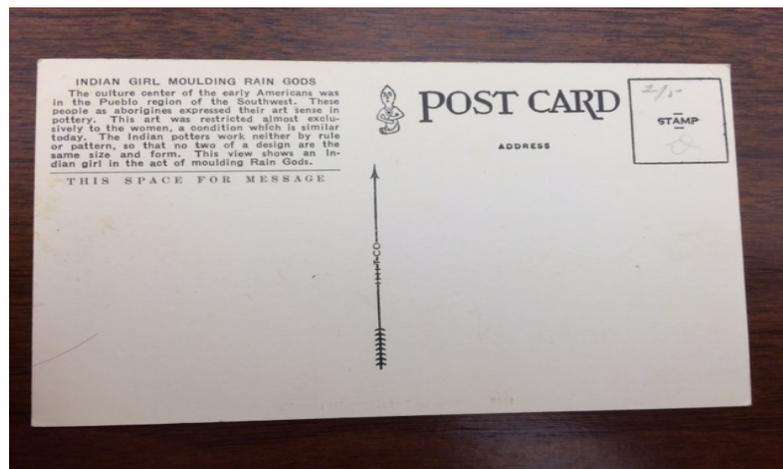
By

Sarah Calnan

A paper submitted to the
American Cultures Studies 105: History of Ethnic America class

Spring 2014

COPY OF ARTIFACT

Front*Indian Girl Molding Navajo Molding Rain Gods**Back**Indian Girl Molding Navajo Molding Rain Gods*

DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACT

Front Description. The image on the front is of a young, Native American girl molding Navajo rain gods. At the bottom of the front of the card is a caption saying “Indian Girl Molding Navajo Rain Gods,” with its series number, 5318, to the left of it indicating this card was one of

many of its type or subject of Native Americans that was published. The publisher of this postcard, © H.H. Tammen Co., is printed at the bottom left hand corner of the front side. There are no borders on the front side of this post card. Its entirety is the picture of the young girl on her knees molding the clay. Behind her is a piece of cloth, maybe a blanket or rug, with a zig-zagged diamond design of red, black, white and blue. Next to it, on the right side, is a small pot hanging on a hook off the wall. In front of the girl is a vase ornately designed with red white and black paint. Also in front of the girl are eight rain gods that have already been molding while she is working on another one on a white mat.

The young girl herself, with medium length black hair, seems to be wearing modern clothes—a navy blue dress with a ivory long-sleeved shirt under. Her shoes, on the other hand seem more native due to their zig-zagged design that is similar to the mat behind her. It seems that she is in an adobe house due to the cracked walls. Nothing else indicates what type of building she is in except for the window at the front left side of the card. The picture is very colorful, mainly containing earthly colors such as red, brown, ivory and black with few variations except white and blue. However as colorful and intriguing the picture may be, it is a bit blurry. The only signs of wear and age are the corners and sides where they are a bit fringed and have lost their color.

Back Description. The back of the card is divided. However, the division is an arrow pointing up with the private publisher's initials, TCO, inscribed in the middle of the arrow. It is probably to guess the significance of this arrow as being part of the Native American culture. The left side of the back contains a description about the picture as well as a very brief history of the Native community. It starts out with the heading *Indian Girl Molding Navajo Molding Rain Gods*. Beneath this heading is the description, "The culture center of the early American was in the

Pueblo region of the Southwest. These people as aborigines expressed their art sense in pottery. This art was restricted almost exclusively to the omen, a condition which is similar today. The Indian potters work neither by rule or pattern so that no two of a design are the same size and form. This view shows an Indian girl in the act of molding Rain Gods” (Indian Girl Molding Navajo Molding Rain Gods). Below this inscription is a line with the message “THIS SPACE FOR MESSAGE,” and an empty space for writing without lines. On the right side of the arrow, there is a heading containing the message “POST CARD” with an image of an Indian rain god to the left.

To the right of this heading is an empty place for a stamp with the writing “2/5” inscribed in pencil. Since there is no year for this supposed date, the best guess is that maybe these numbers signify February 5. Below the heading is the word “ADDRESS” inscribed and a blank area, without lines, for the address. This post card has no writing or message indicating any intent on being mailed except for the supposed date. After much observation the conclusion has come to be that this card is a post card, not a postal card because there is no indication that it was issued by the government, only a private publisher H.H. Tamm Co., because there is no proof of a prepaid stamp on the card, only an empty space for one.

Material Description. The postcard is linen-weave. The back of the card does not explicitly illustrate this but the front of the card where the image is clearly indicates linen weave through its textured surface— seeing the weaves. The edges and the corners are frayed like cloth, not paper. The condition overall is very good expect for the edges and corners that are frayed and slightly bent. It is not bent, scratched and torn. The card’s back tint is slightly tan/yellow a clear sign that it has aged but not so significantly. The image on the front is most likely a painting that

has been transferred onto the card. The colors and the blurriness of the image especially indicate a painting and copying of one.

DATE OF PRODUCTION

The approximate date of publication for this postcard ranges from the 1930s to the 1940s and possibly even the 1950s. The indication of this time period is due to the postcard's material which is linen and the bright colors that are not water colors or color color-wash that are used for the image on the front. In *Grundy County*, the author David A. Belden writes that beginning in the 1930s to around 1944, postcards were made of linen thus giving the name the linen era to this time span (9). Also postcards during this era were signature in their bright colors (9).

Although the main fact contributing to the dating of the postcard to the 1930 and 1940s is the linen material, the bright colors also indicate production in the 1950s. For example in *A History of Water: The world of water*, the author I.B. Tauris writes that in the 1950s, the images on postcards, or linen postcards specifically changed to be more colorful and bright through the use of chromo-lithograph (331). This source also mentions that in the 1930s, card were made from "heavy card stock" that became known as linen (331).

Also since the back is divided, it must be older than 1907, according to Gayle Floyd's *Washington D.C. in Vintage Postcards*, the year where divided backs were permitted (Floyd 8). It has no white border so it is passed the white border era of 1915-1930 (8). Since it is linen, it is part of the linen era from 1930 to 1944) (8). Lastly, because the picture contains bright vivid colors, it is part of the chrome era which is 1945 onwards (8). In conclusion, because the postcard fits into these categories as being linen and having bright vivid colors, we can conclude that the postcard was publish from 1930 to the mid 1940s and possibly late to early 1950s.

SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTINGS

Demographics. During this time period, 1930s to early 1950s, the overall population of Native Americans increased. According to Leon Edgar Truesdell, in 1930 the population of Native Americans was 332,397 (3). In 1940, the population rose to 334,000 then 343,000 in 1950 (132). The jump in population from 1940 to 1950 was recorded as 2.7% increase (132). After examining this postcard, and picking it out of the Navajo section, the research to come will be focused on the Navajo tribe. In regards to Leon Edgar Truesdell, in 1930, the number of Navajos in Arizona was 20,707, New Mexico had 16,971, Utah had 1109, and Colorado had 185 (58). According to Robert S. Mcpherson's *Northern Navajo Frontier (1860-1900): Expansion Through Adversity*, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah were the states with the most Navajo inhabitants (Mcpherson ix). In 1940, the total Navajo population was 50,000 (34) according to Nancy Shoemaker's *American Indian Population Recovery in the Twentieth Century*. Then in 1950, the total population rose to approximately 62,000 (34).

The dramatic changes or increase in populations was due to a mixture assimilation practices, although some did not succeed, and isolation. For example, tribes such as the Navajo, Cherokee and Chicksaw did not have much contact with non-Indians, they had lower mortality rates (Hacker & Haines 28). Also intermarriage led to lower child mortalities. Children whose mothers were able to speak English and parents with a mix of white blood, approximately 50% white blood, had lower mortality rates ranging from .326 to .333 (Hacker & Haines 29). The more assimilated into western culture people were, the more success they had because being part of a community enables access to certain facilities and privileges and, in this case better living conditions. Navajo's especially, after escaping Bosque Redondo in 1868, began to raise sheep,

horses and cattle to cultivate their new lands (Shoemaker 33). Eventually Anglo traders began to trade with the Navajo for their wool, blankets and silverwork (33). This trading also brought in revenue to what was an economically insufficient community. In 1968, one hundred years after the Navajo Treaty, their reservation size increased by more than two times (33). Also, as part of history in the nineteenth century, the Navajos had lower mortality than other Indian tribes because they lived separate and apart from each other in dedication to rising livestock thus escaping from epidemics (35).

Geographical Locations: For the geographic locations, the Navajo were primarily found in four different but physically and geographically connected states. These states were Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico (Towner 512) with southeastern Utah, northeastern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico as the highest ranking countries (Mcpherson ix). The Navajos too faced relocation. Although during the 1930-1950 time period the Navajos were not relocated, they were relocated much earlier in 1864 to Bosque Redondo, which is often referred to as the “Long Walk” by Navajos, due to bureaucratic recording or population control reasons (Shoemaker 32). At Bosque Redondo, the Navajos suffered greatly. The land was infertile and the water was undrinkable (32). Many Navajos died due to starvation and disease however some did escape to Arizona lands that the government had granted them in 1868. Ironically, this land was originally owned by the Navajos.

Government Approach. In the wake of the 1887 Dawes Act, the Navajo were excluded from its provisions and as a result, their land size quadrupled in allotment years (Wilkins 58). This already shows the Navajo having favoritism with the government if not pure luck. For example the Navajo, or some, were lobbyists and often went to Washington to ask for more land to help cultivate more land and “support their pastoral lifestyle and expand their population,” (58). The

Navajo were involved in politics. As for government approach to the “Indian Problem,” some laws were already in action such as the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 where every U.S. born native is considered an American citizen. From the 1930s to the 1940s, the government, to rationalize the Navajo economy, reduced Navajo stock and used lands for mineral exploitation (Shoemaker 34). Navajo families became impoverished after losing their land rights.

Disheartened after what they witnessed and experienced, the Navajo changed the business council of the 1920s to a Navajo Nation tribal government (34) to maintain their people and lands. Then in 1934, according to Peter Iverson’s *The Navajo* the Navajo rejected the Indian Reorganization Act thus motivating the U.S. government to give them 243,000 acres worth of land to the Navajo Nation (124). Like Edward Carr’s mention of Collingwood, an Oxford philosopher and historian, the past still lives in the present (Carr 11) as clearly seen with the Navajo nation’s past in politics and now in present day the interaction of Native Americans influencing government policies for their people.

Throughout history, the Navajo, though faced adversities, did have success in government. Although none of the success happened during the time period from 1930-1950, their actions leading up to this point was very significant in their way of life as it is. Also in 1944, the Indian Claims Commission Act set up a special commission in which native would ask for monetary compensation for damages they encountered due to poor enforcement of previous treaties and agreements made by the government to the tribe(s) (60).

Although it may seem that progress had been made with the Natives as indicted through the Indian Citizenship Act and the Navajo Indians having a voice in government as lobbyists, public opinion was mixed between good and bad. For example, May Ann Weston’s *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth century Press*, the Wheeler-Howard

Bill of 1934 had an intended purpose that tribes who accepted the Indian New Deal would not only initiate their own corporations but also create a representative-style constitution that would be guided under the Indian Bureau (52). However, this bill was met with some opposition.

Missionaries believed it promoted anti-Christian beliefs and paganism (52). Also conservatives viewed the bill as communistic and un-American (52). Those who were in government and those who were not both saw the bill as conflicting with American ideals.

Public Opinion. Native American image in politics was not perfect and neither was it in the media. In the 1930s, the press showed a positive image of Native Americans as good and noble savages to promote cultural pluralism (Weston 59) but negative or superficial images also existed. In her book, *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular music Teach Us About Race, Class, Gender and Sexual Orientation*, Linda Holtzman writes that in most films, Indians were portrayed negatively and synonymous with “bad guys” who were dominated by the white men or “good guys” (214). Indians were portrayed as savages in movies like *Drums Along the Mohawk (1939)* and *Northwest Passage (1940)* (214). From these movies it can also be seen that natives were identified collectively and not distinctly based on tribes (214). More focus was put on white actors and actresses even though the title of the movie correlated with native history and events. One such movie, although later in years than the 1930s to the 1950s, was *Cheyenne Autumn (1964)* that was supposed to emphasize the trip the Cheyenne tribe took from Oklahoma to Montana in the 1870s (214). However, the movie’s love story between the two characters prevailed the storyline instead of the historical aspect of it (214). Although the image of “the Indian” gradually developed into positivity, there still existed typical, superficial stereotypes of Indians and significant ideology of Indians (i.e. their struggles) was overlooked for mere white interaction.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the postcard in regard to this time period, does not depict the true history of Indians at the time. It is simply a flattering depiction of Indians, that in fact existed during this time, however, it does not depict any struggles or success Indians had during this time. It does not depict any typical depiction of Indian positivity or negativity or any humor of the Indian community that did exist during this time period. Although it does illustrate, maybe, a lifestyle that Indians at the time experienced, as stated at the back of the postcard, it does not depict a true reality but only the very surface of it. This postcard is not a bad depiction of native realities at the time it simply depicts as very small, yet cute—the little girl playing with clay, aspect of the Indian community that has much more history.

Works Cited

- Belden, David A. *Grundy County*. Charleston: Arcadia, 2007. Print.
- Carr, Edward Hallett. *What is History?* 2nd ed. Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Panguin Books, 2008. Print.
- Floyd, Gayle. *Washington, D.C. in Vintage Postcards*. Charleston: Gayle and Dale Floyd, 2005. Print.

- Hacker, David and Michael Haines. "American Indian Mortality in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Impact of Federal Assimilation Policies on a Vulnerable Population." *Annales de Demographie Historique* 2 (2005): 28-29. Print.
- Holtzman, Linda. *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us about Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000. Print.
- Indian Girl Molding Navajo Molding Rain Gods*. Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.
- Iverson, Peter. *The Navajo: Indians of North America*. New York: Chelsea House, 2006. Print.
- McPherson, Robert S. *Northern Navajo Frontier 1860-1900*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2001. Print.
- Shoemaker, Nancy. *American Indian Population Recovery in the Twentieth Century*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999. Print.
- Tauris, J.B. *A History of Water: The World of Water*. Eds Terje Tvedt and Terje Oestigaard. Vol 3. London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2006. Print.
- Towner, Ronald H. "The Navajo Depopulation of Dinétah". *Journal of Anthropological Research*. Vol 3. New Mexico, 2008. Print.
- Truesdell, Leon Edgar, and United States Bureau of the Census. *The Indian Population of the United States and Alaska, 1930*. Vol. 2. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937. Print.

Weston, Mary Ann. *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press*. Westport: Greenwood, 1996. Print.

Wilkins, David Eugene. *The Navajo Political Experience*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Print.